

THE GO-AHEAD SIGN

How 15 organisations fundraised
in their communities?



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Belgrade, 2021

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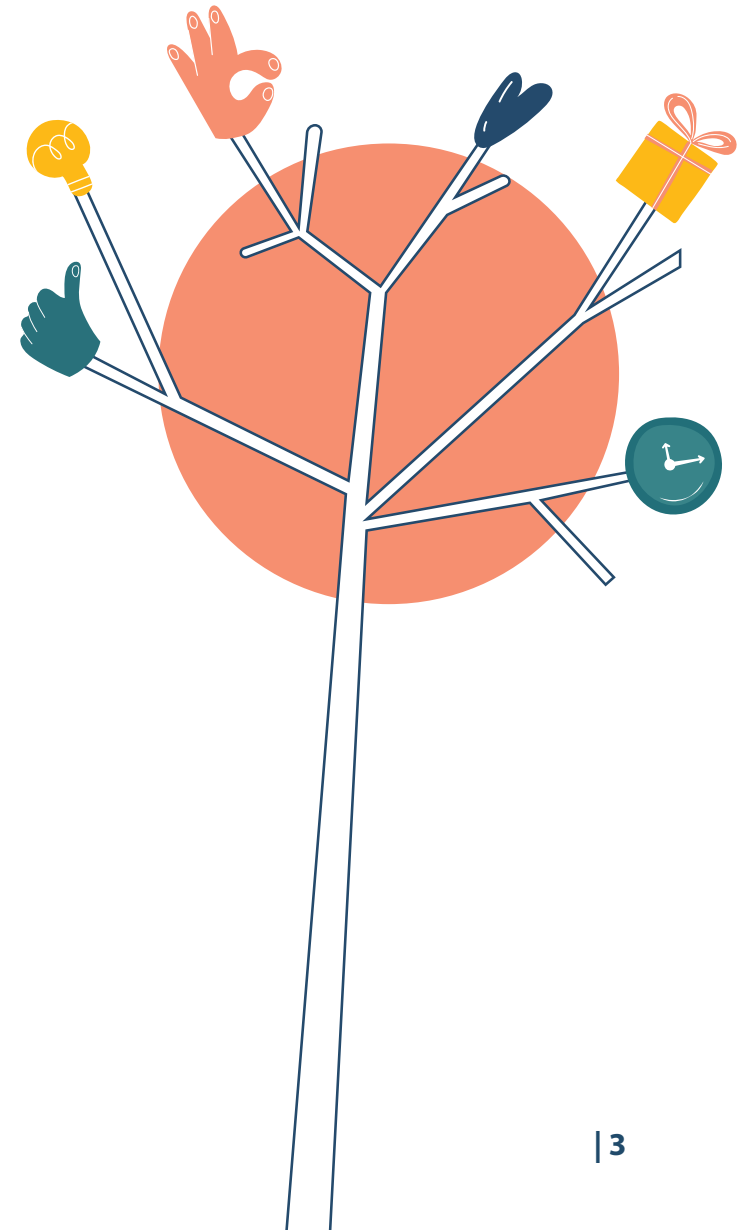
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Foreword

If you were waiting for a sign to turn to the community and seek support for ideas of common interest, this collection of stories is that sign. In its pages you will travel through five countries in the region; you will get to know fifteen civil society organisations and a bit more passionate, tireless and courageous activists; you will read their experiences in fundraising from individuals and companies, and we hope you will find yourselves in the fight for a better society and the sustainability of not-for-profit initiatives. These organisations' stories are diverse: one's success is not a universal recipe, just like its challenges must not detract others from similar endeavours. On the contrary, the stakeholders were cherry picked to show that the goal can be reached by as many roads as there are travellers. However, the common thread throughout these tales is the perseverance to stay the course in these winding, unpredictable or even unbeaten roads, in spite of everything. And as in life, the course remains steady owing to other people's support. Therefore, it is important to shed some light on those who provided the support.

Firstly, each organisation was supported by the Southeast Europe Indigenous Grantmakers Network (SIGN) made of Trag Foundation from Serbia, Mozaik Foundation from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Fund for Active Citizenship - fAKT from Montenegro, Forum for Civic Initiatives - FIQ from Kosovo, HORUS from North Macedonia and Catalyst Balkans from Serbia. With their combined forces and with support from donors like the European Union, Balkan Trust for Democracy, Balkan Civil Society Development Network, and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, for over a decade this regional network has encouraged strengthening philanthropy, sustainability of local communities and the overall development of civil society.

The Sustainability Academy represents one of the ways SIGN network keeps doing this over and over again. It is a program that has been implemented by the five listed network members in their respective countries, with technical support from Catalyst Balkans. The reader will find each of the fifteen organisations at the point when they met the Academy, which is why it is particularly important

to emphasize that it follows the same plan in all the countries. Organisations first apply with their ideas that they believe will change their communities for the better, in the broadest sense. They undergo training on the fundraising process and techniques and then they think of a way to reach a pre-set amount of money, with mentorship and financial support provided by the organisers. After they put their plan to practice and raise the funds, the organiser matches their funds to facilitate the implementation of their idea. All participants come together again after their projects have been implemented, this time to exchange knowledge and learn from others' experiences. The programme aims to have each organisation leaving the Academy not only richer by one more implemented project and a wealth of theoretical and practical knowledge, but also a step closer to their community and more independent in terms of funding. Numbers also testify of how much this straightforward process is in fact a (tacit) revolution. More than 100 civil society organisations from the 5 SIGN Network member states attended the Sustainability Academy; in their 70 communities they raised a combined total of over 350,000 Euros from companies, distinguished individuals, and citizens, while their impact on the development of local philanthropy remains immeasurably high. Finally, apart from coming to life on the wings of multitudinous support, these stories were penned down with a view to provide support as well. If they can encourage at least one not-for-profit organisation from the region to embark on the uncertain but thrilling and valiant journey of community fundraising, they will have served their purpose. Hence, as the name says, you can see them as the sign to go ahead.

Trag Foundation on behalf of SIGN Network



“Every Action Creates a Reaction”

Aktivna zona (Active Zone), Cetinje (Montenegro)

If we were to make a list of all the problems that Aktivna zona from Cetinje tackled over the previous decade, it would have been a lengthy list. Among others, it would feature advocating for a more active citizen participation in local policymaking issues, environmental protection, town accessibility to people with disabilities, healthcare service enhancement, infrastructure development, non-formal education for the youth and promotion of volunteering. *“Unfortunately or fortunately, there are many ways in which a community can be improved, and that is why we never limited ourselves to a single sphere”* - explains Miloš Marković, executive director and one of the founders of Aktivna zona. However, as on the other hand such versatility called for a firm stronghold, very soon after they were founded they started looking for their own space. It was imagined as a base for the organisation and a centre of social life and activism, where the citizens could come together, talk, exchange knowledge, and launch initiatives of relevance for Cetinje.

Searching for future Community Centre offices, the crew from the association came across the “Košuta” (Doe) abandoned shoe factory in 2012. In spite of all the debris, they saw immense potential in it. They approached its administrative receiver who was thrilled with the idea and gave them the premises to use. They started a working party and soon mobilised the entire community; they were joined in the clean-up by utility workers, firefighters, artisans, businesses and ‘common folk.’ *“Some of them we called to help with taking the rubble away, but many people joined on their own accord, just because they could see we were building something to benefit everybody”* - Miloš remembers. However, as the project gradually drew the attention of the entire town, starting the new centre in the place where the old factory was located also kickstarted some ancient social issues in its turn. To wit, former workers saw the resuscitation of their old workplace as a sign to ‘resuscitate’ the issue of their back pay and severance. Although the Community Centre was not open in that location because of these issues, Miloš says they were glad that their initiative inspired others to fight

and that it taught them a valuable lesson: *“We learned from that beginning that every action creates a reaction. If it weren’t for our initiative, we would not move those citizens to join us in tidying up the place, nor would the workers raise their voices and seek justice. All social issues are intertwined and stirring up one of them inevitably caused others to be stirred up as well.”*

You do not know until you go ahead. You do not know what it takes, you do not know who is ready to help, nor how easy or difficult it will actually be. You do not know any of this until you go ahead. So - go ahead.

Several months later they found a new facility not far off the main pedestrian zone, but it also needed fixing up and furnishing. In that opportune moment they saw the competition for the Sustainability Academy. As they wanted to create a future place for dialogue, they decided that the right way to raise funds was precisely through close communication with the community. Their fight belongs where the town lives and breathes, in its streets and squares,



the green markets and urban pockets of Cetinje. Every day during their campaign they would set up their stand in busy locations, but instead of soapboxing and presenting ready-made solutions, they asked their fellow residents what the centre should look like and what issues it should deal with. Thereby they presented themselves as their peers, as community movers and fellow fighters willing to listen to anybody. They say that it was indeed the way they won over the entire community to their cause - one person at a time - and added that only there in the street they could truly understand how important it was to find a common language. *"We could not find a way to reach our senior citizens until one old man snapped at us: 'What is that community centre of yours in the first place?' In my wish to warm him up to the idea I replied: 'Something like a youth club in your day.' And at that moment I saw that we had an understanding, that we had his support and that we had to speak the language of the community if we were asking for its support"* - Marko recalled.

They connected to the business community of Cetinje in a similar way. They wrote to businesses, went to meetings, and talked about how the Community Centre can improve the town for everybody. *"The business sector also consists of people and consequently we followed the same approach as with others: approach openly, avoid empty phrases and really invite them to make our community better"* - Aktivna zona remarked. Several years later this approach brought about the signing of a cooperation agreement between Aktivna zona and Cetinje Business Club and their joint effort in socially responsible activities.

After Aktivna zona raised the required funds from the community, the Fund for Active Citizenship matched the sum and gave them the needed support to put their idea to action. To this day the community centre enables citizens of all ages to take part in public debates, creative, educational, and developmental workshops; to enjoy exhibitions, mini-concerts, and other community activities; as well as to find ways to change Cetinje for the better. It was there that numerous initiatives that raised their own funds in the community were spawned, such as the 'Safe First Heartbeat' civic action during which they raised funds by way of donation boxes for a new CTG machine in the nursery, or the 'For a Green Lovćen' movement during which they raised funds through guided mountaineering tours to reforest the mountain peak devastated in the fire.

Today they say the community centre is the best medicine against lethargy. It has succeeded in being the driver of social change for years now. This is precisely why they would like to tell other civil society organisations that often this first snowball is enough to start an avalanche of virtuous deeds.



ADVICE FROM THE SOURCE:

- 1. Speak the language of your community.** Use ideas and concepts close to your fellow citizens.
- 2. Never underestimate people.** There are lots of ways in which people can help you, so do not write anybody off.
- 3. Find ways to collaborate with the local government.** Offer ready-made solutions since it often gives better results than criticism.

“Patchwork of a Society”

Red Cross, Skopje (North Macedonia)

The Red Cross of the City of Skopje annually receives around sixty tons of donated used clothes. That is sixty tons of wardrobe that need to be sorted by season, age, and purpose; washed, pressed, and stored; the unusable surplus needs to be transported to a landfill and prepared packages need to be delivered to those in need. If you are uncertain of how much clothes that actually is, just imagine a line of three thousand suitcases packed to the brim. Almost mission impossible for a humanitarian organisation that – moreover – has very limited funds available. *“People donate wishing to help, but unfortunately sometimes that does more harm than good. Most of the clothes we get are unusable and therefore we need lots of space, time, people, and money to sort it, even just to safely dispose of it”* - says Angelina Ristova Andreeva of the Red Cross.

We must find a way to remain sustainable outside of projects and state grants, for the sake of the people who are counting on us.

All of this leads us to a somewhat unexpected conclusion that too many donations can present a problem, if they are not adequate or if they exceed the recipient's capacities; nevertheless, even this situation has a solution. In the case of the Skopje Red Cross the solution was brought about by a social enterprise managed by Angelina. It is a second-hand clothes shop with an adorable name - Kopče (Button), getting its supplies from the aforementioned surplus of donations, hiring people from socially vulnerable categories and representing a location where all citizens can donate, purchase, or receive free clothes. Red Cross beneficiaries who once waited for wardrobe packs now get vouchers four times a year for free seasonal clothes that they can choose for themselves

in the shop. Kopče also opens its doors to all citizens in need of more affordable apparel because of their lower income, environmental awareness, solidarity, or fashion taste. *“We started in 2017 from the need for sustainability. This refers to the sustainability of the charity service, sustainability of the distribution model, fashion sustainability, environmental sustainability, economic sustainability of the socially vulnerable people's daily lives”* - Andreeva says. In a single stroke, Kopče managed to tackle the needs of marginalized groups, tap into the potential of excess donations, solve the long-standing distribution issue, and contribute to saving the environment.

Since the Red Cross did not and does not have a separate budget to fund the operation of a social enterprise, Kopče turned to the market and community fundraising immediately after its incorporation. The offices in the city centre that the organisation gave them were furnished from donations made by a local bank. They quickly became visible and recognisable because of the media support, and consequently donations started coming in from citizens in the form of a business plan, marketing services and clothes. As their capacities slowly expanded, so did their desire to contribute more to the community. In 2018 Angelina and her colleagues thought about teaching sewing to those who could use such knowledge to secure their financial stability. Their primary focus were single mothers and women who had been unemployed for a long time – two categories underserved in the social protection system. They had the idea, they had the sewing machines, but they needed additional funds to set up a training course. The HORUS Sustainability Academy program seemed to be an ideal opportunity to secure the funding. They also point out that the training changed the way they work, introduced them to other organisations they still keep in touch with, and expanded their horizons in terms of funding possibilities.

However, as Kopče already had a developed business model, they decided to raise the required amount by revenue from clothes sales. They increased their

revenues by selling tote bags especially designed for this campaign, signalling their response to the overuse of plastic bags. As they say, promotion was never a problem: *"Our concept was appealing to the media from the start. So, during the training fundraiser campaign we would appear at least once a month on television and even once a week on radio. Apart from these, we have a mailing list with all Red Cross staff emails, and we used that as well to spread the word."*

During the five months sales were better than ever. They succeeded in raising the funds, got a matching grant from HORUS and taught four women a new trade. It is interesting to note how they learned the new skill while using old, unusable materials and succeeded in breathing new life into them using the patchwork technique, making tote bags, accessories and pillowcases that would be sold at Kopče. Angelina says the following about the long-term impact

of this project: *"That process brought us so many benefits. One of the women who were trained was hired and still sews for Kopče to this day. Also, the campaign helped expand our original audience and reach students and environmentally conscious young people."*

Although social entrepreneurship is a way to impose social responsibility as an integral part of doing business, fundamentally important services must not be left to the market. This would mean that – instead of a helping hand – we are extending the 'invisible hand of the market' to the vulnerable, hoping it would care for them. On the contrary, Kopče teaches us how social enterprises can additionally empower society only if society empowers them in return. In other words, individually we can be vulnerable and powerless, but together - just like patchwork - we are tailored into something bigger and better.



ADVICE FROM THE SOURCE:

- 1. When raising funds, think about what you can offer in return.** It can be retail of goods or services that people would pay for anyhow.
- 2. Expand your mission only in those fields you have a good command over.** That is how we chose sewing to supplement the second-hand concept.
- 3. Try to cover several different needs with one stroke.** Use the campaign to try to get the broader public interested; solve a burning social issue; protect the environment or expand your service portfolio.

“Snowball effect”

Da se zna! (Let it be known!), Belgrade (Serbia)

Da se zna! association from Belgrade is dedicated to providing psychological support and legal aid to LGBT+ persons. It arose in 2016 primarily from the desire to document the violence over the LGBT+ community, to have it legally recognised and more easily overcome with the aid of psychologists. After two years of persistent work, they managed to receive a neglected, dark, and cold office from the Belgrade municipality of Vračar, located in what was once the Božidar Adžija Education Centre. Although it did not seem at all like the ‘safe space’ for those who need support, they managed to see the future counselling centre for LGBT+ persons, their parents, and friends in it.

Asking for money brings the community together - telling them we are in fact in the same problem and that we have to create a mutual fund to solve it.

They applied to the Sustainability Academy program organised by Trag Foundation in 2019 in order to raise the funds to refurbish the counselling centre and help operate it. This was not their first encounter with fundraising and so they did not feel any of the beginner’s fears or reservations. Aleksandar Savić, the organisation’s coordinator of communication and fundraising, highlights the following: *“From the beginning we have been looking for and building ways to raise at least some of the funds in the community. We have permanent individual donors and partner organisations whose help we can count on. We have a rich contact base that we constantly top up. We always sell cups, badges and similar products at the Pride Info Centre and it’s going pretty well. Every year we also showcase several*

events like the Drag Show in Pride Week, where we raise funds from ticket sales. In other words, back in 2019 we had a rather sturdy base around which we could weave a good strategy.” And indeed, their concept of the strategy was nerdy, insofar that they were covering all available channels, reaching as many segments of society as possible and motivating citizens to give even small donations. The association was always largely present in digital channels through a newsletter, podcast, YouTube channel, Instagram, and Facebook, so several tens of thousands of people saw their call for donations. At the same time, they continued selling branded mugs and even had some success with larger orders. Apart from that they sent personalised emails to potential donors from their contacts database and marked some positive replies. In addition – and in agreement with four Belgrade cafes – they organised a ‘Coffee Day’ and invited their followers to have their morning cups in those cafes and donate their entire bill to the Counselling Service. They were hardworking and diligent, and their efforts paid off. Each of these individual activities brought certain funds but all of them together also brought about something else – public attention. Moreover, attention from one particular company would give their campaign a quite unexpected wind in the back. Inspired by the organisation’s mission, McCann marketing agency decided for their part and on their own accord to donate a campaign called “I do not disown.” One of the hardest moments for LGBT+ persons is declaring their sexual orientation to family members, particularly in smaller communities where fear of public rejection is huge. This is exactly where the idea came from about a series of confidential ads in national and local press throughout Serbia, where parents would publicly support their LGBT+ children. Immediately after their publication the confidential ads flooded the social networks, were all over the media and became the subject of a debate, while the campaign got a lot of support from the public and celebrities. For a mere couple of hundred Euros of media investment, the message had one and a half million views. The incredible attention that Da se zna! suddenly received was also reflected in the fundraising effort. In a

matter of days, they reached their target sum that was subsequently matched by Trag Foundation. Apart from the funds themselves, they say the campaign helped them gain new partners among parents of the LGBT+ population and new potential donors among companies. The latter can be seen in the fact that somewhat later Japan Tobacco International donated a large amount to them for additional refurbishing and operation of the Counselling Centre, which brought the total of the funds raised to six times more money than originally planned. *"Although it may seem that all of this happened by accident, I believe that is not the case. Fundraising is not a linear process; it is accumulated work. Like when you're learning a language for years, you learn the grammar and the rules, you think you don't know and then it just 'clicks' and you start speaking. And in fact, it did not just 'click' out of the blue, but as a result of a sustained effort. That is why it is important to always work, even when it seems there are no results. Especially then."* - one of the founders of the association Dragoslava Barzut commented.

The story about this association is the story about how the fundraising process often resembles a snowball starting an avalanche. The community would probably not have shown so much interest if it was not for the organisation's tireless and diverse work. Without the attention from the community, word of them would not so easily reach the marketing agency. It is doubtful whether they would gain new supporters without the agency's creativity and media coverage; whether additional corporate donations would follow and whether all of it would finally be returned to the community through the work of the Counselling Service. Aleksandar underscores precisely that side of fundraising: *"By raising funds you are also gathering allies. You are engaging other stakeholders within society - individuals, companies, the media, and institutions - in your work directly so your battles and victories become their own as well. Every donation, any contribution, every new friend, every gesture - could be small in itself but always leads to something bigger."*

ADVICE FROM THE SOURCE:

- 1. Communicate honesty and authenticity.** Steer clear of phrases and what you think fundraising should sound like. Approach in a humane and open manner.
- 2. Make a contact list.** Put every new person you can contact for support in it and soon you will have a database of partners and friends.
- 3. Do not underestimate the importance of non-financial donations.** Perhaps such a donation will bring about the biggest step forward, like in our case.



“Everyone is invited”

Djeca Crne Gore (Children of Montenegro), Tuzi (Montenegro)

“I never thought about children with learning disabilities. I remember I used to avoid them when I was little. Or I would hide behind the grownups, holding their hand tight. I never teased them, but I did see other children do it. Now I am ashamed of myself and them. A wounded person is easy to hurt by avoiding and misunderstanding, let alone by sneering. Is it fair they can expect love only from their parents and understanding only of those similar to them? This must not be so.” A girl in the sixth grade in Tuzi is behind this text, and the change she is describing - from ignoring, avoiding and fear, to questioning, empathy and honest acceptance, was also felt by many others in this small town precisely because of the tireless work done by Djeca Crne Gore.



This not-for-profit nongovernmental association was launched in 2009 with the goal of spreading the idea of inclusion, opening the community for diversity and providing specific support to marginalised children, children with learning disabilities and children at risk. *“There was not a single institution in Tuzi working with children with learning disabilities and their parents. That is why we are most proud for gathering parents, improving the lives of children and essentially succeeding in addressing a very deep-seated need in the local community that was not even aware of its existence.”* - organisation’s founder Sabra Decević says.

In 2019 they were determined to take another step forward in including children with learning disabilities in the community’s everyday life. They saw the Sustainable Citizenship Fund competition for the Sustainability Academy and wondered: how is a project that should promote inclusion truly written? The answer they reached was simple but unexpected: by involving children in its development. Therefore, adults left the decision making to the children, moreover those that are not asked about much. *“One of the boys said he had never been on a boat. Others said they would like to go on a picnic all together. Someone shouted they could go out and have pizza. Then they started loosening their imagination and they wanted to go visit the Adventure Park. We made our project from their wishes and the Fund for Active Citizenship adopted it. We decided to do only what they wanted and because of this they gained new faith in themselves throughout the process.”* Sabra recalls.

After they included the children, the tougher part of the task was to follow: include the entire community in fundraising. *“Tuzi is a small town and just like any small town it is full of prejudice against differences. Due to how the community often treats children with learning disabilities, they develop fear and draw to themselves. We wanted to bridge that gap.”* - they add in the association. In other words, to raise the funds for children with learning disabilities they had to show how the children actually have the same needs as all of us - to be accepted

and to belong. They decided to put together a humanitarian exhibition of children's drawings and get the entire community in one place. Owing to good cooperation with the local media and intensive advertising on social networks, the whole municipality soon found out about the event. Whether out of solidarity or curiosity, all stakeholders inside the community were in the same place at the day of the exhibition, in sheer spirit of inclusiveness: local reporters, representatives of local authorities, children with learning disabilities and their parents, as well as other children with their families. The children that the association cared for stepped before them with an open heart, and the drawings of Snowman and Sponge Bob spoke out from the display in their stead, confirming that all children dream and yearn for the same things. On that day, the community may have understood for the first time that these children have a lot to show and tell: *"Only then did many people realize that it is possible to make contact with our children, that they are not castaways. And when they understood them and saw it was worthwhile to work with them, only then they were ready to believe and support."* - Sabra adds.

It does not matter how much people give, but that they give from the heart. That is the whole point: to recognize the good in others.

Thanks to the exhibition and subsequent support from the town and local companies, the organisation succeeded in raising the targeted amount that was then matched by the Fund for Active Citizenship. The wish list from the beginning of the project was soon fulfilled. That list of everyday activities gave them the extraordinary opportunity to feel just like anybody else and it comes as no surprise that with every action ticked the children became more confident and sociable. From then onwards the organisation has undertaken many more inclusive activities but the exhibition of children's drawings remained a watershed moment. It showed that if you wish to build a community where everyone is welcome, you have to build it together with others. In other words, when work is done to benefit everybody - everybody is invited to contribute.



ADVICE FROM THE SOURCE:

- 1. Develop your goal so that it indeed fulfils the needs of the beneficiaries.** Do not just assume what others need by yourself.
- 2. People will listen to what you are saying, but they will also read between the lines.** Try to make it so that they can read only an honest wish to improve the community.
- 3. Do not waste your strength on changing someone's opinion.** Turn to those who have understanding for your goal and wish to help. The others will come on their own in due time.

“Books without Borders”

Education Comes First, Đakovica (Kosovo)

“Education is the foundation of personal and societal development. If we are not prepared to learn and to work on ourselves, nobody else can help us.” - says Saranda Rexha, psychologist and one of the founders of the Education Comes First organisation from Đakovica, Kosovo. This organisation emerged out of the desire to make education available for everybody. Having completely accidentally discovered the extent to which it is systemically inaccessible to blind and vision impaired persons and having heard the stories of those who had not read a single book twenty years after losing their eyesight, they decided to find ways to open the books for all people desiring of knowledge. “At first we thought about books in Braille script but the costs of producing such a book are too great. Besides, only one person can read it at a time, provided they understand the script. That is why we thought of audio books. Everyone can listen to those, regardless of their age and knowledge and they can do it at the same time, from different parts of the country or even the globe.” - Saranda maintains.

The die was cast in 2017: they will create a large, open, digital database of audio books and call it simply *Libra meze* (book hors d'oeuvres). How? Any way they can. For starters they made a list of literature according to the wishes of future beneficiaries. Then they gathered several dozens of volunteers - mostly psychology students - and recorded them reading the books on phones or voice recorders. They purchased a domain, uploaded the podcasts, forwarded the link to potential listeners and waited for the reaction. Unfortunately, it turned out the website was not easily accessible for visually impaired persons and that they would have to develop a mobile app if they really wanted to push the envelope. Since such an undertaking required a sizably larger budget, they understood they had to turn to fundraising. Hence in 2019 they applied at the Sustainability Academy program organised by the Forum for Civic Initiatives - FIQ. They acquired a wealth of knowledge and developed a detailed strategy; however, it was summer when the time came to implement their learnings and

put the plan into action, and they were faced with a town that was nearly empty. They did not lose their spirits. They thought the following: if all potential donors are on holiday out of the country, why would the borders of Kosovo limit their fundraising?

Fundraising is a full-time job, but it also must be a passion. If not, everything will be difficult.



Kosova ideas is a crowdfunding platform located in Switzerland and intended for crowdfunding projects in the fields of art, culture, civic activism, and sustainability in the territory of Kosovo. *“We applied with our project, but it was not easy. We developed the project in German, French, English and Albanian, we recorded and edited a video and we did it all in a rush because of the deadlines.” - as they remember now. However, their hard work paid off, partly because they were honest and direct, and in part because of strong media support. During the project development stage, they appeared almost daily on television, radio, and local press, and they grabbed public attention.*

They raised half of the sum through this platform, with support from companies and individuals both from Kosovo and the diaspora. The rest, however, they raised from their fellow citizens in an unorthodox manner. They organised a two-day children's camp modelled after the 'games without borders' before the World Children's Day. The only difference was that there were some borders this time: specifically, the children would have to be blindfolded through all games and activities. *"We wanted to raise the funds but more than that - we wanted to develop empathy. The point was not for the children to hear what's it like being blind from us, but to experience it in some way and learn from the experience of the importance of support and solidarity. Of course, aside from the education, we had a good time and supported the project."* They collected donations by selling tickets for the camp and they were fortunate that one of the volunteers was employed in the human resource sector in a large company and so he managed to get the company to buy 500 tickets for the employees' children.

They raised the funds successfully and in time. However, more importantly, their story is in fact telling of the relevance all other types of donations have. Audio books came to life owing to the support of sixty volunteers who voiced all the paperback heroes. Owing to the local radio that gave them the studio and recording equipment, the sound quality was at an enviable level. Owing to the media they were contacted by numerous writers asking to donate their books and copyright, as well as by the Ministry of Education that gave them access to a fund of 100 books. And finally - thanks to the IT developers who dropped the app development price by 50%, the Libra meze app was installed by more than one thousand users. The analytics tell them the users are not only the blind and vision impaired, but also those who have trouble reading or lack free time or are simply curious enough to hear something new. Looking back on the entire project, Saranda says she is proud of herself and the organisation because they managed to raise the funds and make a change in many people's lives, and adds: *"When you're daydreaming, you think: Oh, everything is possible! But as soon as you start working, you think: No, it's impossible, there's not enough time, there's no way... But if you persevere despite it and find an alternative route like we did, there is no better feeling than proving that knowledge truly knows no borders."*

ADVICE FROM THE SOURCE:

- 1. Plan ahead.** We overlooked the obvious - that it was summertime and most of our potential donors were not there.
- 2. Be everywhere.** For the people to hear of you, you need to be everywhere: on social networks, on portals, in the papers, on the radio, on television, in the street, in their inbox.
- 3. Think outside of the borders of your community.** You never know who can help.



“Better Society through Connections”

Eko ZH, Široki Brijeg (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

“You cannot make people protect the environment. You can encourage them to connect with nature and start wanting to take care of it.” This is how Mario Brekalo, founder of Eko ZH association, starts the story about the efforts to raise the level of environmental awareness among citizens. In Široki Brijeg, the area that is rightfully called the ‘lungs of Bosnia and Herzegovina,’ the association has been struggling for a decade and a half to protect nature, both through working parties to clean the area and plant trees and through art and education. It all started with the ‘Family Tree’ initiative in which 150 families planted a walnut tree each along the road in the village of Izbično in West Herzegovina. Today these are mature walnut trees bearing fruit and they are witnesses of other various Eko ZH activities. One of the most famous ones is the art colony that has gathered students from fifteen art academies from Široki Brijeg, Mostar, Zagreb, Belgrade, Niš, Novi Sad and other regional cities and towns and inspired them to fight for the protection of nature with brushes and paint.

The society should be taken personally. One should wonder: What is up to me? How am I contributing to this problem, and can I contribute to the solution?

The association had a tough time raising funds in the beginning, they say: *“We could rely only on ourselves, and hence all of our actions were ad hoc. We would meet, everyone would give something and we would have enough to, say, organise transportation and food for a cleaning party. In the beginning we were our own donors.”* That also changed over time. When in 2019 they applied

to the Sustainability Academy organised by the Mozaik Foundation, they already had a sizable base of long-standing donors. Everything they needed was a promising idea to intrigue them. In the spirit of their initiatives uniting nature and society they came up with project ‘Youth in Beekeeping’ with an aim to simultaneously improve pollination and biodiversity, but also to encourage solving the unemployment issue. The idea was that ten young unemployed people attend training, learn the basics of this trade of the future and receive three hives to begin their own independent operation. They raised the targeted sum incredibly quickly and unbelievably simply: they raised it in less than a month from the twenty-odd businesspeople they could always count on. Mario said the following about the short path without much wandering: *“We had, and we still have a base of people who have known us for long and who trust us. We never send them meaningless emails. I call them to meet me, I explain the idea, I ask their opinion and only then do I ask for support. The ones who helped us before helped us then and will surely help us tomorrow as well.”* From the money raised they bought thirty hives with bees and set up the workshops, and the ten youths who attended the workshops are still in beekeeping to this day.

The story does not, however, end there. Soon after they completed the project Mozaik Foundation contacted them with news that they will organise another round of the Sustainability Academy for the most successful associations. There was no doubt that Eko ZH was on that list. They decided to tackle another burning environmental issue this time: illegal dump sites. There are more than 200 illegal dump sites on the territory of the West Herzegovina Canton with around 100,000 residents, and these are a threat for the creatures, air, water, and environment in general. As somebody who worked on mapping dump sites for years, Mario shares the following about this issue: *“Eko ZH has been fighting the authorities, media, utilities and the local population for all stakeholders in this society to take responsibilities. Everybody is passing the ball around and denying responsibility*

and the dump sites are becoming a rising threat. And ultimately, nobody brought the trash in from Belgrade, Zagreb or Mostar. It's our trash, we made it and we should dispose of it." Therefore, when the second round of the Sustainability Academy unexpectedly opened the association seized the opportunity to finally mobilise the community. Using tried and tested techniques and addressing the same reliable people who had supported them many times before, once again they raised the necessary funds quickly and had them matched by Mozaik Foundation. They invested the available budget into organising working parties where they mobilised their volunteers and local people alike and succeeded in cleaning four illegal dump sites together. However, they did much more than that: they pushed this topic into the spotlight. Encouraged by them the local government initiated the procurement of electronic waste containers, organised a series of lectures on recycling in schools throughout the canton and even improved existing legislation in the field of waste management. Mario says the following about the slow but steady steps made in protecting the environment: "In these parts people often say - 'it's not worth the trouble.' And it's wrong; it is worth the trouble if you're working for the common good and contributions are always visible, only sometimes that takes years. The environmental protection program will have its real effects only in the future. Today it seems people do not get much out of education sessions, but it sticks with them, and they slowly adopt better habits."

ADVICE FROM THE SOURCE:

- 1. People in your immediate environment can be your biggest support.** Try to make contacts in every stage and sphere of life that you can call on later and ask for help.
- 2. Do not ask for help according to a template.** Ask in person, address them by their proper names, eye to eye and customise your message.
- 3. Ask those who helped you to do so again.** Do not do this too often, you do not want to bore them. Give them attention, keep them updated on successes and they will want to donate again.

The experiences of Eko ZH association teach us changes for the better are indeed possible if you have connections you can count on. However that may seem to you at first glance, it is true that human relations and connections between us are the foundation on which we build associations, communities and ultimately the entire society. In that respect, perhaps the biggest success would be to one day say we fixed society, improved the community, or protected the environment in no other way but - through personal connections.



“Having a Good Plan”

ETEA, Priština (Kosovo)

ETEA is an Ancient Greek word meaning the spirit of an age. But if you ask the citizens of Priština, it means something else entirely. It is the name of a famous organisation of young people on a mission to shape the spirit of the city with books and education. For years they have been fighting for the culture of reading and against, it may seem, the inevitable decline of the general interest in books. When in 2019 the Forum for Civic Initiatives launched the Sustainability Academy program, the association seized the opportunity to take a giant step towards their goal. If their fellow citizens are not visiting libraries as much, they reckoned, perhaps it might be time for libraries to come to them. That is how the Mini-library project started.

For the common good to be common at all, it must include the community. That is obvious but often overlooked.

The idea was to put twelve open glass cabinets in various parts of Priština. Each would contain exactly one hundred books of different genres and ages, split into two sections: children and youth for one and adults for other. The shelves would initially be stocked by ETEA, but the books would change subsequently under the principle of exchange and the slogan ‘bring one book and take another.’ Also, immediately after their installation these street libraries would become the property, responsibility, and care of the neighbourhoods. In other words - their condition, the extent of their use and the literature on offer would depend entirely on the people living there. Therefore, for the project to succeed at all it would have to be accepted and, in some way, owned by the community. This in fact largely determined the way ETEA raised funds.

Specifically, the fundraising campaign had two main streams: one for the local businesses and the other for the residents of neighbourhoods where the libraries will be located. When it comes to onboarding businesses, one of the founders of the organisation Agon Ahmeti says half of the work was in properly conceiving the approach: *“We decided to target only those businesses that we knew would want to connect with the project, only those who were close to our idea and to whom our future beneficiaries were important in terms of business.”* Thus, they selected local private schools, libraries and bookstores that would benefit by their name being tied to the idea of open education, both by their logos on the cases and in the media reports. They explained the idea at meetings with decision makers, but they also presented the benefits that the endorsement can bring to the business in the long term. This was a sure-fire strategy, and they quickly raised the money to pay for the twelve mini libraries to be built and mounted.

The next objective: collect books to fill the shells. Agon explains why they decided to get those from the citizens: *“We could have asked the companies to donate books as well, but we decided it was smarter to get them from the citizens, so that somebody from each entrance or at least building in a neighbourhood can contribute a thing of their own to the benefit of all. In this way it would not be a library that ETEA made, it would be their own and consequently it would have much greater changes of surviving. That is why we chose this personal approach, so to speak.”* And who could have a more personal approach to the neighbourhood than those who live there themselves? That is why they gathered 27 volunteers from the neighbourhoods included in the project. Each volunteer would approach his/her neighbours to melt away any possible apprehensiveness, distancing, or suspiciousness. With combined forces the volunteers managed to collect as many as 1200 books in various parts of Priština that eventually found their place on the shells of the mini libraries. They were rigorous in terms of transparency of donations. Each book and each financial contribution were recorded and

publicly announced with the donor's name, which only solidified the already great trust within the community.

Apart from strong direct campaigns, the association mentions they had strong media support which they can primarily pin on their interesting idea. The unusual news story about street libraries being opened spread through the social networks and quickly reached national television and the most popular portals. They asked them for interviews and the sketch of the future library made its way to the media, which definitely helped people imagine it more easily. The association shares the following about the extensive media coverage: *"Even before we turned to people for assistance, many of them had already heard of us. We had a cue to build on. Also, the media kept reporting on mini libraries to this day, sustaining the interest of the entire city."*

ETEA raised all the funds required for their plan within a record thirty days; they even exceeded their goal by about 20%. When they look over their shoulder, they have no doubt: the secret of their success lay in a well-planned strategy. They knew whom to approach and in what way. They estimated when to ask and when to give in return. They were able to use the full potential of the media. They thought of every detail and prevented any possible blunder. To put it simply, they had a good plan. And is not a plan precisely the factor that makes the difference between a wish and a goal?

ADVICE FROM THE SOURCE:

- 1. Think well of whom you are talking to.** Ask yourselves who shares your goal and whom will it benefit.
- 2. Keep everything under control.** Keep accurate records of all donations received and work with the volunteers on securing transparency. In this way you will ensure that there will be no abuses and reasons for any public mistrust.
- 3. When you approach companies, put yourself in their place.** Ask yourselves: why would a company support your project? Sometimes it is even useful to tweak your idea based on the suggestions you get from them, as long as it does not jeopardize the ultimate goal of your initiative.



“As Long as we Have Each Other”

Moje Nožičko (My Nožičko), Nožičko (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

It is winter 2017. It has been snowing for days in the small village of Nožičko, in the Southwestern part of the Municipality of Srbac in the Republic of Srpska. For days Danijela Božić and Velimir Mikulić have been calling the municipal utilities company to clear the roads, but the roads remain snowed in. When one morning they nearly had a traffic accident because of the black ice, they decided to take their village into their hands and establish the Moje Nožičko citizens' association. Reminiscing on the early days, Velimir says: „Nožičko is the prettiest place in the world to us, but like any other village it has some issues that an individual cannot tackle alone. That is why we needed an association to stand for us and so we established it, researched thoroughly how things work and what we can achieve with it and went into action!” Forty locals came to the first meeting, quite sufficient to get things going and move things from a standstill after many years. Four years later Moje Nožičko can boast a big chess board for the elderly, a playground for the kids, a refurbished park and paved access to the old potable water spring, new benches, trash cans and a bicycle stand, as well as the initiative to expand the Village Hall. It was this last endeavour that was part of the Sustainability Academy whose new cycle was launched in 2019 by Mozaik Foundation.

People from Nožičko understood in the first training sessions that fundraising was a new name for everything they did until then, on their own steam and intuitively. To wit, the association funded all their initiatives until then with funds from the community and invested a combined total of twenty thousand Euro in this way. Apart from financial donations, there were frequent donations in raw materials, goods, and volunteering. When they built the playground they received oak wood for the toys, a toboggan from a local company, the swing set from the diaspora and skilful hands willing to help from the townsfolk.

Beside all this, when they were first founded they also fixed a voluntary membership fee that is paid and often overpaid by its 225 members, who

know that the money will be well spent. When asked how he would describe their approach to fundraising, Velimir says: *“Stewardly. When you're working with the community, being upfront is important. Speaking face to face. Although the townsfolk, say, know everything that's been going on, all the same they like to converse, hear the same things told from the proverbial horse's mouth and in other words.”*



They imbued their techniques with a broader methodological framework at the Sustainability Academy and they were encouraged in their intention to raise funds to construct an auxiliary room for the storeroom, toilet, and a semi-open kitchen at the Village Hall. The idea had emerged occasionally for years on the association sittings and throughout the neighbourhoods. Everyone saw the Hall as the heart of social life in the village, the one place for all the school pageants, concerts, celebrations, commemorations, lectures, congregations, and various other meetings. Many times they discussed what needs to be fixed and in what order, they designed and redesigned the layout of the future blueprint. Therefore, when the time finally came for their joint dream to become a reality, it made perfect sense for the entire village to gather on the occasion. And how can they gather except with music and refreshments.

The community should feel that they are the ones working on the solution, rather than someone else.

In a small place such as Nožičko good news spread fast, and so a single day was enough for the entire village to learn that a charity concert was in preparation. Hence it is no wonder that the Hall was packed on the warm April evening. A visiting ensemble from Banja Luka was in charge of the music and they played all night, varying between - as they say - "everything from Bach to sevdah" and the menu featured fish soup, broiled for everybody in a large pot. The people of Nožičko enjoyed themselves, socialised and made new plans of what could be done in the Hall as soon as they fix it up. The association raised the required sum with the donations from that evening and subsequent contributions given by local businesses and Mozaik Foundation matched their funding that they soon put to use to begin the refurbishment.

This initiative, symbolically called "My Nožičko – My Home," is an example of how the association and the community can work together every step of the way: from the initial idea, through funding, all the way to execution. The founders on the association commented the following on that unbreakable bond: *"Civil society organisations are not separate from the community; they are one and the same and cannot do one without the other. Besides, these organisations are nongovernmental, which is very important since the government often lacks the spirit, the ear and even the interest to meet the actual needs of the*

people. Therefore, the association teaches us this: firstly, I do not know and cannot do everything myself, but I have to ask others for help, we need to invest our own money, time and effort for our benefit." In these terms, they still see fundraising as the only way the association can survive, and the life of the community can be improved. Only through giving, they say, can people develop a feeling of what the common benefit is, whom it belongs to and how much it is really worth.

And while we listen about dying villages throughout the region, this little place with just over one thousand inhabitants lives a new life, thanks to the Moje Nožičko association. Instead of a conclusion, Velimir adds: *"I believe this is a good solution for all villages. We must learn how to find among ourselves those who will go in our name to the municipal head or whoever it takes and demand solutions. And we must learn that usually nobody will come to sort out our lives but us, but that alternatively nothing is impossible - as long as we have each other."* In other words, sometimes even bad news like the one that nobody is coming to plough the snow - can simultaneously be the news that will bring us together, empower and mobilize us.

ADVICE FROM THE SOURCE:

- 1. Align your goals with the community's wishes.** The goal should be chosen in such a way that every member of the community can say: *"Yes, I'd like that sorted out already!"*
- 2. Have your answers prepared.** Although you may be best acquainted with the topic that you are asking support for, put yourselves in the shoes of the wider community and try to predict what they may ask about. No stuttering, no *"I'll let you know tomorrow"* or *"We'll see."* The community must see that you already thought about it that most of the townsfolk will benefit from your idea.
- 3. Make short-term goals.** Or segment the long-term goals into shorter ones since rapid implementation will give rise to community trust. If the people see results soon after the donation, they will want to continue supporting you.

“Good Sounds Travel Far”

Omladinski kulturni centar (Youth Culture Centre), Herceg Novi (Montenegro)

Herceg Novi has a large number of artists and creatives who - due to lacking infrastructure and public support - have been leaving the town for years or simply giving up creative work altogether. Wishing to put an end to this practice and raise public awareness about the importance of culture, several young denizens of Herceg Novi decided in 2012 to self-organise and form an institution called Omladinski kulturni centar. They started, as they say, with ‘elbow grease,’ donating their own musical instruments and organising guerrilla concerts. Very quickly they won the ears, hearts, and support of their citizens. *“It is one of the lovelier examples of the rapport between a civic organisation and the community. We started promoting the budding, independent scene and soon we had the attention of the public who also wanted to help. Hence, for example, we got the white canvas for the silver screen from the old army garrison, furniture was donated by a hotel that was closing and our fellow citizens donated outdated stereo equipment and speakers. That is why we say that Omladinski kulturni centar was started by us, but the entire community set it on its feet.”* – Nataša Dendić, one of the founders, recalls.

People are not used to donate for culture because it does not seem to be urgent - but creativity, expression and connection through art are a fundamental need.

Even in its early years it became evident that fresh sounds were sought after in Herceg Novi and where there is demand, there should be a venue as well. The idea of the Open City Practice Room and Studio was not a new one, but it was the right match. All the aspirations of the youth to create their own music,

socialise, experiment, and develop their talent outside of the framework of formal education poured into it. They applied for the Sustainability Academy in 2018 with a wish to bring that idea to life. *“The theory segment of the Academy was very good. The organisations’ stories were fascinating to us. Armed with knowledge and energy, we wanted to see for ourselves what can be done.”* – Centre co-founder Vedran Krnić remembers. Driven with the belief that music should be fought for with music they came to the idea to organise two charity concerts in the heart of town of different genres.

“Small towns have many difficulties, but advertising is not one of them. Moreover, it is very easy to spread word of any activity.” - the organisation says. It was enough to put up posters designed by a local artist around town, to spread the news through local portals and media outlets and to invite the youth via social networks. Therefore, it was no surprise that several hundred citizens of Herceg Novi gathered in the beautiful amphitheatre of the town theatre to



hear the new hopes of electronic music. *"For many of them this was the first time they performed their own tracks and people came up to us later, surprised that there are so many young people making their own music."*– Nataša recalls. From its inception Omladinski kulturni centar fought that art and culture be accessible to everyone and so they decided that the entrance to the concert should be free, and donations left to the good will of their fellow citizens. *"To our surprise mostly kids donated. Although they were all young people with no significant financial means, they obviously wanted the music room opened so much that they were prepared to give the little they had."* - Vedran ads.

The second concert had a completely different atmosphere. They organised a phenomenal acoustic jam in the charming streets of the old town core, showing that good music exists in each genre and sentiment. They won over the older crowds with melodic guitar sounds, raised additional funds and shown what the city could offer if support to the independent art scene comes to life.

The remaining funds were donated by local businesses and restaurant/cafe/bar owners, and then the Fund for Active Citizenship matched the amount. *"We managed to do three important things with concerts: we showed the potential of Omladinski kulturni centar and the independent scene, promoted young musicians and succeeded in gathering a good share of the donations needed for the music practice room."* - Nataša and Vedran sum up their successes. They bought the instruments, necessary sound recording gear and equipment, and currently they are waiting for official approval from the town authorities to convert a room in the Youth Centre into the long-awaited music room.

Although raising funds for culture and art is often not easy, Vedran points out that their campaign made a step forward in that respect as well and highlights why is important to give for those ideas as well: *"If we always only answer to our basic needs, we will survive, but what will our quality of life be like and what will the city life look like? Culture is not something foreign and remote; something that is nice, but not necessary, to have. It directly and powerfully impacts the psychological and social health in a community."* And the example of Omladinski kulturni centar teaches us without a doubt that - once we decide to fight for the music - good sounds travel far.



ADVICE FROM THE SOURCE:

- 1. You must have an educated and well-prepared team.** If you are well prepared, there will be no major surprises.
- 2. The campaign must be branded properly.** The idea, choice of words and visual presentation will give your goal a higher meaning and make it recognizable.
- 3. Keep informing the public about ongoing activities and their progress.** That will build trust.

“In for a Penny – In for a Ball”

Okular, Čićevac (Serbia)

“If you work from the heart you will succeed, even if the entire world says you’re crazy!” – they say with a smile in the organisation Okular. Back in 2015 it may have been madness to imagine an association that will gather over 500 young people in an area, spread the idea of inclusiveness and strongly encourage activism among the children and youths. Nowadays, ‘after the battle,’ it all seems quite natural, but the beginning was not easy. In the beginning the association raised funds for its activities with assistance from larger organisations and networks; however, despite its few projects, each garnered great publicity. Human Rights Day celebration, games without borders called Sports for Everybody and the first inclusive playground in Serbia echoed so much, they say, that there was no person in the area in 2018 who had not heard of Okular.

It sounds like a cliché, but it is true: do not give up and you will always find support. Be persistent and make yourself impossible to ignore.

As the organisation slowly grew, the need for their own space arose. They wanted it to be more than an office: they wanted a place where the organisation will live, where volunteers and children can socialise and arrange things. They wanted an Inclusive house for the children. As a result of their passionate advocacy in 2019 they managed to get an office in the centre of Čićevac that needed a renovation and some furnishings. They applied at the Sustainability Academy in the nick of time. *“If they hadn’t put out that call and if we hadn’t applied to it, all of this would never have occurred to us. It was*

and remains one of the most useful training sessions we attended in our lives.” – Aleksandra Milutinović of Okular remembers.

They started raising the funds thanks to the gifts the children made: These included red gingerbread hearts, key chains and trinkets that passes by could pay for by donating however much they wished. They put up their stand everywhere, hackled people they knew, sold door to door and soon, when it stopped giving results, they decided to try their luck in Vrnjačka Banja. The bigger town seemed to them a bigger opportunity, but it soon turned out that even there only people who followed their work would donate. Then they confirmed the lesson from the Academy - those who know you, give to you! - and decided firmly to find new ways to connect with their community. They no longer had the luxury to spend time and energy on small-time activism. It had to be something big, an idea so crazy that it cannot fail. The first ball in the history of Čićevac.



If it were an ordinary party of concert, the idea would not be nearly as successful. Only the idea of a ball was so bold, magnificent, and unheard of for this small town of ten thousand residents that virtually nobody wanted to miss it. And indeed, on that evening in May 2019 all influential locals, successful entrepreneurs, and representatives of companies from Čičevac and the district came to the newly opened hotel decorated at the last minute, dressed to the nines. Some of them were personally invited, others were reached by acquaintances and yet others invited themselves. They were all greeted by a decorated hall, abundant catering, and phenomenal music. The party could start.

They left nothing to chance, in order to raise as many funds as possible. They received some of the donations from ticket sales, but they also planned other activities for donors, one of which 'stole the show.' It was a public auction at which each guest could 'purchase' the symbolic bricks, windows, and tiles of the future Okular premises. Starting with the first brick the donors competed for the price, who will buy the pillars, who will sign the door and who will take credit for the chimney. Every piece of this symbolic inclusive house from the foundation to the roof soon bore the name of at least one donor. Other than that, they held a 'silent' bidding of artwork and photographs made by children and disabled youths, and even the mayor - a painter in his free time - donated his pieces for the occasion. To their surprise, all the artwork was finally purchased by the hotel, and they adorn its walls to this day. They were also surprised by the mayor of neighbouring municipality of Varvarin who collected donations from his citizens in the days before the ball and arrived with a hefty sum. The ball lasted until the small hours and while the guests partied and danced like never before the photographer captured every moment, and at the end of the night decided to donate all proceeds from sold photos.

The entire area was abuzz about the ball in Čičevac long after that night, and the donations kept coming in. It turned out the organisation raised even more money from the people who did not attend the ball but wanted to give their contribution nevertheless. When the confetti finally settled and the bottom line was drawn, Okular managed to exceed the targeted amount and get as much from the Trag Foundation. Not only did they refurbish the offices owing to the funds raised, but they also continued funding their activities as well. The ball is still remembered and told of even now, just like the lesson learned - if you intend to change the world, get the people going and do something really big, sometimes you must not settle for anything short of an insanely bold idea. In other words, in for a penny - in for a ball!

ADVICE FROM THE SOURCE:

- 1. It's not true that it can't be done.** We raised a considerable sum of money in one of the poorest municipalities in Serbia. If we could do it, anyone can.
- 2. Every activity will get you funds or friends, and both of these gifts are valuable.** This is how our street activities raised less money but brought us volunteers and beneficiaries.
- 3. Always ask.** If you ask for support, they can donate or move on. But if you do not ask, those who may want to join you wholeheartedly will certainly pass you by.



“Philanthropy Exercised”

Proekt Sreka (Project Happiness), Skopje (North Macedonia)

Kristina Arnaudova used to be a singer who did charity work in her spare time. Over time philanthropy grew into her calling and singing became her hobby. The crucial turnaround happened in the last day of 2015 when, nine months pregnant, she started the Proekt Sreka association. She says the idea occurred ‘at the eleventh hour’ but also at the right time, since it is never too late to support education and development of children and youth coming from socially vulnerable strata of society, poor background or remote and rural areas. According to the data at her disposal, as many as half of the children in North Macedonia do not have equal opportunities, access to informal learning and new technologies, and many of them live on the brink of survival.

**Nobody can do everything,
but everybody can do something.**

Since 2015 to this day, Proekt Sreka developed a base of 1,200 such children throughout the country, received over 3,000 donations, distributed, or invested over 160,000 Euros and brought, like their name says, happiness to children, parents, society, and Kristina herself. Throughout the process they were able to crystallize the main needs of children from the margins of society. *“They usually manage for the basics, but they lack everything else, everything that is normal for other children. They do not go to sports activities, ballet, the cinema, theatre, tutoring, cultural events... And these are all opportunities to explore your interests, develop talents, socialise, and gain confidence.”* These needs were the starting point of all of the association’s activities and therefore they gave rise to free summer camps for children who cannot afford summer holidays, free drama studio for those attracted by the limelight and finally - free music lessons. They

applied in 2019 at the Sustainability Academy organised by HORUS with this last idea in mind. The school with the charming name *Gitare, dirke i svirke* (Guitars, keys and gigs) was intended to provide regular piano and guitar lessons twice a week to marginalised children between the ages of seven and fourteen.

In the years before that Kristina funded all her projects by raising funds in the community, mostly from companies. Therefore, it is no wonder the Sustainability Academy met her with the following words: *“You can even teach here.”* She adds, laughing, that she did have the practical knowledge but that the training sessions provided her with the additional theoretical framework and system. Therefore, after the Academy they ventured into fundraising more confident than ever before. At first, they talked to the media. Several radio appearances, TV shows and articles in the press were sufficient to get the public interested. Then they emailed the companies they thought would be willing to donate. They scheduled meetings with those companies that indeed showed interest to hear more about the project, where they familiarised them with the idea in person, explained its relevance and infected them with some of their own enthusiasm. Of the initial twelve companies, five supported the project, but it was more than enough to surpass the targeted amount by 50 percent. Although this technique may seem too simple at first glance, Kristina reveals the secret to her approach: *“They always tell me there is no use for this,*



nobody reads these emails and I am trying in vain. But I beg to differ; it works, you just have to know what to expect. We have a list of companies. If we are fundraising for school supplies, we write to all the companies that make them or publish textbooks. If we are making New Year's presents, we call companies that make toys or candy. Apart from that, on average we send about 100 emails of which perhaps ten companies reply, but the ten is enough to implement one project."

Aside from financial donations they received two guitars as gifts from Kristina's erstwhile colleagues. After HORUS matched their funds, they equipped their existing offices with instruments and auxiliary equipment, hired teachers and started working. All donors were invited to the gala opening and received thank you notes, and the children even prepared a small show for the occasion, performing their first numbers.

A total of fifty children passed through 'Guitars, keys and gigs' since then. Many of them went on to enrol in high schools of music and continued doing music, and as of this year the project has been supported by the Ministry of Culture. Kristina adds the following about this intersection between the education system and civil society organisations working with children: "Informal education should become part of formal education. It is perhaps more important. In school children learn facts, but they do not learn anything about themselves. Only through opportunities to explore and develop their potential can they learn who they are, what they can and what it is they want." And indeed, if working on informal education of socially vulnerable children taught Kristina and her colleagues anything, it is that these children are not the same once they climb onstage, learn a new song, or discover their talent. They are stronger, bolder, and confident enough to be who they are and as such become equal members of the community. In other words, in some ways the society corrects its systemic shortcomings through these projects and empowers and integrates the marginalized groups. If you ask people from Proekt Sreka, fundraising plays a crucial role in this: "Yes, fundraising is important because of donations and support, because of the freedom it provides when compared to project funding and because of the opportunity to start discussions on important matters through raising funds. However, it is also a way for us to work on philanthropy. For us all to exercise empathy and altruism until we practice it so well that philanthropy comes quite naturally to our children tomorrow." Just like anyone who dedicates days and months to master an instrument 'plays it by ear'.



ADVICE FROM THE SOURCE:

- 1. The idea is important.** It can be something that was not previously done, something urgently needed and something that sounds great off the bat.
- 2. Choose your donors wisely.** If you are doing a project on a topic, do your research and contact companies whose core business is in that field.
- 3. Always try to leave the impression of professionalism.** It is true that nobody wants to give money to 'amateurs. For example, it is professional to send a document with the letterhead of an organisation or project and from an official-looking, decent email address.



“Practical Class”

Shpresa e Jetës (Hope of Life), Priština (Kosovo)

The year is 1999 and the war in Kosovo is over, while the construction of a civil society is yet to begin. A group of students establishes an organisation to provide urgent, needed assistance to the vulnerable and poor, who are so many in number that the system cannot care for all. They called their organisation Shpresa e Jetës which means ‘Hope of Life’ in Albanian, as a sign of determination to bring back hope on the faces of children and their parents. In the first years their work focused on collecting and donating the basic provisions such as food, clothes, hygiene supplies and medications, but in time they shifted their focus on education. When asked why education, Bernardete Palucaj Lekaj, one of the founders of the association, replies: *“Education is a longer-term form of giving. Urgent donations will always, of course, be necessary and important, but deeper change require us to go beyond those and try to make systemic change.”* In the beginning they found allies in acquaintances and friends who would donate goods, clothes, or their time through volunteering. However, they soon realised they will have to learn more about fundraising to be able to create more momentum and turn more demanding ideas into action.

One of those ideas was born in 2018 from the wish to help 249 children - mostly from families the organisation already worked with - meet the beginning of the new school year prepared. With a tremendous wish to learn as much as they can, they applied to the Sustainability Academy organised by the Forum for Civic Initiatives Bernardete says the following of the program and training sessions: *“Then we realised there are many ways to raise the money. You can organise an event, go door to door, include celebrities, use social networks... There are countless ways, the trick is choosing the one that is best for your goals and your community.”* The best way for them, as it turned out, was to get in touch with local companies and citizens. They made an extensive list of potential donors and decided to go to them one by one, door to door. They told every owner, director and manager who would set aside some time to listen to them what access to education and

community support can mean to marginalised children. They told the same story over fifty times in as many companies, they say. *“We were not lazy because we understood that fundraising was in fact the way to include the community in solving issues common to everyone. It’s not just a technique to raise money, but a way for citizens and companies to find out how their fellow citizens are living, what is going on in Priština, how systemic support to the vulnerable is not enough and how important it is to involve them.”*, Bernardete adds.

When pondering how to begin raising money, start from the end. Your goal will determine your message, channels, and audience.

Although they raised almost the entire amount through corporate donations, they did not stop there. They decided to turn to another important group of potential donors: the parents. To that end they organised a day-long event on the main Priština square, with a number of activities for the children. The children played, coloured, drew, read, sang and were just being children and it is precisely their carefree attitude that made their parents think about what life is like for children whose childhood is fraught with worry. The donation box was full at the end of the day. Soon after they raised the required amount the Forum for Civic Initiatives matched their funds, thereby providing 240 children from minority ethnic groups and underprivileged families with sorely needed school equipment, textbooks, and an equal opportunity to be educated. *“Community fundraising was completely new for us as an organisation, and*

Today they find countless flaws on their first fundraising enterprise, pointing out how they should have had a bigger campaign, better promotion on social networks, how they should have involved celebrities or exclusively turned to larger companies. However, as it may be whenever learning a new skill, every mistake is in fact a lesson. And some lessons are not learned at school or in training sessions as much as among people.

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“A Long Journey of Three Steps”

Sutra je novi dan (Tomorrow is a New Day), Velika Kladuša (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

“One of the best medicines against illness is to have company. Be with persons who went through the same. Share your fears and distress with someone who understands.” This is how one of the famous ‘Kladuša heroines’ describes the importance of the Sutra je novi dan association in the lives of everybody in this town facing the diagnosis of a malign tumour. And unfortunately, there are many of them. Although Velika Kladuša (Great Kladuša), contrary to its name, is a small town of almost seven thousand residents - it has around 250 cancer patients, according to the local Health Care Centre data. The husband of Nasija Džihanović, founder of the association, was one of them. After a hard fight that ended with his death in 2016, Nasija decided to do everything in her power so that nobody else in Velika Kladuša had to go through this experience alone. Saying she succeeded would be an understatement. today the association gathers over 400 people, mostly women, and has gone through a number of humanitarian activities, lectures and - not least - many days of conversation, socialising and laughter.

Being there for somebody, without a reason, is all the sense in life for me.

“We named the association after the Donna Ares lyric ‘Tomorrow is a new day/ Even weak I am stronger.’ We wanted to tell everyone going through any form of this wicked disease not to give up for anything, not even in the hardest times. Not to be afraid of the long and uncertain fight ahead of them but to fight it one battle at a time, day by day and shoulder to shoulder with us.” - Nasija says. It was the daily support that was the backbone of the ‘My Life Is Not Cancer’ project that they applied with to the 2019 Sustainability Academy program organised by Mozaik Foundation. The goal was a simple one: raise funds to

include psychological counselling, teaching about healthy living habits and decoupage workshops in the association’s regular activities. When asked why they chose these three items, Nasija says: *“Education is important both for prevention and recovery, psychological support is crucial for strengthening and creativity is also a form of therapy. We learned decoupage from one of our members and it brought everyone not just a pastime and feeling of usefulness, but also over time an additional source of income for treatment, too.”* They were no strangers to community fundraising even before the Sustainability Academy. On the contrary, since its establishment they would raise funds to help the patients and finance the operation through donations via social networks, street activities and in direct contact with businesses and local governments. Over the years the entire canton heard about these cheerful and feisty women and had opportunities to see their efforts. So, when it came to the Academy, they had no doubt for an instant about the way to put this idea into action. They started along the beaten path.

The first step: spread the word of the activity. *“There is certainly nobody in Velika Kladuša that does not listen to our local radio. Fortunately, we have excellent cooperation with them. They always want to broadcast our appeals and it is often enough if we just write the account number and the purpose of the fundraiser on a piece of paper and they will read it out, and the people will respond to it.”* That was also the case now: they just announced on air that they can get to their goal only by working together and that the smallest donations mean a lot because of it. Their invitation quickly gave results and the first payments started coming in.

The second step followed: talking to the companies. They contacted the Business Association and through them sent an email to all members, asking for donations. Most of the businesses already supported their work in the past and felt the need to do the same now. Therefore, it is no wonder that during

the same day many answered the email by making direct payments and that the majority of the funds were raised through corporate donations.

A little more was left to reach their target amount and another, ultimate step: go out among the people and share something nice with them. The Sutra je novi dan association was famous for its Cake fests, humanitarian fundraisers through selling irresistible cakes. So, during that sunny April the residents of Velika Kladuša could have a sweet time with pies, crepes, cakes, baklava, urmašica biscuits and other sweets and leave donations for the future of the association. The fact that one supporter soon hired them as a catering service for his business-related event speaks volumes about them conquering the hearts and palates of gourmands.

These three steps were enough for the association to raise the funds that were then matched by Mozaik Foundation. They procured production supplies for decoupage, organised a dozen highly attended lectures about nutrition, tobacco harmfulness and cancer prevention, but also established a psychological counselling service. This project enabled them to be there for each other day after day. To someone on the side-lines, today their story may seem too simple to be possible, but the truth is that these three steps could occur only after a journey of a thousand miles. In other words, it took years for this money to be raised in under a month and a half. Nasija speaks precisely about that, ending her talk: *"The secret of our success is trust. We never meddled in politics, never lied to anybody, never failed anyone. People could see over and over again that we work hard and that we're doing the right thing. The truth is that people in these parts may not open their door just like that, but once they are sure you can be trusted they will always leave it at least a little open."*

ADVICE FROM THE SOURCE:

- 1. Do not forget: The community sees all beneficiaries as representatives of the association.** If you are really important in your members' lives, they will talk about it themselves and help spread the good word.
- 2. Be transparent in your work.** Share with the public what you did with each of the donations you received.
- 3. Find the most relevant communication channel in your community.** Once you discover that, use it as much as you can. In our case it was the local radio.



“Homework Well Done”

YMCA, Bitola (North Macedonia)

YMCA. The famous disco hit of the eighties, but also one of the oldest and largest youth organisations in the world. Founded in 1844 in London in the heyday of industrialisation, with a goal to prepare young men to create a more humane society, almost two centuries later the Young Men's Christian Association is still viewed by many as one of the first civil society organisations. Today it numbers close to a million in as many as 119 countries throughout the world. North Macedonia is one of them, with two YMCA associations - in Skopje and Bitola. The Bitola branch was founded in 2001 as an informal, non-religious and not-for-profit youth club. Over the first ten years it helped organise numerous musical, film and sports activities and youth camps, funded mostly with the support from European Union programs. Two milestones were set in 2010: Youth summer camps become their chief activity and the cooperation with the Youth Corps and the Embassy of the United States of America intensified. In the words of one of its founders, Viktor Iliev, this cooperation largely changed the way they operate: *“At the time we worked from one day to the next, from project to project, from grant to grant. In working with them we learned that longer-term plans need to be made, that today we have to sow some things that will sprout and bear fruit only in five years' time, so that we can have certain stability.”* Therefore, bit by bit they started learning about fundraising from companies as a way to secure more lasting forms of funding for the organisation. Although Viktor, as he himself says, was very pessimistic, they managed to develop a large network of potential donors with the help of the US Ambassador. For years they organised a fundraiser called ‘Tea with the Ambassador’ that was attended by many businesspeople, CEOs, and marketing managers of companies throughout North Macedonia. The organisation openly admits: *“In the beginning the companies would respond because they were invited by the Ambassador himself; however, as we built relationships, in time they started coming for us as well. It is true that big names can open doors or connect you with donors, but nobody will give you money solely based on a*

recommendation. You have to earn their trust.” In order to use the full potential of every opportunity they had, early on they decided to always come to the meetings well prepared. Research was their main weapon. Long before they shook hands with and met any donors, they would know who the decision makers were, what they are interested in, how does the actual company do business, what are their corporate social responsibility projects and also what are their values, budgets, and expectations.

The biggest mistake organisations make is being uninformed. Be nerds and do your homework.

“You have to do your homework. You have to know the background to be able to negotiate. That is why we would do research day and night, searched LinkedIn, subscribed to business magazines and portals, found publications, went to Chamber of Commerce events and input all this new information into our database.” - Viktor shares. Although one in ten companies would donate to them in the beginning, even that was a huge leap for YMCA Bitola. It brought about the opportunity for them to not be dependent on grants alone but to fund the camps partially themselves. Over the following year those numbers grew, just like their knowledge and network of donors did, but also, as they say, like the corporate philanthropy culture in the country did: *“All the time we shared best practice examples from other countries with local companies and talked to them about the importance of giving for the common good. We like to say that we developed their capacities alongside our own.”*

The 2019 Sustainability Academy only confirmed that they were following a good course and gave them additional wind in the sails. Their goal was to raise some of the funds for the youth summer camp and continue strengthening their ties to the business community. They first organised an annual corporate event and gathered companies that they already collaborated with and some fresh faces for a cocktail. Representatives of as many as sixty of the 120 largest businesses they invited actually came to the event. The organisation presented its work to them, introduced the young attendees of the camp, and publicly thanked those who donated thus far, so that at the end of the day the potential donors had a clear impression of what they can expect. There was no rest after the party. Hundreds of emails and telephone calls to companies ensued, which was a lesson learned long ago: *"Statistics are relentless. On average only 10% of the emails you send are replied. This means you have to send over one thousand emails annually to be sustainable."* All of the meetings, negotiations and calls did bear fruit. YMCA Bitola raised the required amount, and it was matched by HORUS, which provided a massive portion of the budget for the camp.

As a person with plenty of experience with many ways of organisational funding, Viktor finally says, smiling: *"If you ask me, project-based funding is like a government job. It is secure, loaded with bureaucracy, but there is no growth and no freedom. On the other hand, fundraising is like entrepreneurship. It is challenging, tough, variable, but also interesting and fulfilling. Perhaps the balance between the two is in fact best."* However, as in everything else, the cure against uncertainty in fundraising is research and good preparation. That at least is certain.



ADVICE FROM THE SOURCE:

1. Tear the psychological barriers down. If consciously or unconsciously you feel ashamed to ask for funding, it will impact your openness and resolve, and consequently the donor's motivation to support you. You must work on approaching donors as equals, rather than inferior to them.

2. You must have quantity to have quality. Get used to rejection - the majority will not reply to your emails or return your calls and you should not take it personally. A small number of them is enough for you if you collaborate well.

3. Always send a report after you receive donations. It can be a presentation with a video and photographs, with the donor's logo, the story and clarifications of all achievements made with donations received. Few organisations do that, and all donors appreciate it.



“Start where You Are with What You Have”

Ženski centar Milica (Women's Centre Milica), Vrnjačka Banja (Serbia)

“As a woman who experienced breast cancer I felt all of the failings of this system, starting with inaccessibility of diagnostics to the absence of psycho-social support once you're diagnosed, from insufficient information to excess of those that are wrong and dangerous, from job loss to loss of support from my partner and family.” - this is how founder Vesna Bondžić begins her story of Ženski centar Milica. Her personal experience and the sake of the common good gave rise to 'Milica' in 2012, an association dedicated to improving women's quality of life and health, primarily those fighting cancer.

It is important you are heard of, but it is also important what is heard. We did not want sad stories, because they do not encourage anybody. We wanted to talk about strength, victory, hope and togetherness!

A person diagnosed with cancer has a thousand questions and no place where she can find certain answers. That is why, since the very beginning, this association was determined to open the one door for all doubts and fears. The road from the mouldy and run-down offices they received for temporary use to the Day-care centre - where women affected with cancer and their families would find support, advice from a psychologist, nutritionist, and physical therapist, but also creative workshops, experience therapy, training for self-examination and education - was long, to say the least. Fortunately, the Sustainability Academy that they were a part of in 2013 gave them the wind in the sails to embark on that journey.

Right from the start they understood that they have a much bigger task before them prior to raising any funds: destigmatisation of cancer. *“There were no associations dealing with cancer. Nobody wanted to talk about it - lest 'the devil may hear. The town did not want us at celebrations and events. The media did not want to hear us or asked us to tell sob stories, and sobs won't encourage women to get examined. So, our first goal was to demystify cancer, to say - yes, it exists, but we are not victims. We are alive and strong. And there are many of us!”* - Vesna recalls. And how destigmatisation does not happen overnight but goes step by step, they decided it was more important to be present often and in as many places they can, rather than to make one big event.

There were not many opportunities and they were not ideal, but they succeeded to turn every one to their benefit. When they got an out-of-the-way, barely discernible stand on the town square during a carnival, they came up with the idea of spreading a ten-meter-long purple canvas on the asphalt and inviting all children and passers-by to paint it. Not only did they become the stars of the carnival, but they successfully started fundraising as well. When, on another occasion, they received a green light from a local hotel to hold a donors' event at 5PM, they decided to call it 'Tea for Better' and attract businesspeople and officials to respond to the interesting concept.

Before New Year's Eve they brought a bunch of cookies and cakes to the town square and imbued the entire centre of Vrnjačka Banja with scents of cinnamon and vanilla. They would give passers-by two muffins for each donation, with an idea that they can keep one and hang the other on the Tree of Joy. At the end of this activity the Tree was full of muffins that children with learning disabilities 'picked' with a smile. Two charity football matches and several highly visited rock'n'roll gigs in local cafes followed, and their events became the best parties in town. Soon they discovered the power of social networks and saw for themselves how pictures are often worth a thousand words. They posted

photos of their run-down offices with an account number and raised another third of the funds they needed. They ended the campaign successfully and Trag Foundation matched their funds. Soon they started work on refurbishing the Day-care centre and the donations kept coming in. They received a mammography training doll for self-examination training and practice from the Clinical Centre in Niš for the beginning of their work; the doll is still in use.

In a matter of months, Ženski centar Milica succeeded in winning the favour of entrepreneurs, private companies and public enterprises, the local self-government, musicians, athletes, friends, and beneficiaries of the Centre's services, as well as of many individuals from Vrnjačka Banja and the area. Some donated money and others showed their solidarity by volunteering, lending venues, food, and beverages, organising concerts and events. In other words, they made a very difficult topic a little lighter by taking it out of the dark into the light of squares, cafes, clubs, and stadiums.

Today, seven years later, Ženski centar Milica numbers several hundred beneficiaries and oncology experts, and it provides a multitude of services at national level. When they look over their shoulder, they see a long a winding road behind them. Perhaps it may seem like the road less travelled, but it is a very frequent one for most of civil society organisations. Yes, sometimes we a

fortunate and the finish line can be seen from the start, or we stumble across a shortcut on the way. However, much more often we have to clear our own path, start from where we are, work with what we have and walk with the people we know. But then, once we finally look back we will see that we beat the path for many who once had nowhere to go.

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ADVICE FROM THE SOURCE:

- 1. Be in command of your topic.** When you know it better than everyone and when you want to advocate it regardless of anything, then you will be listened to.
- 2. Start from your community and your acquaintances.** For the whole country to know you, the local community must get to know you first.
- 3. Keep adapting.** If something does not work, try something else. If you get little, think about how to make it bigger. If they do not want to listen, be louder.

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CAPTURED NOTES

1
Start from the end - from the goal. Conceive it so it gathers members of your association, your friends, beneficiaries, companies, and the entire community.

2
Make short-term goals or segment longer-term goals into shorter ones. That way the people will soon see the results of their giving.

3
Be in command of your topic. You must know the ins and outs of it, act professional and have an answer ready to each question.

4
Reject shame and fear. Remember - you are doing something agreeable and good for everyone.

5
First of all, put yourself in other people's shoes. Ask yourselves: why would somebody support your initiative?

6
Brand yourself. An original concept, slogan and graphic design will distinguish you.

7
Speak so that the entire world understands. Avoid phrases and templates.





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Find the best way to capture the attention of as many people as possible.

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Think beyond the rules as well. That is the only way you will discover what can 'work' in your case.

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Do not waste your strength on changing someone's opinion. Turn to those who have an ear for you and wish to help.

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Giving inspires giving. When asking for donations, think about what you can offer in return.

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Do not underestimate the importance of non-pecuniary donations. Those donations strengthen bonds with the community and mean more in the long run than a single payment.

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Do not forget - all of your beneficiaries and members of the association are your ambassadors. Let them spread the good word about you.

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Be transparent in your work. Share with the community what you did with each of the donations you received.

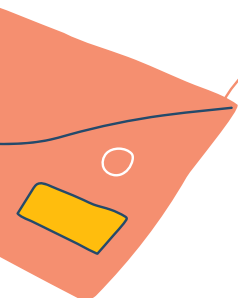
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Do not give up. There will be rejection, unexpected turns, ups and downs, but it will be worth the effort.

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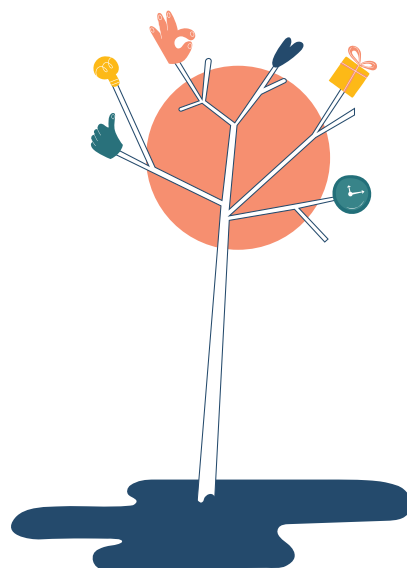
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