

Primary school “Stanimir Veljkovic Zele”, Serbia “Share” by Ana Stojkovic, teacher

Located in an underdeveloped rural part of the south-east Serbia with a high unemployment and poverty rate which strongly affect our school life, our school has turned a challenge into a mission to successfully overcome the sensitive issues our community faces. A great number of our pupils come from disadvantaged families. One third of all our pupils are of Roma nationality, often associated with weak academic achievements and a high dropout rate.

These issues may sometimes pose challenges for pupils. Joining the *Share* project and exchanging practices with other schools helped us learning how to prevent and recognize unwanted behavior and how to promote common values of tolerance, mutual respect, empathy, equal opportunities, gender equality and non-discrimination, which is our main priority.

Different “awareness-raising” activities which actively engage our entire community (teachers, pupils and their parents, local government representatives, cultural centre, sports organizations) and enhance the sense of belonging have become regular practice in our school.

Some of these activities include additional support for pupils with learning difficulties. As well as work of a pedagogical assistant for social inclusion of Roma to promote the importance of schooling among this population, help them stay within the education system and keep them motivated to finish their schooling. Our Roma pupils are also provided with the opportunity to learn about their language and culture from an appointed Roma teacher and to present their customs to other pupils at our school.

We also cooperate with a humanitarian organization. Various charity activities, workshops for parents and pupils, fairs and exhibitions to promote healthy lifestyles and the environment protection are some of the usual activities conducted.

Skype meetings with pupils from other countries and taking part in the *Let`s end poverty* project started on the Microsoft platform *Skype in the classroom*, are activities that help our pupils learn about other cultures and help them become aware that we are all global citizens.

Every year we celebrate important dates such as The International Day for Tolerance on 16 November and The International Roma Day on 8 April when parents are invited to support their children at school performances. Then, the overall school atmosphere of equality, tolerance and non-discrimination is most noticeable, which makes us all very proud.

The most important result we have achieved is a significant decrease in the number of drop outs from our school in the past few years as well as the increase in the number of pupils of Roma nationality we have managed to motivate to finish their primary education.

Our primary goal has always been to treat every child equal, no matter their background and to provide all our pupils with equal opportunities to fulfill their potentials. We are on a mission of making them good citizens able to continue building the world of tolerance and acceptance, free of all kinds of

violence and discrimination, which we can achieve only with the strong support of the whole community.

If we have succeeded to provide a good example to other schools, it means that with the right support, enthusiasm and effort no mission is impossible.