

## Public Achievement (PA)

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Public Achievement (PA) is the name of a program which in a very practical and natural way makes young people active and helps them to become social entrepreneurs and responsible citizens. In PA people of all ages learn the skills of public life, and discover how, with democracy, ordinary people have the power to do extraordinary things. With the decision to take action and work with others, it is possible to have real, important and lasting impact.

The PA initiative was first launched in Poland by MTO in 2004. Our idea of the School Plus Network and the activities which MTO had been running since 1991 were very similar to the basics of PA. MTO trainers have been working as coaches with a group of students at Splot High School in Nowy S cz. They have been able to use the skills they have acquired as teachers and trainers in democratic methods of engagement with students and in coordinating projects that involve volunteers.

A PA pilot project ended in November 2004 (the group work continues) in Moldova, Romania and one Ukrainian school. In July 2004 we started with a group of 33 volunteers (future mentors) from Moldova (18 participants), Romania (13 participants) and Ukraine (2 participants). 31 out of the 33 participants have PA groups in their schools or communities either individually or in partnership with another a colleague. There are a total of 19 different groups (9 each in Romania and Moldova and one in Ukraine). This pilot project, covered by the East-East program of Open Society, is still having much impact and is instilling democratic principles in youth in the region.

A Balkan phase for 48 participants, which was sponsored by National Endowment for Democracy (NED), was implemented in 2005. A PA seminar for 24 volunteers (future mentors) from Albania (8 participants), Kosova (12 participants) and Macedonia (4 participants) was held from January 30 to February 6 in Nowy S cz. The goal of this seminar was to introduce the PA program into 16 Schools Plus and NGOs in the region. Our coordinators were: Pjeter Korriku from Lac Kurbin, Albania, Nexhdet Kuqani from "Center for Primary Education - CPE" in Prizren, Kosova and Izedin Murati of Primary School "Naim Frasheri" in Tetova, Macedonia.

The second PA seminar for 24 future mentors from Bulgaria (15 participants) and Serbia (9 participants) was held from March 23 - 30 in Nowy S cz and involved 16 Schools Plus and NGOs in the region. The Serbian coordinator was Milan Djordjevic from DENIZEN Center for Civic Activism in Svrljig. Emil Zhivkov Stoyanov from the Pshelitsa PTA in Vidin was the Bulgarian coordinator.

Participants were introduced to the Public Achievement Program and underlying concepts. Participants and trainers shared their experiences of working with youth in their countries and towns. They explored which skills they hoped to acquire during the workshop: how to become an effective mentor (coach) for a group of young people, how to encourage cooperation instead of competition, which methods can be used to enable youth to respond to issues important to them and solve problems they encounter. One day was devoted to cooperation in a group setting. Activities, games, and panel discussions were designed to positively engage youth in group work.

Two PA groups were created in order to have a first hand experience of the process. The most difficult aspect of the activity was convincing adults that their role was not to lead, but rather to guide or mentor. This has enormous influence on developing knowledgeable and active citizens. Later, working in smaller groups of 5-6 persons to simulate work in real PA groups, each group chose a topic/ project/ goals, created a name, logo, rules for cooperation, and action plan to realize their goals. All participants were actively engaged and the results of their work were very impressive. There was also much sharing of accomplishments and discussions of the outcomes of each PA group.

The Public Relations workshop run by Agata Kita was designed to highlight how to effectively work with the media. Participants practiced writing press releases and participated in a simulated press conference which presented the idea of Public Achievement.

The positive opinions in the evaluation regarding content and commitment to doing PA back home confirm our belief that the program will be well-received in South-Eastern Europe. We are convinced that thanks to "Public Achievement" young people will make positive changes in their communities and above all will become aware of their power as active and responsible citizens.

There were two three-week monitoring visits by Alicja Derkowska and Julie Boudreaux. In April 2005 the two MTO trainers visited the participants in Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia and in September 2005 they visited participants in Serbia and Bulgaria. 42 of the 48 participants have PA groups in their schools or communities either individually or in partnership with another colleague. There are a total of 30 different groups (6 in Albania, 5 in Kosova, 3 in Macedonia, 6 in Serbia and 10 in Bulgaria ). The age of the PA group members range from elementary school to high school and the size of the groups vary from 5-28 members. There were also a wide range of problems tackled.

The monitoring enabled us to evaluate how well the training in Nowy S cz had been able to get across the spirit of PA. Judging from what we saw and discussed, we feel that the seminar did, in fact, convey the concept, process and soul of PA to the participants. We were overwhelmingly pleased with what we witnessed - active citizenship at work. We were impressed by the level of engagement, genuine interest, determination and enthusiasm of the groups. They knew that they were doing something that was important and were enjoying themselves at the same time.

It also became clear that the interest in PA is increasing. There is a need for training of trainers so that more teachers can become involved and so that a select few, who find PA particularly fulfilling can gain more in-depth understanding of

the process and become qualified to train others. MTO has applied for funding to help PA become "institutionalized" in the region.

There is also a need to share and collaborate with other PA groups. We were often asked, "Who else is doing PA? What are their groups doing? Can we meet them?" The idea of a PA Groups Unite Interim International Meeting gained momentum.

MTO has applied for support to encourage cross-border cooperation and for this event which we believe will be successful and rewarding thanks to the inclusion of students (great potential for youth cooperation), mentors (sharing of best-practices) and school directors (who can facilitate the spread and adoption of the program in their schools and communities).

We would like to take this opportunity to thank National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and Mr. Charles Merrill for support of this project. We believe it was successful and significantly contributes to grassroots democracy in the region.