



**Foundation for Social
Change and Inclusion**

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION PROGRAMME



Opening the school door for forgotten children



INTRODUCTION

Hidden from the world's gaze, hundreds of thousands of people are living in severe poverty in the Balkans. Young people, particularly state and foster care leavers and Roma, become prostitutes and criminals because of severe deprivation and having grown up with a lack of proper education, job opportunities, access to social services and support. Families spend freezing winters living in one room shacks with leaking roofs. Human traffickers prey on these highly vulnerable members of a fractured society. The legacy of communism, failed political reform and war has left Southeast Europe a region where too many people are simply struggling to survive.

The Foundation for Social Change and Inclusion (FSCI) was founded in 2008 to help revive hope and restore dignity to some of the most vulnerable and marginalised individuals and communities in Bulgaria. FSCI now works with individuals, groups and communities throughout Southeast Europe by partnering with local people, organisations, businesses, churches and municipalities, helping them to effect positive change in their communities.

FSCI has three main programmes:

- **House of Opportunity**
- **Social Enterprise**
- **Early Years Education**

MISSION & VISION

MISSION

FSCI works towards the social development and integration of underprivileged individuals, groups and communities.

VISION

Our vision is a world where children are not abandoned and where everyone has the opportunity to live a successful life free from poverty, crime and prostitution.

To see an end to the vicious cycle of poverty and social isolation broken. To see a better, more hopeful future realised with dignified living for everyone.

OBJECTIVES

- To work for the social development of underprivileged individuals, groups and communities;
- To help underprivileged children, young people, adults and families meet their potential as an accepted part of society;
- To promote the rights of underprivileged individuals, groups and communities, in particular those of children and young people;
- To encourage and popularise voluntary work.



EARLY YEARS EDUCATION PROGRAMME

EXCLUDED, MARGINALISED, TRAPPED

The Roma community is very marginalised in Bulgaria; they are treated with prejudice and suspicion. People in some parts of the community live in extreme poverty and have very poor access to education and health care. There is a significant generational poverty cycle which it is very difficult for their children to escape from.

Education is a key factor in breaking out of this poverty cycle because those with basic qualifications, such as the Bulgarian School Diploma, have a much better chance of gaining legitimate employment.

There are, however, very significant barriers to young Roma children successfully entering the education system. Research shows that reasons for the general failure of educational work with Roma are of a complex and difficult nature.



The following reasons are strong factors in why Roma children find it difficult to adapt to the school environment and to integrate further in society:

- Low levels of literacy and qualification among adult Roma; severe social isolation of the Roma community;
- Low standard of living (a factor in low school attendance, incomplete participation in educational activities and high rate of school dropouts);
- Lack of good child care skills and responsible parenthood in the community;
- High unemployment rate amongst ethnic minorities;
- Myths, attitudes and prejudice which aggravate marginalisation.

The consequence is a poor level of school attendance and a high level of drop-out for those who do attend. Only 11 percent of Roma children in Bulgaria will go on to graduate high school. This results in difficulties in securing legitimate employment, and young people end up working in low skill jobs or becoming involved in criminal activities.



OPENING THE SCHOOL DOOR

FSCI's Early Years Education Programme (EYEP) is developing effective practices with the intended outcome of increasing school attendance in high-risk communities. The pilot project is a kindergarten in the Roma community of Fakulteta, in Sofia.

Our team of outreach workers spend time with local families, encouraging them to send their children to the kindergarten and helping them where appropriate. The team work closely with local primary schools to ensure that young children can make the change from early years education to school fully supported and with a much greater chance of making it all the way into secondary education. In time this will improve employability amongst Roma people. It will help to break the generational cycles of poverty, deprivation and exploitation of young uneducated children, who often end up working in the sex industry.

LEADING THE WAY

Sevda is part of the team at the Fakulteta kindergarten in Sofia. She is a keen advocate of education in Roma communities.



"Since my early years I have been volunteering in different NGOs that work in our community. After graduating as an assistant tutor I became part of the FSCI team that works in the neighbourhood of Fakulteta where I grew up and still live. I want to be a good example for the young people in our community and to help them and their parents change their attitudes towards education and early marriages".

HOW OUR KINDERGARTENS WORK

Our Early Years Education Programme consists of special kindergartens tailored to individual communities.

By working together with families we aim to provide a vital pathway into education for marginalised children.



SPECIALIST TEAM: A blend of experience and local community knowledge is essential



TEACHING: Basic literacy, numeracy and creative play to prepare for primary school



INVESTING IN FAMILIES: Encouraging families to keep their children learning and growing in confidence and ability



COMMUNITY RELATIONS: Promoting the value of education in the surrounding community

BEYOND BULGARIA...

FSCI would love to see this programme made available to Roma communities throughout Southeast Europe - could you help us to achieve this?

FSCI is working to replicate this model in other Roma communities. In partnership with A2B Albania we opened a kindergarten in Peqin, Albania, in September 2016.

We have also supported a kindergarten start-up in Chisinau, Moldova, with our partners, Beginning of Life.

WHAT DOES IT COST?

Our kindergartens cost €19,000 - €25,000 per year to run.

Fakulteta, Bulgaria, typical costs (monthly):

Rent: €95

Staff salaries: €1050

Food for children: €105

(12 children per day)

Peqin, Albania, typical costs (monthly):

Rent: €100

Staff salaries: €1120

Food for children: €880

(Breakfast and lunch for 30 children per day)

Will you consider supporting the Early Years Education Programme?





BUILDING ON SUCCESS

Based on the success of the Faculteta kindergarten we plan to increase the number of places available – ensuring that even more children in this community get the best possible start to their education.

We have been gifted some land and we plan to build a bespoke community centre that will allow us to expand the kindergarten and also set up services such as housing and welfare advice, family planning, adult education, teen support groups, job searching, and medical clinics which will benefit the whole community of Faculteta.

This community-led approach will help marginalised families to realise futures filled with possibility for their children and help set a template for similar projects in other communities.

The cost of building and equipping the new centre will be £95,000. Would your organisation be willing to help raise funds for this innovative and vital project?



If you would like to find out more about the Early Years Education Programme please get in touch with us.

Are you or an organisation you are involved with interested in supporting a ground-breaking initiative that helps vulnerable families to make positive choices for their children through access to education?

If so, we would love to hear from you and discuss how you could become part of something that is really changing lives. We need financial support to make our plans a reality; you could make a huge difference.

Chris Mould
Chief Executive, FSCI

If you would like to receive our e-newsletter, please sign up here.



Contact details:

Richard Parsons
rich.parsons@fscinet.org
+44 (0)1722 580192

FSCI (UK)
St Paul's Church
Fisherton Street
Salisbury
SP2 7QW

FSCI Sofia Office:
Teodora Koleva
t.koleva@fscibulgaria.org

www.fscinet.org

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