

Firefly International

Cross-cultural creative projects combating social division worldwide

April 2010 – March 2011

Annual Report

Introduction

2010 – 2011 was a busy year for Firefly. As well as fundraising for and supporting ongoing inter-ethnic workshops, running summer camps & coordinating international exchanges in Bosnia, the organization also ran a series of very successful fundraising efforts in the UK, which culminated in the purchasing of the Ellie Maxwell Youth Centre in Brcko, North East Bosnia. This gives a permanent home to our activities there, and we are extremely grateful too all of our supporters who made this possible. In addition to this we helped curate the first ever Refugee Film Festival in Damascus, in association with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, began work on our most ambitious cultural exchange project yet and formalised our friendship and support for Kalash Welfare, which supports vulnerable communities based in North-West Pakistan.

Firefly International's Aims and Objectives

To facilitate communication and joint cultural and educational activities between people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

To decrease isolation in remote areas; establishing links between young people, through the promotion of co-operation between art or educational institutions both locally and in the wider international community.

To provide people with opportunities to participate in activities not otherwise available to them, and to learn skills and gain qualifications which may help them find employment or simply increase self-confidence.

To create opportunities for people from different countries to work together, either as volunteers teaching activities or through joint projects with youth groups, towards improving understanding and tolerance between people of different backgrounds, ideas and nationalities.

To facilitate exchanges of ideas between organisations with compatible aims working internationally.

We originally worked towards those aims with the establishment of Firefly Youth Project, Bosnia in 1998. This has now been handed over to local management in Brčko, and our programmes of youth work and on-going arts-based reconciliation projects will continue there under the locally registered name, Svitac.

Firefly International continues to work with Svitac on youth and arts projects in Bosnia such as festivals and summer camps that involve individuals from other countries.

We have developed these projects to involve many other countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon and the UK and now work with a wide range of participants as well as continuing to build up links between divided communities on an international level through festivals, exchanges, trainings and support.

Svitac

Svitac (Firefly Bosnia) is a multiethnic youth arts organisation in Brcko, Bosnia.

Svitac and Firefly were originally one organisation, and a core part of Firefly's work is still with Svitac. Below is a description of Svitac's structure and a summary of its projects over the past year.

Structure

Svitac is run by Director Gordana Varcakovic, who also teaches English classes and does all administrative and fundraising work. She is supported by Edina Vošanovic, who coordinates international volunteers in Brcko and teaches German and the piano, and Sanjin Vošanovic who runs guitar workshops and the Svitac samba band. There are also local volunteers who run their own projects and work together on larger ones: Arman Jašarevic (Media), Armela Mujanovic (Dance Workshops), Denis Vlasisavljevic (Dance Workshops) and Maša Bacanov (Dance Workshops). Kristina Varcakovic worked on the summer camps

Over 2010-2011 Svitac hosted many international volunteers who ran their own projects and also supported ongoing workshops. Local volunteers acted as one-on-one support for their paired international volunteer, offering advice, helping with diverse workshops and translating. In return they learnt new ways of working, practised their English, made links with other countries and cultures and developed their skills.

If not specified, the activities and events mentioned in the report take place in the town of Brcko.

ARTS WORKSHOPS

Dance

Dance workshops are an ever popular part of Svitac's programme, and we were very lucky this year to have the opportunity to send 2 of our young volunteers to the USA for a series of training workshops (see below). The dance workshops on offer for 2010/2011 included Latino, ballet, African and belly dance. The dance workshops are coordinated by local young volunteers Masa Bacanov and Armela Mujanovic, with support from Svitac core staff.

Samba

Another very popular Svitac workshop is the Samba Classes. These are coordinated by Svitac staff member Sanjin Vosanovic, with support from Edina Vosanovic, along with local volunteer Masa Bacanov and international volunteer Maja Schulze. Samba has around 20 regular participants from all backgrounds, and the group is in constant demand for street parades and celebration events in Brcko. During the summer of 2010 a number of international volunteers also took part in a week long Samba camp, held in Brcko in August 2010. We aim to develop this into a summer camp held outside of Brcko for summer 2011.

Guitar

Sanjin Vosanovic continued to provide guitar classes, which were held at the new Svitac youth centre along with some at the Brcko youth centre. A number of new participants joined these workshops this year, and Sanjin is working on developing participation for 2011/2012.

Arts & Crafts

International volunteer Maja Schulze ran arts and craft workshops throughout the year, the main strand of which was recycling fashion - Maja has completed an apprenticeship in fashion and

design. The project idea was developed from a similar one Maja had taken part in in Germany and turned out to be very popular. A big, public fashion show, displaying all the work that had been done, took place at the Svitac New Year's Party. Maja was assisted in this by Sanjin Vosanovic and Dina Vosanovic.

The Arts & Crafts group also worked on designing and developing a series of fundraising postcards, as part of a collaborative project with PRONI. These were to fundraise for a girl from Brcko who was in need of money for an expensive, life-saving operation. Svitac arts and crafts workshop added their support to this campaign by making and selling these postcards. Dina Vosanovic and Saira Čandić gave invaluable help to Maja on this project.

Media

These workshops were coordinated by local young volunteer Arman Jašarevic and held twice-weekly in the Brcko Youth centre. They focus on learning how to use and maintain audio equipment.

Unfortunately due to a continued lack of security in the youth centre (which has been the case since 2008) the workshops have to be organised from 8am to 4.00pm. This doesn't suit to some members because they have to go to school in the afternoon. The Media group is hopeful this problem will be solved soon. Firefly aims to help with this by fundraising for equipment for Svitac, which could be housed in the Svitac Youth Centre. This would ensure continued access for these workshops, as well as providing a revenue stream for Svitac.

The group helped with presentations in the Youth Centre organised by Brcko's primary and high schools, along with all Svitac presentations, events and festivals throughout the year.

LANGUAGE WORKSHOPS

Language teaching is a key element of Svitac's work, it is regarded as vital by the young people in order to help with their future prospects, and these are continually popular workshop.

English

English classes continued almost all year except for the school holidays. English classes were taught by Gordana Varcokovic and were held in the Youth Centre and Svitac offices

The students were all awarded certificates on completion of the course, and they will all be invited to the Svitac English Camp in the summer of 2011.

Svitac was given a Monopoly set and several English card games by students of Renbrook schools, which they plan to use in their future teaching.

Spanish

In late 2010 Svitac also started to offer Spanish classes. At this stage the classes are still small, but the team is currently working on marketing these to help this project grow.

German

Edina Vosanovic provides weekly German language lessons and completed the German Grammar course with her group, all of whom were enthusiastic and regular attenders.

SUMMER CAMPS

The summer camp's main goal is to gather large groups of children from different ethnic backgrounds, give them support and skills, encourage them to develop their imagination through English, arts & crafts, and help them to work together despite their different ethnic backgrounds.

The summer camp was held in Brcko between the 21st and 28th August, and consisted of arts & crafts, English, music and dance classes, and culminated in 2 days of music concerts and a Children's Day with different activities, games and competitions.

The summer camps were very successful. The children enjoyed themselves as did the volunteers and we felt that Svitac staff and international volunteers co-operated extremely well.

The Summer Camps 2010 were funded by the Brcko District Government and Trust in Children, along with private donations.

LOCAL YOUTH VOLUNTEERING PROGRAMME

Svitac has a strong focus on encouraging volunteering, and runs many volunteering projects within Brcko. These volunteers work on a wide variety of projects, from Dance Classes to Sound Engineering, Arts and Crafts workshops to Event Coordination. They work with children and young people from different backgrounds and nationalities, generally between the age of 9 and 17.

This project is run with the support of Trust in Children - <http://www.trustinchildren.org/>

INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERING

European Voluntary Service

European Voluntary Service (EVS) is a youth volunteering programme administered by the European Commission. Throughout this year Svitac had to go through the EVS reaccreditation process and is happy to announce that it is now reaccredited and has applied to host 3 volunteers in Brcko for the summer of 2011. Svitac also has begun researching sending volunteers from Bosnia to other European countries. It aims to do this in 2011/2012.

Other International Volunteers

Svitac was very happy to welcome Maja Schultze to Brcko, who is currently volunteering for 12 months through funding from WeltWarts (<http://www.weltwaerts.de/>). Maja has been involved in a number of different workshops. Svitac aims to continue and develop this volunteer exchange programme, and is very happy to have Maja as part of the team!

Svitac also hosted a number of international volunteers through out the year for the Summer Camps and other projects.

Svitac also had the opportunity to send a number of local young volunteers abroad this year for the first time. Rebecca Davis and Ashley Belyea, who were short-term volunteers with Svitac in 2009, wanted to continue their cooperation with Svitac. They offered to take 2 students from Brcko to the USA for Dance Workshop training in July 2010, and fundraised for this effort.

Whilst in Brcko Rebecca and Ashley ran Ballet and African Dance workshops and during their time they identified 3 students who they felt would benefit from this trip: Masa Bacanov, Armela Mujanovic and Nikola Maric. Unfortunately due to other commitments Nikola was not able to attend, but Masa and Armela made the trip to the USA for 6 weeks in the summer of 2010.

Masa Bacanov and Armela Mujanovic returned from the USA at the end of August 2010. At least 50% of their training in the USA was focused on how to make their future workshops successful, which has been a great boost to dance training in Brcko. They also learned special choreography

pieces to teach the other students. They began their new dance workshops in September 2010 following a performance on during Children's Day 2010, where they were able to show off what they have learnt at the Dance school, to great success.

Svitac is very thankful to Rebecca Davis and Ashley Belyea for this wonderful opportunity.

Local Language Classes

Svitac provides local language classes to all international volunteers. They also have the opportunity to practice with their paired local volunteer.

ELLIE MAXWELL YOUTH CENTRE

The Ellie Maxwell Youth Centre (named after the founder of Firefly) was purchased in August 2010 and is a 3 room youth centre in the centre of Brcko for Svitac's needs. Prior to this Svitac was based in rented accommodation, which led to high costs and precarity. This youth centre was established with funding from Firefly International, all of which came from private donations. Svitac moved to the new centre late in 2010 November and continues to work on refurbishing the centre.

Svitac's workshops have been moving to the centre over the course of 2010/2011. Language classes are now run regularly there and Arts & Crafts and music workshops are gradually moving to the new centre. Young users of the space report a really great feeling when several workshops run simultaneously and the building is full of activity. Svitac is planning to officially open the Ellie Maxwell Youth Centre in the summer of 2011.

FIREFLY INTERNATIONAL'S WORK OUTSIDE OF BOSNIA

European Voluntary Service

As with Svitac, Firefly International also went through the process of reaccreditation in 2010/2011. It is now a registered Sending, Hosting and Coordinating EVS organisation and aims to host young people from the Middle East in the UK in 2011, as well as sending young people to Bosnia and internationally through the EVS programme.

Firefly began it's new EVS project by sending a volunteer to Iceland to work with SEEDS, a youth environmental project. This has now begun and will last for 9 months.

Firefly also aims to host volunteers under EVS, and is working towards hosting the first Syrian EVS volunteer in the UK later this year, in association with our partner organisation Jafra Youth Centre.

Refugee Film Festival, Syria

Firefly was honoured to be asked to curate and coordinate the first ever Refugee Film Festival in Syria, in association with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. This festival took place in a number of different venues in Damascus and Aleppo (with side events also taking place in Amman, Jordan) and brought films from Sierra Leone, Iraq, the UK, Palestine and more to audiences in Syria for the first time. Film makers Hady Zaccak and Perla Issa also took part in Q+A Sessions at the screenings in Damascus.

Kalash Welfare

2010 and 2011 have seen Kalash Welfare's activities expanding. Throughout 2010 and 2011 Kalash Welfare has been working with Nabaig Sharakat, the first Kalash lawyer regarding his ambition to undertake an LLM in the UK. Connections have been made with the British Council as well as other funding bodies and we are hopeful that Nabaig will be awarded a funded place at UK university in the coming year.

In February 2011 Kalash Welfare took a 4-man film crew to film the annual game of *chitik gal*. *Chitik gal* is a game rather like golf, but played in waist deep snow. The film is currently being edited, it will focus not only on the game, but also the tensions of living in a isolated community, surrounded by larger cultures who follow a different faith.

Reel Festivals

Firefly International is the co-ordinator of Reel Festivals, an international cultural dialogue project with the following four aims:

- Spread awareness of areas in conflict beyond the headlines.
- Empower cultural figures and encourage their development.
- Encourage engagement with the arts and international issues.
- Encourage dialog between communities.

To achieve these aims we work through specialized festivals, dealing with specific areas in conflict in an in-depth manner and using as many different arts and educational forms as possible. Previous Reel Festivals have taken place in the UK and focused on Afghanistan and Iraq. We are now in the development stages of a tri-lateral festival showcasing culture and artistic collaboration between Syria, Lebanon and the UK for 2011. This will begin in Damascus, move to Beirut and finish in Edinburgh and feature musicians, poets and film makers from all three countries. This project is supported by the British Council and Creative Scotland, along with a number of other local partners in all 3 countries.

Sponsors and Partners

Firefly is very grateful to all the individuals who have made our work possible through their generosity and the organisations below for their support and partnership:



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