

THE GREAT BEAR

STRESS-MANAGEMENT PROGRAM FOR YOUNG PEOPLE, MEMBERS & NEW MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

PROJECT CHARACTERISTICS

A) Context and Motivation

Already in 1983 the American Time Magazine has described stress as “the epidemics of the eighties”. Unfortunately, the situation has not been improved since. Just the contrary: a survey performed in 1996 by the magazine *Prevention* showed that as much as 75% of Americans suffer from “a great stress” at least once a week (in 1983 it was only 55%).

It's doubtless that a similar negative trend reached meanwhile Slovakia as well as the whole Europe. Pediatricists affirm a presence of this unfavourable development also with young people unable to cope with a great deal of problems around.

The principal stressing factors are:

- enormous demands at school and an overall frustration of students
- psychical trespass of students by teachers and/or classmates
- negative thoughts and feelings concerning the self
- changes in their bodies caused by the puberty
- problems with friends, so-called peer pressure
- problems in families (divorces, diseases or deaths of family members)
- change of the school
- great expectations of parents
- financial problems

Stress starts many physiological reactions in the body to prepare an organism for an attack or a defence. They are demonstrated by a quickened pulse and increasing blood pressure, speedy breathing and a high blood sugar level. Besides an increasing risk of cardiogenous diseases, stress overloading of an organism provokes psychosomatic diseases. According to the *Chicago Big Seven*, classic psychosomatic diseases contain:

- Asthma
- Neurodermitis
- Rheumatic arthritis
- High blood pressure
- Hyperfunction of a thyroid gland
- Large intestine ulcers
- Duodenal ulcers

A great accumulation of psychosomatic diseases attracts a public interest for wellness and relaxation. It is confirmed by an unbelievable number of 18,700.000 results of searching for the term *stress* on the most enjoyed Internet browser *Google*.

The O.Z. Society of Slovak-Indian Partnership organizes rehabilitation stays, sportive and cultural actions as prevention for healthy ones as well as ill, event. handicapped young people. The key interest in these actions is paid also to stress and its prevention. Many years we have made endeavour to keep good contacts with friendly organizations abroad. When the young members of our Society heard about the EU-YOUTH program, it gave birth to the idea of organizing international exchange stays for youths aimed at *Stress-management* where we would have a chance to meet foreign partners including common discussions, achieving multi-cultural knowledge, comparison of rehabilitation methods and agreements for further co-operation.

The primary aim of the project would be to engage youths directly into all three phases of the project development: its preparation and organizing, its realization and evaluation of results. Youths should get a chance to go through the project as organizers, therapists as well as patients. Numerous discussions should add to mutual acknowledgement of groups and nations and to comparison of differences as well as common qualities.

We wish to present the realized project at schools and student's boarding houses in Slovakia. Several members of The O.Z. Society of Slovak-Indian Partnership belong to the families where only one of the parents has been

employed because an unfavourable situation at our regional labour market does not allow everybody to be employed.

Banovce nad Bebravou, Trencianske Teplice and Stara Tura are the towns situated in a beautiful environment, apart from great industrial centres. We believe that these exchange stays could be a contribution to make Slovakia and our region more visible, and so to attract investors to this area. We would like to pass our multi-cultural feelings and experiences also to other countries and to receive from them because only by knowing and understanding of another culture we understand the others.

Health going hand-in-hand with the *Stress-management* has been an integral part of the modern world. Psychically and physically healthy people create healthy conditions and a healthy environment. Health is not everything but without health we can do nothing. Through this project we would like to fulfil ideas of our first International Peace Conference that took place in August 2003 in Czech, and of the Festival "India Full of Colours" that took place in Trencin in the presence of The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and The Indian Embassy representatives. We hope that the Project makes our Association more visible and improves our communication at the local, national and international levels. It would surely help "to add the brick" to the construction of our common European House.

The first one to react to the Project was a group from Malta. They had learned about our activities from an article on curative stays for youths. With the program named *The Great Bear* we made acquainted also our partner organizations in Austria and Czech Republic, and they reacted with an interest. We contacted the Austrian partner group *Buschjager* thanks to their co-operation with the Piestany branch of the organization *Freedom of Animals* with which we have a very close connection. The Czech *Galaxy* society had been our co-organizer of programs on space discoveries and cosmonautic trips at the High School in Stara Tura, Myjava.

B) Preparation

An intensive preparation for the Project goes on in parallel at several levels:

1. Preparation of participants
2. Communication between individual partner's groups, knowing each other through e-mails, phone calls and personal meetings
3. Preparation of the Program of reciprocal exchange
4. Creating organizational & technical background of exchange
5. Creating financial background of exchange

1. Preparation of participants:

This item seems to be the most important in preparations for reciprocal exchange. There is no reason to organize an exchange of youths without interested and sufficiently informed participants. As the participants should take part in all three phases of the project development, a success of the exchange depends on them.

At the first place we put an effort in informing the participants about the EU-YOUTHS program. Besides, it is important for participants to have an approximate overview about the program as well as planned activities. We want to intermediate certain knowledge about partner countries and their organizations, and in such a way to remove possible prejudices before the exchange stay of youngsters.

We also put an effort to engage participants into organizational work, and so to rouse their interest in the Project success.

Besides the participants, we would like to inform the local publics as well as to ensure releases in media.

2. Communication between individual partner's groups, beginning to know each other:

Through e-mails and telephone calls we try to know our partners better and to compare each other's suppositions and ideas concerning the exchange. Based on mutual communication, the project is formed into an ideal form.

3. Preparation of the program of reciprocal exchange:

The author of this idea is The O.Z. Society of Slovak-Indian Partnership but all partner groups take part in cooperation at the Program. Its aim is creation of a balanced and an interesting program to satisfy all organizations concerned.

4. Organizational & technical background of exchange:

This item contains providing of necessary material for exchange. Besides, it contains planning of excursions, a local transport, travelling and other tickets, and creation of a common web site.

We should mention also preparation of the Project for the EU-YOUTH program.

5. Financial background of the exchange:

It is clear that it is not possible to obtain all finance necessary for exchange from the EU-YOUTH program. Therefore, in the state of preparation we put an effort to find sponsorships at the local and the regional basis. The participants try to find possibilities for the financial support of the project in the local area.

The preparatory visit: Trencianske Teplice, the 1st half of May.

The goals of the preparatory visit:

- consultation of details concerning the exchange preparation and the program
- discussions with partners about organizational and technical background
- questions of participants of exchange
- examination of the area for realization of an exchange, board & lodging

The number of participants:

3 x 2 (one youth worker + one substitute of the participants of exchange) + representatives of the O.Z. Slovak-Indian Partnership Society.

Program:

1st Day Arrival of participants to Bratislava; their transport to Trencin; making an acquaintance; accommodation of participants.

A visit to the Chief Magistrate of Trencin Town, discussion on possibilities of a future cooperation between Malta, Austria and Czech. A realization of the Days of Maltese Culture, an exchange of experiences in the subject of The Healthy Town, The Healthy School.

Informing the partners on our planned activities in 2004 in cooperation with the town and another non-governmental organizations. Our presentation should prepare grounds for a long-lasting sympathy and cooperation.

Meeting a pediatricist; informing about possibilities of medical help; a possibility of spa cures for parents.

2nd Day Examination of board & lodging area in Trencianske Teplice.

Meeting with the representatives of Trencianske Teplice town.

Meeting with Slovak participants; specification of participants name list; discussion to the program of exchange.

Handing over propagation materials about O.Z. Slovak-Indian Partnership Society and about the Slovak Republic; giving presents prepared by participants.

C) Integration of young people

Members of The O.Z. Slovak-Indian Partnership Society come from small towns situated at the border area of Stara Tura, from Banovce nad Bebravou, Zlate Moravce in the Southern Slovakia, and from Liptov. These youths already went through healing sojourns, and they have an active approach to their diseases (asthma, bronchitis, allergy, scoliosis, neurotic symptoms, headache).

Preliminary period: Young people are interested in a program, they communicate together. Their regular practice of remedy exercises enables them to lead morning and afternoon exercises. They take photos of the group. As the partial preparation of meals is also the part of the program, they become familiar with cooking according to recipes. They prepare recipes in different languages (English, German), and also learn English and German. They come along with manifold ideas.

Realization period: During the program realization the activities are centred at the participants themselves: they lead morning exercises (the other participants will be included gradually). First they should do few exercises, later on they lead the whole practise. They will partially cook and do shopping, prepare menu, exchange recipes. As for creative activities, evening programs are being prepared already in the preliminary period. Each country is presented in a "mosaic". The participants of our country bring national costumes with them to put on while dancing and singing national and folk songs and dances. They prepare carnival masks as well as pantomime exhibi-

tions at the campfire. During the *Stress management* they will act in a psychodrama (See Item F). They will even make order themselves, and lead a point evaluation of maintaining the order with a reward for the best one.

Evaluation period: Evaluation will take part at the end of the stay in a form of an inquiry, by “the bound of thanks” in a circle, by a discussion and talking about what the participants have learned and how they appreciate the stay. An important part of the project evaluation should be processing of the documents by the participants, making a CD with photos and other materials and preparing a common website. After return home we shall spend a lot of time in our mutual communication and keeping contacts. If the participants would be interested, we should offer them a possibility of planning another common activities.

D) Theme

Our motivation and a general introduction to the theme of The Great Bear have been already discussed in Item A). It is clear that the theme of the *stress management* is very actual and interesting but at the same time very comprehensive, requiring a thorough preparation of participants even before the exchange. This theme joins *health* and *the European Citizenship*, and partially *a sport*.

The actual joining the E.U. brings many changes and reforms to Slovakia, Czech as well as Malta. It requires adaptation of the new members as well as of all countries. A good adaptation leads to the positive evaluation and attitude to the membership. A maladaptation creates uneasiness, hesitation, anxiety, fear, aggressivity, nostalgia, complaining, discontentness, and a black image of things to overcome. *Stress management* leads to joy, to the active citizenship and to building a united Europe.

During preparations and mainly during the exchange stay we shall supply the participants with theoretical knowledge on the theme, an ample overview of different types of stress, main stressing factors and indications of overloading the organism. Besides this theoretical information we plan to teach the participants to avoid stress practically, to show them different forms of relaxation and exercises, to make them familiar with anti-stressors e.g. sports. Besides prevention, the pediatricist and the psychologist will pay attention to actual problems of our young people and search for therapy methods. For the preventive medicine there will be a discussion on AIDS, the first aid, accidents, sensitive micro-traumas, etc. During the special program we shall try to enhance the participants to spread their achievements in the environment, and in such a way to create a pleasant atmosphere all around.

E) Goals

The goals of this project are wide enough; besides the exchange itself, the most important ones are:

- to commence cooperation with Austria, Malta and Czech at the European level
- to know young people from the partnership organizations, to make familiar with the life and the work with youths on the regional/overall level at the realization of different actions
- to make the participants familiar with the *stress management* and to pay them attention concerning a therapy and a prevention during the special program.

Our exchange program is aimed at strengthening of health and adopting new psychohygienic habitudes supporting a healthy lifestyle of the participants. It means to copy with our own problems, stresses, and to be active not only in the field of health but also in our everyday life: to be the active citizen, to mobilize and march on without fear of the European unity. As for psychical health, it means development of communication, intuitive, creative skills, self-discovery and harmonization, an adaptation to model situations (multi-cultural), to get rid of different fears and complexes.

F) The activities program

An approximate program of the planned activities is attached. Besides these activities we plan also morning exercises, shopping together and cooking according to the healthy nutrition principles.

Day	Theme of Day	Activities / Methodics	Aim of Day
1. 1.8. 2004	We recognize each other (Arrival)	- Arrival (approx. 4.00-5.00 PM) - Accommodation - Games for making acquaintance – introducing; games for recognizing all participants (especially between groups), putting names to faces	Making acquaintance Together
		- Sports games aimed at cooperation of teams	Team cooperation

2. 2.8. 2004	We do it together!	- <u>Discussion</u>: Stress & Achievement - Psychodrama – Playing of stress situations at international exchange - <u>Pediatrist</u>: Introductory health inspection, badminton – accident prevention, right shoes, drinking regime	creating friendly atmosphere inside & outside groups (during games the groups will be re-combined)
3. 3.8. 2004	Good morning!	- <u>Morning exercises</u>: rounded back, scoliosis - <u>Psychodrama</u>: Stress at home in the morning - Watching the night sky; Moon phases, their impact on seas, humans, women, nature; biorhythms in Slovakia, Malta, Austria, Czech - <u>Pediatrist</u>: Importance of optimal calories receiving at the morning start-up; right habits in nutrition	Morning stress realize & cope with the morning stress, make a fun of the own situation
4. 4.8. 2004	Lucky things there are three	- <u>Morning exercises</u>: Joints - <u>Discussion</u>: 3 types of stress: from environment, from the body, from the mind - <u>Cultural exchange</u>: Environmental stress in Slovakia, Malta, Austria and Czech - <u>Psychodrama</u>: What to do if you don't catch the city bus? - <u>Lecture</u>: Breathing & human physiology; correct breathing training - <u>Cultural exchange</u>: What nations implemented correct breathing into daily life? - <u>Pediatrist</u>: Puberty; examination of one's own body	Three types of stress and their manifestation in individual countries
5. 5.8. 2004	Silence is a luxury	- <u>Morning exercises</u>: Eye problems - <u>Discussion</u>: Would you like to live in a great town or rather in a rural country? In which state? How do you perceive noise around you? - <u>Workshop</u>: My imagined country - Singing national folk songs and dances; free program - <u>Pediatrist</u>: Noise and its negative impact to concentration at learning; preference of calmness	Silence as a luxury available for everybody
6. 6.8. 2004	Balance of body & mind	- <u>Morning exercise</u>: Achieving balance of body & mind - <u>Psychodrama</u>: You ought to be at home at 10 PM but you are late; what to do? Relations among generations - <u>Workshop</u>: Become familiar with nature around; survey of environment in mixed groups of 8 members - <u>Discussion</u>: Who were our ancestors? - <u>Pediatrist</u>: Thinking as an important factor in classic psychosomatic & civilisation diseases	Realize and train the correct balance at the beginning of every day
7. 7.8. 2004	Slnko, Sun, Slunce, Sonne	- <u>Morning exercises</u>: Watching sunrise, greeting the Sun - <u>Discussion</u>: How the Sun influences our body & mind; the Sun and the skin colour; racial intolerance - <u>Workshop</u>: The Sun in religion and world literature - <u>Lecture</u>: Lack of sleep & stress - <u>Pediatrist</u>: An importance of sufficient sleep; releasing a hormone of growth in sleep	The Sun and its influence to our body & mind

8. 8.8. 2004	Excursion following health	- <u>Morning exercises</u>: rhythmical breathing in standing and sitting positions - <u>Excursion</u>: Bus excursion from Banovce nad Bebravou; meeting with representatives of O.Z.Patriot specializing to "living food" (raw food) - Discussion with volunteers from O.Z.Patriot and excursion in a surrounding fauna & flora	Meeting with members of O.Z.Patriot understanding their motivation & way of life
9. 9.8.	Sports	- <u>Morning exercises</u>: Joints, II. Part - <u>Discussion</u>: Upright body keeping - <u>Workshop</u>: Making one's own combination of exercises - <u>Cultural exchange</u>: Sports & exercises - which one of the	Sports as a form of relaxation & stress prevention

2004		nations is more active in them? - <u>Evaluation</u> of the 1 st “half part” of the exchange - <u>Pediatrist</u> : Correct body keeping	
10. 10.8. 2004	Mt. Blanc	- <u>Daylong activity</u> : Climbing the highest Europe peak Mt. Blanc; acquiring a thorough preparation necessary to attain the goal - <u>Discussion</u> : Social heritage & dietary habits in Europe	Mt. Blanc as a clearly given goal to overcome laziness
11. 12. 11. - 12.8. 2004	Excursion	- Visit to <i>The Freedom of Animals</i> organization in Piestany - Excursion to Poprad town at The High Tatras, and the Tatra National Park - Night stop in Svit town at an eco-farm - Rafting the Dunajec river	Excursion On beauties of Slovakia to widen the scope of knowledge
13. 13.8. 2004	Religion	- <u>Morning exercises</u> - <u>Cultural exchange</u> : Religion. Why people pray from time immemorial; how religion demonstrates in particular countries - Workshop: Human body in reality and in speech (<i>Achilles’ heel, it lies heavy in my stomach</i> etc.) - Sports match in pentathlon - Theatre - <u>Pediatrist</u> : Evaluation of the state of health	Religion as the theme for a serious discussion at the end of the exchange stay
14. 14.8. 2004	Evaluation	- <u>Morning exercises</u> - <u>Discussion</u> : Evaluation of the stay - Workshop: Evaluation of the stay in the form of a poster - <u>Discussion</u> : What we learned; what we still wish to hear - <u>Evaluation</u> of the 2 nd “half part” of the exchange stay - <u>Inquiry</u>	Evaluation of the Project and establishment of new information
15. 15.8. 2004	The End	- <u>Morning exercises</u> led by participants - <u>Discussion</u> : Themes according to interest of participants - Play at the end of the exchange stay - <u>Depart</u>	Farewell

G) The impact at the local level

The preparation of the Program resulted in strengthening cooperation with the ICY (The Information Centre of Youths) and starting regular discussions on *Stress management* at high schools.

As the multicultural and intercultural area of interest is involved, in the preparatory period we contacted Regional Citizen Associations, Cultural Sections, Chief Magistrates of Trenčin, Stara Tura, Trencianske Teplice, Banovce n/Bebravou, The Embassy of Maltese Knights Order, The Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Office of the President of SR, and The Ministry of Culture of Malta. An integral part of the Program would be discussions and meetings with interesting persons of the region, a press conference, audio- and video-recording of points of interest.

The Program will be enriched by preparation of an exhibition of activities, photographic documentation, creativity of participants themselves and cultural presentations. We are planning to inform various media about this exchange sojourn: The Slovak Radio, newspapers, journals for youths, magazines on health and healthy lifestyle (e.g. VITALITA, Duha (The Rainbow), and to inform the publics and young people especially about the most interesting moments, opinions, activities. It should be also an example of development of tolerance, the fight against racism and against rejecting peoples with a darker skin.

Not only the participants but also other members of the society would gain from this experiment because we would like to proceed in the development of cooperation in future, too. Young people will be inspired to “entry the Europe” actively, without fear of changes, and to bear patiently a mistrust of the “old” member states against the new ones.

By means of this exchange program we shall add to varied colours of the regional summer and strengthen the air of tolerance and a multi-culture in the region.

H) Inter-cultural dimension

The inter-cultural dimension has been integrated in a daily program. It reflects primarily in *Cultural Exchanges* where the participants from all partnership organizations in small groups will discuss about particular themes. We hope that in such a way a common discussion and an interest for exchange of experiences would arise among participants. It seems to be a great contribution that the youths come from groups of similar attitudes, and so they could easily make contacts and discuss the themes of a common interest.

The communication language will be English. Members of all partnership organizations now improve their language capacities, but in case of necessity we would be very glad to help them and to translate the expressions they do not know.

We know from experience that the best way to overcome the barriers is the sports and other activities calling for team cooperation. That's why we have planned manifold activities enabling development of a mutual communication already on the 2nd day of the exchange stay.

Leisure time is also very favourable for knowing each other better. We shall try to coordinate it a little so no one of the participants would feel neglected and the individual groups would not isolate themselves but spend their leisure time together.

I) Evaluation and the activities bound with the Project

During the exchange stay the evaluation of the day, event, of its course will pass systematically each evening among leaders, in the collective and in groups. The inquiry will be done after the 1st week, and at the end of the stay. Health aspects will be evaluated at the end. As the aim is to learn to lead a healthy life (healthy thinking, healthy diet), during the daily program a progress should be visible in abilities to cook healthy food, to make exercises regularly, to breathe deeply, to be positively orientated and to await good things, a success, winning in the game.

During many *Workshops* the participants will create posters, take photos, write texts, compose songs so they could process accepted information in a multi-perception way. We would like also to commence a chronicle where every day would have its double page.

When the Project will be over, we shall process the created materials and exhibit them at schools, in office areas etc. We hope to arise an interest of the local people and provoke discussions.

On our common website we shall publicize outputs of this exchange stay. We shall also send this Internet address to our friendly organizations abroad to see the results of applications of our efforts in practice.

We hope in the success of our Project and in a further cooperation with partnership organizations. There could be contact seminars for persons active in similar projects. Besides, we would like to visit some of the partner's countries through an exchange project of youths following up *The Great Bear*.