

*"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."
Nelson Mandela*

CULTURE AND EDUCATION PROGRAM

PROJECT: Education Beyond Barriers

PROJECT SUMMARY:

The project *Education Beyond Barriers* aims at preventing early school dropout and improving the school performance of the children who benefit from the project, by offering tutoring and homework support in the subjects where children experience difficulties and low results.

The activities developed in this project drive at establishing a close collaboration from the point of view of the beneficiaries educational' process, between the children and their families, by raising an awareness regarding the importance of education in the children's future; between the mediators and the teachers from the schools these children attend.

PROJECT BENEFICIARIES:

20 children - from families in need.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES:

- To prevent early school dropout and improving school performance for children who are the project beneficiaries
- To learn communication and relational skills through exposure to varied activities offered to project beneficiaries.
- To provide a safe environment where beneficiaries learn to express themselves freely, to evolve personally, under the supervision of counsellors and volunteers.
- To actively involve families, tutors and teachers in the educational process.
- To inform and advise parents about children's needs, raising awareness on the importance of education.

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES:

- ✓ Weekly Tutoring (provided by volunteers) in the subjects where beneficiaries have learning difficulties and school performance is weak.
- ✓ Psychosocial, individual and group counselling for children and their families.
- ✓ Individual and group counseling for children at risk of school failure, for their families and teachers.
- ✓ Crisis Counselling - Psychological intervention in crisis situations.
- ✓ Advise students and parents in accessing funds and legal benefits (scholarships, grants, school supplies, money for a computer) to obtain identity cards.
- ✓ Educational purposes socializing and leisure time activities (outdoor activities, shows, visits to museums, theme competitions, holiday camps etc.).
- ✓ Providing snacks and fruit before the beginning of tutoring classes.
- ✓ Monthly distribution of goods consisting of food and school supplies.
- ✓ Computer courses.
- ✓ Meetings between volunteer tutors, parents and children's teachers.
- ✓ Home visits to the children involved in the project.

REASONS FOR SCHOOL DROPOUT

Reasons for school dropout at student and family level:

- Financial difficulties.
- Educational model provided by parents.
- Educational model offered by siblings is more influential. In families where older siblings have given up education earlier, their younger siblings tend to replicate their model.
- Family disorganization triggers financial difficulties. Divorce, alcoholism, domestic violence are signs that often precede school dropout decision.
- Involvement in barely legal activities.
- Entering the job market.
- Low confidence in education is proving to be a rather refuted stereotype, actually.
- Circular migration doesn't seem to be a risk factor in itself, but there are important reintegration issues in the case of children of migrants who leave the system and then return at an older age. The same problems are found in the case of older students who enter the education system.

At community level, dropout factors are:

- Early marriage model acts as a factor that prevents further education, especially in rural communities.
- The appearance of a child tends to be a community feature rather than an individual act. Beyond the fact they come from poor, dysfunctional families, girls usually follow examples of predecessors in the community where they live.
- Lack of security in the area. There are communities where, due to the high crime rate, teachers are afraid to interact with parents and this lack of cooperation contributes to increased risk of school dropout.

Ceasing education after the eighth grade model. This rule was found in one community, relatively well connected to the city, where the eighth grade graduates avoid further education in high school, often arguing absence of colleagues to continue their studies. At school level, the causes that determine dropout may be due to recurrent failure, insufficient integration of students in the class or weak relationship with the other students and teachers. There are very few actions to prevent early school leaving at school level. Teachers can play an important role in preventing early school dropout, because they are constantly in contact with the students, they can identify and diagnose their problems and can attract the attention of authorities or competent non-governmental organizations to intervene if necessary.

Legal Representative of CRIS-DU Areopagus Association

Name: Conf. Univ. Dr. Alexandru NEAGOOE

Position: President

Project Responsible

Name: Gabriela POVIAN

Position: Social department coordinator

FOR MORE INFORMATIONS:

Contact person: Gabriela POVIAN – social worker - Social department coordinator

Phone: 0256 487 485 / 0725.093910

E-mail: social@areopagus.ro

<http://www.areopagus.ro/en/cris-du/>

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