

## Case study

# “Independent and Integrated Lives for People with Developmental Disabilities”



KREATIVNO EDUKATIVNI CENTAR ZA  
MENTALNO NEDOVOLJNO RAZVIJENE OSOBE

## Overview

<b>Driver</b>	Creative and Educational Center for the Developmentally Disabled (KEC MNRO)
<b>Country</b>	Belgrade, Serbia
<b>Societal issue addressed</b>	Social exclusion of people with developmental disabilities (DD) – lack of adequate educational and employment programmes
<b>Partners</b>	Businesses, Public administration and government (Ministry for Social Welfare, City of Belgrade, Municipality of Palilula), Community organisations, Brokers
<b>Status</b>	Ongoing, running since 2004
<b>Impact</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Primary beneficiaries: 65 young people with developmental disabilities employed, 300 of their family members, parents or guardians</li> <li>Impact: 200 employees and 20 high school students with raised awareness on DD issues through direct contact with primary beneficiaries</li> </ul>
<b>Challenges</b>	Lack of adequate legal framework for developmentally disabled employment and education
<b>Endorsements</b>	Third prize of ERSTE Foundation Award for Social Integration 2009

## Executive Summary

The main objective of the programme is to help young people with developmental disabilities (DD) to lead an independent life, prevent their institutionalisation and promote social inclusion by assisted employment programmes. The most successful method of integration of people with developmental disabilities into society is achieved through work and work placement. This is at the same time a powerful therapeutic resource for beneficiaries and an educational tool for the general population about the existence, abilities and needs of people with developmental disabilities.

*“As a result of this programme, 65 people with DD are currently working in local businesses, organizations and institutions.”*

KEC MNRO – Creative Educational Center for People with Development Disabilities works with local businesses, public administration and community organizations to introduce a programme for the integration of people with developmental disabilities into society through assisted and full employment in public places, local community and in social and private organizations. As a result of this programme, 65 people with DD are currently working in local businesses, organizations and institutions.

## 1. Situation and societal issue

People with DD lead a very difficult and challenging life in Serbia. Societal attitudes towards them are generally very negative, and the services provided to them are basic at best and, in most cases, grossly insufficient. The estimated number of children with disabilities (in 2008) is 142,700 out of 3 million children living in the country. Considering that 2 million people live in Belgrade and that 10,000 are diagnosed as having a DD, this programme is greatly needed for a large segment of the population. Only 10% of these children have been included in any kind of targeted program. Children with DD are provided with limited educational programmes through secondary schools.

Once an individual has reached 18 years of age or has finished the school programming there are no more formal or informal educational, social or work related programs offered to him/her. Vocational training and higher education of persons with a mental disability is overlooked both in legislation and in practice. Usually they return to their homes where they will remain until their family is forced to send them to a long-term care institution. Additionally, existing legislation treating this matter is highly inadequate; the law on employment of persons with disabilities treats only people with a physical disability, while the law on NGOs and civic associations does not allow them to obtain funding by selling their goods or services; the law on social enterprises is not adopted yet.

*“Once an individual has reached 18 years of age or has finished the school programming there are no more formal or informal educational, social or work related programs offered to him/her.”*

Corporate social responsibility, understood as a strategic approach to doing business rather than a mere philanthropy, was introduced in Serbia during the last few years by multinational and foreign companies operating in the Serbian market. Philanthropic projects and programmes are still the most common form of CSR activities in Serbia, and are often confused for CSR, both by companies and their stakeholders, general public included. Companies’ initiatives related to a more innovative approach to community engagement (e.g. employee volunteering programmes) are relatively rare, but recently their number is increasing. The partnership which KEC MNRO established with local businesses is one of the most inspiring best practice examples, with measurable and tangible results.

## 2. Partners

### a. Driver

KEC MNRO is a non-governmental non-profit organization established in 2002, whose entire programme and its many years of experience are devoted to designing projects and activities which help young adults with developmental disabilities to organize their lives and work. KEC MNRO’s mission is to create partnerships with the immediate and wider community in order to help every person recognize their own potential, talents and strength so that they can contribute to a better life in their own community. KEC MNRO’s activities include educational programmes and sheltered workshops, and most importantly, assisted work placement programme.

KEC MNRO provides the support which enables individuals with DD to lead more independent lives in the community, and decreases the possibility they will need to be institutionalized. It is also responsible for establishing partnerships with businesses, conducting employment training and facilitating the employment process.

## **b. Businesses**

Companies involved in the programme are: Delta Holding, Roggenart Bakeries, McDonald's, City of Belgrade's Public Parking Service, Euro Salon/Home Center.

Involving businesses in KEC MNRO's programme was a rather challenging task, since CSR in Serbia is still understood as philanthropy among the majority of companies, and long term business-NGO partnerships are relatively rare. Companies involved in the programme vary significantly in terms of size and ownership (private or public), which shows that the support for this issue still relies on individual stands and contacts, rather than a wide systematic approach. Companies are involved in the project by investing in preparing an adequate job position for their future DD employee and in the necessary training, while some of them also support KEC MNRO's programme financially.

## **c. Community organizations**

Community organizations involved in the programme are: The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, International Women's Club Belgrade, Foundation of H.R.M. Princess Katarina, Bread of Life, The Bridge of Life, 1 High School in Belgrade.

KEC MNRO works with other NGOs (in the same or related fields) to create replicable programme models for other disadvantaged groups in Belgrade and across Serbia, and also to lobby the government and local authorities to improve laws concerning work placement and employment for people with DD, as well as concerning social enterprises and NGOs selling goods or services in the formal economy. As a part of KEC MNRO's activities, students of one high school in Belgrade regularly take part in joint activities with their developmentally disabled peers.

## **d. Broker/ intermediary organisations**

Two companies' foundations (Delta fund and Telenor foundation), besides the traditional donor role, actively promoted the employment programme to their founder-companies. SMART kolektiv, a non-profit organization which promotes corporate social responsibility, although not directly and formally involved in the programme, included KEC MNRO in its series of trainings for NGOs on how to cooperate with business successfully, supported it in approaching new companies to join the programme, and actively promotes the programme as a best-practice example of successful cross-sector partnership.

## **e. Public administration and government**

The programme was supported by the government's Fund for social innovations. One of City of Belgrade's communal companies is included in the DD employment programme. The longest and strongest partnership was established with the local municipality of Palilula, which at first provided premises for KEC MNRO's day care, and then joined the employment programme the following year.

# **3. Programme Description**

## **a. Initiation**

The Serbian government's stated objective is to reach full deinstitutionalization of people with developmental disabilities by 2015. There is an imminent need to create non-institutional,

community-based programmes to replace the activities that were previously performed by the institutions, and to expand the range of services aimed to improve the quality of life of people with DD. KEC MNRO believes that its small scale day centre, sheltered workshops and assisted employment model can serve as a model programme to fill this void.

## **b. Process**

KEC MNRO was founded in 2002, at first offering educational programmes and sheltered workshops to DD youth. In 2004, the content of the programme was expanded to assisted employment and work placements for developmentally disabled people. Furthermore, KEC MNRO actively works on improving the legislation on DD employment, and shares its experience and knowledge with other organizations working in the same field across Serbia.

In the future, KEC MNRO plans to:

- Continue to provide daily educational and creative programming for people with developmental disabilities
- Expand the number of beneficiaries participating in the assisted employment program
- Increase the number of businesses and organizations employing our beneficiaries
- Lobby the government to improve the proposed law concerning work placement and employment for people with DD in order to create a strong legal framework for such activities
- Use this model to ensure that integration of DD adults, through work opportunities, is the norm and not the exception

## **c. Activities**

The “Independent and Integrated Lives for People with Developmental Disabilities” programme is the result of years of experimenting with new ideas in an effort to achieve more for KEC MNRO’s beneficiaries.

### **Day care centre**

With the original motivation to provide programming for those DD people who are no longer eligible for state-sponsored educational and vocational programming, the first activity was starting a basic day centre. Over time, the range of activities offered by the day centre expanded from small-scale creative workshops (making holiday cards and small artistic objects) and outings, to educational workshops, professional training, physical exercise and rehabilitation. The day care centre now offers a well-rounded array of programming and social activity to its beneficiaries, as well as much needed support to their parents and guardians. Activities are specially designed to prepare young people with DD for an independent life, to prevent institutionalization and promote inclusion into society.

### **Evening workshops**

KEC MNRO organizes and delivers evening workshops for people with developmental disabilities and their parents in 10 locations throughout Belgrade and the surrounding areas, in order to reach as many beneficiaries as possible, i.e. those who do not have the possibility of attending the day care centre. Some of the day care centre’s workshops are transferred in these two-hour weekly gatherings, and are often the only educational and social service provided to people with DD in these neighbourhoods.

## **Educational activities for parents/guardians and employees**

KEC MNRO does not only organize educational programmes for the primary beneficiaries of the programme: counselling for their parents and guardians on how to support the children in leading more independent lives, as well as sensitization trainings for the future colleagues of young DD people are a necessary element of the programme and are conducted by KEC MNRO's expert staff.

## **Assisted employment**

All the activities listed above were conducted with the ultimate goal of inclusion of people with developmental disabilities into larger society through assisted employment. Initially work placements were made in small neighbourhood establishments, and building on this experience contacts with larger companies were made. Simultaneously, KEC MNRO attended trainings and workshops on how to establish successful cooperation with businesses, in order to improve their capacities. Until now, McDonald's, Parking Service, Roggenart Bakeries and Delta Holdings (which is the largest private-owned company in Serbia) are included in the programme. After the proven success of the programme more and more companies contacted KEC MNRO with willingness to join, but the complex and long process of training, as well as the unclear laws on DD employment are making the fast increase of companies involved in the programme unfeasible.

## **Advocacy**

KEC MNRO continuously works closely with the authorized ministries, working groups and other professionals involved in drafting new laws which will affect people with DD.

## **4. Programme Evaluation**

KEC MNRO works closely with all of their DD beneficiaries in order to ensure that they reach their full potential, but also in order to develop new services and to adjust the programme to their needs and interests. KEC MNRO uses feedback of DD beneficiaries, their parents and guardians, and their employers and colleagues to improve the programme, and to follow the development of their work habits, social and communication skills.

## **5. Impact**

The primary target group of the project is a group of 100 young developmentally disabled persons, deinstitutionalized and currently living in assisted living units or with their families, who are not included in any educational, social or professional state-run programme. Out of this number, 65 currently work in local businesses, organizations and institutions. The programme also involves 300 of their parents, guardians and family members.

Over six years, the following results were achieved:

- Participants developed or improved their work habits, social skills, communication skills and reinforced their basic knowledge
- Young adults with DD received job training and were placed in assisted employment positions
- Participants were skilled to lead more independent lives (became less dependent on their families, able to travel unaccompanied, etc.) and were more integrated into a wider social community
- Increased psychological stability of participants

- Improved family relations
- Empowerment and education of family members

### **a. Benefits to the companies**

By taking part in this project, companies have been able to experience and show the power of well envisaged and carefully planned cross-sector partnerships through achieving tangible and measurable results, and making a real difference for both primary beneficiaries and the wider community. The project can also be showcased to inspire other innovative CSR projects, moving forward from philanthropic activities.

From an internal point of view, 200 employees in companies involved in the project, who are in every-day contact with the DD beneficiaries, are now sensitive to the needs of this group, and show more satisfaction about their workplace, since it offers them a possibility for personal development.

### **b. Further Impact**

One of the long-term goals of the programme is to sensitize the general public to the needs of developmentally disabled people and about the challenges they are facing in Serbian society. This is to be obtained by employing them majorly in public places (e.g. McDonald's restaurants, public parking-lots, Delta Holding's retail facilities) where they are in constant and everyday contact with large numbers of colleagues and customers. Furthermore, a part of KEC MNRO's activities is conducted in partnership with a Belgrade's high school – several times a year students take part in different activities (sport activities, field trips, creative workshops) with their developmentally disabled peers. The idea has proven highly successful, showing increased sensitivity about social matters, a greater sense of tolerance and compassion among students involved.

## **6. Challenges**

Two main challenges that make the development of the programme more difficult and slower are extremely low awareness of the rights and potentials of persons with developmental disabilities; and a lack of adequate legal framework for their employment, as well as for NGOs to provide funds by selling their products and services. "Even people with developmental disabilities themselves and their families often do not realize their basic human and civil right to become equal members of the society" says Margareta Kecman, director of KEC MNRO. The programme addresses this challenge by insisting that DD beneficiaries are employed in public places where they will be in constant contact with general population. In addition, KEC MNRO works closely with other NGOs, authorized ministries, working groups and other professionals involved in drafting new laws which will affect people with DD.

## **7. Endorsements**

In June 2009, "Independent and Integrated Lives for People with Developmental Disabilities" was awarded third prize in ERSTE foundation Award for Social Integration. Out of 1300 applications, 71 projects from 8 countries were short listed. The ERSTE Foundation Award for Social Integration adds value to social practice by highlighting innovative projects in Central and South Eastern European countries (CSEE). The Award gives due recognition to the role of individuals and groups in that region in creating societies with equal opportunities

for everyone. Social integration is applied here to mean policies and programmes which foster stable, safe and just societies and therefore are inclusive of disadvantaged, vulnerable groups and people with special needs.

## 8. Contact & Further Information

Svetlana Damnjanović, SMart kolektiv

[svetlana@smarkolektiv.org](mailto:svetlana@smarkolektiv.org)

phone: +381 11 2440 096

Margareta Kecman, Creative and Educational Center for the Developmentally Disabled (KEC MNRO)

[kecmnro@eunet.rs](mailto:kecmnro@eunet.rs)

phone: +381 11 2415 107

[www.kecmnro.org.rs](http://www.kecmnro.org.rs)

[www.erstestiftung.org/integration-award/en/macedonian-prevention-campaign-from-trafficking-in-children-wins-first-prize-of-erste-foundation-award-for-social-integration-2009/#more-1621](http://www.erstestiftung.org/integration-award/en/macedonian-prevention-campaign-from-trafficking-in-children-wins-first-prize-of-erste-foundation-award-for-social-integration-2009/#more-1621)

## INCLUDE – Pathways to Community Investment

The European project INCLUDE provides local intermediaries like civil society organisations, economic development agencies, chambers of commerce and public authorities with support that will help them to engage businesses in innovative cross-sectoral partnerships. INCLUDE identifies on a worldwide scale good examples of collaborative business initiatives as well as business engagement in cross-sectoral partnerships, which contribute towards skills development and employability of disadvantaged groups, towards social inclusion and innovation in addressing societal challenges and communicates them.

INCLUDE builds upon the results of the CSR-Laboratory “Skills for Employability enhanced through Employee Engagement” which was carried out as part of the European Alliance for CSR and is run jointly by UPJ and the ENGAGE initiative coordinated by Business in the Community (BITC). Partners of the project are the German Federal Department of Labour and Social Affairs, Citi-Group, Asociata pentru Relatii Comunitare (Romania), Önkéntes Központ Alapítvány (Hungary), SMartKolektiv (Serbia), Pontis Foundation (Slovakia) and Özel Sektör Gönüllüler Derneği (Turkey).

The project is supported by the European Commission (Directorate-General for Employment, social affairs and equal opportunities).

Further information about the project is available at [www.bitc.org.uk/global/include.html](http://www.bitc.org.uk/global/include.html) (in English) [www.upj.de/include](http://www.upj.de/include) (in German)

### UPJ

UPJ is the German national network of engaged businesses and local non-profit intermediary organizations. Its projects and programmes create new connections between businesses, civil society organizations and public authorities thus contributing to solve societal challenges and to shape sustainable communities. UPJ, a registered charity under German law, provides organizations from the business, community and public sectors with information and consultancy to improve their Corporate Citizenship and Corporate Social Responsibility activities. [www.upj.de](http://www.upj.de)



### ENGAGE

ENGAGE is an international programme that brings together businesses and community organisations around the globe to increase the quality and amount of employee community engagement in their local communities. Its mission is twofold: To inspire, mobilise and support companies to develop sustainable community investment programmes, and to provide community organisations with a network, tools and support that will help them work more effectively with business partners. [www.engageyouremployees.org](http://www.engageyouremployees.org)



### Contact

#### **Dorothee Albrecht**

Project Manager  
UPJ  
Brunnenstr. 181  
10119 Berlin, Germany

Tel: +49 30 2787 406-0

EEmail: [dorothee.albrecht@upj.de](mailto:dorothee.albrecht@upj.de)

#### **Tom Halley**

Communications Officer BITC International  
Business in the Community  
137 Shepherdess Walk  
London N1 7RQ, United Kingdom

Tel: +44 20 7566 8663

EEmail: [tom.halley@bitc.org.uk](mailto:tom.halley@bitc.org.uk)

INCLUDE is co-financed by  
the European Commission

