

**MEETING WITH SOUTH-EAST EUROPEAN GROUPS
INTERESTED IN A CANADIAN-SOUTH EAST EUROPEAN
INITIATIVE ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

Centre Premancan and Centre Elerji, June 3-5, 2003

Background

Gary Bunch (Chair, Board of Directors, Marsha Forest Centre, Toronto, Ontario, Canada) and Gerv Leyden (United Kingdom Associate, Marsha Forest Centre) visited Slovenia June 3 to June 5, 2003. Their purpose was to meet with representatives from various South-Eastern Europe (SEE) nations to further discussion regarding a joint Canadian-South-East Europe initiative to strengthen movement in the participating nations toward inclusive education for persons with disabilities. Contact between the Marsha Forest Centre (MFC) and organizations related to disability in SEE began in the early 1990's. Marsha Forest and Jack Pearpoint were invited by Joze Primovic and others to Slovenia to work with Soncek (Zveza Drustev za Cerebralno Paralizo Slovenije) in the area of inclusion. More recently Gary Bunch and Gerv Leyden partnered in a research project on inclusive education with Dr. Lelia Kis-Gravas of the University of Zagreb, Croatia. This project involved a number of visits by Gary to European nations collaborating in the research project, including one to Zagreb and Samobor, Croatia. These various contacts brought into focus the value of a joint CANADA-SEE initiative with the objective of developing sustainable inclusive education supports and expertise throughout the area comprising the former Yugoslavia.

During 2002 and into 2003 the concept of a CANADA-SEE initiative began to move to the level of active discussion between MFC and players throughout SEE. Interest in an initiative began to grow as the value of inclusive education for citizens with

disabilities and to their countries was considered. Tentative contact was made in Canada with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), a federal agency with a mandate to support activities in other nations directed to positive change and development. CIDA presently is engaged in collaborative partnerships with a number of the nations indicating interest in the strengthening of inclusive educational opportunities in SEE. CIDA officials have indicated interest in a discussion meeting, but have emphasized that no commitment can be made at this point.

Fortuitously, Zveza Soncek of Slovenia was planning a regional meeting of organizations related to disabilities in order to maintain and cement regional ties. It was suggested by officers of Soncek that representatives of MFC attend the meeting to outline the possible initiative emerging from discussion among the few individuals involved so far. Joze Primovic, Sekretar, Sveze Soncek, and Franc Pronik, Predsednik Zveza Concek were central to extending the invitation to MFC and in reserving time during the regional meeting for discussion of the possible initiative.

Presentation of the Inclusive Education Initiative Concept

Attending the meeting were representatives from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Sarajevo, Serbia, and Slovenia. Following the meeting an agency from Macedonia made contact with a request to be included in any future initiative. Though the regional meeting which made room for presentation of the possible inclusive education initiative was attended primarily by organizations related to cerebral palsy, participants representing other areas of disability, student groups, Ministries of Education, universities, and other organizations also were present.

The full morning of Thursday, June 4 was reserved for presentation and discussion of the initiative. The afternoon meeting and evening meeting schedule was designed flexibly to allow for individual and/or small group follow-up discussions. Many such discussions occurred.

Copies of a draft outline of a possible initiative had been made available to Soncek prior to the meeting. Copies for all participants were available on the Thursday morning (see Appendix A), as were samples of inclusive education publications from MFC and from Inclusion Press of Toronto. Inclusion Press is one of the potential Canadian supporters of the inclusive education initiative. One of its books on inclusive education has been translated into Slovenian and distributed in that nation.

Gary and Gerv presented the various parts of the possible inclusive education outline. They emphasized that the actual form of any plan for a future initiative would be determined by a collaborative team of representatives from SEE and MFC. It was agreed by everyone that any project developed would be developed to reflect the culture and conditions of the participating nations. Assisting Gary and Gerv in their presentation was a Slovenian interpreter. A record of the meeting was developed by Gerv, Joze, and volunteers from the group using graphic facilitation, a visual recording method designed by MFC to facilitate communication among meeting participants. Approximately two hours were devoted to the initiative outline and an additional 1 1/2 hours to questions and discussion, and to the development of points on values of inclusive education and points to consider if discussion of the possible initiative moved to the proposal development stage.

Response by the group was positive. Many participants voiced strong support for an initiative in inclusive education and stated that their agencies would supply letters of support as an indication to CIDA that organizations supporting persons with disabilities, universities, governments, and associations of persons with disabilities viewed a collaborative initiative as important to their nations. Particularly emphasized was the potential of inclusive education in promoting recognition of persons with disabilities as full citizens of their countries and in leading to increased employment opportunity. Quotes from a number of statements from participants from various nations are provided below.

- We in Montenegro are very interested in this project. It comes at the right time in terms of reforming education for persons with disabilities. (NVO Staze)
- Such a project would be important in preparing teachers to teach students with disabilities and to understand them as members of the community.
- Our organization for blind and partially sighted students is very interested in this project. It fits well with other projects and recognizes the importance of research, educational assistants, teacher preparation, and the need to work with the non-disabled children as well.
- The Bosnia-Herzegovina Association for Helping People with Intellectual Disabilities will support this project because it brings together all the factors necessary to address a situation that must be changed.
- The University of Zagreb is interested in this project as it complements our plans in the area of disability and combines both theory and practice in schools.

- The Cerebral Palsy Association of Serbia always has inclusion in mind and supports this project because it recognizes the struggle we are engaged in to better our lives and that there should be no decisions concerning us without our participation.
- The Ministry of Education considers this a very important project and stronger than many other projects suggested to us. It recognizes that there are differences among the participating nations which must be recognized in any project. We will definitely provide a letter of support.
- We need better education and not just what we had before. Since the war we have not had even the access to education we had before. This project will give us hope for a better future and better education. (Cantonal Association for Patients Affected by Cerebral Paralysis and Polio Sarajevo and Cerebral Infantile Paralysis Association of Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina)
- As principal of a school I will provide a letter of support. Unlike this project, other projects discussed with us have had too much of a colonialist quality. We must learn how to bring students with disabilities into our community schools and work successfully with them.

Points and Values for Consideration

Points and values for consideration emerging from discussion (edited to support clarity) are noted below.

- Naming the project appropriately and determination of actual international partners.
- Bringing partners to a level of mutual collaboration.

- Developing a program plan for educating partners and their constituencies on the principles of inclusive education.
- Focusing on inclusive education as a strategic tool for rehabilitation of persons with disabilities (e.g. cerebral palsy) and improving their quality of life by moving beyond mere survival levels.
- Developing a strong education system for persons with disabilities.
- Including a focus on preparation for future employment and the improvement of employment opportunities.
- Working to replace the medical model of education with a social model based on active participation of all members.
- Developing publications to support sustainability of the inclusive education initiative.
- Recognition of the importance of participation in international non-government agency projects.
- Respecting differences among participating countries in terms of economies and levels of socio-economic development.
- Using a term descriptive of the project and the collaborating partners other than Balkan. (This was a strongly put and general recommendation.)
- NGO's must become the leading agent for moving education toward inclusion. It must be remembered that inclusion means everyone is included and is based on initiative and cooperation.
- Parents must be part of the initiative as they are the child's first educators and know the child best.

- The role of volunteers in the project must be strong and valued.
- In inclusive schools everyone benefits emotionally, socially, and educationally.
- Optimal goals must be set and reached if satisfaction is to be achieved.
- Financial support cannot be the primary motivator. Moving toward independence is necessary. (Sustainability must be a major objective of a project such as the one being conceptualized.)
- A central goal is to educate parents, teachers, professors, principals about inclusive education.

Follow-Up

Follow-up to this first meeting will include a number of activities. The first is preparation and dissemination of this report to all participants.

Second is continued communication among those interested in the initiative. Attached to this report are the names and contact information for as many participants as were available.

Third is the preparation of letters of support for the initiative from governments, universities, agencies involved in working with persons with disabilities, student groups, and groups of persons with disabilities. Many participants asked for sample letters of support and these will be prepared and disseminated in the near future.

Fourth is inclusion in the letters of support of willingness to contribute to the project in various ways (i. e. financially, contribution of meeting space, contribution of office space, contributions of materials, personnel time) to the extent possible for the organizations providing the letters of support.

Fifth will be the scheduling of a meeting in the Fall of 2003 between representatives of MFC and CIDA. The purposes of this meeting will be to determine level of CIDA interest; to emphasize need for funding for preparation of a full proposal, and to discover CIDA proposal guidelines.

Note: No discussion of depth of this project has been held with CIDA. No commitments have been made by CIDA.

APPENDIX A

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION INITIATIVE OUTLINE AS PRESENTED AT ELERJI, SLOVENIA MEETING DEVELOPMENT OF A REGIONAL PROGRAM

TO STIMULATE AND SUPPORT INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN CROATIA, SLOVENIA, MONTENEGRO, & BOSNIA-HERCEGOVINA

Draft Outline of a Collaborative Regional Project

Note: The draft outline below is based on the best information available from discussions with persons from a number of the states mentioned and information on the internet. The draft is simply an introductory concept and will be changed and shaped as a result of further discussion with persons in the states mentioned.

Introduction and Rationale

Croatia, Slovenia, Montenegro, and Bosnia-Herzegovina are four European Balkan nations, which have undergone significant turmoil in the recent past. In political terms each nation recently declared independence of former political/governmental relationships with resultant military conflict. In terms of education, the focus of this proposed collaborative regional project, significant change is occurring as well, as each nation re-organizes and modernizes its educational system.

One particular area of concern in this re-organization is education for students with disabilities. For much of the twentieth century the education systems of these three Balkan nations adhered to the soviet model of education. Under this model students with disabilities were educated separately from typical students in a system generally referred to as “special education”. Teachers of students with disabilities received their professional preparation in programs separate from their colleagues who taught typical students. Thus, both students with disabilities and their teachers were separated from

mainstream education, its philosophies of normal development, and its pedagogical approaches. This reality, for many citizens with disabilities, over-spilled the boundaries of education and negatively affected their lives in the general community as well, alienating them from family, neighbourhood peers, and the common activities of daily life, and otherwise marginalized them.

UNICEF (2000) has commented, with regard to Bosnia-Herzegovina, that “ To build the capacity of educators to address the needs and diversities in the educational process special attention needs to be placed on ensuring the right to attention for marginalized groups of children” such as those with disabilities. The United Nations has been clear in setting a policy that no child should be denied education, and that Education for All is recognized as the right of all children, including those with disabilities. Within the area of disability specifically the UN and UNESCO have been equally clear in stating that access to mainstream schools is the preferred model of education for students with disabilities.

Inclusion is viewed as a stronger answer to the educational needs of citizens with disabilities, than is special education and segregation. Indeed, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development research report of March 2000 on *Inclusive Education at Work: Students with Disabilities in Mainstream Schools* concluded that “based on the examples of inclusion described in this [study] it would be fair to conclude from an educational point of view there is no limit to the degree of inclusion possible. All children however heavily disabled can be included in regular schools with no detriment to themselves or other pupils.... The question then has to be; is there an educational rationale for maintaining segregated provision in a public education system? Given the evidence gathered here, the answer is no!”.

The contemporary term for education of all citizens, including those with disabilities, in mainstream schools is “inclusive education”. Under inclusive education it is considered the right of all with disabilities to be educated in mainstream classrooms with their typical peers, without fear of being segregated due to individual levels of academic and social achievement.

Adherence to a model of segregated education in the Balkan states for the approximately 10 to 14 % of students with disabilities is beginning to change. Kis-Gravas of the University of Zagreb and Ljubic of the Croatian Ministry of Sport (2003) state “Today, however, we encounter more often the term *inclusion*, which replaces *integration* and *students with development difficulties* is replaced with *students with special needs*”.

Opara (2000) notes that Slovenian educators “have been changing the consciousness and understanding of persons with special needs in the direction of the new culture of inclusion”. Djuriscic, working with the group Pathways (Staze) in Montenegro notes that much consciousness raising must be done before inclusion can go beyond small projects. She notes that Pathways is “a raising awareness, campaigning and advocacy organization” which would be eager to work with others on a regional project which has the objective of joining governments, parent groups, groups of persons with disabilities, universities, and education systems in support of reform toward inclusive education.

However, teacher knowledge has not kept pace with even this modest change. Of the approximate 2,100,000 children 0 to 14 years of age in the four nations, an estimated 10 to 14 % or 210,000 to 294,000 are disabled. Many are in segregated settings. A limited number are in integrated settings. A number are not in school at all. Few are in truly inclusive settings. Opara also notes that even though some children with special needs

now are being placed in general education classrooms with typical peers, there is concern “whether students with special needs are appropriately taken care of “in those general education classrooms”. Kis-Glavas and Ljubic (2003) add to the evidence of inappropriate forms of integration and resistance to inclusion. “Some experts, having worked long in special conditions are not prepared to leave the security of their position in protected environments and accept integration/inclusion”.

The collaborative project proposed here is one which will develop a regional model based on Croatia, Slovenia, Montenegro, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The project will support and stimulate government, universities, educators in school systems, parents, and people with disabilities in their move toward inclusive education. Such a project would be based on recognition that:

- Education For All and access to mainstream schools for students with disabilities is supported by the United Nations and UNESCO as preferred policy and practice.
- That the contemporary shift from the special education model, with its emphasis on segregation for citizens with disabilities, to the inclusive model, with its emphasis on education for all in general education classrooms, is international in nature. This shift is occurring at every level of education from early childhood through post-secondary.
- That the governments of Croatia, Slovenia, Montenegro, and Bosnia-Herzegovina have put policies of Education For All in place, though resources and knowledge presently are not sufficient to move forward quickly and powerfully.

- That a resultant disjuncture between government policy of support for Education For All and national educational practice for students with disabilities exists in each nation.
- That support exists for movement toward inclusive education is apparent in Croatia, Slovenia, Montenegro, and Bosnia-Herzegovina across government, educators, parents, and persons with disabilities exists.
- That Canada, with its realization of Education For All and its initiation of inclusive education for students with disabilities in the late 1960's, has particular expertise in this field at the level of government, universities, school systems, and educators, parents, and persons with disabilities from early childhood through post-secondary.

It would appear that there is fertile ground for a partnership focused on inclusive education between Canadian people and institutions with expertise in inclusive education with leaders and institutions in Croatia, Slovenia, Montenegro, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. In particular, the Marsha Forest Centre located in Toronto, Ontario is well-placed to take Canadian leadership in such a partnership and form a strong team of Canadian and other experts in inclusive education. The Marsha Forest Centre is an internationally known Centre with a mandate for inclusion. It is through the Centre, in close partnership with others, that the strategies Circle of Friends, PATH, and MAPS were developed. Those leading the Centre are acknowledged academic and community leaders at the international level in inclusive education. They have strong connections to both English and French Canadian universities, to universities in other nations, to Canadian school systems that have moved to the inclusive education model, with researchers in inclusive

education, with parent and other advocacy groups, and with persons with disabilities. In particular, they have experience as consultants in inclusive education to nations in both developed, developing, and war-torn parts of the world. The leaders of the Marsha Forest Centre also have personal and professional connection to a number of leaders in inclusive education in the Balkans, as well as in a number of other nations.

Project Proposal

It is proposed that various interested parties in Canada Croatia, Slovenia, Montenegro, and Bosnia-Herzegovina develop a detailed plan to put before Canada's Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) for funding of a five year plan for supporting, stimulating, and researching inclusive education across the region formed by the four nations. The plan would entail contributions to the project by governments and other agencies in each nation.

The overall objective would be to establish on a sustainable basis a collaborative and coordinated structure across the participating nations that would involve government, universities, field level educational practitioners, parents, groups of persons with disabilities, professional educator organizations, and other interested groups, all joined in a coherent plan to establish inclusive education as a functional reality.

Project Components

A. Regional Action Group

An action group composed of government, educator, advocate, and persons with disabilities representatives, and of Canadian representatives, mandated to develop a funding submission to CIDA and appropriate officials and other interested parties in the four nations be formed.

This group would plan, guide, and monitor project activities.

B. Teacher Preparation

i. Participating universities, a minimum of one in each collaborating nation, will review teacher preparation offerings at the undergraduate level in the area of disability and design instructional components in inclusive education in basic teacher preparation for future classroom teachers.

ii. Programs will also be offered in preparation of teachers with specialized preparation in disabilities who will function as resource support workers in community school settings in support of general education.

C. Graduate Studies

A program of Graduate Studies will be offered to prepare future leaders and researchers in inclusive education.

D. Collaboration with Field Educators & Development of Pilot Programs

The Regional Action Group will work with university faculty and field educators in development of pilot inclusive education programs at the early childhood, lower school, and secondary school levels for ages 0 to 14. These pilot programs will be sited throughout the region comprised of the participating nations.

E. In-service Teacher Professional Preparation

Field-sited teacher professional development programs will be offered in those areas where pilot programs exist and in other areas as appropriate.

F. Resource Development

Universities, educators, parent groups, advocate groups, and organizations of persons with disabilities will plan, prioritize, and develop print and other multi-language

resources for teachers, universities, families, and others in support of inclusive education.

G. Advocate Groups

Advocate groups composed of parents and others and supportive of inclusive education will be assisted in development of links between families, schools, and communities to ensure collaborative activity and the development of positive community actions to further involvement of persons with disabilities in the general community.

H. Groups of Persons with Disabilities

From the beginning of the proposed regional project persons with disabilities will be full members of the project and involved in all phases and activities. They will be represented on the Regional Action Group and on committees coordinating other components of the project.

Short-Term Plan of Action

At this stage it is necessary in the participating nations to determine if people in the participating nations are interested to the point:

- Where they agree that it would be worthwhile to form a Regional Action Committee to guide development of a funding proposal to CIDA
- Where they agree to provide written indication of support for the proposed project and indicate what forms this support would take
- Where they agree to locate others in their nations and discuss the proposal with them to strengthen and widen support. There will be a need to approach

local universities, national government, local field educators, parents and other advocates, and groups of persons with disabilities.

- Where they agree to solicit letters of support from the above groups.

In Canada it will be necessary to collate letters of support received, to prepare a project outline (much like that above), and to arrange a visit with appropriate CIDA officials to determine degree of CIDA interest.

- A timeline for these various activities and receipt of letters of support to the end of August 2003 is recommended. This timeline would leave time to visit CIDA officials in Ottawa, Canada and determine CIDA interest.

First Step

The first step would be to arrange a visit of Canadian representatives to one of the participating nations. The objective of this visit would be to discuss the form and content of a larger proposal for CIDA consideration. Development of this proposal would take some months and involve a number of discussion visits.

Funding would need to be found to support working visits and other activities during this period of proposal development. The Marsha Forest Centre will fund two Canadian team representatives for the first inter-nation meeting.

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