

MAKE A CONNECTION – PRZYŁĄCZ SIĘ

Promoting youth civic engagement

THE CHALLENGE

Young people in Poland are still feeling the effects of the political, economic, and social transition that began there in the 1990's. In reaction to widespread changes, many youth engage in risky behaviors such as experimenting with alcohol, drugs, or sex. Polish schools focus most of their attention on developing academic competencies. In non-school hours, young people have few opportunities to spend their leisure time productively. While educational reform efforts are increasingly focused on social and emotional competency development, these reforms are not keeping pace with employers' demands for young workers who possess "soft skills." What's more, few organizations are creating pathways for young people to acquire the training and support they need to become civically engaged and empowered to make change in their lives and communities.

THE PROGRAM

To address these challenges, the *Przyłącz Się* program was launched in 2001 to provide skill building and financial support to young people, ages 16 to 22, who are interested in creating positive social change. Over the past six years, youth-led volunteer groups have designed hundreds of social action and community service projects based on their insight into the needs of their communities. Participants receive small grants and intensive training on life and leadership skills, among other support services. These skill building activities prepare volunteer groups to effectively manage their projects and build sustainable partnerships with community stakeholders. Building on the achievements of Phase I, the current program will reach an additional 3,500 young people.¹



OUTCOMES

In the long term, the program will contribute to Polish youth becoming active and engaged community members, as well as to improving community attitudes toward the role of young people in society. Program outcomes include: increased volunteerism; improved life skills (e.g., communication, conflict management, teamwork, creative and critical thinking, decision making, empathy, respect, and self confidence); improved youth adult partnerships in communities; and the creation of a countrywide network of organizations and volunteer groups.

THE PARTNER

The Polish Children and Youth Foundation (PCYF) was established in 1992 with a vision to foster the positive development of children and youth, ages 5 to 22, and to help raise a generation of responsible and creative individuals active in shaping their own lives, local communities, and the future of the country. Over the past 15 years, PCYF has supported in excess of 700 organizations that serve children and youth. Annually, it reaches 200,000 young people.

RESULTS TO DATE

To date, *Przyłącz Się* has reached close to 10,000 youth who have completed thousands of volunteer hours and addressed a range of community issues. According to a recent study conducted by Brandeis University as part of a global evaluation, half of those youth surveyed in Poland volunteered more as a result of their participation in the program, 48% claimed they were learning more in classes, 36% participate more in classes, and 74% felt more productive in school, at work, or in the

community. Over the past six years, due to investments from this and other programs, volunteerism has taken on a new meaning with more communities across Poland recognizing that it is an effective way to enable young people to be independent and autonomous contributors.

PROGRAM: Make a Connection - *Przyłącz Się*
PARTNER: Polish Children and Youth Foundation (PCYF)
PERIOD: 1 April 2004 – 30 June 2007
LOCATION: National
REACH: 3,500 young people, ages 16-22
MODEL: Community service/youth-led volunteerism

¹ During Phase I of the program (July 2001 – June 2004), more than 5,000 youth participated.