

Hesed and the Roma District

Hesed is an effective and inspirational organization which provides all the uniqueness and beauty of a home, I refer to it as home because children, teenagers and youth in the Roma district experience a different kind of life at the Hesed centers, the kind of life they long to have with the right environment, support from people, friends, and all the surroundings. It's indeed a child friendly environment that not only welcomes children, teenagers and youth but also exposes them to life outside the Roma district, the normal life they should be living. The support and parenting mentorship given to young mothers is incredible as it ensures child growth and development physically, emotionally and intellectually. Pepa and I visiting the Hesed center was very valuable not to mention the wonderful hospitality. Below is a brief assessment of the Hesed center and the Roma People;

What I learnt and appreciate

1. Teaching mother's during pregnancy about the reproductive system, Parenthood, breast feeding etc. Having recurrent and consistent programs/lessons for the mother's, which enables them to start from where they stopped.
2. Teaching mothers about children's feeding and welfare from 10months to 3yrs. Not to mention Provision of nutritious food by the government for infants from 10months to 3years at a very low cost of 1.30leva.
3. Teaching mother's family planning, encouraging condoms and pills for young girls and IUD for mothers with children.
4. I Loved the setting of the day care/first step where children and mothers get interested in bringing kids to the center... First day of the kids... It's child friendly, play materials that emphasize child's simple learning of basic things in life like being organized, working with others, handling property among others. It also teaches mother's how to support their children to do stuff instead of doing everything for them.
5. The registration and evaluation system of the mother's and Children. They measure their current state of the client at the moment of joining the organization and keep monitoring the process. This helps the NGO to know it's impact and how to improve to serve better and meet each person's needs.
6. Involving mother's in mentorship and growth of their children. This gives them a chance to be involved in their children's day to day life.
7. Govt offers financial support to mothers of 40leva monthly per first child and 30leva per the rest of the children.
8. Mentorship of the teenagers and youth and offering them help with their school work is incredible, alongside teaching them other skills like IT, Music, Dance and Drama and so on enables them to discover their talent and passion as well as improve.

Challenges

1. Inconsistency of mother's and Children in the program, this to some extent shows a lack of commitment to the program and thus slow impact.
2. Roma people think they are the victims of government and poor policies. They think they require special treatment and attention
3. Poor influence from the church
4. A sense of hopelessness as they think they are in a different world from other Bulgarians
5. Children find it difficult to blend in society with other children due to unique mentality.
6. Mother's are not empowered to work for themselves thus continuing the cycle of government dependency, poverty, unproductivity, hopelessness and probably crime.
7. Physical poor standards of living were very Obvious.

Proposed ideas/ Solutions

1. I proposed to start Conducting motivation workshops with the kids from 4years to youths. To instill Hope, Self-worth and Confidence, realising their potential, Purposeful living, right decision making. 1hour a day with one group of at most 20children/youths for 3days a week.

Requirements: workshop area, games, stationery, shading, papers, pencils, each lesson to have accompanying activity.

But due to the current virus outbreak in Bulgaria, Pepa suggested that I carry out a training of Trainers with the teachers and caregivers at hesed, because it will be easy for them to pass on the values and disciplines to the children as well as daily monitoring.

2. NGOs or governments need to find a way of involving religious leaders in the community development of Roma people; because they have influence over the people and they tend to listen to the religious leaders more.
3. Taking steps to eradicate the prejudices, beliefs and behaviors of people in the Roma district.
4. Steps to make them feel part of Bulgaria like having a representative in the parliament of Bulgaria. There is a need for a person/group of people who believe in the government and who they believe in to have their best interest at heart, this chain can foster change in mind and development since they will know that they are listened to and planned for by the government.
5. Constructing infrastructure like good buildings, roads etc. Make them feel that they belong.
5. Such infrastructures can also provide jobs for them to make them occupied and give them a sense of importance thus reduced wastage of time in crime and related activities.
6. Creating employment opportunities for them... May start from there area and then enlarge. Find a way of making parents productive

I deeply appreciate the impact Hased is making in the Roma community to wholly impact lives, a journey of 1000 miles starts with one step.