

National Coordinator's Handbook for Community Action

Support and Guidance for Community Action National Coordinators
in High Schools, Special Schools & Residential Institutions

A CHLG Training Manual

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National Coordinator's Handbook *for* Community Action

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B ACKGROUND

The Children's High Level Group (CHLG) was co-founded by Baroness Emma Nicholson and J K Rowling in 2005 and is currently working in a range of countries across Europe.

The CHLG mission is to work with, and at the invitation of, National Governments and Ministries, in the fields of Children's Health, Education and Welfare. The main educational programme offered by the CHLG is Community Action.

The first stage of introducing Community Action into a country is to organise a small scale Pilot Schools Scheme or larger Community Action Pilot Study. The final stage is to introduce a National Strategy for Community Action throughout the country.

To date the CHLG, in partnership with National Governments and Ministries of Education, has organised:

Community Action Educational context

- Community Action is a vital part of the educational experience of young people. It takes the individual's learning experience beyond the classroom, where subjects are taught, and enables a student to become more actively involved in his/her own process of learning
- It is the difference perhaps between "Education" and "Schooling" and it helps individuals to develop understanding rather than just acquire knowledge

*"If I am told - I forget
If I am taught - I remember
If I am involved - I learn"*

- Pilot Study, Romania, 2003
- National Strategy, Romania, 2004
- International Conference, 2006
- Pilot Study, Moldova, January 2007
- National Strategy, Moldova, September 2007
- Pilot Schools Scheme, Georgia, October 2007
- Pilot Schools Scheme, Armenia, October 2007
- Pilot Schools Scheme, Macedonia, 2007-2008
- Pilot Study, Georgia, January 2008
- Pilot Study, Armenia, March 2008
- Pilot Schools Scheme, Czech Republic, January 2009
- National Strategy, Georgia, January 2009
- National Strategy, Armenia, January 2009

Community Action is a voluntary, certificated activity in the curriculum of High Schools which will help students of today to become informed, resourceful and committed citizens of tomorrow.

Community Action links together Secondary Schools with Special Schools, Residential Homes, Day Centres and other placements and creates a new Partnership of Learning.

A Community Action Programme involves pupils (usually in grades 8 – 12, aged about 14 – 18 years) committing themselves to weekly visits to a local Special School, Residential Home, Day Centre or other institution to make contact with children and adults there and engage them in a programme of activities which will facilitate the process of educational development and social integration between the volunteers, the children and adults. This establishes a real Bridge of Communication.

Community Action is organised by a (High School) teacher acting as the Coordinator for Community Action in that High School and responsible for the recruitment of volunteers and the organisation of the Community Action Programme. Enthusiasm, initiative and energy are some of the qualities required by Coordinators. Each High School Coordinator will have a partner Community Action Coordinator in their "linked" Special School/Residential Institution, who will have the same qualities.

Community Action programmes in partnership with the CHLG now involve over 100,000 young people across Europe in regular visits – 2 or 3 times a week - between High School volunteers and

children in Special Schools and Residential Institutions. This regular contact helps forge positive relationships and acts as a catalyst for social interaction, integration and inclusion.

INTRODUCTION

A Community Action Pilot Study was organised in Craiova from February to March 2003 and from January to March 2008. Following this success it was decided that a National Strategy for Community Action should be elaborated and then implemented throughout Romania from September 2004. A National Conference was organised in April 2004 with Regional Conferences in October 2004.

The contributions of Community Action Coordinators from the High Schools, Special Schools and Placement Centres and other Institutions and volunteers from the High Schools have all been vitally important to the success of the National Strategy for Community Action.

In order to help and support the development of Community Action in all Municipalities, Judets and districts of the country now and in the future a Community Action Handbook for all new Community Action Coordinators and volunteers is necessary to help them prepare for their new roles.

The Handbook (of which this is an extract) will help, but it is only a beginning. It is expected that it will be enlarged and improved in the light of experience. I hope at least it will be useful to all involved in the development of Community Action in Romania.

Muir John Potter, M.B.E.
Director of Education, The Children's High Level Group

DEFINITION OF COMMUNITY ACTION

- Community Action links together High Schools with Special Schools, Residential Homes, Day Centres and other placements and creates a new Partnership of Learning
- Community Action is a voluntary, certificated activity in the curriculum of High Schools which will help students of today to become informed, resourceful and committed citizens of tomorrow
- A Community Action Programme involves students committing themselves to weekly visits to a local Special School, Placement Centre, Residential Home, Day Centre or other placement to make contact with children and adults there and engage them in a programme of activities which will facilitate the process of educational development and social integration between the volunteers and the children and adults
- Community Action is usually offered to pupils in grades 8 - 12 (about 14 – 18 years) in High Schools.
- Community Action is organised by a teacher (in a High School) acting as the Coordinator for Community Action in that High School and responsible for the recruitment of volunteers and the organisation of the Community Action Programme. Enthusiasm, initiative and energy are some of the qualities required by Coordinators. Each High School Coordinator will have a partner Community Action Coordinator in their “linked” Special School/Residential Institution, who will have the same qualities.
- In this way a real Bridge of Communication is established



AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF COMMUNITY ACTION

Aims

- To include children from socially vulnerable families and children who may have special needs and who live in residential institutions or family-style homes more directly in their local communities.
- To involve children with social difficulties, teachers, students and other volunteers on a collaborative project.
- To achieve this inclusion and involvement by the engagement of all concerned in an educational programme of activities designed to promote more fully, amongst other things, social integration.
- To introduce students to the practical organisation and implementation of a Community Action Programme in order to assist in the further educational development of these disadvantaged children.
- To encourage students to commit themselves to working with disadvantaged children not only throughout the Community Action Pilot Schools Scheme but also thereafter in order to sustain this process of social integration and educational development.



Objectives

- To initiate programmes of Community Action between volunteers from High Schools and children within Special Schools, residential institutions and other centres and involve other groups such as NGOs in these programmes
- To organise activities for children which will be challenging, engaging and meaningful.
- To stimulate mentally, challenge physically, integrate socially, and develop more fully the abilities of the children through such creative, imaginative and therapeutic activities as Art, Craft, Drama, Dance, Sport, I.T. and Music - or simply by sharing their time with the children.



- To encourage students to acquire or enhance qualities of initiative, commitment and resourcefulness through their participation in a Community Action Programme.
- To prepare them, through specific training courses, to sustain the work of the Community Action National Strategy through a programme of regular visits throughout the year.

**Community
Action**

BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY ACTION

For students participation in Community Action Programmes will:

- advance their knowledge and skills in important aspects of education, in an enjoyable and exciting way
- enhance their understanding and awareness of the individual needs and challenges faced by others in their community
- encourage their resourcefulness, intelligence and creativity to respond to these community and individual needs
- give them the sense of fulfilment in undertaking challenging and useful work
- improve their awareness of important social issues
- help to break down social prejudices and remove ignorance
- develop and enhance their attributes of patience, commitment and dedication

For children, participation in Community Action Programmes will mean:

- becoming further involved and more fully integrated into their local communities and enjoy developing new and personal friendships with volunteers;
- gaining greater self-esteem, and more fully appreciate their own value and worth - which, in turn, would be appreciated by others;
- stimulating their creative, imaginative and expressive abilities through the organisation of a variety of different activities;
- developing new physical skills through a diverse programme of sporting and other physical activities;
- becoming more balanced individuals - gaining personal and emotional security and confidence;
- developing their own individual skills and talents and pursuing their own special interests;
- feeling a part of their community and not apart from it.



Community Action

AN EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

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The National Strategy for Community Action

The main stage of implementing Community Action in a country is the organisation of the National Strategy for Community Action (SNAC).

THE NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR COMMUNITY ACTION (SNAC)

Definition An educational programme – a Partnership of Learning - linking **High Schools** with **Special Schools / Institutions** and **Placement Centres** and others

Aims Increased social **interaction, integration** and **inclusion**

An **Action Plan Example** giving details of the volunteers, activities, times and venues for all the SNAC activities each week:

MONDAY **Basketball, Music/Dance**, 45 children + 28 volunteers (in **3 groups**), 14.30 at Special School
TUESDAY **Drawing, Table Tennis**, 40 children + 20 volunteers (in **2 groups**), 14.00 at High School
FRIDAY **Drama**, 45 children + 30 volunteers (**1 group**), 15.00 at Special School

Organisers The Ministry of Education and other Ministries in **partnership** with The Children's High Level Group

Format An **Activity Programme** involving both the High School pupils and the children from the Special Schools / Institutions which includes a wide range of creative, imaginative and expressive activities used as "vehicles" for social integration (as well as being educational, enjoyable activities at the same time).
Activities may include **Art** and **Crafts, Drama, Music, Dance** and **Sport**

Duration **Ongoing, throughout the school year**

Frequency Groups of High School pupils will visit their link Special School / Institution **two or three times a week** for a **programme of activities**

Timings Community Action is a flexible programme which allows participating schools / homes to find the times (mornings, evenings, weekends) which suit them best for the programme of regular activities

Roles

- Each of the participating schools /homes appoints a Community Action Coordinator
- The High School Coordinator **recruits** (approximately 50) **pupils as volunteers**
- The High School Coordinator and Special School / Institution Coordinator liaise and agree an **Action Plan** (i.e. organise what activities will take place on which day(s) each week)
- Activities may take place **both** at the Special School / Institution **and** at the High School

Special Events

Integrated Special Events (which are prepared for during the regular programme of Community Action activities) will be organised both locally and nationally

- **Art Exhibition**
- **Drama Performance** or **Music and Dance Show**
- **Sports Event**

Support

- A **National Conference** and **Regional Conferences** were held prior to the launch of the SNAC to explain the principles of the SNAC and how it works
 - Help is given with **recruitment of volunteers**, the **Preliminary Visit** (when volunteers and children from the Special Schools / Institutions meet for the first time) and the regular **Community Action activities**
 - Full **documentation** and **expertise** are available at every stage of the SNAC to support, advise and guide Directors and Coordinators
-

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UTCOMES

Outcomes for Children

The outcomes for the children of participating in Community Action Programmes are that they:

- engage in an effective process of socialisation and integration through Community Action Programmes
- receive positive affirmation of themselves, their abilities and their place in the lives of others
- feel valued and appreciated as individuals through their contacts with students
- develop self confidence and become more outgoing
- benefit from the opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings with understanding partners
- become more fully involved in the community through organised events
- gain from opportunities for cooperative participation by developing trust and understanding, in and of, themselves and others
- acquire greater levels of concentration and perseverance when faced with new challenges
- realise unexplored potential over a wide range of activities
- enjoy developing real and lasting friendships

Outcomes for the Community Action Programme

- **New Partnerships** of learning are established between groups of individuals and within communities
- **New volunteers** are engaged in the process of planning, preparation and presentation of activities to children
- **New teaching** and learning opportunities are provided for children, volunteers and adults
- New understanding is gained about organising age-appropriate activities
- Greater appreciation of the need for differentiation in teaching plans is acquired/developed
- Building capacity amongst adults and volunteers for local sustainability is achieved

- Extending the range – depth and breadth – of the SAT through the involvement of new Public Schools, Special Schools and Institutions
- Team building and cooperation between local, Regional and National Authorities was achieved

