

LIBERA

Croatian Association for Education, Entrepreneurship and
International Cooperation

PROJECT PROGRESS REPORT FOR „WE EMPOWER CROATIAN CHILDREN TO OVERCOME FEARS“



Dear donors,

Thank you for supporting our project!

The Libera Association continues its mission of supporting children and families facing major life transitions. Our latest initiative took place in Dublin, Ireland, where we organized a demonstration workshop for children from the Croatian and Serbian diaspora — young individuals who have recently moved to Ireland and are adjusting to life in a new environment.

While part of our regular team is currently taking a well-deserved break, Libera remains active and committed to our values of empathy, inclusion, and child-centered support.

Team Updates

Before we dive into the details of our latest workshop, we must share a bit of news from our beloved team.

Rico, our loyal therapy dog and the shining star of many of our previous workshops, has decided it's time for a little break. After so many wagging tails, comforting cuddles, and

hours spent with children, he's earned some well-deserved rest. We completely respect his wish to take a step back and recharge.

At the same time, our dear psychologist Josipa, who gave her heart and soul to working with children and addressing their fears through creative and deeply human approaches,

has decided to dedicate more of her time to her own family — especially her children. Her energy and care will be missed, but family always comes first.

But while some of our team are taking time to rest and recharge, the Libera Association never truly stands still.

Workshop Overview:

As president of the Libera Association, I had the opportunity to travel to Dublin and work directly with a group of children originally from Croatia and Serbia.

These children, now living in Ireland, face a unique set of challenges — culturally, emotionally, and socially — as they integrate into a new environment.

This demonstration workshop was intentionally kept simple in structure, focusing on open dialogue and active listening. Our primary goal was to understand the children's perspectives and experiences in order to tailor future programming that addresses their real needs.

Key Discussion Topics

The **children were encouraged to speak openly about their feelings and challenges**. The following themes emerged as particularly significant:

- Including language barriers, different educational systems, and adapting to a new pace of life.
- From fear of exclusion and being misunderstood to concerns about leaving loved ones behind.
- Not knowing English well was identified as a major barrier to social integration and classroom participation.
- Children expressed a sense of needing to change or "fit in" in order to be accepted by peers.
- The emotional toll of leaving behind their hometowns, friends, extended family members, pets, and familiar places.

In one of the most touching activities, each child was invited to draw a suitcase — one that symbolically carried everything and everyone they wished they could have brought from home. In these suitcases, they packed:

- Warm memories
- Their grandparents' hugs
- The laughter of their best friends
- The toy they forgot on their bedroom shelf

And heartbreakingly, they also shared what couldn't come with them:

Things too big for a suitcase —

- like a favorite playground,
- a pet,
- or the voice of a neighbor saying “hello” each morning.

The drawing activity opened up heartfelt discussions and allowed the children to process their feelings in a safe and gentle way.

And of course, no Libera workshop would be complete without a special furry friend.

Since Rico was taking a break, this time we were joined by the **sweet and gentle poodle Lilly**, who, although not a therapy dog by training, naturally stepped into the role.

She played with the children, gave soft cuddles, and brought lightness to the atmosphere. Her presence **helped create a relaxed, emotionally safe environment**.
Children

were visibly more open and expressive while interacting with her and playing.

Her presence reminded us once again: **children open up more easily when a dog is nearby**.

While the workshop was planned to last just 45 minutes, the children's need to talk and connect extended our time together — and we welcomed it wholeheartedly.

Every story was important. **Every voice was heard.**

This workshop also marks the beginning of what we hope will be a long and fruitful collaboration with the Serbian Irish Council in Dublin. Together, we aim to support these young individuals as they find their place in a new country — without forgetting where they come from.

This event served not only as a supportive gathering for the children but also as a starting point for deeper collaboration with the Serbian Irish Council in Dublin.

Our next step is to co-develop a new project based on the insights gathered from this workshop. Details of this upcoming initiative will be announced in the following weeks.

For now, we can only say — something meaningful is on the horizon.

The workshop reaffirmed the importance of listening to children's experiences — especially those navigating the challenges of migration and identity in a new country.

Their voices will directly inform the design of future programs by the Libera Association, with continued partnership from educational and psychological professionals.

We remain committed to ensuring that no child feels alone in the process of transition, and we recognize the importance of community, emotional support, and continuity of care in every step of the journey.

The implementation of project activities in the past period is in accordance with the set goals of the project, which refer to:

- socializing and workshops for 10 children with dog Lilly and mentor Irina,
- conducting various topics that teach us about emotions and ways to control them,
- children's photo session to remember the wonderful gatherings with friends and activities with the dog and
- distribution of gifts that included lots of chocolate and sweets.

All these activities will help in the prevention of later more severe forms of anxiety and at the same time contribute to the solution of related specific

social problems and proactively influence the development of the community as a whole.

This type of workshop represents innovative activity for school students. So far, thanks to your support, we have included over 180 children aged 8-12,

and our intention is to implement the program to schools that show interest in this form of holding workshops.

Dear donors, we invite you to stay in touch with us or contact us through social networks or through our website

if you want to know more about our project.

We believe that the pictures in the attachment will also cheer you up.

Warm regards

The Libera Team





