



Reuniting Voices, Building Bridges: Embracing a Journey of Inner Reconciliation and Connection

Report of the Speechless Reconciliation Reunion 2023



Speechless
Reconciliation

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Thank you for supporting our
efforts!



Preparation

We thought about the reunion idea for a very long time. The goal was to have a space to meet our alumni and reconnect with them. We felt that reunion could be the perfect place for that and it was!

At early 2023 the idea of the 1st SR Reunion organized together with our partners from Rotary Club Ljubljana International turned into reality.

The reunion happened at the picturesque Slivniško Pohorje, Slovenia. We were living close to the mountains and even though we were struggling with heavy rains we found a way to create the perfect atmosphere.





Friday (05/08/2023)

In total, we had 24 participants from several different countries: Lithuania, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Ukraine who traveled from 3 countries due to their displacement since the war in Ukraine started. All of them were accompanied by 5 team leaders, who are all professional caretakers from the SOS organization (psychologists, social workers, pedagogues,...).

During the first day, after arriving at our full stop accommodation, we had an incredible day full of reconnection. From the moment when the arrivals began, there was a feeling of love and warmth. We arrived at the place and we started to explore it a bit.

With our alumni, we were reminded very fast about the strength of our community and the power of coming together. We started to share the experiences, and knowledge that we caught in life since the last time we saw each other and this reminds us of the endless possibilities when we unite with a common purpose. After everybody settled down we had dinner together and Matej had a short speech about the program. It was raining a lot but it didn't stop us from enjoying the first night as much as possible. After dinner, we had time for icebreaker activities.





The overall name for the session that included also icebreaker activities was called 'Reconnecting and Connecting with alumni.' Our goal was to reconnect with those we might not have seen for a long time but also to create new connections across our three-generation alumni. We wanted our participants to start to feel comfortable with each other because the next activities and workshops were focused on more serious topics.

We started by separating them into a few teams and afterwards in those groups they shared information about themselves. They had to find 5 things that they had in common and afterwards, they took a quiz. The quiz was filled with questions about their countries so most of the time there were tons of funny moments. They were sharing their stories or opinions about current topics among all participants. They looked all very happy and we were glad that the program for the day would end like this.

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who made this day unforgettable.





Saturday (06/08/2023)

On Sunday morning all of the alumni were ready for the first full day of our program. This day was very much focused on getting to know each other, and we also stimulated (social) contact between all of them. During this day, they opened up to the team and their peers. We made sure that nobody was excluded from the group; as nobody should be left behind. The overall goal of this first day was that by the end they would be ready for the intense coaching & mentoring the group is doing in the next few days.

Our set of 'opening up exercises' was developed by Matej Keka (RCPI Rotary Member)

Opening-up exercises are important before intense coaching sessions with kids (in general) for several reasons:

- **Icebreakers:** These exercises help create a welcoming and relaxed environment, breaking the ice between kids and encouraging them to engage with one another.
- **Establish Comfort:** They help kids feel comfortable before diving into more intense activities, reducing anxiety and making them more receptive to learning.
- **Mental Warm-up:** Opening up exercises activate the brain and prepare kids mentally for the more intense coaching session ahead. These warm-up sessions are repeated daily. We start every day with these sessions, which are led by Andreas Fehrens (RCPI Rotary Member).
- **Emotional Connection:** They allow coaches to establish an emotional connection with the kids, making it easier for them to trust and follow guidance during the session.
- **Focus and Engagement:** These exercises help kids become focused and engaged, increasing their overall participation and enthusiasm in the coaching session.
- **Team Building:** Opening exercises can encourage teamwork and cooperation, fostering a sense of camaraderie among the participants.

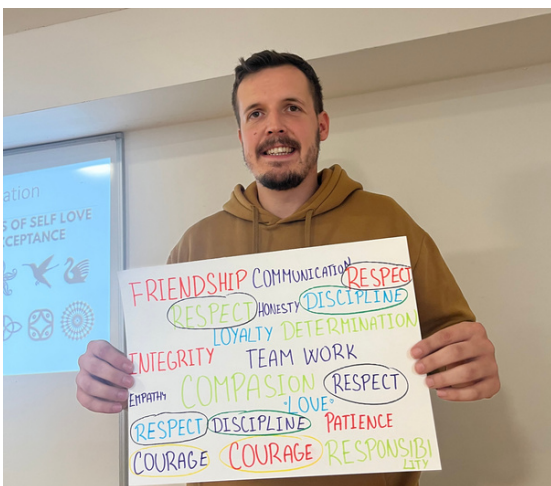


After the Icebreakers Matej Keka (RCPI Rotary Member) was leading his workshop called 'Value-based leadership.' During this workshop, participants had time to think about their values and morals. Matej also asked the participants how they would act in difficult life dilemmas based on their values. This brought up stimulating conversations. We were surprised by how deep the participants went with their ideas. In teams, they had to find out which values they have in common and in the end present them and speak about them in front of everybody. They then explained why they are important to them. They took this exercise very seriously and in the end, they had to express the values on paper in some artistic and creative ways. They were incredible. The pictures and the meanings of them touched our hearts. Finally, we created our own Speechless Reconciliation Values, which alumni loved the most.

Then we had a reflection from Tim Belon (RCPI Rotary Member). Tim shared with the youngsters his personal story about his values and how it affected him. He is sticking to his values so he explained why this is important and how your decisions can affect your life in the long-term. His speech was perfect for closing this topic.

Through thought-provoking discussions, participants enhanced their leadership skills, gained a deeper understanding of their values, and learned how to apply these principles in their personal and professional lives. This experience inspired them to be good leaders in their community.

We are incredibly grateful to Matej Keka and Tim Belon for sharing their wisdom and expertise with us. These workshops have undoubtedly left a lasting impact on our personal and professional growth.





Speechless
Reconciliation

After the speech of Tim Belon, Matej Keka and Tim Belon held mentoring sessions. Some of the participants asked for these before but some of them came voluntarily during the period that was assigned to this activity. One participant from Ukraine with Tim started to think about her project. She wanted to meet with the other alumni and speak about fashion trends. We are happy beyond words that we can help these youngsters make their dreams come true. We can see that during the reunion they were working hard and were filled with ideas!

At the end of the day, we had an intercultural night. This night was an incredible experience. Every country prepared delicious food and gifts for others all related to their cultures. We also saw some traditional clothing from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Ukraine. Every country had an abundance of original ideas and we were surprised about the variations of the presentations we saw. We listened to a lot of typical music from each country and enjoyed the night as much as possible! Very special guests coming all the way from Prague from Rotary Club Prague International, including our supporters Jonathan, Gerry, Mamun and Andás with his wonderful wife Edita. Thank you for coming!





Sunday (07/08/2023)

As the sun rose on this beautiful Sunday morning, we felt a mixture of joy and a touch of nostalgia. The final day of our SR Reunion was there, and what an incredible journey it had been!

During our last day of the SR Reunion, we discussed the future of the alumni program led by Tim Belon, Alen Alagić, and Matej Keka. We brainstormed and generated ideas about how alumni can help or do something for the future of Speechless Reconciliation but more importantly, how Speechless Reconciliation can help our alumni. Then we had a walk in the beautiful nature of Slovenia. It was a miracle that after several days of rain it was finally sunny just for our hike.

The last workshop of Speechless Reconciliation was by Bojana Košnik Čuk about "Culture of behavior, Etiquette for young people, do we know how to behave?" We had heard that she is highly respected and well-read in her field and our hopes were confirmed! She showed participants how to solve a lot of social situations through an incredible show of knowledge. Participants asked a lot of questions and she always found a way to answer creatively. There were many example situations and activities and we believe it taught them a lot about polite behavior and etiquette.





The most difficult moment is saying goodbye because we don't know when it's the next time when we will say "Hello", but we know that one day we will get the opportunity to meet again. We gave the participants their hard-deserved certificates and carried the memories and lessons from this reunion in our hearts. The bonds we've formed here will continue to strengthen us, no matter the distance between us. We believe our alumni will continue making a positive impact wherever they go!

The day concluded with a farewell party. The party was a celebration of the friendships and connections that had been forged and a recognition of the hard work and dedication that the youngsters had demonstrated throughout the program. The farewell party provided a final opportunity for the youngsters to reflect on their experiences, share their learnings, and say goodbye to their new friends and mentors, but as it goes, usually in the Speechless Reconciliation program. We know that this is just the beginning!!





Conclusions

Despite of the fact that this was the first time that the SR team decided to organize such a reunion. We can all say that without a doubt it was yet another successful event organized under umbrella of the Speechless Reconciliation program. It was mainly due to the perfect and disciplined organizational team but also due to the motivation and commitment of the participants themselves.

All of these 24 kids have access to our SR Alumni network. A network of SR youngsters which are connected through our (safe) SR platform. We offer mentorships, coaching, training,... for all of these Alumni. We also facilitate workshops related to different topics like culture & traveling, art,... In partnership with all of our SR partners (such as Rotary clubs), we guide them towards a successful independent life. Every two years we organize a reunion, where they can reunite. This strengthens the relationship among them, this also helps to build a network of SR youngsters all over Europe and the rest of the world. A community of SR youngsters with a similar background that helps & support each other in the long run. Some of our SR Alumni now even start to become members of our SR organization team.

Thank you all. This reunion was a great reminder of the impact Rotary can have on society. We had a major impact on the young lives of 24 youngsters (and 5 of their caretakers) those 3 days.





Based on the result of the evaluation sessions we have done (one with the team leaders/caretakers and one with the youngsters), we are happy to be able to confirm that we have succeeded to achieve all objectives of this Reunion on which the financial and organizational support was provided by Rotary Club Ljubljana International and the Rotary District 1912. The main elements which came up during these evaluation sessions were:

- The reunion brought new passions to our “old” participants, they want to create new projects, be part of the community, and help the society
- High-quality sessions by experienced experts had a major impact on the subject target group including the one conducted by Bojana Košnik Čuk about the etiquette.
- The reunion should be organized at least once every 2 years due to the immense impact it has on connecting participants across the editions





Few words from our partners from Rotary Club Ljubljana International

Peter Ilgo, president RCLI 2022/2023

Speechless Reconciliation program for me means. Firstly, through hard work of outstanding individuals as well as teams putting together a story that means much more than just "to serve" but living as well as feeling the serving. Secondly, being directed to a "left behind" group of youngsters the serving becomes even more meaningful since we are somehow helping create their/our future. And lastly, I do believe that the SR program therefore has a bright future and will be accepted in many more countries maybe even becoming one of the few Rotary worldwide projects/programs.



Bojana Košnik Čuk, president RCLI 2023/2024

The project touched me a lot and I realized again how important Rotary work can be, work that inspires hope, that helps the weak and vulnerable, that can make people happy. I am proud that our club is part of this story. Proud that we may have brightened a day for young people.





THANK YOU

We are so grateful to have so many supporters and partners around the Europe and beyond, who are committed to unique social change for young people from homes for youth without proper parental care, for their involvement in the Speechless Reconciliation Reunion, the reunion which focuses on supporting, helping, and coaching youngsters from orphanages and other institutions.

For this reunion, we had 24 participants from Lithuania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia who were part of previous developmental camps in 2021 and 2022 and also participants from the Ukraine Special Camp 2023. We were very pleased that in the end so many of the youngsters came to see us and spend time in Pohorje, where the reunion took place.

We would like to thank all the members of the Rotary Club Ljubljana International, namely Peter Ilgo and Bojana Košnik Čuk, who were the driving force behind the partnership and also their Rotary District 1912. Without them, the reunion would never have been possible!

A big thank you to our other partners including C9, Progredi, and Wenable.

Also, thank you to the members of our SR volunteers team (Nela, Ivan, Alen and Ace) who were all supporting at the location and remotely. We have worked together AS ONE, through regions and countries. TOGETHER we made a huge impact on the lives of 24 youngsters impacted by their current situation,

Another big thank you to all 24 of the youngsters and their group leaders! They enjoyed the 3 days program and they very much appreciated the opportunity to meet the team and the other participants again. They felt like being part of our Speechless Reconciliation family again and some of them even started to create new projects with our mentors. We are incredibly excited about their future cooperation!

Signed,

Matej Keka
SR Program, Founder

Tim Belon
SR Program, Co-Founder



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