Dear friends of the Foundation “Step by Step”!

Our team is greeting you with a fresh issue of our electronic bulletin, the first one in 2015.

We are proud to say that 2014 was a quite successful year for our Foundation. We marked the 20th anniversary of the Step by Step educational methodology in Macedonia and we have successfully carried out the planned activities under the several projects that the Foundation is currently working on. We would like to thank all of you for your involvement and contribution and we hope that 2015 will bring even bigger success in our future cooperation!

Our Foundation has prepared a calendar to mark the start of the New Year. The calendar is offering a number of activity ideas and inspirational thoughts that the teachers and parents can use with the children. The electronic version of the calendar is available in Macedonian and Albanian language and can be downloaded from our Digital Library, under the Other Materials section: http://stepbystep.org.mk/en/biblioteka

On the next pages of this e-bulletin you have the chance to read more about our current activities. Feel free to share this information with your colleagues and friends.

Greetings from our team!

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USAID Readers are Leaders Project

AN MOU BETWEEN THE MOES, USAID MACEDONIA AND STEP BY STEP WAS SIGNED

BASELINE FINDINGS ON READING AND MATH SKILLS OF EARLY GRADE STUDENTS

Workshops and meetings with teachers and parents in Phase 1 and Phase 2 schools

SATURDAY ACTIVITIES

Creative workshops for children and parents in the Roma centers

NEW CONTENT IN THE DIGITAL LIBRARY

www.stepbystep.org.mk
USAID Readers are Leaders Project

Reading and Math for Intellectual Growth

An MoU between the MoES, USAID Macedonia and Step by Step was signed

On December 9, in the hotel Holiday Inn - Skopje, the Minister of Education and Science, Abdilaqim Ademi, USAID Mission Director, James Stein, and Executive Director of the Foundation for Education and Cultural Initiatives "Step by Step", Suzana Kirandziska, signed a Memorandum of Understanding for implementation of the USAID Readers are Leaders Project.

THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING WILL ENSURE RELEVANT EDUCATION STAKEHOLDERS JOINTLY PLAN AND IMPLEMENT ACTIVITIES AIMED AT MEASURING AND ADVANCING BASIC READING AND MATHEMATICAL SKILLS OF STUDENTS IN THE EARLY GRADES IN MACEDONIA. ADDITIONALLY, THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE HAS EXPRESSED THEIR INTEREST FOR EXPANDING THE EARLY GRADE READING AND MATH ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES THROUGH ALL PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN MACEDONIA.
Representatives of educational institutions in the Republic of Macedonia and schools participating in the USAID Readers are Leaders Project activities attended four presentations held at the end of December and beginning of January. The purpose of these regional events was to present the results from the baseline study on early grade reading and mathematics assessment and discuss the main findings.

The EGRA and EGMA assessments with the help of tablet computers, donated by the Project to the schools, were implemented on a sample of 2,021 students from 42 participating schools in May, 2014. Additionally, through questionnaires submitted to school directors, teachers and parents, as well as school visits, the project got insights on the available materials, teaching practices, needs for additional training of teachers and involvement of families in the work of the schools.

Some of the recommendations for improving the reading and mathematics skills, include:

- More time of the instruction and in the family to be focused on shared and independent reading;
- Children to be exposed to different types of open questions requiring to express their own opinion, interpretation of facts or judgment from an early age;
- Special attention to be paid to Roma students, who have reading problems and difficulties in doing word problems even in the upper grades;
- Teachers to focus on understanding, reasoning and application of mathematical knowledge, rather than memorization of facts, rules, formulas and procedures;
- Use of counters to be increased in the instruction process;
- Access to reading materials (in addition to textbooks) needs to be increased, particularly in rural schools and those with Albanian language of instruction;
- Visits and borrowing books from school libraries to be increased.

The data collected with the baseline study will help us establish national reading and mathematics performance measures that will enable monitoring of student progress in acquiring foundational reading and mathematics skills. This information will be of crucial importance for improving the quality of education in the Republic of Macedonia.

The full report from the baseline study is available [here](http://www.stepbystep.org.mk).
Readers are Leaders Project team continues to organize Saturday Reading and Math sessions in the Children’s Creative Center – Skopje.

In February, we invite all interested parents, educators and students to join us for a fun and educational session on the following dates:

- February 7 (Saturday) 12.00 – 13.00
- February 21 (Saturday) 12.00 – 13.00

Free entrance during these hours!

Everyone who is interested to organize an individual or a group visit in the Center can contact the Youth Cultural Center – Skopje or the USAID Readers are Leaders Project.

Youth Cultural Center - Skopje (Floor 1)
Kej Dimitar Vlahov nr. 15, 1000 Skopje

Working hours:
- Tuesday – Friday: 9:00 – 12:00 and 16:00 – 20:00
- Saturday: 11:00 – 20:00
- Tel: 02/3115-225 and 3115-508, ext.114
- http://mkc.mk/
- www.stepbystep.org.mk
In November and December, in the Phase 1 and 2 schools creative workshops for picture books making were organized for lower-grade teachers, student support staff members and parents. The workshops were conducted by Step by Step educational coordinators and were aimed at presenting new and creative techniques for raising the interest for reading with young students. As a final product from each of the workshops held, we had picture books created as a collaborative effort of teachers and parents.

“The book is an unlimited source of knowledge. We are witnesses that young people nowadays are in a less frequent contact with books, and therefore it is our job as parents and teachers to make continuous efforts in bringing books closer to children. By nurturing the love of reading with children, we pledge to raise better people who will, in fact, be our own reflection. This workshop has taught us some new techniques that will help us in motivating the children to become real readers. In the upcoming period, we will use these techniques in the process of instruction, and an additional help will be the materials that were donated to our school by the Project”, said Gabriela Stevanandzija, a teacher from PS Blazhe Koneski – Prilep.

In order to familiarize the teachers with the materials developed by the project, in November and December project team organized short meetings with the schools from Phase 1 and 2. The purpose of the meetings was to show to the teachers ways to use the digital audio books, digital learning resources and books, as well as to get feedback about their needs in regards to digital materials. We received a total of 124 lesson plans which are currently being reviewed, and a selection of the best ones will be published and distributed through the schools.

“These work meetings have been very useful. Children need to read more and the digital picture books are more appealing to them than the ones in a printed form. We would like to have more materials of this kind because we can use them with the students with special needs, as well“, some of the teachers shared with us.
In November and December, Letters and Numbers Roadshow and Reading and Math are Fun activity gave us the opportunity to visit the Phase 3 schools and spend some fun learning time together. Some of our favorite singers and actors were reading picture books and did math with the youngest students, their parents and teachers.
Reading and Math are Fun with the actors Keti Doncheva Ilikj and Goran Ilikj in PS Hristijan Karposh – Kumanovo.

Reading and Math are Fun with the singer Kristina Arnaudova and actor Gjorgji Neshkoski in PS Tosho Arsov – Shtip, PS Nikola Karev – Probishtip and PS Vojdan Chernadrinski – Karposh, Skopje.

Reading and Math are Fun with the actress Zarije Jonuzi and the professor Bujar Saiti in PS Pashko Vasa – Grupchin and PS Dervish Cara - Dolno Palchishte, Bogovinje.

Reading and Math are Fun with the actor Gjorgji Neshkoski in PS Avram Pisevski – Karposh and PS Kuzman Shapkarev – Kisela Voda.
By the end of December, our Magic Literacy Van visited all of these Phase 3 schools, as well as three additional schools from previous project phases: PS Faik Konica – Slupchane, PS Prparimi – Chegrane and PS Liria – Gorno Jabolchishte, Chashka, where the youngest students and their teachers participated in reading and math activities. In remote and rural areas and communities with no public library, the Magic Literacy Van is more than welcomed with the literature it is offering to the children who usually have a restricted access to learning resources.

Our Digital Library offers 15 new digital audio picture books and four digital learning activities. They are available for free at:
http://stepbystep.org.mk/mk/biblioteka

For additional questions regarding the activities of the USAID Readers are Leaders Project, please contact Ana Dimovska, Information and Communication Officer, through e-mail: ana@stepbystep.org.mk or cell: 072/ 307-321
PREPARATIONS FOR PILOTING THE SOLUTIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
ACTIVITIES IN NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER, 2014

In November 2014, the Guideline for monitoring teachers' work and planning the professional development was finalized. In order to check the validity and effectiveness of the proposed instruments, the Guideline will be piloted in several schools. In November, there were meetings held with the schools in which the proposed solution for the professional development are going to be piloted, while in December a meeting was held with the advisors responsible for the piloting process.

* The main implementer of the USAID Teacher Professional and Career Development Project is the Macedonian Civic Education Center. The Foundation for Education and Cultural Initiatives “Step by Step” is a partner-organization in the implementation of activities under the Teacher Competences Component.

For more information regarding the USAID Teacher Professional and Career Development Project, please contact Project Chief of Party, Vera Kondikj - Mitkovska, Macedonian Civic Education Center, through e-mail: VKondik@mcgo.org.mk
November and December were months marked by workshops and seminars. There were two workshops held in the centers “Nadez” and “Dendo Vas”, one of which was a parent-child bonding workshop where parents and children prepared seasonal baskets out of autumn materials such as dry leaves, twigs, dried nuts and fruits. Another parent-child bonding activity was held in December and this time participants dedicated to creating Winter Holiday decorations.

Perhaps the most important event during November was the first part of the Education for Social Justice training held during November 15-16 in Skopje. The training was attended by representatives from the local community, the social work centers, SOS Children’s Village, representatives from the schools “Brakja Ramiz Hamid” and “26 Juli” and the “8 April” kindergarten, the teams from the Roma centers involved in project activities (“Nadez” and “Dendo Vas”), as well as groups of psychologists and representatives from other institutions that showed interest to be part of this seminar. The seminar itself was conducted through interactive activities that deconstructed the process of creating stereotypes and prejudices and the mechanisms of oppression. In December, the second part of the Education for Social Justice training was held and the process was wrapped up with certificates awarded to the participants.

Since the holiday season has ended, we continue with the activities with full speed, starting off with two workshops. The first one was aimed to familiarize the teams with the demands of the new early-grade Cambridge curricula which were recently introduced in our schools. The second workshop was aimed to strengthen the educators observation skills in order for them to individualize their approach to monitoring children’s progress.

For more information regarding the Project for (Self) Empowerment of Roma Parents and Children, contact Elena Mishikj, Project Coordinator, through e-mail: elena@stepbystep.org.mk or Majda Joleska, Educational Coordinator, majda@stepbystep.org.mk.
On January 24 and 25, the first Educonference for Educators and ICT experts organized by the Association “Friends of Education” took place in hotel Drim, Struga.

More than 500 participants – teachers, students, representatives from the state institutions and NGOs that work in the field of education had the chance to take part in various lectures and exchange experience with colleagues and eminent local experts.

The main objective of the conference was to help all (future) teachers develop and improve their organizational and communication skills, as well as enhance their methodological approaches to teaching and learning.

The Foundation “Step by Step” presented the activities under the USAID Readers are Leaders Project, as well as the pedagogical principles for interactive, creative and stimulating teaching practice which are, in fact, the groundwork of the Step by Step teaching methodology and will also be used as a starting point for the Learning Communities in the Readers are Leaders Project.

The Educonference for teachers and ICT experts 2015 was received with huge interest by educators in our country. Numerous effective, useful and interesting teaching practice examples were shared, and a lot of topics concerning the professional development of teachers were covered.

The organizer of the first Educonference – the Association “Friends of Education” is consisted of teachers, professors and ICT experts who share the same passion: ensuring high quality and creative teaching practice. For more information on their work, visit their official website: http://www.friends-of-education.org/en/