

## PROJECT IMPACT IN ROMANIA

### Scoala Gimnaziala Asau, Romania

#### 1. What impact do you think the project had on you and your organization?

- **At personal and staff level**

As a coordinator of the project and member of the project team, *Animal Integration in the Educational programme-ZORO project* had a great benefit and made an important contribution to my personal development as I had the opportunity to learn about new teaching methods and especially how to apply them practically. I can say the same thing about my colleagues, the other teachers from Asau School, Romania, (a number of 15 teachers) who got involved into the project and applied the method of AAI experimentally to their students especially those with special educational needs, intellectual disabilities and learning delays. The teachers from our school could learn from European specialists in AAI and teachers during transnational mobilities and training in Ireland but also during the workshops we had in our school and shared what they learned making an exchange of good practice.

- **At pupils level**

The benefits were also seen on the 30 students from the target group who interacted with animals during classes or other project activities (visits, trips), but to other students from school who participated to activities as volunteers. The teachers could observe important improvements both at academic level and at the level of behaviour and communication with teachers and peers. They became more open to learning new things, more interested in school subjects as the lessons were more relaxed and pleasant when working with animals in school. Moreover, this new method brought a refreshing breeze for school work as the students considered something unusual to have living animals in class with them and they liked it very much. Their self-esteem raised as they felt the tasks were more appropriate for them to fulfil and their level of understanding raised. They became more socially involved with the topics to be learned at different curricular areas (Languages, Maths, Reading skills, Sciences, Art, Home Economics, etc). The students' parents benefited indirectly from the project activities as their children did better in the school results even passing the year. The higher results can be observed in the school documents for the children who were involved in the project activities

- **At our school level**

Our school benefited from the project activities first by the improvements brought in the school programme at curricular level as far as a new and efficient method, that of Animal Assisted Interactions began to be used experimentally and the recorded results

showed progress for children in the target group. Secondly the school raised its visibility among other schools in the area which allowed creating bonds between teachers in our school and teachers from other schools and even from the School Inspectorate and other organizations and make exchange of good practice through disseminations and workshops.

## 2. Did you involve any other target groups that are not a part of your organization and what was the impact on these participants?

We involved different specialists working with animals such as the vet clinic ALUNVET Comanesti, the public shelter for homeless dogs from Moinesti, Bacau County, the Equestrian Sports Center Hemeiusi, the working dog Tyson (guardian dog) and his trainer. We concluded partnerships with these institutions and associations and on their basis we got assistance for our school activities within ZORO project.

We also attended the annual conference and event for associations working in AAT *The annual day of Human-Animal Interaction* on 25.02.2016 together with the students from the target group and we got into contact with specialists in AAT from Babes Bolyai University getting more information on the use of this form of therapy and animal interactions and about the locations of these organizations in Romania (unfortunately these organizations with licensed specialists in AAT are not very close to Asau area, the closest is at about 200 km away, which makes difficult for a therapist to come to our school).

The workshops for teachers were made by the psychologist prof. Gabriel Mares from University Vasile Alecsandri, Bacau, specialist in occupational therapy who performed activities with teachers in our school and some teachers from other schools invited to the workshops for getting familiar with benefits of animals on humans, designing sessions for students with animal assistance, improving children's skills by the use of animals in education.

During the multiplier event we had the opportunity to invite more people interested in the topic of Animal Assisted Interactions which showed their availability to work with our school in future activities involving animal assistance such as Sadies Stray Dog Rescue, a volunteer organisation from UK (which operates in Romania, too), teachers from High School "Jacques M Elias" from Sascut with veterinarian specialization, the local dog shelter from Comanesti.

We concluded partnerships with the School Inspectorate Bacau, The Center for Educational Ressources and Support Bacau, other schools from the area for volunteer activities and getting support and expertise but also for sharing our experience resulted from practical activities in school.

### **3. Did you in any way manage to transfer the impact of the project on the local, regional or international level?**

#### **At community level**

The local community as a whole had benefits from the project beginning with the improvement of learning which means long term effects, i.e. the children with poor school results got more opportunities for improving their school results, for a better personal development and consequently more opportunities to succeed as citizens of our locality.

We made two presentations of our project's aim, activities, training and mobilities during the English teacher's meeting from our region( meaning the localities on an area of about 60 km) where we discussed about new methods of teaching languages and reading skills to children with intellectual disabilities.

We presented the project with all its activities and funding to the members of the local council and to the Mayor of Asau Village in order to make them aware and get support for further activities after the end of the project and funding.

We also sent periodically reports to our School Inspectorate to the inspector in charge with Erasmus+ programme after each mobility and information about the intellectual output.

We shared the link of our intellectual output from ZORO Project facebook page to a facebook group for Animal Assisted Therapy with more than 600 members from Romania, where all therapist and people interested in this topic have the opportunity to share their work and make exchange of good practice.

We wrote articles about our experience within the project and published them to different symposiums for teachers in order to make exchange of good educational practice about implementing the new teaching method of Animal Assisted Interactions in education.