

VIZ VIŠNJA GORA

Location

Our institution Vzgojno izobraževalni zavod Višnja Gora is located in the suburb of Ljubljana the capital city of Slovenia. It consists of the main building, so called castle, the imposing mansion of the Aursperg counts, gymnastic hall and three new residential homes. The renovation took place in 2004, before that the castle was residential house and the school was situated in the building behind.

The purpose

We are an educational institution established in 1948 meant primarily for girls (but since 1992 we have some boys as well) who attend secondary school.

They are **boys and girls 14-18 years of age**, their common feature is that they have found themselves in trouble during adolescence.

The term for this population is **children or youngsters with personality and behaviour disorders- with problems in social integration**. After decision, made by their parents, teachers or community workers, they are sent to our institution, because they need more help. There are many reasons for them being sent to us; squandering, running away from home, leaving or skipping school, conflicts in their social surroundings, minor and criminal offences, drug abuse.

Social learning in educational groups

At Višnja Gora they live in 5 educational groups which are located at different places. Every group is formed by residents a **maximum of 7 girls and 2 - 3 boys and 4 educators**. Besides that the institution has a detached residential group in Ljubljana with accommodation available for 8 girls and residential group in novo mesto for 2-3 youngsters, who are not able to live in institution.

The educators (special pedagogues) offer them intensive **help to learn and use social skills, to improve relations with peers, adults, parents, school etc**. The special pedagogic work takes place 14. p.m. to 10.p.m. when the night rest starts during the week. At the weekends most of the youngsters go to their homes and are back on Sunday evening.

Youngsters have possibility to become more successful in different life situations:

- they solve problems in a constructive way,
- communicate,
- gain friends,
- take care of themselves,
- meet new places,
- have holidays at the seaside,
- spend their free time actively,
- attend competitions.

The second thing that makes our institution special is the fact that youngsters dispose of all sorts of equipment for free time activities. These can be divided into:

- sports and recreation activities
- musical and cultural activities.

The youngsters' preferences are fitness exercises, table tennis, roller skating, biking, volleyball, soccer, skiing and ice-skating. Among musical and cultural activities they enjoy music, painting, literature. Those who like sports take part in various local and regional competitions. Those inspired by literature issue a journal called *Odprta srca* (Open hearts). Our musical "stars" accompanied by their group perform at celebrations in our institution but also in other institutions all over Slovenia.

Vocational school programmes – a way of inclusion

INCLUSION IN SCHOOL VOCATIONAL PROGRAMMES – a way of reintegration and re-socialisation into society is one of the most important conditions for the youngsters integration to our institution. They are willing to attend 2 or 3- year programmes for an **assistant in the biotechnology and care, gastronomy-catering, textile design and administrator.**

A distinctive feature of our institution is integrated educational school programme since 1987, meaning that students from nearby villages also can attend school. It is our opinion that this is a good thing because by that the social integration is achieved and the image of our institution and youngsters improves.

Our school classes consist of about 8 – 10 resident students and 4-6 students. The latter come into our house only to attend school. In this way our students and workers are directly integrated in the surrounding community. The **maximum is 12 students** at theoretical subject and **4-6 at practical work.**

From 2009 we are involved into project of social enterprise **Tovarna dela (Work factory)**, where we offer national professional qualification to the dropout youngsters for textile design or gastronomy-catering.

Our school functions as a detached unit of four secondary schools in Ljubljana, because we have public programme and we want avoid eventually stigmatisation of our youngsters, when they enter to work or other public school programmes.

Therefore the boys and girls that come to us have, as a rule, been unsuccessful in two or more schools.

Special pedagogical methods are used to make individual approach for each pupil in the class.

Project work as a method is needful from two reasons:

1. The most of our youngsters were not included into school projects in their past schools because of misbehaviour and other troubles.
2. They have not been abroad with their families and they do not know, that there are some wider possibilities for employment after finishing school, or to gain professional experience abroad.

We have been participating in Leonardo mobility programme for 11 years and Erasmus+ for last 3 years.

Every year a group of cooks – 10 plus two teachers- is sent to Italy or to Spain to specialize in Italian or Spanish dishes making. Administrators were sent to Ireland and assistants in the biotechnology and care to Latvia.

Taking part in school competitions is very important for our youngsters' self-esteem.

- More knowledge for more tourism – 35 secondary schools are included and our students have been getting gold recognitions for the last ten years,
- textile design competitions: 2-nd gold Vulcano,
- competition in Mathematics – first place in Slovenia, English language in 2009/10,
- dance competition – we have participated in the last two years.

International projects

Our institution is a member of European association, called Euromet, which includes more than 10 European countries, and we have already made several exchanges of educational groups.

We organised the exchange with south-east Europe, namely Bosnia, with the support of Open Society, Movit and some other European programmes. For us, participating in international projects is a part of work and professional strategy.

Until now we have been developing international cooperation for one main reason - **to help our students with social and emotional problems to achieve self-esteem and self – confidence.**

It is our belief that also the staff needs the possibility to improve their knowledge, to compare different approaches in pedagogical practice. Although they are all teachers with special pedagogic education and are equipped to work with troubled youngsters, they need more opportunities to exchange experiences with their European colleagues. It is also needed since we are, as mentioned before, the only institution for youngsters in Slovenia and we do not have enough chances to exchange practice, views and opinions. Therefore we joined a three year Comenius project *Act and react to socialize*, researched the ways of inclusion in 5 European countries. We also made some study visits in Euro countries – we hosted study visit to get more knowledge and experience.

We stress **the importance and value of knowledge and of mastering certain professional skills.** Therefore our workers focus primarily on motivation, on re-building a positive relationship student – school and on (re-)establishing self confidence and trust in one's capabilities. The school education is encompassed in the wider educational frame to endorse self-confidence and positive self-esteem.

Depending on the age of the youngsters and on their readiness to accept responsibility the tutors act mostly as advisers and animators and not so much as supervisors. Between the tutors and the youngsters democratic and human relationships are established. Nevertheless we do not tolerate aggressive behaviour among youngsters, drug abuse and criminal offences. What makes our institution different from others is the very wide range of activities in which our boys and girls are involved. Every year we work with 35-45 young people who live in the institution and with the same number of others who attend our school.

As long as we are successful in maintaining this balance, our existence will still have its meaning.

The youngsters come to us in bad mood – disaponinted and frustrated, they often left our institution like FELIKS – feel equal, learn to improve your knowledge and selfesteem.

Peter Pal, headmaster