



“Citizen Legislative Advocacy in Minority Communities” Testimonies from the 1st European Delegation visiting the USA from March 26 — May 5, 2012

Tamas Avar (HepC KFT, Hungary):



“The most important I have learnt in the U.S. is a new attitude. That is almost anything you really want is achievable, and you have to keep trying, keep fighting, do one step at a time, and eventually it will worth it. The cohesive power of a small community in trouble can be so enormous, it can resist or even defeat the greatest and most powerful opponents. The compassion is one of the most important human quality ever and if you have to lose everything in life just make sure that you do not lose your compassion for people in need around you.

I have also learnt about self-interest. That is, you must take into consideration the self-interest of any of your stakeholders, if you want them to truly get engage in and committed to your cause. Once you really succeed in tapping into it, you create a win-win situation and everybody will be motivated and eventually satisfied. Finally I have gained experience of how powerful and effective are storytelling and testimonial. Sharing directly and frankly the relevant experiences of people affected by a cause have a great influence and can move things forward surprisingly. I appreciate and celebrate more than even the tiniest results and every effort that is made, including the person who makes it. I focus more than ever to get to know and understand the vision, stance and concrete plans of anyone I wish to cooperate with while sharing mine as well. Sharing our ideas and some of our stories efficiently helps us to get closer to each other and find out where the opportunities are for collaboration.”



Veronica Strelcova (the Centre for Community Organizing (CKO), Slovakia):



“My three weeks internship in *National People’s Action* in Chicago and their affiliates allowed to observe various social or economical issues that also might be applied at home like organizing techniques, strategies and agitating methods. Very inspiring was to realize the role of the Church and Church leaders in organizing, which in Slovakia plays a much more traditional and not flexible role.

As part of my internship was an invaluable experience to live for three weeks in one community house in Chicago. The Stone Soup Co-op is a place where people can live together like one community, share and exchange their ideas and visions. I met there people that are very engaged in any kinds of movements, focused on social or economical issues. I am glad that I could participate in this program and I was one of the three Slovaks travelling to the U.S. It was an invaluable opportunity to be able to go, see, learn, meet with people, make new contacts, gain and share experiences and get new ideas; not only for my job but also personally.”



Peter Lazarov (Movement for National Unity and Salvation Bulgaria):



“It was a great opportunity to improve and enrich my knowledge, gain new and useful ideas and also working methods that I could apply in my professional field. My hosting organization was *Paraquad Inc.* Located in Saint Louis, Missouri. My mentor within the 3-weeks Internship was Mrs. Kirsten Dunham, Director of Policy and Advocacy. Our efforts are focused on working with and supporting people with disabilities. Likewise, protecting their legal rights, and creating real opportunities for participation in the social life of people with disabilities.

My Internship in Paraquad gave me the opportunity to look at the problems and possibilities for their solution from another angle. My goals (described in the Individual action plan) have been taken from the good working practices within U.S. organizations, and I am working to develop and implement them in Bulgaria. In the future, I would like to keep and deepen our mutual cooperation with Paraquad inc., and to collaborate with other U.S. organizations working with people with disabilities, as well. Once again, thank you for the great exchange program and please feel free to contact me at anytime.”



Sponsored by the U.S. State Department Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs,
Office of Citizen Exchanges, Professional Fellows Division.
Locally organized by Great Lakes Consortium for International Training and Development

