

The tool for making the right decisions

A standard company should welcome a client who is able to make informed financial and other life-related decisions. Such a company wishes to gain customers by means of their unique product and not to take advantage of customers' lack of knowledge.

In Slovakia, a number of companies have already adopted this philosophy. Some of them, including three AmCham members, even support the socio-financial education projects of the Children of Slovakia Foundation. They combine financial education with personal skills development, which are an essential prerequisite of making responsible decisions in life. In partnership with the foundation they have trained almost 50,000 people in 12 years. Such innovative projects, however, bring a principal change to society only if all stakeholders are involved in the cooperation, specifically businesses, NGOs, and the public sector.

Socio-financial education

Socio-financial education prepares young people for life; for adults it is a tool for making the right financial decisions. For the disadvantaged, it is protection against poverty.

The socio-financial education program combines training aimed at life skills development with building financial literacy skills. Without critical thinking, active listening, opinion formulating, handling of conflict or stressful situations, partnership communication, and the like, any information on how to handle one's money has

only limited use. In a strategic partnership with Susan Kovalik & Associates, Inc., this program promotes simultaneous development of both skills through expert debates, working groups adjacent to Slovak ministries of education and finance, or as a member of the international coalition for promoting financial literacy of children (Child and Youth Finance International). Training courses on financial literacy include information needed to handle the issues of normal life, such as debt burden, family budget, saving for university studies, where to save money, how to have control over expenditures, how to build your own business, etc.

Innovations – result of cooperation

Our projects involve a diverse mix of people: children, young people, seniors, representatives of NGOs, financial and educational institutions, and local and state government, as well as businesses. In Slovakia, financial education of children is an optional subject of school curricula. So far, it has been taught at 200 out of 6,000 schools. We train teachers in a functioning methodology on how to make financial literacy an attractive topic for their pupils.

Knowledge verified in practice

Our goal is to help families, children, and young people to be able to manage their money wisely. "BUS – Building Understanding and Skills" is a project supported by the Citi Foundation. In five years, it has had an effect on about 3,000 children, young people, teachers, and community workers in 100 communities in all regions of Slovakia. The BUS grant-making program has focused on supporting activities for children and young people from common but also from economically disadvantaged communities. In the last project year, we trained 117 young community workers in the social skills that are essential if people are to engage in proper communication with children, handle conflicts, and respect the child's personality. "The result of the BUS project at our school is that the children have comprehended the knowledge and skills to organize their afternoon meetings or creative weekends, from developing an idea and the budget, to implementing the entire project without teacher intervention," explains Antónia Matušková from the Elementary School in Kvačany.

The first project of community education

"Financial literacy of our clients has significantly improved in the last ten years. We can feel the presence of financial education in society," says Ing. Martina Rybáriková from Sberbank Slovakia, one of the participants of

the workshop on the importance of socio-financial education. This workshop is a part of the "School of Family Finance" project. It has been supported by Provident Financial for six years. It brings learning into the life of a community, which improves the understanding of basic financial products. From January 2014, seniors will participate in the project as well.

Evictions and distress in families due to debts are only a few examples proving the fact that society is still not prepared for the new era. Therefore, the natural way of learning in families must be systematically complemented by other types of education as well.

Preparation for life

Socio-financial education of children and young people is preparation for real life; therefore, it should be an inherent part of a modern education system. "Know your money" is a first e-learning socio-financial project carried out in high schools in Slovakia. With the support of the Slovenská sporiteľňa Foundation, we have been implementing it also in elementary schools. Since 2001, we have been educating teachers in an accredited program for continual education from the Ministry of Education entitled "Management of Personal Finance." The project culminates with a student conference. In September of this year we launched an improved e-learning application for schools, which reflects all our previous experience with teaching children in this field.



*Dana Rušinová
Administrator and
Executive Director of
Children of Slovakia
Foundation*



Social skills training for teachers