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Dr. Angel Kunchev determined the Scholarship Programme as one of the most successful and assured the participants that different options will be sought for its continuation and expansion. He urged the students not to forget their commitment to the Roma community and engage in the activities of Amalipe and other Roma organizations to change the community from within.

I will cooperate with all my efforts for the change of the system and the approval of your suggestions, assured Dr. Kunchev. On his turn Deyan Kolev praised the students that their proposals are aimed not only at Roma, but to improve the efficiency of the healthcare system as a whole, from which a wide range of Bulgarian citizens will benefit.

Greetings to the students were made by the Ambassador of the Republic of South Africa, Boyki Motlung who asked future doctors to spread all the good practices that they have acquired during their training. He encouraged them to fight



**Hristina Velcheva from Sofia, Public Health and Health Management specialty at MU Sofia:**

*"The Advocacy Training in healthcare in 2011 was quite dynamic. When I came to the summer camp, I received more insight into the problems which I will have to solve in the future. I learned that in every problem there are several responsible parties who need to find the most favorable outcome. The training helped me learn the tactics with which I can be useful, more restrained and patient. I think I still have a lot of efforts to put in the last two!"*



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# CENTER AMALIPE Roma Health Scholarship Program ADVOCACY TRAINING 2013



Over 80 participants attended the advocacy training in the field of Roma healthcare that took place near Veliko Tarnovo. Students of Medicine and medical specialties from all over the country took part in the event. Thus, for a fourth year we implemented the Programme for support of medical students and specializing doctors of Roma origin. It involved both freshmen and students who participated in the Programme for a second and a third year, which continued our difficult mission to help young Roma to believe in their abilities and fight for their dreams. Throughout the week of the training, students had a busy schedule for which most of them were not mentally prepared and they were surprised by the intensity and variety of the theoretical and practical activities. If on the first day of the vacation instead of relaxing on the beach, then in the next few days we showed them that they will not regret for a moment, on the contrary, at the end of the training all will be friends and they will not even want the training to finish. And so it was. Everyone exchanged their e-mails and Facebook contacts to continue their friendship and cooperation in the cities in which they study.



discrimination and intolerance.

The conference was part of the Advocacy Training - one of the modules of the Scholarship Programme for medical students and specializing doctors of Roma origin. During the one-week training organized by Amalipe Center, students pass theoretical courses and practical exercises on Roma history and culture, formation of leadership skills and conflict resolution, working with media, etc. Students participate in solving of different tasks. One of them is field work in different locations of Veliko Tarnovo, including participation in the implementation of community monitoring of health services. So they have the opportunity to see in person the problems of different Roma groups and those living in rural areas, especially in the field of healthcare.



**Lilyana Mitkova from Dinkata village, Pazardzhik District, Medical laboratory technician specialty at Yordanka Filaretova Medical College, Sofia:**

*"Thanks to the Advocacy Training I enriched my knowledge about Roma culture and traditions. I met a lot of young people of my ethnicity, with whom besides sharing common interests we work hard for the integration of the Roma community. I was motivated and this gave me the strength to continue to work for the commonweal. I hope that the Amalipe Programme does not stop to support Roma youth in realizing their dreams."*



**Deyan Kolev, Chairman of Amalipe Center:**

*"One of the biggest problems with the access to quality health services for Roma is the very small number of doctors, nurses and as a whole, Roma who work in the healthcare system. As a result, on the one hand, the community does not trust the system itself, not recognizing their own people therein, and on the other hand, this is one of the reasons about the many serious prejudices on the part of the employees in the system against Roma. In the first days of the training, the students are worried and unconfident in themselves, they do not believe that they will succeed. Many of them come from small towns and villages and go into the city where the university is, and they are afraid. This is one of the biggest obstacles to their realization. At the end of the training, they already have the confidence, they know what their abilities are, they have faith in themselves and this is something that is very important just like the outcomes of the training."*



**Teodora Krumova, Deputy Chairman of Center Amalipe:**

*"The scholarship Programme for Roma students in Medicine started 2 years ago, it is now the third year of the Programme, and it is financed by the Open Society Institute - Budapest (OSI) and the Roma Education Fund - Budapest (REF). Within one week before the beginning of the academic year, we gather students here, near Veliko Tarnovo, where we try to prepare them for what awaits them or what they will encounter at the university, i.e. our goal is to turn them into supporters of Roma healthcare."*

*Our task is to be able to keep these young people who have a great potential for Bulgaria, not only to keep them in Bulgaria after their graduation but also to motivate them enough to return back to work for the community. One of the biggest problems of the Roma intellectuals is that after they get a diploma and a good realization, the representatives of Roma intellectuals prefer to hide their ethnic origin.*

*This is a comprehensive Programme which is different and unique compared to all other scholarship Programmes because it has several main elements. One of the elements is the scholarship itself that Roma students in Medicine and medical specialties receive."*



**Momchil Baev, Coordinator of the Healthcare Programme at Center Amalipe:**

*"Usually at the initial call students are a little hesitant and unwilling to engage and they lack particular interest but I am happy to find out that when they come here, they understand that the training is really helpful to them and at the end of the one-week summer camp, as we also call it, they have enriched themselves a lot, they have learned many new things about themselves, about culture, about their friends, about other people of the groups within the Roma community."*

*they are based on evidence and that they must meet the needs of citizens, not only the needs of budget allocations. In this aspect, we deal with topics that affect healthcare in rural and isolated regions, since the closing of hospitals is not the way to improve access to quality healthcare.*

*We strongly support students to engage in extra-curricular activities which are not directly and necessarily related to their education at the university or their participation in the Programme, but we want them to work in their towns and villages or at least in those places where they study.*

*I want to emphasize that the work of health workers as a whole is often close to the work of social workers, and it is helpful that they are acquainted in details with the problems of each community and individual groups within the Roma community because when a doctor has a practice in a Roma neighborhood, they inevitably face the social problems of people."*

*A significant part of the topics that we include in the Programme are related to the healthcare problems and the challenges the healthcare reform is facing. As future physicians and health managers, these young people need to learn that health policy and reforms are made only if*

## Advocacy training in the field of Roma healthcare was held

The training was conducted in two main directions - theoretical and practical. Some of the topics were related to the history, life and culture of Roma, the reforms in the healthcare system and their impact on the ethnicity, conflict resolution, social and health intervention in the community, on the other hand the students also experienced practical work in several locations in Veliko Tarnovo District, where they were accompanied by community facilitators of Amalipe Center, working on healthcare and social programmes. Through their visit, the students had to learn about the access to health and education





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services in the relevant location, by meeting local people, doctors, teachers or mayors. Furthermore, the students participated in the assessment activities relating to the access to health services in the respective localities. The future physicians presented the results of their fieldwork on the next day - August 2 at the conference "We are not impersonal and we are not indifferent," which was held in the District Administration of Veliko Tarnovo.

Except the students, participants in the event were also other representatives of institutions and experts in the field of healthcare and Roma integration. The aim of the practical work and the conference was to encourage the young people to take an active thinking position to improve the health status of the Roma community, to show that young Roma physicians are not only facilitators between the community and the healthcare system but they are also a



**Angel Angelov from Devnya town, a university student of Rehabilitation at MU Varna:** *"Thank you for making us feel proud that we are Roma!!! Personally, I did not know that we have such a rich Roma history and traditions! I am very happy that I met so many young, intelligent and ambitious Roma who have dreams and goals in life! I will be very happy if you organize such meetings more frequently!"*

potential to strengthen the capacities in the healthcare system. At the end of the busy week, the students went to Kotel and Radnevo to try some more fieldwork in Roma communities. There they were accepted by our partners from the Health of Roma Foundation and the World without Borders Association. In Kotel, the future physicians participated in an initiative which looked like a makeshift clinic where students and young doctors from various disciplines examined the willing citizens

who flocked in front of the building. Everyone could check their blood pressure, take a HIV test, undergo a neurological examination and other medical activities. Since 2009, the Open Society Institute - Sofia in partnership with the Amalipe Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance and Intelday have been implementing a Programme for support Roma studying in medical universities and colleges (Roma Health Scholarship Program).



**Miroslav Angelov, Sofia, a university student of Medicine at MU Sofia:** *"The Advocacy Training is an event that I am looking forward to each summer, as a participant in the Scholarship Programme for support of medical students of Roma origin. Thanks to this training I learned many new things about Roma community, about their problems in details, and about the ways to solve them. I met many people with whom I believe we are yet to communicate much more. During the seminar I found my friends Aneliya Ilieva and Hristina Velcheva, for which I am extremely happy..."*

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фото:Д. Луканов

This is the first Programme in the country for support of higher education for physicians and nurses of Roma origin. It aims to contribute to the improvement of the delivery of healthcare services to disadvantaged members of the Roma community in Bulgaria and the elimination of discrimination in the healthcare system. Furthermore, it aims to provide dignified role models to motivate young Roma to pursue careers in the field of healthcare.

The idea is that through a specially designed Selection National Committee for the Programme, pre-selected candidates - medical students and specializing doctors - undergo a specialized training that will help them, through the provision of health services in areas with predominantly Roma population, work for their inclusion and involvement in the healthcare system.

**ROMA STUDENTS DISCUSSED THE PROBLEMS OF THE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM AT A CONFERENCE**

Over 80 people took part in a conference of Roma medical students which was held on August 2 at the District Administration in Veliko Tarnovo. The forum was organized for a second year by Amalipe Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance, under the title



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"We are not impersonal and we are not indifferent." The conference was attended by the deputy governors Andrey Iliev and Stefan Stefanov who welcomed the guests and praised the future doctors for their dedication. Except the students, participants in the event were also Dr. Angel Kunchev - Chief State Health Inspector of the Ministry of Health, the deputy governors Stefan Stefanov and Andrey Iliev, the Ambassador in charge of the Republic of South Africa - His Excellency Boyki Motlung, the president of the Regional Medical Association, Dr. Mariana Kirilova, municipal representatives and other experts in the field of healthcare and Roma integration.



фото:Д. Луканов

Without any hesitation, the medical students impressed the participants in the forum with their professionalism and innovative ideas. In the first panel of the discussion, they presented their proposals on four key healthcare system issues: career development of young professionals, expanding the scope of the health insured persons, the fate



of municipal hospitals, healthcare in rural areas and school healthcare as well as preventive healthcare. For each of the topics, they presented not only the facts about the current situation, but also particular suggestions for improvement.



фото:Д. Луканов



**Antoaneta Ivanova from Vladimirovo village, Boychinovtsi Municipality, Montana District, Nursing specialty at MU Sofia, Vratsa affiliate:**

*"For the few days' stay in Veliko Tarnovo and our meeting with Teodora and Deyan, I had very good impressions. We got acquainted with the history, customs, cultural values of Roma, the Roma health issues, rules and regulations,*

*training for appearance before the camera and others. By the interpretation of the traditions of Roma we did not feel that we were at training, we all dealt with our tasks without boredom. On the contrary, we were amazed. I was charmed by the professionalism of Teodora Krumova and Deyan Kolev who had organized everything so well that even the time for walks had training purposes. I think that at the end of the meeting every one of us left with good feelings and we are hoping to meet soon again!"*

For example, young doctors demanded medical insurance for pregnant women and mothers of up to 1 year, arguing for the interest of the child; increasing the number of specializations with keeping the exam nature of their initiation; reducing the compulsory period for health insurance status to 18 months; a funding system that encourages the preservation of municipal hospitals and opening of practices of general practitioners in rural areas; expanding the number of healthcare facilitators and of the Community Development Centers, etc.

During the second panel, the students presented their impressions of the fieldwork in four settlements which was implemented the day before. On August 1, the future doctors visited Gorna Oryahovitsa, Byala Cherkva, Ledenik and Stambolovo where they held healthcare discussions among the local Roma population and helped the facilitators of Community Development Centers with the implementation of surveys to assess the health services on local level. The young doctors presented their observations and suggestions for solving the problems in healthcare in these communities. They were the addition of local facilitators of Amalipe Center.

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