

Project “Overcoming Gender Stereotypes”

Supported by Youth in Action Program

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From August 5th to 11th Albanian Family Federation for World Peace, in close cooperation with Women’s Federation for World Peace has organized a special Project with the title „Overcoming Gender Stereotypes”. The project was sponsored by the “Youth in Action” program of the European Union. As some of the goals of “Youth in Action” program is to inspire a sense of active citizenship and intercultural dialogue, we could find some common points with our philosophy to apply for the project. The aim of our activity was to provide precious character education, focusing on gender issues for 15 young people from Albania and 15 from Hungary. For most of the participants it was a first contact with our movement and introduction to its philosophy and lifestyle. The Albanian participants came mostly from a high school in Kamza, a city neighboring Tirana, where WFP organized activities before, while the Hungarians were invited by IRFF and UPF; their age ranging from 18 to 27. Participants were hosted in the Mullet training center near Tirana.

The program was very varied and less intense than typical DP workshops, with usually one character presentation based on IEF materials in the morning, where young people explored the topics of good leadership, partnership between men and women, value of service and conflict resolution, as well as dignity of women. The presentation on dignity of women focused on abusive use of female body in advertisement and entertainment industry, as well as the issue of pornography and trafficking. In the discussion following this last presentation students spontaneously proposed a protest letter campaign to Albanian music channels which broadcast clips with images close to pornography. The morning lecture was usually followed by presentations by participants, both in the form of power point and mini dramas, reflecting realistically situation in Hungarian and Albanian families. These gave real insight into existing family and social relationships and provided material for reflection, as well as discussion in groups. From the feedback received after the project, we realized that groups discussion were one of highly rated activities, since they provided room for all to freely express their views and learn from each other. It was all the more interesting, because groups were composed of people from both countries and different ages. Afternoons were usually dedicated to sports, games and outings, providing opportunity to learn about the host country and have fun in a healthy way. One of the most remarkable moments for the Hungarian group was probably a visit to the historical Et’hem Bey mosque in Tirana, which gave a chance to learn about the Moslem religion. Upon entering the temple, girls had to cover their heads with scarves, what probably seemed very exciting for them, as they kept photographing themselves. The evenings provided another opportunity for cultural exchange, when young people took time to present their countries, culture and history. Both Hungarian and Albanian participants put a lot of effort into making this part of the project attractive, what contributed to overcoming barriers between them despite differences in language and mentality. Music brought everybody together and eventually Albanians were singing Hungarian folk songs, and Hungarians dancing Albanian dances.

The culminating moment of the project was visit to Kamza, where participants reached out to local population by interviewing them on gender issues and family relationships and distributed leaflets with messages against family violence, which just in the recent month of July was the cause of death of 4 Albanian women. Before starting this activity, the whole group was received in the city hall by vice mayor, chairman of the city council and director of educational office, Mr. Qemal Cejku, who is also vice chairman of the Peace Council for Tirana. The meeting provided a chance to introduce our campaign to local authorities, as well as for them to explain the structure and functioning of the local government. Data collected from the campaign and the direct experience with people were summarized and analyzed by the participants next day, when they sorted out and counted the answers and commented them in a form of an essay. As Kamza is inhabited by the recently arrived population from the rural areas of Northern Albanian the data reflected a very traditional mentality with strict division of roles between men and women, where especially elder women accept a rather passive and subservient position. The respondents mostly denied existence of violence in their families although they confirmed existence of violent behavior in their community, what raises doubts about sincerity of their answers. A rather surprising discovery was that despite a misbalance in family, almost 100% of men, both young and old, expressed that they would accept a woman in a leadership position, both at work and in government. Young people experienced a slightly different attitudes than the elder ones and were more ready to accept that women are for many reasons disadvantaged in Albanian society; the relationship between man and woman in a family were also more balanced in families, where women were professionally successful. The change of attitudes among young people gives some hope for a more balanced and

peaceful society but there is definitely a need for a clear moral and relationship skills guidance, in order not to fall into the pitfall of individualistic and materialistic thinking, so prevalent in today's western societies. Probably one of the achievements of the project was the fact that all participants, both boys and girls, willingly participated in cleaning and washing the training center. There was a spirit of cooperation and volunteerism.

The last day of the project consisted of a full day outing to Durres, where young people could visit ancient Roman amphitheater and then relax on a beach. Despite some unexpected close encounters with sea creatures such as jelly fish and sea hedgehog, which required some medical help, it was a very joyful time. The trip was completed by a delicious lunch in a restaurant at the sea side. The food in the training center was also ranked very highly by participants. Generally the atmosphere during the project was very good and participants created deep bonds of friendship, what caused many tears at the moment of departure, desire to meet again and participate in other activities of that kind. Most of the participants expressed gratitude to the organizers and we hope they will continue to keep in touch with our movement. Some young people expressed that "it was a best experience in their life" and we already invited Albanian participants for a one day seminar, when they can learn about our ideals more deeply.

A main challenge of the project was to keep proper standard and attitudes among the participants who, by not being our members, occasionally transgressed the project's rule of no smoking and not drinking any alcohol. Luckily we were quite successful in keeping proper attitudes between boys and girls, who even in the case of being boyfriend and girlfriend refrained from expressing their romantic relationship.

Summarizing, we believe that all participants became more aware of many issues relating to good family relationship, gender issues, good leadership and service, becoming exposed to Unification outlook on life. They also learned in a practical way, that despite differences, we are eventually all "One Family under God". We hope we can organize similar projects of that kind in the future, building upon this experience and correcting any existing shortcomings.

The report of the activity was published on the website of Kamza municipality, and Albanian NL Mr. Gani Rroshi had a chance to present it in a TV interview. We still have further invitations from the media and will look out for other opportunities to present the project and its outcomes.







