

MAKE A CONNECTION – KAPCSOLÓDJ BE!

Engaging young people in their communities

THE CHALLENGE

Forty years of centralized one-party politics and obligatory volunteering discredited the notion of a service ethic in many Central European societies. The enduring legacy has been a lack of understanding related to the meaning of volunteerism, community involvement, and active citizenship. Moreover, youth often lack meaningful opportunities to develop their own ideas on how to improve their communities. In response, the Foundation for Democratic Youth (DIA) endeavors to create an open climate for learning and social action by youth, one that teaches them to respect different viewpoints on social and political issues, an essential step in increasing leadership and participation in their communities. Recent studies demonstrate that youth participation in clubs and organizations leads to higher levels of civic engagement during adulthood. Increasingly, volunteer and service activities are being recognized as stimulants for the development of young people's personal experiences and professional skills.

THE PROGRAM

Make a Connection-*Kapcsolódj be!* increases youth civic engagement in Hungary through three core strategies: building a national network of young people, ages 14 to 25, who are committed to volunteerism; supporting youth-led groups to take action on issues important to them; and raising national awareness about the importance of civic engagement. With the support of adult coordinators, volunteer groups — involving a minimum of eight young people — design and carry out service projects in the course of a school year. Projects focus on a range of local issues, from how to meet the needs of vulnerable community members to protecting the environment. Youth groups receive small grants, training, and technical assistance and participate in national networking events. Through their experiences, participants gain valuable life, leadership, and project management skills that prepare them for future academic and employment success. Building on the achievements of Phase I, the current program will reach an additional 2,000 young people, and expand its youth network to all seven regions of Hungary.¹

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OUTCOMES

In the long term, the program seeks to increase the number of young Hungarians who are engaged in service to their communities. Key program outcomes include: increased volunteerism; improved life skills (e.g., communication, cooperation and teamwork, creative thinking, self confidence, decision making, responsibility, respect); sustainable volunteer groups; youth considered resources for creating solutions to community needs; and increased community partnerships with young people. To complement activities at the grassroots level, a national level strategy strives to raise public awareness about the importance of volunteerism and life skills development.

THE PARTNER

Established in 1999, the Foundation for Democratic Youth strengthens youth volunteerism and community service in Hungary by connecting schools, universities, and NGOs, and providing training, technical assistance, small grants, and networking services. DIA delivers *Kapcsolódj be!* in partnership with a network of coordinators across the country.



RESULTS TO DATE

Including Phase I and Phase II, *Kapcsolódj be!* has reached close to 5,000 youth who have completed more than 100,000 volunteer hours and addressed a range of community issues. According to a recent study conducted by Brandeis University as part of a global evaluation, 73% of those youth surveyed in Hungary volunteered more as a result of their participation in the program, 61% claimed they were doing better at school, and 73% felt more productive in school, at work, or in the community.

¹ This current program builds off the achievements of Phase I (October 2003 – October 2005), in which more than 4,400 youth participated.

PROGRAM: Make a Connection - *Kapcsolódj be!*
PARTNER: Foundation for Democratic Youth (DIA)
PERIOD: 1 November 2005 – 31 October 2008
LOCATION: National
REACH: 2,355 young people, ages 14-25
MODEL: Community service/youth-led volunteerism