

Safer Internet for Children

For a Better Future for the Children

One of the priority areas of ARC Fund over the past year has been to improve the conditions for life and development of children in a safer and more supportive environment. Various activities to this end were supported by the Safer Internet Programme of the European Commission, the Swiss Oak Foundation and the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area.

As a coordinator of the Bulgarian Safer Internet Centre (a member of the European network of 30 centres called Insafe and of the International Association of Internet Hotlines entitled INHOPE), ARC Fund received and processed close to 2,000 reports of content and conduct on the Internet which was illegal and harmful for children. Most of these reports were either submitted to the State Agency for National Security for further investigation, or were passed along to partner hotlines in the other 42 member countries of INHOPE. Over 400 children, parents and teachers were consulted by the Bulgarian Helpline for online safety, which was operated by the partner of the Safer Internet Centre – the Parents Association. Consultations about problems related to the use of the Internet and mobile communications by children could be obtained from consultants by using the 124 123 telephone number of

the Bulgarian Helpline, or through Skype, online chat or email.

The protection of children online is exceptionally important, and prevention is crucial in achieving this. Over 80 teachers were trained during the year to apply various methods for teaching pupils how to improve their knowledge and skills in avoiding online risks. The methodology entitled *Prevention of Virtual and Real Violence by Interactive Education in Schools*, which was developed in partnership with the Parents Association, was applied in over 170 schools in 5 Bulgarian cities. Representatives of local commissions for combating juvenile delinquency, social workers, and other professionals working with children were also trained. Over 30 trainings for pupils at different schools all over the country were held.

ARC Fund developed a methodology and a manual for peer trainers entitled *Risky Behavior on the Internet and Human Trafficking* in partnership with Varna municipality. There were 40 young people from prevention clubs in schools in Varna who were trained to apply the methodology with their peers.

The Safer Internet Centre's activities culminated in a series of competitions, events and a campaign on the occasion



An exhibition of drawings by primary school children, dedicated to the themes of the Safer Internet Day, on display at the venue of the national event.



Young creative people presented their projects and ideas for making the Internet a safer and more useful place for children.

of the annual international Safer Internet Day on February 11. The event took place at the premises of the Representation of the European Commission and European Parliament in Bulgaria, with the active participation of nearly 100 students.

Engaging a parent and a child together in an online activity, and teaching young children how to creatively use technology, are among the best ways to prevent risky behavior online. In order to combine these two important factors, ARC Fund joined the international movement CoderDojo. These clubs foster an environment for teaching young children how to develop computer games. Visual and intuitive software, developed especially for children, was used at three workshops and were very successful. Additionally, participation was based on the condition that a child was accompanied by a parent, so that they could continue developing their game idea at home together.

In order to provide children and parents with an opportunity to be together on the Internet when they are not physically together, the online game Family Duels was developed with the help of partners from Kabinata.com. In the game, family teams, consisting of at least one parent and one child, have a limited time to correctly answer random questions from different fields of knowledge, including questions about the Internet and online safety. They can re-send each other the difficult questions, which connects them and gives them a chance to enrich their knowledge together.

The active involvement of fathers in all segments of children's lives plays

an important role in their growth and development. Teacher volunteers from seven primary schools in Sofia were involved in the development and piloting of different in-class and out-of-class activities with the participation of fathers. The main aim of these activities was to actively include fathers, or other men who are significant figures for children, in the school lives of the children. A year of work by this professional panel resulted in a methodological manual for teachers, which included examples of successfully tested activities for more active involvement of fathers in schools.

Apart from working directly with the target groups, ARC Fund actively participated in policy formation in the area of child care, child justice and education. The organisation was involved in the elaboration of *Report Card 2013* – an evaluation of how successful state institutions and administrations were in fulfilling their commitments to children, and improving their well-being and safety. The *Report Card 2013* was prepared by the National Network for Children – a coalition of 125 non-governmental organisations. ARC Fund's experts also participated in the development of the annual *Activity Plan of the State Agency for Child Protection*. At the end of 2014, an intention by the state was announced to pass a Law Amending and Supplementing the Penal Code. ARC Fund was actively involved in the preparation of the bill that would transpose Directive 2011/92/EU of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union on combating sexual abuse, the sexual exploitation of children, and child pornography.



Teaching children the first steps of programming attracted great interest both among children and their parents.