Dear friends and collaborators!

We are greeting you with the newest edition of the electronic bulletin from the Foundation “Step by Step”!

Why is it important to turn the classroom into a creative environment? How do we include in the school activities not only the teachers, but the parents as well? What is needed for professional development in the special education schools? This is just a part from the issues that we tackle upon in this edition, alongside suggestions for new reading resources, new project activities and many other interesting topics.

Read, share and join our activities!

Greetings from the Step by Step team

PROJECT FOR ROMA EMPOWERMENT AND AWARENESS FOR DEMOCRACY THROUGH EDUCATION

The Project will benefit Roma children and women in the Municipality of Suto Orizari and the Roma community in the Municipality Gorce Petrov, specifically:

- 120 children at preschool age (5-6 years), who are out of kindergarten;
- 210 children at primary school age (6-12 years) attending the local schools Braka Ramiz Hamid in Suto Orizari and Straso Pindzur in Gjorce Petrov;
- 500 mothers and women with low literacy and educational attainment levels.

USAID Readers are Leaders Project

“OUR CLASSROOM- OUR WORLD”
Trainings for creating stimulative environment

LEARNING COMMUNITIES
Incubators of innovation and culture of learning

DIGITAL CONTENTS AUTHORING
As easy as a piece of cake!

EVERY CHILD DESERVES A GOOD STORY
Picture books for children with visual and hearing impairments

WHAT IS NEW IN THE PUBLIC LIBRARIES?

“LIVING LIBRARY”

“IT IS EASIER TO BREAK AN ATOM THAN A PREJUDICE” – EINSTEIN

Greetings from the Step by Step team
Having in mind that every child is an individual for itself, with an individual and different learning style, we must pay special attention to creating stimulating conditions in the classroom that will inspire every child to explore, learn and study independently. The classroom should be an environment where the children would feel safe, where they would be able to express their ideas and opinions freely, to gain confidence in themselves, the teachers and their classmates, to take part in establishing the classroom rules, and where they would be encouraged to cooperate and respect each other.

During the last months, USAID Readers are Leaders Project carried out 42 trainings for creating effective learning environment in all Phase 1 and 2 project schools. The trainings were carried out in each school separately, because every school faces different and specific challenges when it comes to the learning environment.

The aim of the training is for the teachers and the parents, with the help of our trainers, to arrange a classroom, and then, using this experience, to rearrange the other classrooms in the school. The idea is to use cheap, easily accessible materials which can be found everywhere around.
Snezana Koteva, first grade teacher in Goce Delchev primary school in Prilep, was happy to share with us the excitement of her classroom being chosen for rearrangement with the training. “It was fun to transform the classroom into an effective and rich learning environment, with warm and inspiring atmosphere, where the first graders will have the opportunity to enjoy and learn. Since the classroom was transformed during the winter holiday, the children’s reaction on the first day of the second semester was priceless. They shouted out with eyes wide open: “It’s stunning, miss.” Then they started asking: “Why is it put there?” or “What is this...” They started exploring their new classroom.” – added Snezana.

Florina Shehu, professor at the Faculty of Pedagogy in Skopje, and creating effective learning environment trainer, shared with us her impressions from the training in Prparimi primary school in Chegrane: “The training introduced a new level of quality in the work and the cooperation among the teachers and the parents, connected with a common point of interest – creating effective and inspiring learning environment. The new approaches and strategies based on joint work and planning can be applied in every classroom, and used by every teacher, parent and child. A big number of participants have requested from us to continue organizing similar trainings more frequently, which would enable us to have a more in-depth approach on specific issues and outreach to a bigger number of teachers and parents.”

In the months to come, this training will be delivered to the Phase 3 project schools, and by the end of the Project it will be made available to three representatives from each primary school in the country.
“Being a special education teacher, I expected that the learning communities will help us create more possibilities to improve the teaching methods, especially for our students and our school environment. After two or three meetings led by our mentor, I realized that the learning community provides us the tools for a very simple and substantial way of communication, and a possibility to cooperate with the other community members.”

– Zana Gjorgjieva, special education teacher.

“I enjoy the most when, while doing the developmental activities, I promote some values like my creativity, motivation, responsibility, self-confidence and my love for the children with special needs.” – Marija Davcheva, special education teacher.

“I hope our learning community will be even more successful in future, and that having seen the benefits, we will have more members. I also look forward to networking with other schools because we feel a strong need to share experiences and practices with colleagues from other special primary schools from the country and abroad.” – pointed out Zivka Panova Sazdova, special education teacher.

The further steps of the project, concerning the learning communities, is to organize meetings on a regional level. This was one of the suggestions that the teachers from Maca Ovcharova primary school consider to be their need, as well.

At the beginning, when I heard my colleagues talk about compiling portfolios, I did not know what it was about, but it seemed interesting and caught my attention. I insisted on taking part in the project because I want to be informed about the novelties in the education. I thought that it would bring mutual cooperation and exchange of practical experience among the teachers.” – shared with us the teacher Zaga Kolodezni.

The learning communities have been actively functioning in 60 project primary schools in the country. The communities function as incubators for new ideas and creating a culture of learning in the schools. We are happy to point out that one of the most active learning communities is the one from the special school Maca Ovcharova in Veles. Several teachers from this school talk about their experience in the learning community, the cooperation and their expectations.

Over the past 10 months the learning communities have been actively functioning in 60 project primary schools in the country. The communities function as incubators for new ideas and creating a culture of learning in the schools. We are happy to point out that one of the most active learning communities is the one from the special school Maca Ovcharova in Veles. Several teachers from this school talk about their experience in the learning community, the cooperation and their expectations.
In the modern education systems, teachers creating their own learning resources is equally important as using resources authored by others. Having this in mind, USAID Readers are Leaders Project organized workshops in 42 primary schools where the lower-grade teachers were introduced to digital tools that are available for free on the Internet, and can be used for authoring reading and math resources.

“The materials that the teachers used to download from the Internet can now be developed by the teachers themselves, easily and free of charge, with the contents that directly answer their particular needs. Adapting the lesson to what they could find on the Internet has now gone to history.” – pointed out Mirjana Mirjana Dimoska, teacher at Goce Delchev primary school in the village of Ljubanci, Butel, who is also a trainer in the Project, has shared with us her impressions about the workshops: “At the beginning, the teachers were surprised to hear what we were going to do at the workshop and were skeptical whether they would be able to do such a thing. But once we started with the stories, teachers’ enthusiasm grew, and were eager to finish the work. They continued with the same pace while working with the other digital tools, because now they were more confident, while at the same time, they found these activities quite interesting and creative.”

Mirjana Dimoska, teacher at Goce Delchev primary school in the village of Ljubanci
Here are some of the tools that are free online and some ideas how to use them when teaching children:

**Storybird** - The teacher can create a story with illustrations and contents covering a topic of their interest. This helps children nurture the love of writing—in this case digital stories based on given illustrations. The digital stories are available online 24 hours, or in a private group created for the students.

**Linoit** - A tool used to create online bulletin boards. It can be used not only to keep students and parents informed, but also as a workbook or a checklist, where the children will be given assignments from the curriculum.

**GoAnimate** - A tool used for creating cartoons on different topics and contents that cannot be found on the Internet. The tool has the options of adding sound effects, music, text bubbles and recorded speech. It can be used in several school subjects: science, social sciences, reading etc.

**Tondoo** - A tool that helps us create comics of one or more pages, which boosts the students’ imagination in creating characters and using different forms of language to express the contents and the messages from the story.

**Mystorybook** - Online picture book community in which the students, the teachers, and the parents can create digital story or use the stories uploaded by other users.

The tools are easy to use, regardless whether you are a teacher or a parent. Invite the children to join you in creating a comic, a picture book or a cartoon. Get creative and share with us all of the new resources that you prepare!
Every Child Deserves a Good Story
Picture books for children with visual and hearing impairments

The audio picture books edited by Step by Step are now available on the site of Union of the Blind People of the Republic of Macedonia.

Visit our Digital library and download the picture books for free.

We selected four titles from the collection of picture books “Our First Library” and upgraded the audio-digital version with sign language, so they can be used by both teachers and parents of children with hearing difficulties.

- Let's Go to Work
- King Ben
- The Doll's Nose
- Dorothy and the Glasses

Read with your children for 20 minutes a day. Every day! Make reading fun and enjoy the story!
WHAT IS NEW IN THE PUBLIC LIBRARIES?

In order to meet the needs of many parents and teachers who asked for “Our First Library” collection of picture books to be available outside the classroom, we distributed the collection to the public libraries in 33 cities across the country.

Parents and other family members, it is time to visit the nearest library. You have 20 titles of new picture books waiting for you there, as well as a manual and a poster that could contribute for an easier and more structured reading time with your children.

It is never too early or too late to become a member of the local library. Visit the library with your children and introduce them to the world of books. Positive habits develop from early age.

In December 2015, we organized educational and entertaining activities to promote the picture books from our collection in the public libraries in Kriva Palanka, Veles and Gostivar.

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.
Foundation “Step by Step” in collaboration with the local NGOs Nadez and Dendo Vas has started implementing the Project for Roma Empowerment and Awareness for Democracy through Education, financially supported by the European Commission and Open Society Foundations.

Project aim: The Project has the overall objective of improving the situation of the Roma community, that is marked with inadequate educational levels, participation and achievements, lack of knowledge and skills for improving employability and quality of domestic and community life and poor financial situation, which has precluded Roma from benefiting from opportunities for education, employment and from participation in democratic decision-making processes on local and national level.

The specific objectives that will be pursued are:

- To improve education achievements, including school readiness of pre-schoolers, school performance of primary school children and literacy levels of women,
- To enhance information and skills levels of Roma families for better parenting practices and proactive responsible citizenship,
- To promote Roma democratic participation in community processes and improve capacities and involvement of Roma CSOs for addressing quality and discrimination in provision of services for women and children.

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For more information regarding the Project for Roma Empowerment and Awareness for Democracy through Education, contact Elena Mishik, Project Coordinator, through e-mail: elena@stepbystep.org.mk or visit the website of the EU Delegation in Macedonia.
This training was aimed at empowering a group of REYN members to create Living Libraries in their respective countries by providing insight into ABCittà approach to the Living Library methodology and the needed knowledge and skills for organizing Living Library events.

Is it really that hard to break a person’s prejudice? Is there a tool, or a safe process that could help us look in between the black&white perception of things and see the different shades that hide in every human story? These were some of the questions covered by the four-day interactive training course for local actions to deconstruct prejudices about Roma, organized under the title “Building Roma Living Library”. The training took place in Skopje, in the period January 26-29, 2016, and brought together a total of 16 professionals from eight countries. It was conducted by ABCittà, and sponsored by The Romani Early Years Network – REYN, managed by the International Step by Step Association.
A simulation of a Living Library event was organized within the training to demonstrate diverse scenarios that could occur during such event and give participants the chance to take upon different roles and responsibilities.

The Living Library training was a unique experience for participants to be part of a professional development and a peer learning process, yet, at the same time build strong and authentic personal connections within the group by appreciating the opportunity to share each other’s personal stories.

Living Libraries could be used as a powerful tool to fight against social exclusion and can be used by adapting it to the local context as a tool to deconstruct various prejudices. So, let us hear the story that each one of us has to share first.

The Living Library is an innovative tool that can be used to challenge prejudice by facilitating a conversation between two groups of people: the Books and the Readers. In the Living Library, books are not made out of paper; books are real people, with real experiences and feelings, who are in constant inquiry of their prejudices that could affect them and influence their lives. These “brave and truthful books” are willing to share their personal experiences of discrimination or social exclusion with the Readers. By doing so, Books give Readers the opportunity for dialogue in the hope that through this process most common stereotypes will be challenged and therefore the attitudes and behaviors of wider society will be changed. Every story has a big personal impact and touch on both sides – the Book and the Reader.

Participants were introduced to the tools and activities under the Living Library methodology and underwent a step-by-step process of preparation and carrying out of a Living Library Event.