

ALUMNI SUCCESS STORIES HIGHLIGHTS AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

PROFESSIONAL FELLOWS FROM THE GLC SHAPING PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY PROGRAM 2019 AND BEYOND

Shaping Participatory Democracy is an international exchange initiative of the Great Lakes Consortium for International Training and Development (GLC). GLC is a program of the Great Lakes Community Action Partnership (GLCAP), formerly known as the WSOS Community Action Commission.



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INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS' OVERVIEW OF THE 32 PROGRAM ALUMNI 2019



17
SPRING FELLOWS

15
FALL FELLOWS

5
PROGRAM
COUNTRIES:

ALBANIA
BULGARIA
HUNGARY
ROMANIA
SLOVAKIA



32
ALUMNI

2 780
PEOPLE
INVOLVED

56 039
PEOPLE
IMPACTED

BREJDON XHAVARA



DELEGATION

SPRING 2019

CURRENT ORGANIZATION

COMMUNITY REPORTERS
ALBANIA

HOSTING U.S. ORGANIZATION

UNITED GLOBAL OUTREACH,
ORLANDO (FL)

US MENTOR

TIMOTHY MCKINNEY

When I returned to Albania after my fellowship in the U.S., I had many new ideas to initiate change in the community, so I gathered a group of motivated young people and we started working systematically with the community and the media.

In October 2020, together with some other colleagues from the media field and the community, we founded the media organization Community Reporters Albania, which now marks 1 year since its creation.

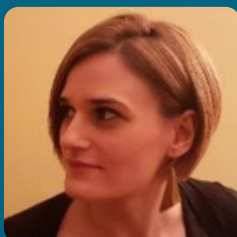
This organization aims to promote civic journalism in Albania and empower members of the Roma and Egyptian minorities to become responsible voices. We have been working on 3 projects for a year related to media empowerment and capacity building of our staff.

We have solved some strategic issues in the media which have to do with the Roma and Egyptian community but not only because we have dived in investigative writings that affect the lives of all Albanian citizens.

These initiatives have their source from the Fellowship in the U.S. The ideas and experiences I gained there helped me a lot to take these big steps for a more active society.

6 PEOPLE INVOLVED **2000** PEOPLE IMPACTED

KATALIN JUHOS



DELEGATION

SPRING 2019

CURRENT ORGANIZATION

STEP BY STEP! ASSOCIATION,
HUNGARY

HOSTING U.S. ORGANIZATION

ACCESS LIVING,
CHICAGO (IL)

US MENTOR

AMBER SMOCK

When I returned from my fellowship program, we worked on committing the candidates of the 2019 local level elections in Hungary to disability issues.

Before the local level elections we analyzed the responsibilities of the municipalities in terms of services for people with disabilities in Hungary and held mayoral debates (in cooperation with other organizations) in Szeged, Pécs and Budapest, during which the candidates described their plans regarding the services they provide for families caring for people with disabilities, e.g. transportation service, day care services etc.

Following the elections, the Chief Mayor's Office of Budapest, as well as 16 other municipalities of the districts of Budapest have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Step by Step! Association (in cooperation with 12 other organizations). The Memorandum includes improving basic social care, housing conditions and accessibility of public buildings, and launching an information platform in all 23 districts.

In this initiative, we collaborated with Anett Csordas, who is an alumna of the GLC Professional Exchange program from the Fall 2015 delegation.

We are the only NGO in Hungary, which has managed to achieve successes in a country where NGOs not connected to the government are highly scrutinized and often attacked for their work.

300 PEOPLE INVOLVED **1000** PEOPLE IMPACTED

TIMEA HOKOVA



DELEGATION

FALL 2019

CURRENT ORGANIZATION

SLOVAK BLIND AND
PARTIALLY SIGHTED UNION

HOSTING U.S. ORGANIZATION

BOSTON CENTER FOR
INDEPENDENT LIVING (MA)

US MENTOR

BILL HENNING

My goal after returning from Professional Fellowship Placement in the USA was to introduce community organizing principles to Slovak blind and partially sighted people.

I have created a database of 42 blind and partially sighted youngsters and in order to monitor their needs, I created a short survey. I've conducted one-on-one with 17 of them to identify their unique needs and leadership potential.

In August 2019 I organized a residential program specifically designed for blind and partially sighted youth. Youngsters were encouraged to contribute with their own experience thus they gained a strong community feeling. They also expressed interest in continuation of similar activities/programs designed for the young community.

The three issues identified by youngsters during the discussion were: 1) community networking, 2) skills development (mostly those related to self-presentation and independent life) and 3) encouraging self-esteem. Through our work we realized that on the level of direct services there is an already existing structure of further training and quality monitoring. However, on the level of community organizing we are still lacking systemic activation of leaders.

27 PEOPLE INVOLVED 4000 PEOPLE IMPACTED

KAROL TÓTH



DELEGATION

SPRING 2019

CURRENT ORGANIZATION

PROJEKT DOM.OV,
SLOVAKIA

HOSTING U.S. ORGANIZATION

UNITED GLOBAL OUTREACH,
ORLANDO (FL)

US MENTOR

TIMOTHY MCKINNEY

When I arrived back from the U.S., I was really influenced by my internship. My job aspirations changed, I quit my governmental job and started working with the organization Projekt DOM.ov which helps marginalized Roma people building family houses.

I started working as a regional Coordinator for the regions Gemer and Novohrad, which are in the south part of Slovakia. During our program we provide for marginalized Roma people financial assistance with their debts, along with financial consulting with their assets building. After this financial setup, we guide them during a family house construction. We provide guidance services focused on administration (land parcel preparation, loan request, building permission, building approval, etc.). We also help them with house building by a construction coordinator who helps them with material buying and with coordination.

It's true that not every client is successful in this process. But despite many obstacles, we have successfully helped building more than 30 houses. This way we try to help people from marginalized Roma communities solve their housing issues. Because we consider that, the legal and safe house is the best base of good and quality life, especially for people in need.

185 PEOPLE INVOLVED 1700 PEOPLE IMPACTED

LUCA CIOBOTARU



DELEGATION

FALL 2019

CURRENT ORGANIZATION

CIVIC RADAUTI,
ROMANIA

HOSTING U.S. ORGANIZATION

MASSACHUSETTS COMMUNITIES
ACTION NETWORK, BOSTON (MA)

US MENTOR

LEWIS FINFER

Since 2017, the initiative group Civic Radauti made efforts to promote active citizenship and civic education in the local urban community. The goal of this effort was to convince the local authorities to support us in opening a community hub, offering the citizens the opportunity to meet, discuss local issues and organize.

In December 2019, after I returned from the U.S., I started discussing these issues with the local community and we planned every step of our future campaign. After meetings with the mayor and city councilors, in April 2020, we participated online in the local council meeting and we presented our idea and they agreed, unanimously, that they will allow us to use the space for free to create a community hub.

Then, we started a crowdfunding campaign and used all the tools of fundraising an NGO like ours had, so in less than 4 months, we gathered over 15.000 euros and with the help of more than 50 volunteers, we completely redesigned the space. Legal professionals, engineers, architects, businessmen, college and high school students worked together for a few months to create what we call today The Radauti Community Center. In December 2020, we opened the community center with a community event. This effort and our campaigns won an award at the National Public Participation Award Ceremony organized by CeRe (The Resource Center for Public Participation) in 2021.

100 PEOPLE
INVOLVED

10 000 PEOPLE
IMPACTED

VICTOR CĂTĂLIN TOMA



DELEGATION

SPRING 2019

CURRENT ORGANIZATION

ACTIVE DEVELOPMENT
ASSOCIATION, ROMANIA

HOSTING U.S. ORGANIZATION

UNITED GLOBAL OUTREACH
ORLANDO, FL

US MENTOR

TIMOTHY MCKINNEY

The main goal of my campaign was to increase the development opportunities (including at the policy level and in the long term) for the young people from Sascut village (Bacau County, Romania) by building a sustainable partnership between the young people, youth workers, public authorities and other local, national and international stakeholders.

The GLC program helped me tremendously to become a better community organizer and after my return from the U.S., I had the opportunity to use all the new skills with the local communities I am working with.

After the fellowship, I organized, together with the local youth group from Sascut and Active Development Association, a number of events, workshops, consultations with the young people and other activities, which impacted directly more than 2000 people. I have facilitated meetings between all the local stakeholders to identify all the problems affecting the local youth and to design a long-term intervention plan. I also designed and delivered training sessions and workshops to develop key competences among the youth, but also one training for the local youth workers about how to build partnerships.

In conclusion, I helped build in Sascut a great group of young people who is now capable to take initiative and to implement their own ideas, supporting the other young people from the local community and creating new development opportunities for them.

30 PEOPLE
INVOLVED

2000 PEOPLE
IMPACTED

BLAZHKA DIMITROVA



DELEGATION

FALL 2015

CURRENT ORGANIZATION

BLAGICHKA - ZERO WASTE /
ZERO WAVE, BULGARIA

HOSTING U.S. ORGANIZATION

UNITED VALLEY INTERFAITH
PROJECT

US MENTOR

LEAH TORREY

In September 2021 I had the chance to be a featured speaker in the GLC International virtual reunion 'Change-making in an uncertain world'. There, I had the chance to present my newest initiative in the field of sustainable development and environmental protection: Zero Wave. Zero Wave is a company with the mission to turn waste into valuable resources. We produce amazingly delicious crackers, all-purpose baking flour and 100% biodegradable and compostable plates and cutlery made out to a by-product. In the summer of 2021, our innovative idea was awarded a start-up grant of 20 000 EUR by the Innovation Starter Accelerator.

Zero Wave is one of the multiple initiatives I've launched and work on since coming back from the U.S. in the fall of 2015. Blagichka - ZERO WASTE is the first restaurant with zero waste in Bulgaria, which employs disadvantaged young people. I've collaborated with Deaf alumni from our national network and recruited Deaf staff along with other young people in a disadvantaged situation.

While dedicating a lot of time on sustainable food production and consumption, I've conducted tens of training sessions on principles of sustainable living and consumption, many of them with young people in schools. I've also shared my learning and know-how in the book 'Life with zero waste', which was published in 2020.

100 PEOPLE
INVOLVED

2000 PEOPLE
IMPACTED

ASHOD DERANDONYAN



DELEGATION

SPRING 2017

CURRENT ORGANIZATION

LISTEN UP FOUNDATION,
BULGARIA

HOSTING U.S. ORGANIZATION

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR
THE DEAF - WASHINGTON, D.C.

US MENTOR

HOWARD A. ROSENBLUM

Listen Up Foundation and Youth Organizations of Deaf Activists (led by deaf alumnus Alexander Ivanov) were the driving force behind the elaboration and adoption of the Bulgarian Sign Language Act. The Deaf community advocated devotedly not only for the passing of the law in the Bulgarian Parliament, but for focusing on Deaf leadership in the legal texts. Finally, the Bulgarian Sign Language Act was voted on November 12th 2020 and January 24th 2021 and passed with full parliamentary support. As a result, Bulgarian sign language is now - for the first time - recognized as an individual language, while provisions are in place to increase the access of Deaf people to education, social and political life using sign language.

We continue building our strategic partnership with U.S. organizations we've got to know through the GLC program, most intensively with Gallaudet University. In 2021 we received news that our common project "Building Bridges for Deaf Leaders of Tomorrow" was selected for funding by the Google Impact Challenge in Central and Eastern Europe. It will help us work with Gallaudet and Sofia University in establishing a Master's degree program for Deaf leaders.

We network and support a number of other causes, particularly with the Equality League - a diverse coalition that was born out of the Bulgarian GLC alumni network. Most recently, we worked on the mural 'We Sign for Human Rights' that can be now seen in the center of Sofia, raising awareness on sign language. This is a collaboration project with alumni Vesya Deyanova and Diana Nedeva.

300 PEOPLE
INVOLVED

10 000 PEOPLE
IMPACTED

VERA TURCANU-SPATARI



DELEGATION

FALL 2019

CURRENT ORGANIZATION

CERE: RESOURCE CENTER FOR
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

HOSTING U.S. ORGANIZATION

TAKE ACTION MINNESOTA
MINNEAPOLIS (MN)

US MENTOR

ELIANNE FARHAT

My campaign was dedicated to strengthening the voice of citizens in the local elections in Bucharest in September 2020. I started by addressing all active civic groups and several NGOs from Bucharest to organize a Candidate Forum. 16 civic groups responded affirmatively.

The event's purpose was to engage the five top-ranked candidates for the Bucharest General City Hall Mayor's and Vice-mayor's offices to respond to citizens' questions and learn what their proposed solutions are. The Forum's structure took the form of a question-and-answer session and covered a broad range of issues prepared beforehand by the leaders of the civic groups based on their advocacy work. The candidates did not receive the questions before the event. Not all the invitees accepted to participate in the Candidate Forum. Nevertheless, we hosted the event live on Facebook and announced during the event the reasons why some candidates were not present.

It is worth mentioning that the Candidate Forum was the only meeting that gathered several candidates in a dialogue with citizens, civic groups, and NGOs. It was a great tool to provide the Bucharest neighborhood civic groups, NGOs, and voters, with an opportunity to learn about and compare the candidates' positions on public issues in a neutral, non-partisan setting. We learned that we have to be more present politically and continuously challenge the power asymmetries in order to achieve a positive change – a true democracy.

28 PEOPLE
INVOLVED

20 000 PEOPLE
IMPACTED

EMIL METODIEV



DELEGATION

SPRING 2012

CURRENT ORGANIZATION

ROMA STANDING
CONFERENCE, BULGARIA

HOSTING U.S. ORGANIZATION

NATIONAL PEOPLE'S ACTION,
CHICAGO (IL)

US MENTOR

JAMES MUMM

In mid-November 2021, Bulgaria had its third parliamentary election in just a year. I worked on Roma-led civil campaigns for all the election cycles with the coalition Roma Standing Conference, which brings together Roma activists from different parts of the country.

On the November elections, we worked in 24 locations with local leaders and 43 observers. For two weeks local structures were working with families to teach them how to vote with a machine and organized local meetings to educate the communities about the importance of voting. In our target locations there are 61155 Roma voters. Out of them 11810 voted in the November elections which is 19.30%. In the previous elections the people voted in the same Roma sections were 22.20%. According to the general turnout in Bulgaria the Roma vote decreased with 2% while overall Bulgarian turnout decreased with 6%.

In terms of advocacy, we set up public open dialogues with politicians from different political parties. All major parties were invited for dialogues. Five parties accepted the invitation, but one dropped last minute. The other four dialogues were productive and political parties committed to most of our suggested flagship initiatives, among which: scholarship fund for Roma students, enterpeneruship fund and new jobs for Roma, advisory position to the prime minister by a Roma expert to coordinate policies for Roma. The 4 dialogues with political parties were broadcasted live reaching 120 000 viewers.

100 PEOPLE
INVOLVED

120 000 PEOPLE
IMPACTED

2021 SMALL GRANTS

PROJECTS

designed &
implemented
by program alumni

28

AT LOCAL
OR NATIONAL
LEVEL

FROM:



74

ALUMNI

actively
involved

PEOPLE

directly
involved
in the projects

1 153

 
INTERNATIONAL
COOPERATIONS

 **BUDGET**
OF 16 257
UTILIZED

33 728

PEOPLE

indirectly
impacted
by the projects

TOPICS

touched
or introduced

14

ROMA
EDUCATION
NEIGHBORHOOD
WOMEN
SOCIAL
WORK
RURAL
DEVELOPMENT
MENTAL HEALTH
YOUTH
HUMAN
RIGHTS
DISABILITIES
LGBTIQ+
SOCIAL
ENTREPRENEURSHIP
ACTIVISM
COMMUNITY
ORGANIZING



CENTRUM
KOMUNITNEHO
ORGANIZOVANIA



PLEASE SUPPORT
GLC Alumni Network
efforts to implement more
online trainings, small
grant projects, building
and maintaining strategic
partnerships involving
European and U.S.
partners.

In celebration of 10 years of
success in expanding
community organizing to
Europe please make a
donation in US Dollars to
GLCAP [here](#), or within
Europe to Pro European
Network [here](#).

Your support is very much
appreciated and will help us
to make a difference in
having the voice of minority
communities heard across
Europe!