



AITO and ASSOCIATION CHILDREN FIRST

AITO held a charity auction at their Conference in Dubrovnik in November 2004 and selected Association Children First as the Croatian charity to receive a portion of the monies raised.

Association Children First (ACF) was established in 1994. Recognising that the conflict in the Balkans would have a devastating effect on children, a small group got together to provide practical and emotional support to protect, maintain and promote a better quality of life in their own community.

ACF works in a poor community in Zagreb to improve the quality of life of children affected by poverty and social problems and also works to integrate minority children, largely from the gipsy community. They are an extremely small and local organisation with just 5 permanent staff and a number of volunteers and specialists. The majority of their work is in education and social work but has also included giving humanitarian aid such as help with food and healthcare to the poorest and most vulnerable members of the community.

AITO RT Committee member Fran Hughes of Explore met with the founder of Association Children First, Blanka Segovic, in London in June to get an update on the projects AITO have been supporting.

The first project AITO chose to fund was to help young school children with their schoolwork, working on improving their basic skills as well as their concentration and motivation. AITO's funds paid for a group of 24 children to receive two x two-hour sessions of coaching from January to June 2005. This included not only the basics of maths and reading etc but also social and communication skills. Very importantly, the programme recognises and nurtures the unique role parents have in the development of their children, encouraging them to take an interest in and put a value on the education of their children...and to be proud of them! The response from this group was terrific with all wanting to continue the course next year.

As the response to the appeal and auction was unprecedented we asked ACF to nominate a second project. ACF requested that we fund a counselling project working with single parents to minimise the impact on the children. AITO's funds gave 5 families undergoing divorce and 16 single parents a chance to receive support.

Small steps in a small community but ACF are making a real difference and giving real hope to families who have never had much to look forward to.

For more information see www.djeca-prva.hr