



“Citizen Legislative Advocacy in Minority Communities” Testimonies from the 2nd European Delegation visiting the United States October 1 — November 10, 2012

Kaloyan Damyanov – Stara Zagora, Bulgaria

Sunflower Community Action, Wichita, Kansas



“I had a chance to learn basic tools and principles in community organizing at Sunflower Community Action, Wichita, Kansas. First of all, it is very important to identifying issues for organizing. My organization is not like Sunflower in Wichita, but I can use same three questions for identifying issues: (1) Can people be mobilized around this? (2) Is it specific? (3) Can something be done to change this situation? Organizations have organized on some very strange issues, have won and built the organization. I learn in Wichita, staff works with leadership: (1) One-on-one; (2) Small leadership group; (3) Public meeting; (4) Demonstration or action; (5) Follow-up to public meetings and/or demonstration, and (6) Negotiation session. In conclusion, I think organizing work is hard work, however, come with dignity of building power.”

Krisztina Hegymegi Molnar – Miskolc, Hungary

Maine People’s Alliance, Portland, Maine



“I saw this sentence on a poster in office of Maine People's Alliance (MPA): “If you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together”. In Maine I realized that it is the method of their work. The goal of MPA is to be a member-driven organization. Members, not staff, should carry out the work of MPA and participate in decision-making, organization building, and strategic planning. Often members are uncomfortable in many parts of this process. At first I felt it too. They took me and other volunteers through more training and helped us to understand the basics of grassroots organizing. The goal of training is to continually expose us to experiences within our “Learning Zone” that build towards organizational leadership. And we started working together. Another important thing is the “story telling” in United States. Everybody has his/her own story. Your story helps to understand your goals and to build good relationship.”

Andreea Buzec – Bucharest, Romania

Community Voices Heard, New York, New York



“My learning lesson revolves around participation, around empowerment. Working and interacting with people doing the work experience program, living in public housing projects, fighting everyday to make ends meet and still full of inspiration and having a will to make a change in their lives has had a solid impact on me, as an human being and as a professional. Continuing to support a culture of participation, empowerment, creating opportunities for people to grow into leaders within their communities and having control over changes that affect their lives will be my organizations’ mission and mine.”

Monika Bandurova – Povazska Bystrica, Slovakia

Lakeview Action Coalition, Chicago, Illinois



“My stay in U.S. helped me to better understand the issues that low income and most vulnerable people face within capitalism. I realized how powerful and important is to empower people in order to make their lives better. Therefore I see community organizing as a crucial mean to empower community and allow people to raise their voices. Private organizations and public officials are organized. In order to live in democratic society people need power, and they have to organize.”

Balint Vojtonovszki – Budapest, Hungary

Community Voices Heard, New York, New York



“Community organizing is the only way to involve oppressed groups in decision making procedures in order to have a real working democracy in Eastern Europe. My work will be easier thanks to this program, because the live and efficient mentor relationship I found at Community Voices Heard, New York. We had great discussions on the dilemmas of involving poor people in the social justice movement. I managed to see good examples on powerful leadership development, which really helped the community leaders in taking on different tasks in the movement. With this help I’ve seen them organizing efficient meetings with public officials, giving authentic testimonies at public hearings and taking direct action. I’ve also seen the methods needed to grow a community organization in numbers: out-reach, mailing, phone-banking, etc. The importance of a database was remarkable in this sense. Last but not least, I managed to learn different fundraising methods and tactics, which will prove to be useful when trying to spread community organizing in my country.”

Nedka Taneva – Sliven, Bulgaria

Maine People’s Alliance, Portland, Maine



“The past three weeks have been a challenging time for me. During the internship I saw how in Bulgaria people are not trained to tell their opinion. In the U.S. they work to develop the community “together”: “If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together.” They work with a mix of races; they believe they’re stronger together. They have some volunteers from minority groups. The main campaigns of the organization were about healthcare, voter registration, small business coalition, and tax fairness coalition. This experience will help me to develop my organization and make my city a better place to live.”



Anda Lupusor – Timisoara, Romania

**Sisters of the Road, Portland, Oregon
Breads and Roses, Olympia, Washington**



“It was a very interesting experience to know American problems and their way to solve them. Behind every person I met it was a great story and was exciting for me to listen, to compare and to understand. I learned the steps for fundraising and I will try this model at home in my country. I remember a sentence from my volunteer experience: “Homeless people are not strangers; they are friends that we haven’t met yet”. This program helped me to understand the great diversity of people and broke my barrier in my mind, which will help me in improving my social work activities.”

Marcela Beresova – Presov, Slovakia

Step by Step, Charleston, West Virginia



“I am thankful that I could learn in the U.S. what community organizing is. It is not used in Eastern Slovakia and now I think that it is very useful tool for all people who need some help. For me as a social worker the idea of community organizing is now very important and I have changed my prior view on providing only social services. I could see very nice programs in the U.S. and I hope that I can realize some of them back home in Slovakia.”



Radu Raileanu – Bucharest, Romania

Lakeview Action Coalition, Chicago, Illinois



“It was great to see American people acting as citizens. True citizens. The involved kind. But this didn’t happen overnight. Many people, organizers, worried and worked many years for this to happen. I believe I have been given the knowledge to help people back home have their voices heard and to get them to participate more in the democratic process. This is even more important for the minority communities in Romania, communities with which I am working.”

Nicu Dumitru – Bucharest, Romania

Illinois People’s Action, Bloomington, Illinois



“I think there was enough time to get to discover a small part of the American culture. Moreover, I think that the organizing experience gained at IPA in Bloomington will help me find solutions for a Roma community in Baia Mare, Romania. Most probably, the faith-based organizing will not work the same, but I’m sure I can adopt some mechanisms and bring added value to my work. I gained a lot of information directly from people involved, which I think it’s hard to achieve otherwise.”

Jolana Natherova – Banska Bystrica, Slovakia

Step by Step, Charleston, West Virginia



“In Charleston I participated in two workshops: Spirituality of Story & Darkness to Light: Adults Protecting Children from Sexual Abuse. These workshops inspired me to bring new ideas to the work of my organization Hope for Children in Banska Bystrica. I will provide two workshops for the Roma poor children in the two different localities in Slovakia. I was glad that I could build closer ties with the people involved in the Charleston, West Virginia and Banska Bystrica, Slovakia Sister City relationships.”

Zsolt Peter Fugg – Szeged, Hungary

**One Village Council, Toledo, Ohio
Harriet Tubman Center, Detroit & ACCESS, Dearborn, Michigan**



“Participating in this program was a life changing experience for me. After reading about community organizing and studying the methodology in theory it was really helpful to see how it is done in practice and acquire some firsthand experience. I also believe I was able to strengthen sister city relations between Szeged, Hungary and Toledo, Ohio.”

Direct action in Toledo, Ohio:

“All 16 professional fellows accompanied Ramon Perez, community organizer of One Village Council to learn about the issues at the Greenbelt Place Apartments in Toledo. We followed resident Simmie Lassiter and Ramon Perez when they went to Congresswoman Kaptur’s office to request assistance in looking into this issue at the HUD on the federal level.”



Mihaela Grigoriu – Bucharest, Romania



**Sisters of the Road, Portland, Oregon
Breads and Roses, Olympia, Washington**

“I saw a lot of interesting projects that can be adapted in Romania. “Books for Prisoners” is one of these, a project 100% based on volunteering. The main idea that I learned is that one’s worth is not measured by what one has, but rather by what one shares with others and also I realized that in addition to the many problems that U.S.A. including the homeless and poor people, there are so many beautiful things, including MY HOSTS.”

Henriett Dinok – Budapest, Hungary



Illinois People’s Action, Bloomington, Illinois

“I had a great time with Illinois People’s Action. I have gotten more from the program and the people than what I expected. Despite of the differences most of the methods and knowledge are applicable in my communities. One of my favorite sentences during the program which reinforces this statement is the following: “A good leader is someone who is angry with reason, angry about what they see in community and wanting to change; and the organizer is who has to direct their anger.” I know many angry people who are ready to change in my country that I can share my experience with from the U.S.”

Vlad Catuna – Bucharest, Romania



**NEOGAP, Cleveland area &
Ohio Environmental Council, Columbus, Ohio**

“During the U.S. Department professional fellowship, I had the opportunity to learn more on community organizing, poverty, power, and minorities and I got really good introductions on different topics. This theoretical and practical background gained in the United States after working with many organizations from different cities will help me start projects with a purpose of enabling communities and people to make their voices heard. In the United States, I’ve got to see how community organizing works as a mediating institution for a better democracy, as people want to belong, want to be part of something, to be able to act effectively. And people care for their democracy and this matters more than anything.”

Milena Kacmarcikova – Kosice, Slovakia



Sunflower Community Action, Wichita, Kansas

“One morning I went to watch a soccer game, where two high schools attended by children with disabilities were playing. It was amazing to watch them although they had hard time running and every time the ball got out of the playground I felt like running and getting it for them but then I understood that I have to let them do it themselves because eventually they are able to manage that and by helping them I would rob them of the opportunity of achieving something and the feeling of accomplishment. The same opportunity has to be provided to Roma children in Slovakia.”

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