

# Report

## Speechless reconciliation 2021



*speechless*  
**reconciliation**



Club 50895 – District 2240 – Chartered 15 April 1998 – Holiday Inn Congress Centre, Prague – Czech republic

## Project introduction

Speechless Reconciliation is a project founded by Matej Keka in February 2021 in partnership with the Rotary Club Prague International. Its short term goal was to organize a 9-days long summer camp for youngsters from houses for kids without parental care from 6 countries of former Yugoslavia in the Czech Republic with the topic of “If I could design my future, what would it look like?”

Its long-term goal is to fulfil the hopes of youngsters with disadvantaged backgrounds from houses for kids without parental care. Hope for a better life, hope for a better future, hope for a better community.

To achieve that, we will offer them opportunities for professional and personal development, through engaging with different stakeholders such as Rotary International, companies, universities, and other organisations from different regions of Europe. We already have a few committed partners from different regions of Europe.

Its vision is to create strong community leaders, that will break the barriers that divide the communities in the region of former Yugoslavia. We will achieve that, by giving opportunities for professional and personal development to the youngsters from houses for kids without parental care.

The whole project is divided into two main parts. The first part is the summer camp, where with the help of the professional trainers the youngsters are working on designing their future direction. Two months after the summer camp, the youngsters' plans are assessed, and various questions are asked to find out if the youngsters are still interested in pursuing the plan that they designed during the summer camp. If not, the alternative is offered.

## Summer camp 2021

**What** - 9 days summer camp

**Where** - Dům sv. Josefa, Staré Hamry and Prague



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**When** - 7th - 15th of August

**Who** - 24 youngsters from 4 different houses for kids without parental care

**Why** - to help the youngsters think about and 'design' their own future with the help of trainers and to create friendships among participants + exchange of knowledge and best practices between social workers

**In August 2021**, we brought **24 youngsters** from 4 different organizations (**SOS Kosovo**, **SOS BiH**, **SOS North Macedonia** and **Dječji Dom Zagreb**). Each country sent 6 participants of various ages. Each organization had the opportunity to send 2 group leaders (social workers who actively work with the youth in their organization).

During the first 7 days of the summer camp participants, in the age between 13-18, participated in various activities, such as team-building activities that were focused mainly on creating bonds among participants from different countries. This was important for the successful outcome of the project because after the initial stage that lasted 2 days, the youngsters were more relaxed and open to share what they wanted to say within the group during the non-formal gathering but also during the following activities.

In the following 5 days, participants were working on drafting the future they want for themselves with the help of one of our trainers Valery Senichev. They also had a workshop on social media and media literacy with our other trainer, Elion Kolcaku. This workshop was very important for participants to learn about topics such as disinformation and fake news which in their countries and cultural context is very present on a daily basis.

The last workshop that participants took part in was organized by Karin Genton. Her workshop was called 6 thinking hats and was focused on development of critical thinking. This workshop was also very valuable and important for the overall success of the summer camp because it was complementary to other activities.

Last 2 days participants of the summer camp spent in Prague. They spent their time in a more leisure manner in order to be able to enjoy what the Czech Republic has to offer to them as regular tourists.



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Team members actively involved in the organization of the summer camp

**Matej Keka**

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**Tim Belon**

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**Gerry Tipple**

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**Joke Cocquyt**

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**Karin Genton**

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**Valery Senichev**

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**Elion Kolacku**

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**Jens Belon**

**Gabriela Rohelová**

**Laura Potisková**

**Nela Červenková**

## Day by day activities

### 1st day

On the first day of the project, all the participants engaged in the activities whose aim was to break the initial barriers between them and start mixing them into one group rather than various groups of individuals from individual countries.

In the first part of the day, the activities were rather physical and outside. In the second part of the day, participants engaged in activities that focused on team building and cooperation



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such as an exercise where they had to work in a mixed team to build a paper tower. This particular exercise was quite challenging given the fact that some of the participants had difficulties with language, but even more, they tried to communicate in different ways.

The second exercise, where they had to draw each other one by one, while sitting in a circle, focused more on the integration of the various groups into one in the activity where the final outcome was a portrait of each participant that was made by the other half of the group. The overall goal of the exercise was to give them the feeling that they created something altogether.

## 2nd day

On the second day, our participants during the first part of the day had the opportunity to listen to the lecture of our first trainer Elion Kolcaku from Kosovo, who talked about the importance of media literacy and the effect that fake news can have on the population. Especially the young part of the society, that is nowadays connected almost 24 hours/7 days a week..

In the second part of his workshop, Elion divided participants into pairs. Their goal was to create social media posts about each other. The outcome was very positive because, in the majority of posts, we could see messages about finding a new friend, realising how similar participants from different countries are, pointing out good characteristics about the other person of the pair, etc. During the second part of the day, we went for our first walking trip into nature. Another great opportunity for our participants to mix and mingle with each other.

## 3rd day

On the third day, the participants engaged in activities and workshops that were led by our second trainer, Valery Senichev, who has years of experience with youngsters with a difficult background. During the first part of the day, youngsters were introduced to the techniques and methodology of Valery's approach towards the tasks. The main goal for youngsters was to design their future.

In the second part of the day, youngsters worked on their designs. The activities aimed at supporting a more active approach towards their lives. The goal was also to train their ability



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to be more sensitive towards their needs and wishes or to learn several techniques on how to work with brainstorming, design your life tools and the so-called Odyssey Plan.

The tangible outcomes of this particular day were various designs with specific tasks that youngsters give themselves to fulfil in the next few years. Youngsters were very active throughout the whole day and many of them actively engaged with the trainer. This fact shows that for many of them, their future is very important.

#### **4th day**

On the fourth day, the participants finished their designs and in the second half of the day, they had the opportunity to discuss their possible future direction with our trainer, Valery. Some of the participants used this opportunity and spent some time with Valery, who helped them to elaborate on the designs of their future.

#### **5th day**

On the fifth day, our last trainer and co-author of the program, Karin Genton-L'Epée organized the so-called 6 thinking hat workshop. This particular workshop was focused on enabling youngsters to take on different perspectives and also building up critical thinking. The goal was to allow them to take on different hats that represented different ways of thinking.

In the second part of the day, we gave the option to our participants to go on two different walks. They had to decide whether they would go a longer or shorter distance. Interestingly enough, the majority of them picked the longer distance. During the walk we could have seen that many of them engaged in non-formal conversations throughout different groups of nationalities and origins..

#### **6th day**

On the sixth day, we travelled to Prague. All the participants had to take PCR and Antigen tests to be able to enter accommodation facilities. Then the rest of the day, they spent in the Lastavica club, where they engaged in non-formal discussions with members of the Lastavica club.



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## 7th day

On the seventh day, we started with a walk towards Vitkov hill, where participants had the opportunity to hear a little bit more about the history of the place and its significance for the Czechs.

After the lunch in Curry house, participants went on a guided tour that was led by one of the members of the Lastavica club, Jana Krásná. The tour consisted of all the important places of Czech history such as Prague Castle, Charles Bridge or the Wenceslas square. The whole day concluded in the Lastavica club, where participants received certificates for their participation in the project. The next day in the morning participants left on the bus to their countries.

## Outcome of the summer camp

The tangible outcomes of the summer camp are relationships and contacts that were created between the participants, social workers as well as the organizing team. E.g. The participants of the summer created various communication groups on social media such as on Instagram, Whatsapp, etc where they still keep in touch with each other. One of the participants even decided to organize such an event as Speechless reconciliation, in her own country, with the help of her institution.

Some of the learnings that we have acquired during the summer camp are continuous communication among the team members is important for the smooth execution of the summer camp. That is why we decided to limit the number of team members and double-check their motivation before including them in the process.

For the participants of the next summer camp, we decided to offer them the possibility of an English language course 3 months before the summer camp. The main reason is to assure that the participants will be able to, at least, communicate on the basic level with other participants during the summer camp.

We will also conduct interviews with each participant to assess their ability to take advantage of the experience and education offered. Also to make sure that we pick the right candidates





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for the summer camp. Those interviews will be conducted with the help of the staff from the participating organizations.

## Learnings for the future development

1. increasing the number of physical activities and more activities in mixed teams
2. we must state and communicate clearly with the youngsters what is the main goal of the summer camp in context with their future - like that we will make sure that we increase their engagement in the whole process of designing their future - especially during the workshops
3. prolong the summer camp for one more day for youngsters to be able to spend more time in Prague
4. different dates of the summer camp might increase the possibility of other organizations participation because many of the youngsters have summer jobs
5. mixing of the groups is also important for the successful outcome of the project - therefore we have to make sure that the majority of the participants engage with participants from other countries as much as possible through introducing new activities for mixed groups

## Organizations involved in the project and the scope of the involvement

**Rotary Club Prague International** - extensive financial support and members actively involved at the execution of the summer camp

**Rotary Club Vilvoorde** - was our biggest contributor of financial support within the Rotary International organization

**C9 International** - the Belgium company was an important partner of the Speechless reconciliation project. They contributed financially but moreover their CEO and CFO were active members of the team that executed the whole summer camp





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**Rotary District 2040** - financial support through district grant

**Porsche Belgium** - financially support

**ADRA Czech Republic** - 3 volunteers that were actively helping and participating during the summer camp

**Lastavica** - provided facilities for the non-formal meeting of participants and Yugoslav expats living in Prague as well as stated the full support of the project for the years to come

## Next steps

1. improve and refine the program of the summer camp based on the feedback we have received from the 2021 edition
2. building up the online tool for the participants to search for opportunities for their personal and professional development - pilot the tool with the 2022 edition
3. offer midterm support to the past participants such as online courses and connecting them with local Rotary clubs in their countries
4. ongoing communication and close cooperation with participating houses for kids without parental care in choosing the right candidates for the next edition
5. bringing on board the project the rest of the countries of the region (Montenegro, possibly Slovenia and Serbia)
6. Consider how contacts between the homes and villages of the participants can be developed and sustained.

The key to the success of the 2022 edition, will be an improved program of the summer camp based on the feedback from the youngsters, piloting the tool with an already existing offer of opportunities. Finally, to bring on board of the project the rest of the countries of former Yugoslavia.



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## Final words of team members and group leaders

### **Matej Keka (Czech Republic) (founder & leader of the Speechless reconciliation project)**

For me personally the outcome of the project was something that I could never imagine. We have worked hard on making this project a successful one, under very difficult circumstances with one main goal in the back of our heads. Make the summer 2021 an unforgettable experience for some of the youngsters from the former Yugoslavia.

We have brought 24 youngsters of different ages, different origins, different histories and mindset, but whom we saw leaving was a group of people that shared experience that created memories that most probably will never forget. And that is why I can consider the Speechless reconciliation project 2021 a big success.

The memories, stories and experiences that we as a group have created in August 2021, will never be taken away from us and it will help us to shape our future, whatever it might be.

### **Tim Belon (Belgium)**

“I joined the project team in an early stage, a stage where a lot of stakeholders had doubts about the feasibility of the project. Especially because the timeline we had was very short. The chance of failure was real. A few weeks ago there were still a lot of important issues to be solved. But we worked as hard as we could with a small team of ‘believers’, all of us realized that we would not be able to make it on time. At that time even the ‘believers’ did not realize at all the impact that this project would have on so many youngsters.

Our first ambition was to give all of the participating youngsters a week they would never forget and to find ways to make a difference in the long run for some of them. Two weeks before the event me and my wife traveled with Matej and Gerry to the location where the event was going to take place. We found this place was in the middle of nature, an inspiring place... ideal for the project. We returned to Prague convinced that we were going to be able to realize our first objective... organizing a week never to forget.



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I can also speak for my family and all other members of the project team when I say that all of us had tears in our eyes on different occasions. The youngsters showed their gratitude in so many ways, messages, words,... it was more than heartwarming.

It was also amazing to see how the youngsters from the different regions, with a different culture, beliefs,... became ONE after only a few days. They connected already during the first day, but they became ONE group after 2-3 days. So beautiful to see, especially when you know that adults (in the Balkans) do not always seem to get along too well. These kids have the potential to make a difference in their region and in the rest of the world.

**Gerry Tipple (Great Britain/Czech Republic) (Rotary Club Prague International president & member of the project team)**

“For most of the youngsters and the organising team the camp was an emotional as well as fun experience. Definitely many of them returned with more hope and a raised horizon of their own potential. This is real success and we are committed to continuing to provide them counselling and practical support where possible.”

**Karin Genton-L'Epée (France) (co-creator of the program of the summer camp & leader of the workshop 6 thinking hat)**

As a fervent European, I truly enjoyed participating in the Speechless Reconciliation Rotary project.

It was a real pleasure witnessing the 24 youngsters from 4 different Balkan countries (Kosovo, Croatia, BiH, and North Macedonia) create and develop friendly and peaceful relationships among themselves during this 2021 summer camp. Looking forward to supporting many more friendships amongst future participants.

**Valery Senichev (Czech Republic/Belarus) (leader of workshops on designing the future)**

I see a huge importance to work with young people within the Speechless reconciliation. Our camp was focused on knowing themselves, their talents and their possible future ways at university or at the labour market.



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It really helps, when we work long-term with our participants. I enjoyed seeing the growth and awakening awareness of themselves and of their friends around. I am also looking forward to our future cooperation with the Speechless reconciliation team. As a psychologist I could really see the impact that this summer camp had on the youngsters.

### **Gabriela Rohelová (ADRA volunteer)**

The Speechless reconciliation project has been a big unknown to me from the beginning. I didn't know what to expect from it, I was even a little scared, especially because of the language barrier, but in the end I was pleasantly surprised.

For the first time in my life, I could communicate without saying too much, and yet the children understood me. We understood each other - even without words. It was amazing. I met a lot of new people and created great friendships.

I enjoyed spending time with the youngsters and carrying out morning activities for them together with other volunteers - my friends. The project gave me a lot of experience but mainly a lot of beautiful and unforgettable moments and memories and most importantly people who inspired me.

### **Nives Radeljić (senior project manager & EU funds leader, Dječji dom Zagreb)**

"Speechless reconciliation project" means:

- for Dječji dom as institution: expanding cooperation and partnerships; new quality in the content of work with young people in the process of independence; new idea for activities;
- for professional staff: new experience in work with group and to build new quality of relationship with youngsters in new environment; opportunity to compare professional work with other similar professionals;
- for youngsters: new life experience, motivation to learn English language, coping in an unfamiliar environment, strengthening self-confidence and expanding the social network.

### **Tina Fidrmuc (group leader of Dječji dom Zagreb)**



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For me, participating in the Speechless Reconciliation project was a unique experience that happened in the perfect moment of my career. Right after studying psychology at university, I got a job opportunity to work at a foster care home in my hometown. Every day and every situation at work is an opportunity for me to learn and absorb different techniques that are useful in working with children, especially with the ones who suffered severe trauma in past years. It is really a delicate job to give the group of children the right amount of structure, support, love and understanding to make them feel secure and give them a nice environment to grow and develop.

During the project I got to see how other social workers approach their children in their own special way and each and everyone of them taught me something. They showed me how one person can mean so much to so many children while still being in control.

Secondly, it was so nice seeing the children making friends with children from completely different backgrounds in no time! They started laughing, talking, running, playing football, and enjoying the beautiful scenery the very first hour they met. Their laughter filled every moment of the project and the friendships they made are one of the most valuable things that happened to them this summer!

One of the goals of the project was to teach them something valuable that they will take back with them and that nobody will ever be able to take away from them. They were working on building their self-esteem, polishing their presentation skills, thinking about in which direction they want to continue their education and career journey and all that while being aware of cybersecurity. To sum up, the week that we spent in Beskydy mountains was a magical experience that none of us will ever forget.

### **Ljupco Trifunovski (group leader of North Macedonia)**

The Speechless Reconciliation project for me as a group leader means that I can go out of my routine and retreat and volunteer in a positive manner. It means forming contacts, networks, sharing and gaining ideas on how to improve the support, to participate in creating new opportunities and approaches in empowering youth and building their potential and capacity.



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For me personally, every activity that brings youth exchange and growth through personal development by expanding your own strengths and experience in general is of greater use than it seems. Finding someone that you can look up to is as important as education. It also tackles the possibility to learn new languages and to cultivate respect toward other nations, cultures, religion and stereotypes may subside and compassion and empathy will take its place.

Living in a western Balkan country which is a candidate for entrance into the EU and being able to teach youth and give positive examples of respecting self and others is also beneficial for all and gives us the opportunity to demonstrate and practice European values and show leadership that is postulated on knowledge, humility and compassion.

#### **Anesa Cuca (group leader of Kosovo)**

Our participation in Speechless Reconciliation has been achieved after a long way of great effort, work and commitment. Our director, Ora, after she received the invitation to be part of this project, she worked so closely with Matej, the leader of the project and with unconditional effort, seriousness and dedication we've made the dream of six youngsters become a reality.

I call it a dream because I remember very well the first months of meetings and preparation, how sceptical we were with all the procedures such as organization, visas and travel. But the youngsters' great desire to be part of this project has been a great motivation for us to work more intensively, so together and united we made the dream come true.

For me and the six youngsters, participation in the Speechless Reconciliation Project was an extraordinary experience. Through this project, the youngsters have learned many things, as to how to open themselves up and how to create and cultivate lasting friendship, how to think and design their future, how to choose wisely their professions, how to use a collaborative thinking mechanism for making the right decisions in a group, how to keep themselves safe in social media.

They have learned about different countries, their cultures and have had the opportunity to see other countries' traditions, music, dance and taste their cuisine. Most importantly they've learned that being different doesn't mean being apart, it means that maybe people have





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different views of seeing things, different languages, religion or history, but if we know how to communicate properly, kindly and with respect then we have something huge inside us, humanity.

Our youngsters understood that when there is the willingness to bond with someone there is no space for communication barriers. So, they've used the English Language as much as they did to communicate with other youngsters from Western Balkan countries because they wanted to be part of a group and to enjoy every moment spent in Beskydy. This interactivity helped them to improve their English language skills. They have been very involved in every activity, even formal or informal, enjoying it, so for a week or more, they had stopped being conscious of the perception of time.

This project was a life-changing experience in so many aspects. Although for our youngsters this trip was the first trip abroad and in the beginning, in their eyes you would see fear, anxiety and curiosity about how the days will go, they've managed to turn these emotions very quickly into happiness, friendship, communication, joy, enthusiasm...They've immediately broken the ice and started introducing each other, chatting, talking, sharing contacts, social media, dancing and singing, playing Uno, watching stars, sharing stories, taking photos together and opening up about themselves. This kind of view has been present during the whole trip.

Each youngster has been unique, regardless of their background history, traumas processed or not, each of them has reflected a positive message. Without hesitation they wanted to talk about themselves, to share laughs and stories, and it all came so naturally. The way they all interacted with each other was magical. After a day or two, we looked more like a family rather than a group of people.

The interactivity with each participant has had a positive impact on my personal and professional advancement. Meeting colleagues from different countries, and seeing their approach to work helped me learn more about how to interact and deal with children of different ages, with different backgrounds and traumas. During this project, I have also learned how similar youngsters are and how easily they can understand each other and make solutions or help each other during the activities.





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Even though the purpose of this project has been educational, the experience and moments spent, 24/7 together with colleagues and young people from different cultures have let me understand that the best lesson doesn't come from books but the life of the individual. To sum up, the week that we spent in Beskydy was a remarkable experience and made the summer of 2021 never forgotten.

## Feedback from the youngsters

Many of the youngsters stated that the experience of socializing with other participants from other countries was important for them in a sense, that it gave them a different perspective and it enhanced their positive view about the people from neighbouring countries.

Also, the voluntary factor at the beginning of the summer camp, where organizers didn't force any participants to take part in activities, was very important to build trust throughout the whole group. This is something that various of the participants mentioned in their feedback.

Surprisingly, one of the key non-formal activities was the stargazing of Perseids. Perseids is the meteor shower that takes place every year during the second half of the month of July and culminates during the second week of August. Which were exactly the days we were at the Beskydy mountains. For many of the youngsters, it was the first time they had seen the falling star and on one of the nights, some of them managed to see even 50 falling stars. We can only imagine the impact it had on their experience.

What we didn't know from before was that for many of the youngsters this was the first time they have seen a falling star, and not only one but more than a hundred. From the reactions of youngsters, who shared those moments with other youngsters from other countries, we could see that the impact was huge.

The majority of the participants mentioned sports activities as one of the important factors for team building and socializing, which is why we have decided, as already mentioned, to include more physical activities for the future edition.



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Some of the messages we have received from participants included Below you can see only a few of them. For the sake of anonymity, we are not disclosing the names of the authors.

**„I promise that I will work hard in the school and yes you and your family have a very special place in my heart, so I will wait for the day that we are going to meet again“.**

**“Before I came to the camp, I was a quiet person. I didn't talk with a lot of people, I was a closed person. After I met you guys, I am more happy. I talk with a lot of people. I am more confident. I enjoy every moment.”**

**“Many people can leave their marks in your life, but only a few can leave their marks in your heart. You are one of the very few”**

We would like to conclude this report with the poem that the Kosovo team wrote to our Speechless reconciliation team. Another concrete example of the impact the project had on the participants.

**Not very often, the miracle is here  
But this is what happened to us this year  
Our friend Matej called us one day  
And came up with the idea that made our minds fly away  
Together with SOS they came up with the plan  
To unite the youth of all the Balkan  
We told them our story from the first day to the last  
So the Rotarians can have a clear picture of our past  
They listened carefully of what we had to say  
Then they gathered around and started planning right away  
They organized the trip for us and others too**



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**Together and united Rotarians can make our dreams come true**

**At the time that this happened, we thought that it is a dream**

**Never did we think that it would become real thing**

**Here we are today, together with our new friends**

**Happy and relaxed spending more than just a weekend**

**Kosovo, this beautiful place, is home to many people that are young at age.**

**Young Europeans, we are called very often and that is why we feel that we can do anything... even cross the ocean.**

**NEWBORN Obelisk represents us all, because we are the youngest country in the whole wide world.**

**Being here today and sharing our time with you, brings us joy and happiness too.**

**Thank you for the wonderful memories that we are making every day,**

**Next time we are expecting you in Kosovo, preferably in May.**