ANNUAL REPORT 2017

www.stepbystep.org.mk
ABOUT THE FOUNDATION “STEP BY STEP” — MACEDONIA

The Foundation for Education and Cultural Initiatives “Step by Step” - Macedonia focuses its capacities toward the democratization of the process of education by promoting and nourishing the idea of constant training and support for teachers, pedagogues and pre-school and school principals while maintaining fruitful cooperation with the government institutions and teacher training faculties. The Foundation guides, coordinates, participates in and directly implements activities which promote innovation, progress and development of the work of preschool institutions and primary schools in the Republic of Macedonia.

The Foundation for Education and Cultural Initiatives “Step by Step” - Macedonia was established as a nongovernmental organization with the aim to continue the educational program “Step by Step” that has started with its implementation in 1994, as regional program of Open Society Institute – New York and George Town University from Washington D.C.

The Mission of the Foundation “Step by Step” - Macedonia

The mission of the Foundation for Education and Cultural Initiatives “Step by Step” - Macedonia is to prepare, develop and implement programs that enhance the education and culture in the modern society as a key factor for educational, cultural, economic and social development. The Foundation “Step by Step” - Macedonia is implementing programs in the kindergartens, primary schools and other educational and cultural institutions, supports innovative approaches and finds different ways to raise the possibilities to help the children achieve their full potential through education.

Strategic goals

- Encouraging the democratic processes in the education of children, youth and adults.
- Promoting and support of the educational initiatives based on modern approach to children.
- Advocating the idea of permanent training of the teaching staff and the teams in the kindergartens, primary schools and the students at the Faculty for teachers.
- Building partnership relationship with the ministries and the institutions that educate teachers, schools, kindergartens, with the local authorities as well as with the local and foreign institutions that share the same vision and objectives.
- Meeting the needs of every child, including the children with special needs, the children from minority groups, Roma children, children that lack the opportunity to be educated and the children who live in the rural areas.
- Increasing the public awareness of the needs of Roma children, poor children, children from the rural areas and children with special needs.
- Printing and publishing professional manuals, picture books for children and other reference books that promote our mission.
- Encouraging local communities in their support of the children development.
- Providing opportunities for the children to express themselves in a creative way.

The Foundation “Step by Step” - Macedonia is part of the International Step by Step Association (International Step by Step Association - ISSA) and through its actions fully supports and acts upon the ISSA principles for quality pedagogical practice:

1. Interactions
2. Family and Community
3. Inclusion, Diversity and Values of Democracy
4. Assessment and Planning
5. Teaching Strategies
6. Learning Environment
7. Professional Development
Professional development activities of Step by Step staff

During 2017, Foundation Step by Step staff participated in a number of professional development activities and events: Digital Security Awareness Training organized by USAID Macedonia, Network of Education Policy Centers (NEPC) General Assembly and Conference in Tallinn, Estonia, Regional conference for inclusion in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Peer Learning Activity: ensuring safe spaces for young children in families and communities organized by ISSA member International Child Development Initiatives, NEPC Regional Summer School on Poverty in Education in Kosovo and Training for adult learning education Curriculum GlobALE.

Team members also participated at the Global Teacher Prize and Global Education and Skill Forum organized by Varkey Foundation in Dubai, United Emirates, the annual ISSA Conference on “Local Responses, Global Advances: Towards Competent Early Childhood Systems” in Ghent, Belgium and presented paper on Non-Positional Teacher Leadership as a Method of Democratizing Education at the University of Birmingham, UK. The Step by Step Foundation actively participated and gave proposals for urgent democratic reforms in the area of Education and Youth Policies, providing recommendations for primary education, preschool education and inclusion of children with special education needs.

Elena Misik, Program Manager at Step by Step Foundation for Education and Cultural Initiatives Macedonia was appointed President of the International Step by Step Association (ISSA) Board for the period January 2018 — December 2019.

Organizational capacity building of Step by Step team

In 2017, the capacity building support provided to the Foundation Step by Step – Macedonia through the USAID Organizational Performance Improvement Program (OPIP) was finalized. OPIP representatives concluded that the undertaken performance improvement activities had a very positive impact on SBS’s organizational development. The repeated organizational assessment performed by INTRAC, showed that as a result of the extensive capacities building process improvement was observed in each assessed area: internal organization, funding structures, mobilizing resources, managing relationships and external environment. As part of the Early Childhood Program grant provided by OSF London, the Step by Step staff went through a three-module training delivered by Prof. Zoran Velkovski to strengthen the capacities in the area of research, monitoring, development and e-learning.
Program activities during 2017

Foundation “Step by Step” continued with the implementation of various projects, based on the fundamental values represented ever since: stimulating children’s critical thinking, developing potential of all children and particularly of the children living on the margins of the society, enhancing teaching process and establishing collaborations to undertake initiatives aimed at fulfilling creative and intellectual potentials of the children, teachers and parents.

During 2017, Foundation “Step by Step” had its role in the implementation of two projects: USAID Readers are Leaders Project and Project for Roma Empowerment and Awareness for Democracy through Education, funded by the European Commission and the Open Society Foundations. More details on each of the projects are provided in the following sections of this report.

USAID READERS ARE LEADERS PROJECT

USAID Readers are Leaders Project aims to improve children’s reading and numeracy skills, strengthen teacher’s pedagogical skills, especially diagnostic and formative assessment skills, and increase overall community recognition of the value of reading and numeracy skills. All project activities, with due concern to geographical, ethnic, gender and social diversity, are aimed at addressing the needs of the children in the early grades within the formal education system, children from vulnerable and marginalized groups, including Roma children, children with special needs and residents in remote rural areas, and children residing in institutions, including: hospitals, orphanages, etc.

The initially planned lifespan of the project was May 2013 throughout November, 2015. Upon request of the Ministry of Education and Science, USAID Macedonia extended the project cycle until November 2017. With the latest modification, USAID Macedonia granted unfunded extension to the project until June 30, 2018. Besides the extension of implementation period, the project team also expanded the project activities in all primary schools across Macedonia to provide support to schools for two additional academic years and thus increase the likelihood that activities and practices introduced by the project become deeply ingrained in every-day school practice.

More detailed information on 2017 project activities by component are provided below.

Component 1: Reading and Numeracy Assessment

The main goals of this component are to develop and implement the instruments for early-grade reading and math assessment, EGRA and EGMA, which will provide reliable results that can be used to set reading and math standards for early grade students.

Presentation of Nationwide Early Grade Reading and Mathematics findings:

The nationwide findings from the early grade literacy and mathematics assessment study conducted in May 2016 were presented to representatives of all primary schools in February 2017 and to the expert public and education stakeholders in September 2017. Representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science, Bureau for Development of Education, National Examinations Center, Teachers’ Training Colleges, international donor community and local organizations attended the event. The presentation included an overview of the nationwide study, summary of the main findings in reading and numeracy skills of early grade students as well as main conclusions and specific recommendations for schools, teachers, families and institutions.
EGRA and EGMA study in May 2017: The annual assessment study implemented in May 2017 collected baseline performance data in reading and mathematics in Grade 5 that can be used for future efforts of establishing national benchmarks and compared reading and math performance of Grade 2 and 3 students from schools involved in the earlier stages and those involved in the later stages of project implementation. The sample included 1,500 Grade 2 and 1,500 Grade 3 students from 70 schools as well as around 500 Grade 5 students from the longitudinal sample of 42 schools. The study was carried out by 157 school assessors, while 18 observers monitored the quality of data collection process. Representative of the National Examinations Center helped with data processing. Based on the reading and math performance scores, the project team prepared individual reports for each school participating in this year’s study. The study results showed that the academic performance in both project and control schools in reading and math in 2017 is very close to national performances obtained in 2016 nationwide study: most children read with poor fluency and limited comprehension. In the area of mathematics, they still have problems with addition, subtraction and word problems.

Setting Country-Specific Benchmarks: Data produced by EGRA and EGMA are used worldwide to establish benchmarks, which are in fact standards that define a desired level of performance in reading and math achievable at a particular point in time. For this purpose, the project established a Work Group, comprised of the experts who developed EGRA and EGMA tasks as they are familiar with the theory and the process behind the development of these two instruments. In addition, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Bureau for Development of Education and the National Examinations. Because the benchmark setting is a time-consuming process, the actual work is planned to continue in 2018 after consultations with the Ministry of Education and Science, which should take ownership over the benchmarks. The benchmarks should be also in line with the latest modifications of the national curricula in language and math for the early grades that are currently under way.

Component 2: Professional Development

This component aims to improve teaching and student achievements in reading and numeracy by providing professional development activities to early grade teachers. The best professional development is experiential and collaborative and therefore the trainings offered within Component 2 provide teachers with the opportunity to expand their skills, develop new teaching strategies and network with colleagues from other schools. During 2017, the following activities were implemented as part of this component:

Training for teachers for using innovative and effective strategies for improving student literacy - “How to read, learn and have fun?”

This one-day training aims to introduce teachers with innovative approaches and teaching techniques for improving student language skills and offers examples of integrated teaching of language and other school subjects. In this reporting period, a total of 30 trainings “How to read, learn and have fun?” were delivered for 598 representatives from 103 primary schools.
Training for teachers for using innovative and effective strategies for improving student numeracy—“Math+”

The training is envisioned as one-day condensed practical training that provides participants with numerous practical exercises and an array of didactical material for numeracy that can be made of hands-on resources together with students for various classroom purposes. Additionally, the training aims to provide participants with necessary skills to reflect on their own practice in developing and promoting math across learning.

In this reporting period, total of 29 training workshops “Math+” were delivered for a total of 532 representatives from 102 primary schools.

Training for teachers for creating effective learning environment “OUR CLASSROOM – OUR WORLD”

The classroom should be a dynamic space that will welcome and inspire students to actively participate in individual and group learning activities and use shared space and resources while feeling safe and cozy. This training aims to build upon teachers’ previous knowledge on the topic, giving them more in-depth theoretical knowledge on the principles for creating effective learning environment and brings together teachers and parents for a collaborative classroom-makeover action in the schools. During 2017, a total of 241 school representatives and 97 family members from 76 primary schools were part of such collaborative actions and the results are rearranged classrooms that will serve as effective learning environment for the youngest students.

Dissemination of the training workshops

Participants from the schools where the training was delivered for only three representatives, were encouraged to disseminate the techniques to their colleagues within the schools where they work. In 2017, in total 1180 teachers attended the disseminations of the trainings.

Handbook “Step by Step to Literacy - 50 activities for improving student literacy skills”

Handbook “Step by Step to Literacy - 50 activities for improving student literacy skills” was prepared and uploaded on Step by Step website. This handbook was prepared in both Macedonian and in Albanian language.

Component 3: Learning Communities

This component promotes school-based professional learning communities as a method of a contextualized, sustainable professional development for teachers which is underpinned by teachers’ personal agency and co-creation of knowledge. The goal of learning communities is creating shared knowledge among colleagues and nurturing a culture of learning in the school.

Introducing Learning Communities in 27 new schools

In the final stage of the project implementation the 27 primary schools that served as control schools in the EGRA & EGMA assessment, were included in the project completely: established learning communities and participated in the three trainings. These schools follow the same methodology as the learning communities established previously.
School coordinators take the lead in phase 1 and 2 schools

As a method to strengthen sustainability of the learning communities' component in the schools, in 40 phase 1 and 2 schools elected school coordinators to take over the responsibilities of facilitating the learning communities from the mentors. During 2017 these learning communities successfully conducted 2 support meetings, repaired for and participated in a networking event. The School Coordinators proved to be more than capable of accepting this new role of facilitating and coordinating the focus group. By the end of the project their contribution will be invaluable for the certification process but mainly for continuing with the positive practices of collaborative learning in the schools.

Networking events

During 2017, there were a total of 20 networking events for the 63 schools from the first three phases of the project. The networking events followed a different agenda than the previous cycle of networking events. This time the teachers had to prepare posters that did not focus on their development activity specifically, but on themselves as superheroes. They had to invent an origin story, outline their superpowers and their weakness, their allies and nemeses. In the second part of the event the mixed groups of teachers that formed superhero teams were given three types of challenges from education that required devising a strategy for solving them. The challenges dealt with issue of inclusion, teachers' professional development and collegiality and inventing a more effective school day. The strategies were summarized in a report from each networking event and provided a great insight in the way teachers think about some of the most relevant issues in education today.

The majority of the participants embraced the format of the networking events as very positive: the superhero activity allowed them to talk about their positive sides without feeling exposed or conceited; teachers considered the superhero activity as something they can try out with their students for various topics (i.e. literature analysis, biology and confidence building). The developed strategies were proof that the teachers are an extremely important factor in devising policies and practices in the schools.

The next steps in this component is to transform the positive experiences into lessons for other school environments. The very encouraging results from School Coordinators’ standing ‘behind the wheel’ provides reason for optimism about the sustainability of this component. The learning community is becoming a synonym of collaboration, shared knowledge and a vehicle for improving organizational cohesion.

Component 4: Digital Learning Resources

This component creates and adapts and distributes materials for reading and math, in printed and digital form, and encourages the use of ICT in reading and math instruction.

Picture books in Turkish language: During 2017, USAID Readers are Leaders Project adapted eight picture books in Turkish language in electronic form, PDF format. They were made available for the general public in the Step by Step Digital Library.
Picture books in Bosnian language: In 2017, we selected five titles of the children’s book collection “Our First Library” and we adapted and published them into bilingual edition – Macedonian and Bosnian language. Members of the Association for Promotion of Bosnian Culture Divanhana who also work as teachers in the Bosnian language school in the village of Ljubin, Saraj, contributed by translating these books.

“The collection of children’s books developed by USAID Readers are Leaders Project arrived at our school in Macedonian language. When reading these stories to our students, we, the teachers, had to directly translate them into Bosnian. Now, these bilingual editions will not only make teachers’ job less complicated, but they will also be a valuable reading resource in our students’ mother tongue.” – Sanela Tarik, lower-grade teacher from PS Dituria, village of Ljubin, Saraj.

Component 5: Family and Community Involvement

This component prepares and carries out initiatives and creative activities that will raise interest for reading and numeracy in students, engage their families and the wider community.

Picture books making workshops for parents and teachers

In April, project carried out picture books making workshop on math topics in 42 selected primary schools with mixed groups of parents and lower grade teachers. A total of 476 school representatives, 397 family members, and 38 students participated.

Some of the positive aspects shared by participants is that such workshops are an excellent opportunity for collaboration between teachers and parents, and the practical creative tips for making picture books can be reproduced easily in the classroom and at home by using affordable materials.

Magic Literacy Van: During 2017, the Magic Literacy Van visited 78 different locations – central and satellite buildings of primary schools that showed interest to become part of this activity, both rural and urban. A total of 5,567 students, school staff and family and community members visited the mobile library.

During the summer period, the Magic Literacy Van was part of bigger cultural festivals and roadshows – MakeDox traveling cinema in the Porece Region and the Akto Festival for contemporary arts in Bitola.
Speech4Teach event: Second year in a row, the Foundation Step by Step – Macedonia organizes the Speech4Teach-Inspiration for Education event, as part of the USAID Readers are Leaders Project. On November 1 in Skopje, more than 250 participants (teachers, parents, education policy makers, international community, NGO sector, and the media) joined for a session of inspirational talks shared by selected speakers in the role of teachers, parents, children’s authors, and professors.

The event was officially launched by the Director of the Bureau for Development of Education of the Republic of Macedonia Rizvan Bela, USAID Country Representative David Atteberry, and Step by Step Foundation Executive Director Suzana Kirandziska.

This year, the following inspirational speakers shared their stories on stage:

- **Shpetim Latifi** – The USAID and LCIF Children with Visual Impairments Project Chief of Party
- **Kiril Barbareev** – Professor at the Faculty of Education, University “Goce Delcev” - Shtip and education blogger
- **Radmila Rangelov Jusovik** – Executive Director of Center for Educational Initiatives Step by Step – Bosnia and Herzegovina (video message)
- **Gorast Cvetkovski** – actor and parent
- **Vanco Polazarevski** – writer of children’s books
- **Vesela Bogdanovikj** – lower-primary teacher from Koco Racin primary school in the village Ivanjevci, Mogila, and selected as Top50 innovative teachers worldwide by Varkey Foundation and her Grade 5 students

Some of the topics tackled in this year’s inspirational talks were the boundaries of the inclusive education, the possible ways of restructuring teacher pre-service training, the role of the parents in today’s digital world and the standards of a quality children’s literature. A group of Grade 5 students shared with the audience their perspectives and points of view on what a good teacher should be like and what kind of teachers they would be if that is what they decide to do when they grow up.
2017 was the second and final year of READE Project implementation. Daily activities continued to provide children in the Suto Orizari and Gorche Petrov municipalities with structured learning activities that replicated or complement the subject matter taught in preschool and in primary schools. As a result, 65 children who attended the preschool activities enrolled in primary education with knowledge, skills and Macedonian language fluency that corresponds to the readiness level of children from affluent communities or who had attended kindergartens. 245 children aged 6–12 improved their school achievements and attendance rates.

Over 650 girls and women took part in educational activities organised for improving their status, skills, health and wellbeing as well as awareness, information and knowledge about issues pertinent to their lives as individual and family and community members (including health promotion, employment and further education advice, household budget management, etc.), their parenting abilities (including skills how to understand the curriculum and knowledge and skills it develops and how to support their children’s learning), and their literacy levels and motivation and habits for reading.

A review of policies affecting Roma conducted among project beneficiaries revealed that despite two strategies and numerous action plans, and improvement in enrolment, retention and completion in primary, secondary and higher education, and in regulation of health insurance, immunization and safe motherhood practices, Roma are still faced with:

- Educational activities for Roma children in the community learning centres Dendo Vas in Gorche Petrov and Nadez in Suto Orizari
- Messages from children and parents reflecting their wishes and dreams for the future

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• poorer quality housing, utilities and public infrastructure,
• low participation rates in public employment programmes, except communal works,
• extremely high unemployment and inactivity rate, esp. among women,
• low education attainment and lack of qualifications,
• high rate of social transfer dependency.

The most significant activity in 2017 was the Awareness Raising Campaign aimed at promoting the importance of education and learning for Roma. It comprised several activities:

- posters and leaflets with advice for parents and with messages created by Project beneficiaries were published and distributed;
- 5 bilingual picture books in Macedonian and Romani languages were published and distributed, with educational themes addressing inclusion, socialisation, sharing and empathy:
  - Magical Armchair
  - Icicle
  - To have a Dog
  - Oranges for Everyone
  - Hannah in her Wheelchair
- 6 round-table discussion on issues affecting education of Roma children were organised in Tetovo, Gorche Petrov, Kumanovo, Prilep, Bitola and Suto Orizari, where issues such as lack of access to preschool education, poor achievements, lack of parental support, lack of additional teachers for remedial teaching, high numbers of out-of-school children in particular girls, lack of local stakeholder collaboration were discussed. The roundtables were co-organised with local authorities, schools and civil society and attended by over 100 persons.
- The online initiative “I want to...” aimed at raising awareness and mobilisation on the importance of equal access to quality education for Roma children was carried out. 20 different individual messages were created by children and their parents and designed as on-line posters, with one published each day in May-June 2017 on the official web-pages and Facebook of the Step by Step Foundation, CSI Nadez and ZCOP Dendo Vas.

The Project was officially closed in June 2017, in the presence of representatives of the EU Delegation, international community, local schools and authorities, civil society and beneficiaries.