Dear teachers, parents and collaborators,

The school bell has stopped ringing at the end of this school year, but that does not mean that our activities will stop. On the next pages of the latest edition of our e-bulletin, you can read about our most recent initiatives, as well as get informed on the activities and resources that the Foundation Step by Step is offering so that the fun learning with your children can continue during the summer break, as well.

Please share this bulletin with your collaborators and friends.

Warmest greetings,
Team of the Foundation

A simple click on one of the titles below will take you directly to the selected content you would like to read first!

Foundation "Step by Step" at the Children's Book Summer Festival in Skopje City Mall

USAID Readers are Leaders Project
EGRA and EGMA instruments implemented in 103 schools
Learning communities in preparations for the next school year
Huge number of children have visited the Children's Creative Center over the last period
Magic Literacy Van is bringing joy in many school yards

USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

PROJECT FOR (SELF) EMPOWERMENT OF ROMA PARENTS AND CHILDREN
Future first graders from the Roma centers getting ready for school
Regional Conference for Educators in Bosnia and Herzegovina, August 18-21

REGISTER AND BE PART OF IT!
With the aim to assess early-grade reading and math skills, in the period between May 18 and June 2, 2015, a group of 157 assessors with great enthusiasm and dedication have implemented EGRA and EGMA instruments in 103 schools from across the country with a sample of students from Grade 2 and Grade 3.

Assessors (school pedagogues, psychologists, sociologists and early-grade teachers from these schools) were in a training for administering these instruments with a tablet computer.

EGRA and EGMA instruments are fully adapted to the curricula in Macedonian and Albanian language, and math. The language assessment tool – EGRA is used to assess how much students have mastered letters recognition and reading skills, as well as their level of reading comprehension. In the field of math literacy, math assessment instrument – EGMA is used to measure students’ skills in number discrimination, comparison and finding the missing number in a line, mathematical operations such as addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, solving word problems, as well as geometrical forms recognition.

In order to simplify data collection, save time and reduce possibility for errors in data input and procession, each of the schools included in this study has received a tablet computer.

Part of the USAID Readers are Leaders Project are two primary schools for children with special needs: Maca Ovcarova – Veles and Sv.Kliment Ohridski – Novo Selo. With the help of the recommendations received from the special educators Zivka Panova Sazdova and Marija Davceva from the special primary school Maca Ovcarova – Veles, who have been part of the reading and math assessment study for two times before, EGRA and EGMA instruments have been adapted and can be used not only to assess current level of reading and math skills with students from these schools, but also their potential for developing these skills in the future.

At the beginning of the next school year, the results from the study will be shared with education institutions in the Republic of Macedonia and with all the schools that were part of the study.
In the period between April and June, the first and second support visits with the learning communities were carried out in all 42 first and second phase schools. Each visit was facilitated by a mentor selected and trained by the project to support these professional learning communities. The goal of the first visit was to explain the concept of the learning community as a platform for professional development of teachers through tackling practical challenges which arise from the context of that specific school. The teachers were introduced to the instruments that will be used as a methodology of their development work and a structure of their portfolio. Also on this occasion the learning communities completed an instrument that intended to evaluate the organizational structure in the school and to learn what conditions need to be met in order to build a culture of learning in that school.

The second visits which were conducted in May and beginning of June, focus on redefining the development activities of the teachers so that they can reflect a systematic approach toward a practical challenge from teachers’ work. Teachers continue to enrich their development portfolios with evidence of their learning process and through sharing experiences and opinions about pedagogical practices in the school. One of the tasks assigned during this visit was the incorporation of the work of the learning community and teachers development activities in the schools’ annual program.

In the second half of June, after the second visits are completed, a second meeting with the mentors will be held in order to hear mentors’ impressions, challenges and ideas for continuing the work with the learning communities in the next school year.
In the last period, Children’s Creative Center has been visited by a huge number of children. Both students from primary schools from around the country, as well as children from kindergartens who will enroll in the first grade in autumn, they all found activities and resources suitable to their age, interests and curricula.

"To me, the most interesting part was when we were compiling ecological messages and we were pronouncing them into both Macedonian and Albanian" – Robert, a second grade student

"We spent wonderful and productive time here. Children left the center with smile on their faces and under strong impressions. We have no words to express the creativity used in planning and designing each centimeter of the space. Bravol" - shared on our Facebook page by Sanja Gudzova, lower-grade teacher from PS Vasil Glavinov - Veles.

Singer Kristina Arnaudova sharing a reading time with children from the kindergarten Femo Kulakov - Negotino. Kristina used to go to the same kindergarten when she was a child.

This space has also proven to be excellent place for joint student activities for schools that work with Macedonian and Albanian language of instruction and are part of the USAID Interethnic Integration in Education Project (IIEP). Second graders from PS Mirce Acev - Gjorce Petrov and PS Bajram Shabani from the village of Dolno Svilare, Kondovo, partner schools under IIEP, together with their teachers, parents and Step by Step team were acquainted one to another and studied through play in the Children’s Creative Center.

"To me, the most interesting part was when we were compiling ecological messages and we were pronouncing them into both Macedonian and Albanian" – Robert, a second grade student

Note: Due to summer holidays, the center will be closed in August.
Spring days were maximally used to visit as many school yards across the country with our Magic Literacy Van. In each of the schools we spent a few hours of learning and socializing with early-grade students, their parents and the school staff.

It doesn’t matter if the school has 30 or 300 students, the Library on Wheels has space for everyone! Groups of students, together with their parents, teachers, pedagogues and psychologists enter the vehicle and explore the contents from the library shelves.

In the school yard, right in front of the Literacy Van, we set up a math corner where the students have group activities for fun learning of mathematics through games with cards and numeric tiles. By solving math problems and challenges, the students develop logical thinking and problem solving skills and they get the chance to practice mathematical operations which they learn in class.

“The students were excited, curious and eager to get in the van and find out what’s inside. Every student wanted to see as many books as possible. The encyclopedias were the most interesting resources for them. The kids watched the picture books that were presented on TV with huge interest.” - Zujca Stojanova, pedagogue in the primary school Goce Delchev – Konche.

So far, the Magic Literacy Van has visited more than 50 different locations around the country and more than 5400 students and 300 teachers have participated in the activities. During the summer vacation, we will visit several school communities which have demonstrated interest to get involved, and from September we proceed full steam ahead.

And, wherever we go, the last question that students ask is always the same: “When will the Magic Literacy Van come to visit us again?”
Summer is the time for rest and relaxation. But we should not allow the results and success we have been building throughout the school year, to drop over the summer only because children will not regularly read or practice math. Recent researches in the United States of America have shown that if children do not read regularly during the summer, can lose up to 30% of what they have learned, which additionally makes the back-to-school process in September much more difficult. Therefore, we offer some tips and simple strategies that will help you motivate children to read and learn mathematics all summer long, whether you are by the lake, at home, at the sea or in the mountains.

Read while traveling!
Whether you travel to a far-off destination or you take a local trip, there are many ways in which you can read and learn with your children during the journey. You can take books, picture books, magazines or newspapers. But you can also use all written signs that you come across on the road: billboards, car plates, maps, brochures... Let them be your inspiration for reading or word recognition games.

Write during your trips!
Children can write letters or postcards to friends and relatives or keep a travel journal. Let children help you with writing SMS or instant messages. The level of complexity of words and sentences should be appropriate to their literacy skills. Help them make step-by-step advancement in writing.

Have fun while reading at home!
There is no better place to read than the comfort of your own home. Reading materials (picture books, children encyclopedia, and books on the Internet) should always be available in your home.

Visit a library together with your children!
During the summer break, join the local library and visit the children’s department. Ask for book recommendations from the librarian, teachers or other parents. When choosing a book, choose together with the children and always respect their choice. Same goes when buying books together in a book store or when giving books as a gift. If we respect their interest, there is a bigger chance they will read those picture books.

Be a good example for your children!
Children usually copy adults’ actions. Therefore, we should all be a good example for them. Let them often see us with a book in our hands, and that you read for pleasure.

Summer math!
While traveling together with your children, count objects on the road or in the surroundings. For example, road signs, beach pebbles, cars... Time passes quickly with such activities. Additionally, you can encourage the children to compare different quantities, to add, subtract, divide or multiply by using objects from the surrounding.

Learn while you shop!
First, children can participate in writing down the shopping list. Then, you can ask them to make estimation of the quantity of products, to calculate the sum you need to pay, the change you need to take etc.
A rich selection of reading and learning resources can be found there.

**Materials for children:**
- 17 digital audio picture books in Macedonian and Albanian language. You can read, listen and watch them together with your children on a computer, tablet computer or a smart phone.
- 5 digital activities. Our digital activities complement the picture books and the children can use them to compose words and learn through play. These activities can be used offline, so you do not even need internet connection to use them.

**Materials for adults:**
- Manuals for educators
- Conclusions and recommendations from recent international researches in the field of education and early childhood development

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
PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES FOR SCHOOL DIRECTOR AND SCHOOL LIBRARIANS

In May, a working meeting was held with directors of primary and secondary schools during which the Draft Professional Competencies of Directors were reviewed. Also, in May the working group for drafting professional competencies and standards for students support service staff – librarian began. Two meetings of this group were held.

PILOTING OF THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CAREER ADVANCEMENT SOLUTIONS

The piloting process of the solution for professional development was finalized and the piloting of solutions for career development commenced. The piloting is taking place in 20 primary and secondary schools in the region of Skopje, Gostivar, Strumica and Prilep. Mid June, it is expected the piloting process to be completed and the feedback received to be used for improving the instruments and procedures for career advancement of teachers.

* 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 Kondijk - Mitkovska, Macedonian Civic Education Center, through e-mail: VKondik@mcgo.org.mk
Future first graders in preparations for school

Usually, at this time of the year the children that are in their last year in kindergarten are getting ready to enroll in the first grade of primary school. Therefore the children from the three centers included in the Project for Self-Empowerment of Roma Parents and Children who will start first grade in September, visited the “Brakja Ramiz Hamid” primary school. They were acquainted with the school building, classrooms and the atmosphere within, part of the teaching staff and the school pedagogue. This activity was conducted for the purpose of making the first contact with the school pleasant for the children so that they can form a positive attitude toward going to school. A meeting with the children’s parents, school pedagogue and part of the teaching staff was conducted for the same purpose. At this meeting the parents received information about the technical aspect of enrollment, the expectations of the school and curriculum and there was a discussion about what is it that parents can do in order to support their children’s transition from the less formal to more formal education. Consequently, with the support and guidance of the centers’ staff, a series of individual testing for the children was conducted which resulted in the successful enrollment of 70 children in grade 1.

The children will continue to get prepared for school during the summer, along with the completing of documentation of children's development and progress which will be handed to their future teachers and school staff so that they can adequately monitor children’s development and intervene as necessary.

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 Josheska, Educational Coordinator, majda@stepbystep.org.mk.
For seven years in a row, the Center for Educational Initiatives Step by Step from Bosnia and Herzegovina is organizing the Regional Conference for Educators. This year, the Conference will take place in the period August 18-21 in the Stanisici Ethno Village, near Bjelina. The main topic of this year’s Conference is “Language as a tool for developing critical thinking”.

More than 250 participants from six countries in the region are expected to be part of this annual conference, and, as always before this will be an excellent opportunity for all educators to share experience, as well as to present and advance their teaching practice.

We encourage everyone interested to register for conference participation (deadline is June 30) or to participate with a presentation or a workshop (deadline is June 20).

For more detailed information regarding participation fee and conference program, please refer to the official website of the Center Step by Step – Bosnia and Herzegovina: http://www.sbs.ba/7-konferencija/

IMPORTANT DATES:

Conference dates: 
18 – 21.08.2015.

Deadline for conference registration: 
30.06.2015.

Deadline for presentation/workshop registration: 
20.06.2015.