

STEP FOR BULGARIA SUMMER ACADEMY 2010

Program Report

Aug 22 – Sept 04, 2010

A Step for Bulgaria Foundation Initiative

The Step for Bulgaria Summer Academy took place for the fourth consecutive year between 21st August and 4th September 2010, at the Hotel Rusalka near Varna. Forty-one students from Sofia, Plovdiv, Gabrovo, Berkovitsa and Silistra were selected to participate in the programme, delivered by more than twenty volunteers from Bulgaria, Norway, the USA, Poland and the UK. The Step for Bulgaria Summer Academy aimed to train underprivileged students in essential professional skills through providing instruction in English and computer literacy, and fostering entrepreneurship capabilities through business projects designed to test leadership, creative and teamwork skills. The programme was supplemented by a series of sessions designed to provide skills for independent life and healthy-living, as well as recreational and cultural activities making the most of the beautiful setting on the Black Sea coast.

English Classes



The students were split into five streams for English classes so that the material could be tailored to individual needs. Each group was under the direction of a native English speaker and two or three Bulgarian volunteers, who provided two and a half hours of classes per day. The classes covered an impressive range of topics, from personal descriptions and everyday conversational language, sports, parts of the body, travel, animals and job applications and interviews, amongst many others. Vocabulary was largely delivered through a combination of pictures, sign language and group participation in games, and grammar and sentence structure was utilised through a combination of verbal and written communication with the teachers. The students enjoyed learning English and were keen to participate in classes and keeping excellent notes, with many using every opportunity to

use what they had learned and asking for extra vocabulary after class time which the teachers were very happy to provide them with!

Business Projects

Group 5: Group 5 elected to undertake a marketing project which aimed to create a promotional strategy for Hotel Rusalka. They worked with members of the hotel management to create a package of brochures and presentations, including a multimedia video advertisement, to be used in an advertising campaign. Their strategy aimed to attract affluent tourists from both within Bulgaria and further afield, especially from Russia. Group 5 presented a summary of their ideas during the visit of the American Ambassador.



Group 4: All of the members of Group 4 proved to be keen players of various sports. Therefore they decided to undertake the organisation, and promotion, of the Step Summer Olympics as their business project. They divided themselves into smaller groups and each of these organised, with help from the others, an event with students from all of the other groups competing in a sport. Competitions in football, volleyball, rope-jumping, basketball, table tennis took place on various days throughout the academy and the winners in each received special prizes from the organizers.

Group 3: Group 3's project set up a fashion design company. This included making bracelets, necklaces, other accessories and souvenirs, and also designing t-shirts using materials purchased at low cost, which were then available to purchase during Steps night. The group also exhibited their creations with a catwalk-style fashion show during Steps night.



Group 2: There were several aspiring chefs and artists among the members of Group 2, so they chose to set up a catering company and carried out market research. They worked with the hotel's catering department to design and execute a menu for Steps night, which they were responsible for coordinating and delivering. They also undertook the management of public relations for the event, designing posters and sending invitations to guests.



Group 1: Group 1's project involved several activities designed to raise awareness of ecology among all the students and volunteers at the academy. A presentation to the whole academy provoked a lively debate with participants from all groups discussing ecological topics ranging from recycling to global warming. Subsequently the group selected an ecological movie to show, and designed posters in both English and Bulgarian, to encourage further thought on what each individual could do to help protect the environment. The group also organised a garbage pick up competition on Saturday and a workshop on making art from garbage which both proved popular with the other students and volunteers alike.



Careers Guidance

During the second week of the programme, careers guidance specialist Petya provided group advice sessions on career planning, CV preparation and public speaking. Alongside this schedule there were also individual advice meetings and mock interviews, which gave the students an opportunity to gain and practice vital skills for independent adult life. Part of the



careers advice programme included a visit to the nearby Helios hotel which was a great success. Students received a tour of the hotel and information about how it operates and how it is managed. After the visit, the manager of the Helios hotel was so impressed that he has expressed great interest in continuing to work with the Step for Bulgaria by providing employment opportunities for students interested in the tourism industry. Catering specialist; Stoycho – finance and guidance

Skills for Life

Alongside English classes and working on business projects, the Step Academy programme contained a number of lectures, workshops and advisory sessions designed to help the students to manage their personal affairs and lead a healthy lifestyle. During the first week of the programme, Stoytcho provided a series of session which were delivered to small groups of students



which aimed to provide tailored and structured advice about managing personal finances. Classes centred on topics including budgeting and

balancing necessary versus luxury purchases, using banks, savings, taxes, pensions, loans and healthcare. The students took an active part in group discussions and enjoyed the sessions.

External trainers from 'Art of Living' provided five two-hour sessions after dinner during the first week of the Academy. Using a combination of meditative techniques, physical and breathing exercises and advice, the sessions aimed to provide the students with guidance about physical, psychological and spiritual well-being, and healthy lifestyle guidance. During the second half of the programme, members of the Bulgarian Yoga Association provided a programme of sessions and classes to promote relaxation and healthy-living. The students also received workshop sessions on healthy eating and diet planning from a catering professional and first aid.



Workshops

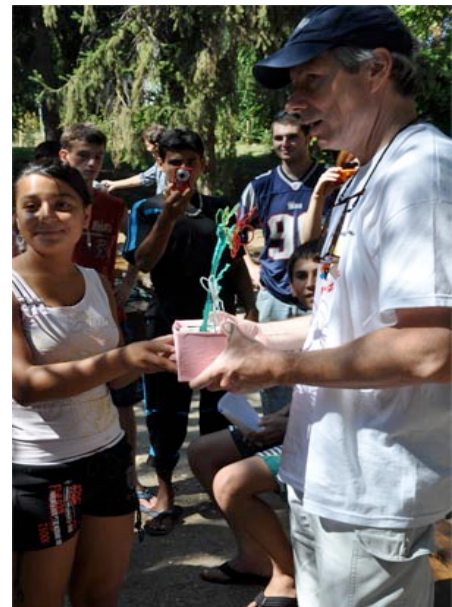
Throughout the Summer Academy, the students spent their evenings enjoying a varied programme of sports, games and workshops. These ranged from hotly contested sports competitions in football, basketball, volleyball, American football and table tennis to cultural



sessions on traditional and popular music and dancing. Workshops on 'Fun Science', robotics (on the picture), and Chinese calligraphy and culture were also enjoyed by many of the students who were very keen to participate and learned a lot. There were four birthdays celebrated with parties during the course of the Academy, and the students relaxed as well with movie nights and board games on the terrace, amongst which Monopoly proved to be especially popular.

Special events: Ambassador Warlick visit

On Saturday, the student spent the morning completing a scavenger-style treasure hunt in the hotel grounds. The group was divided into several teams who worked together to work out a series of riddles and clues in both English and Bulgarian in order to complete the challenge. The teams enjoyed working together and demonstrated a high level of support for their peers in a competitive situation. In the afternoon His Excellency James Warlick, the US ambassador to Bulgaria, visited the Summer Academy. He witnessed Group 1's presentation on protecting the environment and Group 5's business project, answered questions from the students about his job, (and his favourite sports teams!), and had a chance to talk informally with students and volunteers.



Steps Night



During the penultimate night of the programme, the students presented an evening of entertainment and celebration to commemorate the end of another successful Step for Bulgaria Summer Academy. The evening began with a spirited performance of the camp song and a speech from the Step for Bulgaria Foundation Board President, Evgenia Peeva, following which representatives of each group delivered a presentation of their business projects. Group 3's presentation consisted of a live catwalk-style fashion show in which the jewellery that they had made during the previous fortnight were demonstrated using skills learned in a workshop led by professionals from the fashion world. Following the presentations, more than twenty of the students presented a comic

sketch which provided a review some of the more comical moments of the Academy using a script written and directed by Laura and Conor, the American Fulbright volunteers. The evening concluded with the presentation of diploma certificates to all the participants in the Summer Academy, along with a package of rewards and prizes for every student, provided by Step for Bulgaria Foundation and Swissnex Boston. After the ceremony, all the students, guests and volunteers gathered together for a party on the terrace of the hotel with catering provided by Group 2 and music from 'DJ Duc'. Everybody had a fantastic time, and there was a lot of dancing, singing and photo-taking to celebrate the end of the Academy.

Testimonials:

Stoycho, Personal Finances Advisor: "For me, the students who have participated in the Step for Bulgaria Summer Academy 2010 have demonstrated that for every problem and disadvantage they have had to overcome, they have overcompensated with joy for life and eagerness for learning which never ceases to amaze me".

Zuzia Morawska, International Volunteer: "The thing which has been most striking to me about the kids is how enthusiastic they are to learn new things, and I wish them all luck for their future lives"

Dimcho, Student: "The Step Academy has helped me a lot. English is my favourite class. Before the academy, I did not know enough to communicate. Now I can!"

Asen, Student: "Step Academy has helped me to improve myself in many ways. I am trying to take everything I can from this programme and use it in the future. I have also made a lot of new friends from across Bulgaria."

Nina Yordanova, Supervisor: "I've seen the kids grow so much over the past two weeks – it's incredible! Thank you on my and on their behalf for all that you're doing. I believe they've learned a lot in English classes. The personal finance class is also very interesting and helpful to them."



Special thanks to our partners and supporters for making true our 2010 Summer Academy:



A big Thank you!

*to our honorable visitor: **Ambassador James Warlick***

*to our fashion expert: **Dessislav Dimitrov - Desso***

And to our partnering children's homes: «Assen Zlatarov», Sofia; «Petko Slaveykov», Sofia; «Hristo Raykov», Gabrovo; «Olga Skobeleva», Plovdiv; «Dimcho Debelyanov», Silistra; «Lyuba Teneva», Berkovitsa, Center for Family-type Accommodation in Berkovitsa