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“Girl power in Lithuania”

The association Missing Persons` Families Support Centre (further Centre) was established in 1996 by relatives and parents of missing people. The main reason for founding such organisation was dissatisfaction with tardy search for missing people in Lithuania and strong willingness to change this situation. During the first years of work it appeared that many girls missing from Lithuania suffered from trafficking in human beings. Thus the association began providing assistance to the victims in 1997 and established the first shelter for trafficking victims in Lithuania in 2001.

The main object of the Centre is to combat trafficking in human beings and provide assistance for victims of human trafficking and their relatives. Prevention activities against human trafficking are one of the main goals our Centre at this moment. One of the preventive projects implemented by the Centre is called “Girl power in Lithuania”. It has been implemented since 2004 in Lithuania and is especially important in the Lithuanian case of human trafficking.

Aim of the project “Girl power in Lithuania” – to empower young girls in Lithuania by using the Girls’ group method and to prevent them from such risks as being trafficked, abused or socially marginalized.

Main goals of the Girls’ group method:

- Strengthening the girls’ self-confidence and self-consciousness
- Highlighting their own strengths and capacities
- Breaking the “negative” inheritance related to the family background
- Raising motivation for the further studies as a way to achieve financial sustainability
- Exposing the connection between gender, sexuality and power, encouraging young women to stand up for themselves.

Currently girls’ groups’ activities are implemented in 18 groups, which take place in various paces in Lithuania – Vilnius, Kaunas, Anykščiai, Kelmė and district areas of these cities. Girls’ groups consist of 6-8 members within a certain age group. In 2010 **18 leaders** worked with the girls of Girl Power groups and around **220 girls** attended the meetings. An average age of participants of the groups is **15 years old**.

How the girls do spent time in the Girls’ groups:

- Individual and group work;
- Discussions;
- Meetings and excursions;
- Excursions and camping.

The main principle of the group method is discussions with peers, which are combined with different kinds of activities.

This method is successfully implemented by qualified Girl group leaders. In the frames of the project is not only activities of Girls’ groups, we arrange training courses for girl group leaders and lecturers as well. Trainings are hold by the creator of Girls’ group method Mia Hanström or Lithuanian lecturers, who also have experience training new Girls’ group leaders in Kaliningrad district area.

Results of the method the best are shown by the girls who participate in the project opinions:

Inesa: “We have good discussions, which help us to gain more knowledge about ourselves, our relationship with the opposite sex and about our health. Here I have found true friends with whom I can share joy and sorrow”

Agne: "A couple of years back, I was kind of childish. But now they say I have grown up /.../ when I start an activity I also finish it now, but earlier, before I finished one activity I already started with another one"

Karolina: "Here we all live friendly /.../. I like it here. The atmosphere here is totally different".

Jurate: "Now I really regret I was skipping classes at school /.../ because, after all, what you could do these days without education? Nothing."

Ruta: "Here you can talk about your life, ask for advice, give advice to others, and so on".

According to the questionnaire, which was spread for girls who participate in such groups more than one year, 57 girls from 60 answered, that this group helps to strengthen their self-confidence and self-conscious, 56 of them discover positive things about themselves. 60 girls agreed that they would advise to participate in Girl' groups their friends too.

In the frame of the project **trainings for the Girl group leaders** are implemented as well. In 2010 it took place on the 24th – 25th of September, when 15 women from Vilnius, Kaunas, Kelmė, Anykščiai and Anykščiai region gathered to two days seminar in one secondary school of Kaunas. Kaunas was chosen because of saving financial means.

Girl group leaders who have no experience and those who already have some skills to work by Girl group method were invited to the event. The seminar was conducted by the lecturers Daiva Šabūnienė and Rūta Žitkienė, who have long time experience working by Girl group method and were trained by the founder of the method Mia Hanström.

During the seminar Girl group method and its features were presented, as well as challenges that Girl group leaders face to and their solutions were discussed. Theoretical information was diversified with practical activities that could be later applied during Girl group activities.

From 15 participants of the trainings, it is known that only 4 women have not established new groups yet. Other ones have started to work with girls. It is planned to make trainings to develop their knowledge in the frame of Girl Power project 2011 – 2012, as well as during this year to start new practice in Lithuania – Boy Power groups. For this reasons trainings for future Boy Power groups' leaders will take place on the 21st - 22nd of October in Vilnius.

Achievements:

For an excellent implementation of the project "Girl power in Lithuania", in 2006, MPFSC was awarded by LR Ministry of the Interior Award for the Implemented Project in Sphere of Crime and other Criminal Offence Prevention.

Future plans:

- Continue working with Girls groups and spread Girl group method by establishing new ones;
- Arrange trainings for Girls' groups' leaders and prepare lecturers who can teach new Girls' group leaders in order to spread this method;
- Involve boys and men in gender equality work by establishing Boys' groups and arrange trainings for Boy group leaders.

Prepared by project coordinator Giedrė Blažytė