



The Sun Center is a non-profit organization that has been helping child victims of abuse, sexual abuse, and domestic violence for more than 18 years. We run several specialized counseling centers and safe houses for children and also adult victims of violence, while implementing several projects aimed at helping children and families in crisis. More info at www.centrumslniecko.sk Due to the post-communism heritage of Slovakia, the issue of violence perpetrated on children was considered taboo for a long time. Because of societal pressure in the wake of several tragic cases of child abuse, the issue has been finally brought to light in the past 10 years. Despite this public outcry, our country still lacks an effective system that would ensure the protection of children and adult victims of violence, as well as preventive measures that would lower the risk of such incidents. These are the areas that we try to address through the educational and preventive center EDUCAN - aimed at preventing violence, providing training in identifying children that are exposed to violence, and also providing intervention for battered and sexually abused children in the context of a multi-disciplinary cooperative approach, in order to prevent secondary victimization.

The main goal of the EDUCAN Center is to help eliminate serious socially pathological issues, such as domestic violence, sexual abuse and parental neglect. In 2017, we did so mainly by:

1/ implementing a training module for social workers, teachers and police investigators called **"Bruises on the soul I"** that aims to provide these professionals with examples of good and bad praxis in the approach of individual actors that come into contact with a sexually abused child during the course of an investigation. A methodological movie that realistically portrayed how these professionals can traumatize and victimize a child victim of sexual abuse simply through their attitude was an integral part of this training module. In the beginning of the movie we are introduced to a girl that confides in her teacher that her father is sexually abusing her. The meeting with the teacher during the first sequence of the movie shows how the teacher shakes her head in disbelief, tries to persuade the girl that she must have gotten it all wrong and argues that her father drives her to school everyday, supports the school, and that such a person would surely not be able to hurt her. Every sequence of the movie contains bits of the internal monologue of the girl, which are inaudible to the actors, but can be heard by the audience and provide an invaluable opportunity for the professionals to - sometimes for the first time, hear and understand the reasoning of the child in such circumstances, but most of all, understand how a child might feel when nobody believes it, when its story is doubted and when it is left alone in dealing with the problem. If the child musters up the courage to confide in someone about sexual abuse, the first person that it confides in becomes very important. If this person reacts appropriately and the child discovers that it is not the one that should feel guilty (self-blaming is often an accompanying sign of sexual abuse) it can slowly and with the help of professional support come to terms with what has happened. If the adult reacts with distrust or blames the child, the child is left alone in its pain and its problems, as it continues to live its life in a cycle of abuse. The second sequence of the movie begins with the rewinding of the bad example back to the beginning and the story begins anew, now with an appropriate attitude of the teacher. She believes the testimonial of the child straight from the beginning, she praises the child and also explains what she has to do to protect it. She does not promise something that she knows she can not keep and she guides the child through the whole process. The story continues in the same vein when dealing with the social worker, who at first victimizes the child by asking inappropriate questions, doubts the child, does not understand its concerns, blames it that it made the whole story up. The story again rewinds back to the first encounter with the social worker, but this time, the social worker shows interest in how the child feels, clearly explains the process that is going to take place and answers the questions that the



child might have, asks the child about its opinion and respects it, and also assures the child that she believes her. The last part of the movie begins on the premises of the police station in the interrogation room. The child is alone when we see her for the first time, but soon a barrage of people (lawyer, social worker, psychologist, investigator, cameraman) enter the room and overwhelm the child. The child is supposed to retell its intimate personal story in front of all these people. In this part, the commentary mentions the inadequacy of the premises where the interrogation takes place, which is often really the case when it comes to child witness testimonials. The commentary also mentions how the child feels in premises like the ones shown and in front of all the strangers. It also mentions the lack of specialized premises for child witness testimonials and a lack of trained investigators who specialize in interrogating children. It is very important for the child to be in a comfortable space, to know who are the people that are present behind a one way mirror during its testimonial and to know that it can refuse to testify. The second part of the film shows us the correct process of obtaining a testimony, the interrogation is done in a child-friendly room with a one-way mirror, the investigator introduces herself and also the people behind the mirror who are legally required to be present, she praises the child for deciding to give its statement. She gives the child enough time to think about her answers and also makes sure that the child understood the information provided. She asks the child open questions and asks them in a manner that is age appropriate. All this helps the child feel more comfortable and open about its experience.

2/ implementing a preventive module called: „ **The Adventures of Kozmo**“

In Slovakia, as well as in other countries, children experience long-term violence in all its forms. Violence against children is especially serious, because children do not know how to protect themselves. But adults are not the only perpetrators of violence against children. Children can also harm each other. They observe the behavior of adults, especially of those who they consider a natural role model, they mimic their behavior and learn social norms through them. „The Adventures of Kozmo“ preventive module deals with the issue of violence amongst children. The preventive module is intended mainly for teachers, caregivers, preventive workers, psychologists, social workers and other professionals working with children. Behaviors like taunting, shoving, and arguing between children is often seen as innocent and normal. We tend to think that problematic behavior magically starts only once puberty has set in, but the fact is that according to recent research aggressive behavior is more common among younger children (Hanish et al., 2012). Experts warn us that child aggression has serious negative consequences that often result in psychological problems later in life, problems with social adaptation, behavioral problems and the perpetration of violence in adolescence and later. Childhood behavior predetermines adult behavior to a certain degree. Research findings show that pre-school children that displayed aggressive tendencies were more likely to display deviant and difficult behavior also in school (Campbell et al. 1996).

The central message of the KOZMO preventive module is to sensitize children to the idea of respecting the rights of every child and also to the issue of violent and negative behavior. „The Adventures of Kozmo“ shows story of Kozmo, an astronaut travelling through an alien galaxy, where he becomes a witness to many aggressive and violent behaviors that are common among children. Kozmo explains his views in short clips and tries to persuade the aliens to try to get along. An important part of this module is talking with pre-school and elementary school aged children from 4 to 8 years old about alternative options of resolving the situations that Kozmo encountered. Since children are naturally more solution oriented than problem oriented, they tend to come up with a lot of different resolutions to the conflicts that were observed. "The Adventures of Kozmo"



was also published last year and it came out with a manual for parents on how and when to find time to talk to children about violence between children. The main protagonist, Kozmo, is very well known among school children and he became a sort of a symbol of the whole campaign. You can learn more about Kozmo and his adventures here:

<https://www.facebook.com/KozmoveDobrodruzstva/videos/852614418253038/>

The implementation of the module is supported by The Velux Foundation and The Ministry of Justice of Slovakia. The senior officials of these institutions agreed to become the godfather and godmother of the newly published book. Pre-school institutions and elementary schools have shown great interest in the module. During 2017, more than 1000 children took part in the module.

In the coming months, we plan to train 20 trainers, lecturers and pre-school teachers, who can help Kozmo spread his message and raise "good Earthlings". We also plan to translate the Kozmo book and manual for parents into English..