

## **Association for Gender Equality and Freedom, A.L.E.G., Sibiu, Romania The Gender Equality Festival**

**The Gender Equality Festival** is a yearly public awareness campaign addressing young people with the purpose of preventing gender-based violence. The campaign was created in 2004 by the Association for Gender Equality and Freedom, A.L.E.G., based in Sibiu, Romania, and funded by Peace Corps Romania.

A.L.E.G. has a young team and wanted to initiate original activities aimed at preventing gender-based violence and discrimination, by tackling patriarchal attitudes and the patterns of violence as learned behavior. We decided to address young people as the main target group, in order to help them eliminate prejudice from their lives and base their relationships on equality. With this campaign we hope to contribute to breaking the pattern of by which people repeat the behavior they are taught in the family and society when they are young.

The campaign was recognized as good practice by the Gender and Development Committee within Peace Corps Romania, and is being replicated in 4 other cities in Romania in 2005. At the same time, the process of developing the campaign and the results were presented in a case study in response to AWID's call for contributions in spring 2005. The contribution sent by Camelia Blaga, director of A.L.E.G., was selected as one of the 29 essays and case studies from different parts of the world to be presented at the AWID 10<sup>th</sup> International Forum.

The second edition of the Festival is taking place in Sibiu 14-17 October 2005 with the support of the local community. At the second edition, 80% of the activities are carried out by young people themselves.

### ***Narrative report***

**"The Media and Gender Stereotypes" seminar (December 8-9)**, hosted by the Faculty of Journalism brought together 30 journalism students and local journalists. Our goal was to address myths like victim blaming, and the use of demeaning images of women in the Romanian media. The first day of the seminar focused on helping journalists understand that violence against women is a worldwide public health issue and a violation of human rights. The day ended with a role-play in which journalists had to step in the shoes of those whom they usually interview to better understand the trauma and the mechanics of domestic violence. The second day, our guest-speaker Brândușa Armanca, editor director of a national newsgroup, gave a presentation on the dangers of stereotypical images of women and men.

**The Human Puzzle** was a street event meant to send out a message against violence and discrimination on a very special day: December 10<sup>th</sup>, International Human Rights Day. 30 volunteers from local high schools carried big letters and lined up every 15 minutes downtown Sibiu to spell out the following messages: **"I choose equality"**, **"I choose diversity"**, **"I choose a life without violence"** and **"I choose not to be a victim"**. Between messages, the 'human letters' wandered around disseminating information material on women's rights and gender issues.



**The Gender Surgery Show** was our idea of a gender educational event for teenagers. We wanted to help teenagers think outside the frames of harmful stereotypes and introduce the concept of gender equality (gender education is still unheard of in Romanian schools), but to do this without preaching to them. Since we believe young people learn better when they are having a good time we decided on a show, and the local Gong Theatre loved our idea and supported it. Together with 5 teenagers we prepared two parodies based on traditional fairy



tales which we turned around so that the woman is no longer the passive character waiting to be saved and the man is still a man - quite a more likeable one - even when he suffers defeat. The other part of the show was a team contest in which traditional boy and girl tasks and challenges were reversed. The girls nailed together some pretty nice birdhouses and the boys tried out their sewing skills while mending socks. The boys seemed to know quite a bit about cooking and baby care, and the girls proved to be quite knowledgeable in sports and cars. Everybody had a great time and saw that things don't fall apart when they are different than what the norm says they should be.



During the intermission we invited the public to an interactive exhibition called **"The Portrait of Your Thoughts"**. Over 50 girls and boys portrayed their beliefs and their wishes on the walls of the theatre hall. They all received a picture of themselves and their message. Friends gathered around under common logos and the time seemed too short for all they had to share. Our intention with this activity was on the one hand to give more visibility to girls' inner worlds, as girls in Romania are too often valued by their looks and not by who they really are. On the other hand, we wanted to encourage boys to express their feelings and find non-aggressive

ways to do it.

Our final Festival Brochure will include all their messages.

A.L.E.G. produced a TV and a radio public awareness advertisement for young people against domestic violence. They were broadcast during the campaign on the main local TV station at prime time and two radio stations.