

MAKE A CONNECTION – PRIPOJ SE

Promoting youth civic engagement

THE CHALLENGE

Thirty years of communist rule left its mark on Czech society in both economic and social terms, including unemployment, socio-economic stratification, and continued social disengagement, as evidenced by a lack of civic engagement and political participation, particularly among young people. A recent report from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports confirmed that young people rarely take part in the civic and political decision-making process. Moreover, participation in civic life is not an integral part of young people's lifestyles. As a result, youth pursue education and economic activities while neglecting social issues and civic participation.

THE PROGRAM

To address this challenge, the *Pripoj se* program was launched in January 2002. Its goal: to facilitate and promote youth civic engagement, thus increasing the visibility and scale of civic participation in the Czech Republic. Groups of about eight young people, ages 16-24, identify community needs and develop volunteer projects to meet those needs. Over a period of six months, the program offers small grants, training, and consultation — among other support services — to volunteer groups. Through their experiences, participants gain valuable life, leadership, and project management skills that prepare them for future academic and employment success. The program is implemented in five regions and via a network of children's homes throughout the country. Building off the achievements of Phase I, the current program will reach an additional 1,200 young people.¹

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OUTCOMES

In the long term, the program seeks to increase the number of young Czechs who are engaged in service to their communities. Key outcomes include: increased volunteerism; improved life skills (e.g., contribution, communications, empathy, conflict management, and respect); strengthened capacity among regional partners to recruit and support young volunteers; closer cooperation among young people and community stakeholders; and program alumni meaningfully involved in the program.

THE PARTNER

Established in 1993, the Civil Society Development Foundation's (NROS) mission is to enhance civic responsibility through the support of non-governmental organizations. NROS provides grants to third parties; implements programs focused on education, research, and publishing; cooperates with governmental and non-governmental bodies at the national and international level; and acts as an implementing agency for European Union programs. Young people are a key target group of the organization. NROS delivers *Pripoj se* in partnership with five regional partner organizations and the Tereza Maxova Foundation network of children's homes.



RESULTS TO DATE

Including Phase I and Phase II, *Pripoj se* has reached close to 3,000 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, one third of those youth surveyed in the Czech Republic volunteered more as a result of their participation in the program, 24% claimed they were doing better at school, and 17% felt more productive in school, at work, or in the community.

A recent public opinion survey completed by the STEM company stated that volunteer work is now perceived more positively compared to previous years among the Czech public and the notion of volunteerism is understood better.

Program: Make a Connection - *Pripoj se*
 Partner: Civil Society Development Foundation (NROS)
 Period: 1 January 2005 – 31 August 2008
 Location: National
 Reach: 1,200 young people, ages 16-24
 Model: Community service/youth-led volunteerism

¹ This current program builds off the achievements of Phase I (January 2002 – July 2005), in which more than 1,500 youth participated.