



SUCCESS STORY

Peace Corps Volunteer Helps Educate Kids about Violence

Volunteer's local organization benefits from USAID support for small project.



Photo: Peace Corps

Mary White, a Peace Corps Volunteer serving in the southern Bulgarian town of Blagoevgrad, shared this story about a Small Projects Assistance (SPA) project designed to educate young people about prevention of violence and trafficking in persons.

My organization, Resource Center New Alternative, recently wrote a Small Project Assistance project called "How to Work Together." We held a conference for 30 people and invited school psychologists and social workers from 10 schools in and around Blagoevgrad, as well as other organizations dedicated to working with kids on the prevention of violence. A speaker discussed the importance of partnerships and a representative of the NGO Face to Face spoke about teaching trafficking prevention in schools. An online forum was created so that the participants can exchange information.

This led up to our first project, a poster and essay contest called "Kids Against Violence." Participants from all 10 schools submitted more than 150 posters and paintings and over 60 essays and poems. With such a broad topic, the kids were able to truly express their creativity. The paintings ranged from school settings and bullies to more intense portrayals of domestic violence. In the essays, the kids spoke about what violence means to them and ways they can combat it. The submissions were broken into three different groups based on age. The judges were school psychologists and other experts. We had planned on giving 6 prizes worth about 20 leva (about \$15), but because businesses around town offered help, we had many more. The prizes included really cool history books for kids, painting sets and portfolios.

The municipality agreed to partner with us, so we displayed all the entries in their lobby. Winners were announced on February 5. The 30 kids with the best entries were also invited to a bowling party. Most of the kids had never bowled before, so it was a lot of fun watching their attempts. More than a few times, two balls were rolled at once, the kids went all out of turn, and no one knew how to keep score. They all seemed to have a great time, even though not many of them knew each other beforehand.

We are still wrapping up the rest of our project, but I'm confident it will be considered a success. Over 200 kids learned something about violence. I am hoping that the forum will lead to long lasting partnerships.