

Annual report

Reachout.BG



Children
receive:

Educational support

Special care

**Development
opportunities**



2013



Annual report

REACHOUT.BG

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Review

Reachout.BG began working with children at Petko Slaveikov Orphanage in 2009. Back then the team consisted of volunteers from different professional backgrounds united around the idea to devote part of their free time to support abandoned children. Our idea then was to help children through classes in cooking, sewing and modelling to build skills that will help them in everyday life. However, we gradually realized that most of them don't have the necessary level of literacy, have knowledge gaps and that what they need most is educational support. We understood that volunteer efforts are not enough to help them fulfill their potential and that to achieve our goals we must expand the organization as a team and to attract teachers and other professionals who have experience working with children at risk and can help them to overcome a number of shortcomings, difficulties and problems.

So in 2012 we launched an education support program which we continue to develop and improve until this date. Then, upon a request from the management of the orphanage, our teachers and other specialists (a speech therapist and a psychologist) started work with those of the older

children who had serious difficulties and lagged behind in school. Meanwhile, our volunteers continued to actively participate in various activities, undertook several trainings and acquired competences for working with children at risk which enabled them to orient themselves better in terms of children's behaviour.



As our work with children was progressing, we realized that in order to be useful we must start working with them as early as possible, since at the beginning of the school year they still don't have such big knowledge gaps.

Therefore in 2013 we launched new activities described in this report.

Educational support program

During the previous years the program was oriented towards older children because after the completion of the initial schooling stage pupils are unable to receive support for doing their homeworks. During our working with them we identified poor literacy skills, knowledge gaps from previous school years and lack of motivation for learning. These children attend school, but given their reading and writing difficulties, they do not acquire new knowledge as it is difficult for them to understand the increasingly complex teaching material.

In order to prevent children from being in such a situation when entering school for the first time, we opened a study hall for first graders, while continuing to work with older pupils on an individual basis.



After school study for the youngest pupils

Starting school and the first school year is an important transition stage which is marked by a number of changes in children's lives. They must gradually switch from their main activity – playing games, to learning, master a new social role - that of a pupil, and start forming habits of systematic learning and independent work.

For children who cannot rely on the support of significant adults such as parents and other family members starting school is often associated with a number of adaptation difficulties. They can occur as difficulties in learning the material and dealing with various tasks and exercises, or in the form of specific actions or behaviours like non-compliance with and attempted destruction of order in the classroom, shunning the other children, expressing aggression, and sometimes even showing strong reluctance and refusing to go to school.

Together with the absence of a parental support, there are two very important factors that influence heavily on success and adaptation towards school environment of children in institutions.

These are the removal of children from one institution into another shortly before the beginning of first grade and insufficient knowledge, skills and social competencies for entry into the first grade.

These two factors are rarely thought about,

more rarely talked about and hardly taken into account.

In practice, however, due to the division of institutions for children deprived of parental care based on age (from 0 to 3, 3 to 7 and 7 to 18 years) seven-year-old children face the possibility of parting with everything familiar – the place where they grew up and the adults who cared for them - by being moved to a place which is new and completely unknown to them.

However, for the successful implementation of study material in school when joining first grade children need to have different knowledge, skills and habits acquired during the preschool age, and many of them have not even attended kindergarten



Guided by the understanding that children deprived of parental care are in great need for support during primary school and after a long study and thorough analysis of their learning difficulties in the beginning of the school year 2013/2014 Reachout.BG opened the study hall for first graders. Teaching activities took place every day in the week during the whole year and were visited by all first graders in Slaveikov Orphanage. The study hall was led by a primary teacher who was helped during the first three months by one of our volunteers. Immediately after its launch every child went through an individual school readiness test which allows to quickly assess the level of acquired knowledge and skills in preschool. The results of the test helped us organize our working activities with the children in a manner consistent with their previous experience. Therefore, during the first few months, along with writing homeworks, afternoon activities included educational games and tasks intended for younger kids.

Through these exercises children managed to make up for some more significant knowledge gaps which made it easier for them to deal with the learning

material. Furthermore they began to acquire learning habits and improved their concentration and attention - important prerequisites for progress.

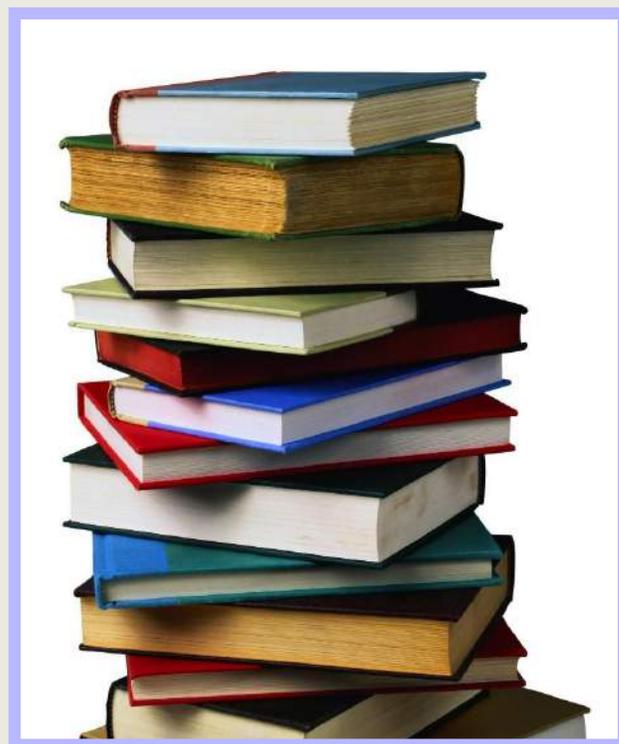
Educational support for 5th to 12th graders

Most children who Reachout.BG supports are pupils at the junior high and high school classes. While they were in primary school they were neglected and were not receiving additional help neither at school, nor outside it, and therefore have low level of literacy or large knowledge gaps. When we started work at Slaveikov Orphanage in 2010 educational support was provided primarily by volunteers. The more our work with children progressed, the more we realized that volunteers' assistance was not sufficient for filling the gaps in children's knowledge. This made us change some elements of the support program and look for a teacher who knows the methodology of training. So in 2013 a leading role in working with children took a Bulgarian language teacher while volunteers continued to help him.

Working with older students is a great challenge. They have low motivation for learning and believe that everything is too hard and they cannot cope. They feel awkward about showing their ignorance to their peers and to seek help from a teacher or another adult. They do not recognize the value of learning and the importance of acquiring new knowledge and

skills and don't strive for it.

Taking all this into account and considering the fact that the learning gaps and literacy levels of each pupil are different, Reachout organized its work with older pupils mainly in the form of individual activities and work in a small group.



Individual support proved essential to children's progress because it allowed us to create a space in which students can go back to the learning material as much as necessary in order to become literate, to learn to read and write, to understand text freely without worrying to ask questions, to make mistakes and exercise.

Parallel to this the teacher helped children to prepare their homework adapting the learning material to the class, so that they can understand and learn it despite the still low level of literacy.

As a result of the support given to the children they gained more confidence in their own abilities, the level of their motivation for learning and making progress increased. Their conversation skills improved and they overcame the inconvenience of speaking and reading in front of the other children.

The improvement of their literacy level contributed to their success with school subjects as well.

In 2013 our educational program was used by three young boys to prepare

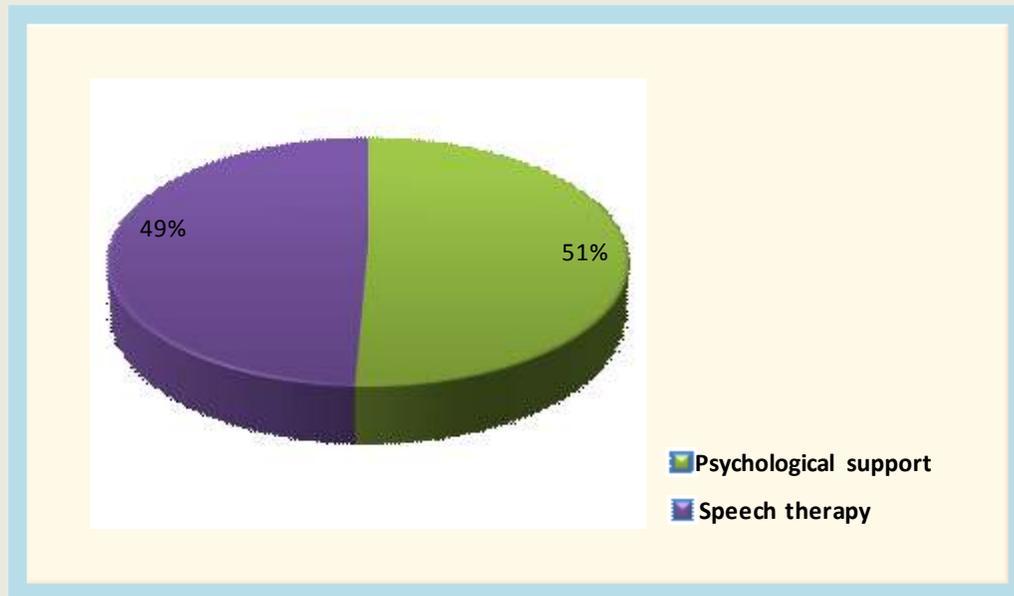
for a final examination and a girl who started preparing for the external assessment after 7th class. With the help of the teacher the future graduates went through the full set of high school's Bulgarian language course materials, to fill their knowledge gaps of Bulgarian grammar, improve their spelling and writing skills.

Two of the youths successfully took their matura exams and completed their secondary education, while the other ones, who are going to sit the exams in 2014, continue to study hard.



Specialized support

In the last year the psychologists and the speech-therapist of Reachout.BG provided a total of **434** consultations (220 by the psychologists and 214 by the speech therapist). A year earlier, in 2012, the total number of consultations by specialists was **281**.



Psychological support

In 2013 Reachout.BG broadened the scope of care to include the emotional development of children. Four children with behavioural problems and adaptive difficulties received psychological support. Working with a psychologist helped these children to get to know better their own emotions and feelings, to understand those of others and to overcome the difficulties in communicating with adults and peers. It also helped them overcome concentration problems and to retain their attention on learning tasks.

We continued to provide weekly individual psychological counselling to

three girls with the Down Syndrome. The psychologist continued working with them for the development of communication skills as well as their cognitive and emotional development. Along with the consultative work, one of our psychologists was engaged in identifying the school readiness of first graders. Using tests he determined the level of their preparedness which, in the absence of objective information about children's preschool knowledge, helped us understand quickly what knowledge and competences they have.

Speech therapy

During the previous year Reachout.BG continued to provide this type of specialized care for children with special needs. Reachout's speech therapist continued to work individually with the three children with Down Syndrome.

We started providing speech therapy to a first grade boy in order to improve his language and speech abilities. During the speech therapy sessions the child also acquired spatial and temporal orientation skills, improved its fine motor skills and learned the importance of many words.



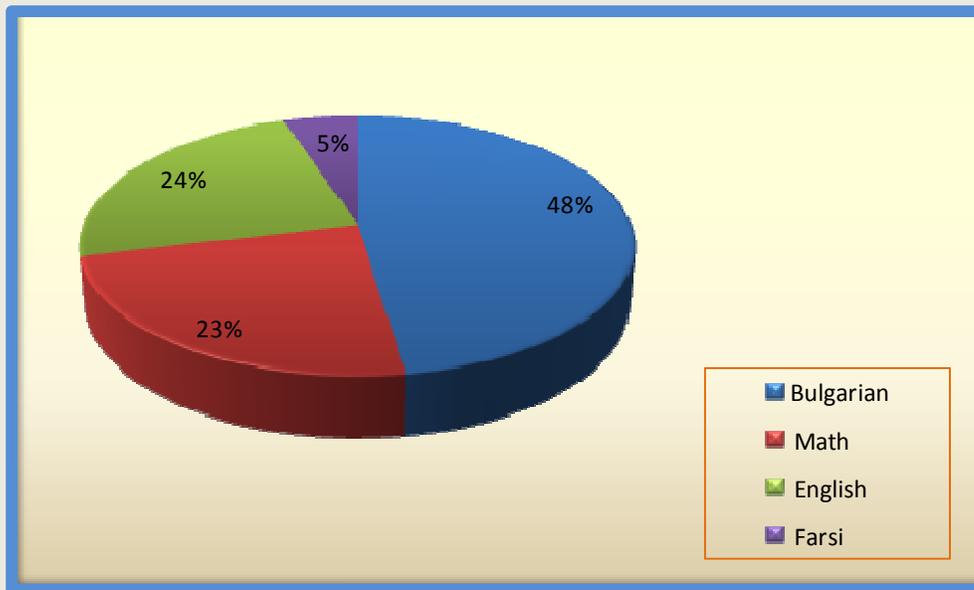
Support by volunteers

Our volunteers took part and actively helped in all activities we accomplished in 2013. They participated in a number of group activities - adventure travel in nature, a Christmas walk and visits to HackIDemia.

They gave us a big support for the launch of the after school study

Like previous years, some of them continued to support an individual child helping it to study a given subject.

In 2013 our volunteers have done **277 hours** of voluntary work: **132 hours** taught Bulgarian language; **65 hours** - math, **66 hours** - English and **14 hours** - Farsi.



- ✓ **Bulgarian** – In informal communication with our volunteers, children turn to books easier because they do not see reading as a form of coercion or an exam, but rather as funny and entertaining time during which they learn many new things.
- ✓ **Mathematics** – During the previous year our volunteers continued to help children improve their knowledge of mathematics. Some of them took active part in the preparation of one of the girls for external assessment after 7th grade.
- ✓ **English** – English courses is an activity which Reachout carries out only thanks to the efforts and dedication of

its volunteers.

Children's interest in learning English is increasing. Some of our volunteers are English teachers which allows us to work with more children.

- ✓ **Persian (Farsi)** – At the beginning of 2013/2014 school year, one of our volunteers started giving courses in Persian language to two refugee children accommodated in the Orphanage. In this way we help children keep their native language. We believe that the knowledge of languages, especially rare ones, would favour the successful development of children in the future

Experience-based learning

In 2013 Reachout.BG and adventure school Reverso set the beginning of a successful partnership. During the year we conducted together two one-day activities in the nature and two camps in the mountains at the beginning and end of summer, in which 15 children took part.

We decided to entrust Reverso with the organization of our summer camp because they have long and extensive experience in experience-based learning.

They took us to beautiful places with landmarks unknown to the children, making them face different challenges such as the construction of a camp, rock climbing, cave orientation and playing various interesting games.

Children actively participated in all daily activities - cooking, preparing equipment, gathering sticks for the fire, and had a lot of fun.

We believe that in order to progress in learning and the acquisition of skills children should be given clear and achievable purposes, so the only condition for participation in the camp was active participation and achievements in the educational program of Reachout.

So those who were persistent and consistent as successive were rewarded for their efforts. We believe that we can give children an example how efforts are rewarded and besides the really good moments in the mountain, they also felt proud and pleased with their success.



Art workshops

Our main goal in organizing the workshops was to bring children together and help them develop ability to work in a team. We chose two holidays - Baba Marta and Christmas, and offered them to make martenitsi and Christmas cards. They designed the models, used various materials, worked together with the other children, had fun and learned from each other. Thanks to the enthusiasm and willingness with which they joined the effort, the cards and martenitsi became so beautiful that provoked great interest among people who support us.



Events

- ✓ **HacKIDemia** – In 2013 thanks to our new friends from Soho, children enrolled in two HacKIDemia editions. One was on the occasion of Children's Day and the other was organized especially for us. HacKIDemia's workshops were a wonderful opportunity for children to learn interesting facts from various scientific areas in a funny and interactive way.
- ✓ **To continue** – For a second consecutive year in November we were invited to the children's performances in the Central Military Club in Sofia. At this charity event children watched a children's musical and a play presented by their peers from the city of Dupnitsa.
- ✓ **Christmas party for the kids** – It was jointly organized together with Melexis, which had prepared wonderful surprises for the children. There was a special holiday program with many games and songs, treats and gifts for the children.
- ✓ **Christmas walk**– For a third consecutive year it took place on the second day of Christmas. We took the children from Petko Slaveikov to watch the child version of The Nutcracker in the Musical theatre. After the show we went for a walk in the park. In the end, we had all together a Christmas lunch during which we laughed a lot and shared memories of the past year.



Financial account

Sources of funding and realized costs for the period 1 January 2013 - 31 December 2013 in BGN.

Financial account for 2013	BGN	GBP*
Revenues	27,668	12,037
Costs, from which	31,306	13,620
<i>Psychologist</i>	5,701	2,480
<i>Speech therapist</i>	4,493	1,955
<i>Training</i>	3,410	1,484
<i>Camps and materials for working with children</i>	3,715	1,616
<i>Other</i>	100	44
Total direct costs	17,419	7,579
<i>Salaries</i>	10,971	4,773
<i>Training of volunteers</i>	380	165
<i>Accounting expenses</i>	1,200	522
<i>Other</i>	1,336	581

*Exchange rate British pound to Bulgarian lev 0.4351

In 2013 we significantly expanded the scope of our program. Not only the number of children we work with increased, but the age group covered in the program also broadened. We expanded the network of volunteers involved in the implementation of our activities too.

During the previous year program expenses increased by 40% which is related to the support given by professional specialists (teachers, psychologists and speech therapists). We would like to emphasize that the above table does not include the free work done by our volunteers which amounts to BGN 3500.

We continue to adhere to the philosophy of making minimum administrative costs which are limited to salaries for a coordinator and an accountant.

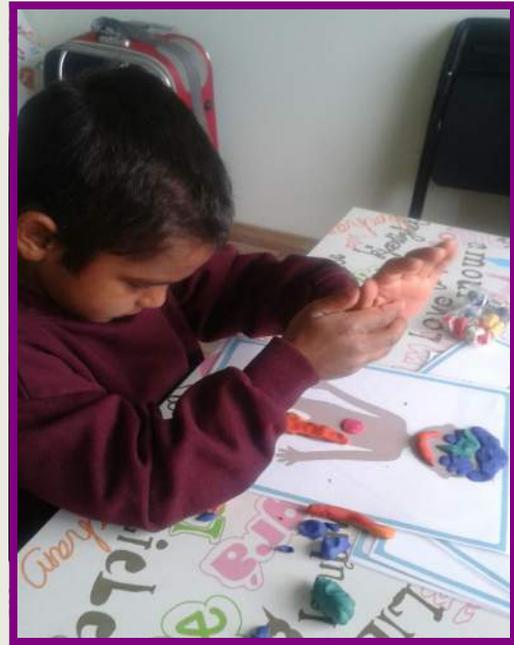
Reachout's plans for 2014

- ✓ Extend the scope of our program in Petko Slaveikov Orphanage with priority to provide more specialized care for the smallest children;
- ✓ Improve our program for school support by making individual programs for individual children;
- ✓ Develop individual plans for development and support of older children according to their interests and achievements;
- ✓ Develop a program with cultural, educational and sports activities for children's free time;
- ✓ Transfer the model for educational support to schools where children of low social and educational status learn;
- ✓ Expand our volunteer network by identifying and attracting new corporate partners, as well as creating corporate social responsibility programs for companies in Bulgaria;
- ✓ Conduct trainings for volunteers involved in the various initiatives of Reachout.BG;
- ✓ Organize workshops for NGOs whose goal is to build lasting partnerships and exchange of best practices for working with children without parental care;

Thank you to all who last year donated time or money to our cause. Your support allows children deprived of parental care to grow up smiling more, increases their opportunities for development and for a better future

Everybody's contribution, no matter how small it is, brings change in the life of children at risk.

You can support our cause by making a donation via bank transfer, PayPal or the Virgin money giving platform.



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Account in UK

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London, W1S 1EA
Sort code: 40-05-01
Account: 8169 0493

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BIC: UNCRBGSF
9, Knyaz Al. Dondukov - Korsakov Blvd, 1000 Sofia, Bulgaria



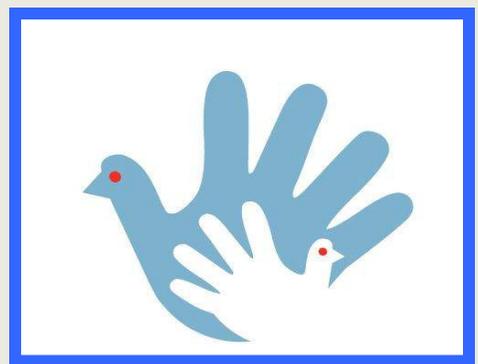
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