



## **Macedonia Schools Project Newsletter**

**September, 2024**

Welcome to the sixth issue of the Macedonia Schools Project (MSP) Newsletter. In May of this year, our president, Blazo Mitasev, visited schools and talked with teachers who have received MSP Grants. In addition, he visited a maternity hospital in Bitola. It proved to be a heart-warming experience as he learned how impactful the MSP Grants have been and how grateful teachers are to participate in the MSP program.

### **CONTENTS:**

1. MyTrip to Macedonia in May, 2024, by Blazo Mitasev
2. Meet Liljana Vasilevska, MSP Liaison Teacher in Bitola
3. Meet Lejla Limanova, a Macedonian Teacher in Podares
4. Meet Aleksandar Temelkovski, Macedonian Music Teacher
5. The Bratsvo Edinstovo Multiethnic School Choir Trip to Albania
6. Board Member Vasja Jordanova's Story
7. Donations and Membership

## MY TRIP TO MACEDONIA IN MAY, 2024

By Blazo Mitasev, President of the Macedonia Schools Project

The month of May started with a visit to the Dr. Trifun Paunovski Clinical Hospital in Bitola. The Macedonia Schools Project (MSP) joined Hand Till Hand, a Swedish non-governmental organization, in funding the remodeling of the restrooms and showers, including installation of a heat pump-based hot water system for the Department of Obstetrics and Neonatology. Together with Maria and Thomas Rosengren (Hand Till Hand principals), and Liljana Vasilevska, an MSP liaison at the Gorgi Sugarev Elementary School, we joined town mayor Tony Konjanovski in touring and viewing all the upgrades, along with local leadership Dr. Nikolina Ristevska and hospital chief Dr. Elizabeta Chipurovska.

This project has already proven to be of major impact for the local population, by supplying hot water and proper sanitary facilities for the maternity patients. Since the remodel and upgrades, this maternity ward has been filled with patients, including the mayor's daughter-in-law. Before the remodel, the maternity unit was in decay, and most patients went to private hospitals.

Sincere and enormous gratitude was given to both organizations by the hospital staff and the Bitola mayor for the financial help and all the hard work Maria and Thomas had invested. I left the hospital filled with pride and satisfaction that MSP contributed to this project's success.



Thomas Liljana Maria Blazo

May ended with a road trip from Stip to Struga, with stops in Prilep and Bitola. In Prilep I met with Ilija Risteski, our liaison to the Dobre Jovanovski Elementary School, a 2024 pilot project. We spent quality time going over the MSP rules of operation and learning about each other. Ilija is a young and enthusiastic teacher, an activist for organizing the youth toward a better Macedonia. I am excited to have another school in the MSP program, and a young, hardworking liaison that can help us in developing a solid long-term relationship with his school.



Blazo and Ilija

Next was a stop in Bitola and a visit to the Kole Kaninski Elementary School. I was greeted by our liaison, Mare Stojmenovska Micevska, and Director, Dijana Hristovska. This is a second pilot project for MSP in 2024, a school which is in desperate need of upgraded benches and chairs for the extended day classroom. The warm reception by Mare and Dijana and our ability to help them immediately filled me with personal satisfaction and happiness that MSP is continuing to grow the number of institutions benefiting from the generosity of our donors.



Mare

Dijana

The culmination of the trip was attending the 60th anniversary of the Josip Broz Tito Elementary School in Struga. It was a rich, entertaining program with participation from all grades from Struga and the satellite schools in Radozda, Mislesevo and Vranista. Director Dejana Chakareska expressed special gratitude to MSP for 16 years of material and financial support, enabling children of all socioeconomic backgrounds to have access to the latest technology and learning. This was possible

with the tireless work and dedication by our liaison, Margarita Ruvinova Niceska, who has always been willing to help MSP and all the schools under the Josip Broz Tito umbrella. MSP has been blessed with very special people, like Margarita, who volunteer and contribute from their heart, wanting to make a difference. This positive outlook and quest also fills my heart with joy and pride, and enormous hope that we and future generations will continue the charter of MSP, helping students and teachers in Macedonia.



Director Dejana Chakareska announcing special recognition and gratitude to MSP



Margarita and Blazo

On this trip, I experienced sincere, heart-warming time spent with our new pilot schools' liaisons and recipients of the MSP grants at Bitola Hospital, Kole Kaninski Elementary School, and Josip Broz Tito Elementary School. The trip provided positive feedback and appreciation to all of us willing to help the children and teachers in Macedonia. I want to thank all our donors for their generosity and all the volunteers in Macedonia and the USA for making a difference and achieving a positive impact!

#### **MEET LILJANA VASILEVSKA, MSP LIAISON TEACHER IN BITOLA**

My name is Liljana Vasilevska, and I'm a math teacher at Gorgi Sugarev Primary School in Bitola. I have participated in numerous conferences and workshops that contributed to my professional development as a teacher. In recent years, I have been actively involved in the field of inclusion and diversity in and out of classrooms. For the last three years I have been a coordinator of the Macedonia Schools Project (MSP). My first contact with this organization happened in 2021. With the help of a mutual friend from abroad, I got in touch with MSP Board Member Vasja Jordanova. She was willing to help us, and that is how we have become part of this journey.

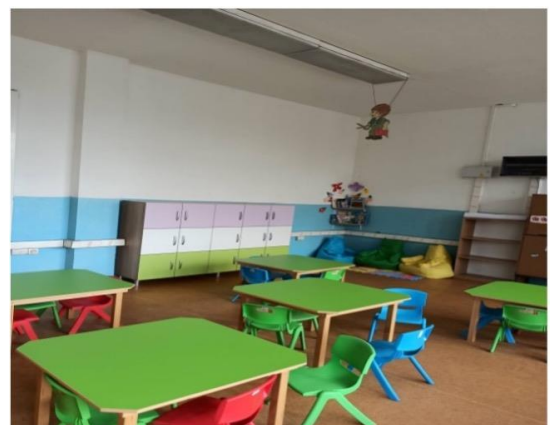


Gorgi Sugarev Primary School was established in 1973, and it is located in the center of Bitola. As far as the composition of the students is concerned, we can report that the number of Roma students has considerably increased during the past twenty years. As of 2024, there are about 620 students of which 90% are Roma and 10% are Macedonian. This is due to the school's location, close to Roma settlements or neighborhood. So, at the moment our school is a home for students with multi-ethnic backgrounds. It is important to mention that there are classes for children with special needs in the school, taught by teachers who are specialized to work with them.

The condition of the school facilities are not at a desirable level, but every year we are improving them by doing different projects. That is the reason why the MSP financial support has been warmly welcomed by teachers, students and parents.



With the first MSP grant, we were able to use the equipment (bought by this grant) in many of the STEM subjects (mathematics, biology, physics, and chemistry). All the teachers were excited to see the students' happy and curious faces when they worked on the activities using the equipment. Students were thankful for the opportunity to apply various teaching aids that increase their learning and help to achieve their objectives.



In addition, we were all grateful for another big MSP grant, three air conditioning units. The units were installed in the three cabinets on the top floor of the school. The use of the air conditioning units was a most anticipated event in our school.

The next MSP grant had a great impact on the first graders (six and seven-year-old students). Two of their classrooms had not been renovated for more than 40 years. As a result of MSP's generous grant, they now have a completely different look. Both of them were fully equipped (desks, chairs, closets), with space for relaxation, especially for students who have a short attention span and developmental difficulties. Today, students are required to spend more hours in the classroom.



Thanks to MSP grants, we made their five-hour stay at school more enjoyable and interesting. You can tell this by looking at their happy faces. When the classrooms were ready, we were honored with a visit from an MSP team, including the president, Blazo Mitasev and Tom Lineham, founding president of MSP.



Blazo Mitasev      Alice Mitasev Liljana Vasilevska      Tom Lineham

Finally we would like to express our great gratitude for this year's grants. The interactive board and smart TVs will create an immersive learning experience, aiding students in better comprehending complex concepts through visual and interactive methods. By addressing the digital divide in our classrooms, this project will ensure that all students, regardless of their socio-economic background, have equal access to digital learning materials.

We all know how important classroom conditions are for the proper physical and mental development of the students, so we want to express our deep gratitude to Macedonia Schools Project for being part of our organization and helping us create positive changes. It gives me great honor, pride and pleasure to be part of the MSP, contributing to the achievement of improvements in our school and teaching..



### **MEET LEJLA LIMANOVA, A MACEDONIAN TEACHER IN PODARES**

My name is Lejla Limanova, and I am a teacher at Kosta Racin Elementary School. Our central school is located in the village of Podares, which is near the town of Radovis in the south eastern part of Macedonia. We also have a satellite school located in the smaller neighboring village of Jargulica. Students in Jargulica attend a 5-year elementary school program, after which they proceed to the second educational stage of elementary school, spanning from year 6 to year 9 at the central school in Podares. We have a total of 160 students, 17 classrooms, and 30 teachers and other members of staff.

The teaching staff at our school has had the opportunity to attend various courses and take part in many projects. This has enabled our teachers to learn and apply new teaching methods and technologies in their everyday teaching. Continually improving one's skills and knowledge takes time and effort, but it also requires having the right teaching tools. One of these tools is using technology in teaching, which was something we were lacking. In 2021, we were fortunate to learn about MSP for its charity work. So far, we have submitted three project proposals to MSP, all of which were about integrating technology into teaching.

In 2021, we wrote a project proposal and applied to MSP for two laptop computers. Thanks to their generous 2021 donation, we have improved the learning experience of our students from grade 5 to grade 9, totaling around 100 students, as well as the teaching experience of our IT teacher. The computers were used in their classes in the IT lab.

In 2022, we wrote a project proposal and applied to MSP for five more laptop computers, which made it possible for us to have a fully equipped computer room, including the two laptops from the previous donation. The computer room is used not only in IT classes but also in all other classes by teachers who wish to integrate ICT (Information CommunicationsTechnology) into their teaching. It is also beneficial for additional classes conducted at the end of the school day. Now, students can improve their basic computer skills as well as learn programming or coding. This is particularly important because only a small number of our students have a laptop/desktop computer at home, so most of them don't have the opportunity to use a computer.

In 2023, we wrote two project proposals, and the one that was accepted was for a 75-inch interactive board, which has brought numerous benefits to our classrooms. The interactive board enables teachers to build lessons that include videos, images, text, recordings of their explanations, etc. Classes created with an interactive board are more attractive and engaging to students, thereby improving the learning and teaching processes. It has positively affected both the students and the teachers, enhancing and enriching teaching and learning processes in our school.

In September 2023, we were honored to welcome Blazo Mitasev, the president of MSP, and Tom Lineham, the founder of MSP, to our school. We were pleased to spend some time with them, show them around the school, discuss with them and thank them for all of their kind donations that have had a significant impact on our students and have improved the learning environment.

Overall, MSP has greatly contributed to the digitalization of education in our school. We would like to express our sincere gratitude for all your support and generosity and for taking the time to consider our proposals. Also, we are very thankful for everything you have done for schools in Macedonia. We truly appreciate your commitment to improving the educational process in our country.





## **MEET ALEKSANDAR TEMELKOVSKI, MACEDONIAN MUSIC TEACHER**

**By Aleksandar Temelkovski**

I am Aleksandar Temelkovski, and I would like to briefly share with you a story and experience about the great deeds of the Macedonia Schools Project (MSP). Since 2016, I have been a music teacher at the Aleksandar Makedonski Elementary School. The school is new, but unfortunately, the music classroom had no equipment for conducting lessons. For the first five years, I taught using my small Bluetooth speaker, which was not loud enough. Choir lessons were difficult without instrumental support, and we had no orchestra as we did not have a single musical instrument. There was no funding from the state to equip the classroom.

I learned about MSP through Ljudmil Jordanov, brother of MSP Board member, Vasja Jordanova, to whom I am endlessly grateful. They facilitated an interview with the president, Tom Lineham, who encouraged me to apply for the first project. From that project, we received funding of \$1,000, which we used to purchase an electric piano, a large speaker with two microphones, and a printer. With that grant, the quality of music lessons drastically improved. In every lesson, students could listen to various musical works according to the program, students sang accompanied by the piano, interest in choir singing increased, and for the first time, we had instrumentalists – pianists. Our school events are now sound-enhanced with the speaker.

In the second year, during an online meeting, I met the wonderful people from the board of the Macedonia School Project and their members in Macedonia. Everyone shared experiences and praises for MSP's help and their successful mission. In the second year, we received a grant of \$2,500, with which we acquired guitars, a bass guitar, percussion instruments, melodicas, xylophones, and additional musical equipment. This made a significant change in the music classroom. There was great student interest in playing instruments, high interest in choir singing, and enormous productivity in music lessons. We started winning first places in music competitions.

With the third grant of \$2,500, we purchased an electric guitar with an amplifier, new guitars, percussion instruments, microphones, studio equipment, music stands, cables and accessories, microphone stands, and a large printer-copier-scanner for the teachers. We had the special honor and pleasure to present this donation during a visit from the president Blazo Mitasev and his wife, Tom Lineham, Vasja Jordanova, and Ljudmil Jordanov.

I can now say that the music classroom is fully equipped. The interest of students is overwhelming. This year we had 45 choir members and more than 20 instrumentalists from grades 3 to 9. We won many first places, and I am immensely pleased that many students continued on to high school music education.



We started from zero, and now we are complete. MSP has brought us joy, the discovery of musical talents, opportunities for work, progress, and fulfillment. MSP provided all the conditions for work and achieving the goal, making music education one of the most beloved subjects among students, a class where everyone learns new skills and leaves happy. This is why I was chosen as "Teacher of the Year" in 2024.

I am deeply grateful for everything MSP has done for us and for everything MSP does for education in Macedonia. MSP's contribution is immense and of great significance, and I hope that in the future, MSP will grow larger and and continue its highly successful mission.



## **BRATSVO EDINSTOVO MULTIETHNIC SCHOOL CHOIR TRIP TO ALBANIA**

**By Emilija Paunkoska, A Macedonian Teacher and MSP Board Member**

This year, the Macedonia Schools Project (MSP) provided funds for a special request. The Bratsvo Edinstvo school in Ohrid asked for support of its Multiethnic Children's Choir. This Choir was first formed in 2006 by the music teacher and choral director, Burim Hidri. The Choir was invited to represent Macedonia, participating in the Cherries Festival in Tirana, Albania, joining children choirs from neighboring countries. MSP provided funds for travel and accommodations for 30 children, two adults, and the bus driver.



Bratstvo Edinstvo translated into English means Brotherhood and Unity. The name of this choir paints the unique picture of the reality hidden behind the name. The choir members belong to different ethnicities: Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish and Egyptian, which makes it the only multiethnic primary school choir in Macedonia.

The choir has a rich repertoire of compositions sung in eight different languages, and it is our school's pride and joy. In 2013, it started taking part in regional and state competitions. Since then, the choir has received five First Prizes, three Second Prizes, and one Third Prize in the Choir State Competitions, and this year the choir won the Gran Prix Prize with 99 points. In 2021 and 2022, the Multiethnic Choir won Gold and Silver medals in The International Choir Competition Melodianum in Kikinda, Serbia, which, because of the pandemic, was held online.

The choir members, who regularly practice during the school years two to three times a week, are between the ages of 10 and 14. They leave the choir once they finish primary school, and every year is a new challenge for the choir. As a reward for their hard work and persistence, this year, with support from the Macedonian Schools Project, the Bratstvo Edinstvo Choir took part in the Cherries Festival in Tirana, Albania, and celebrated Children's Day on June 1, 2024, along with choirs from four different countries. At the end of the day, members from all the choirs joined together to sing "We Are the World," sending a message that said children are the future of the world, and we should live in peace and harmony.



Singing "We Are the World"

The Bratsvo Edinstvo singers were very excited because some of them were traveling abroad for the first time without their parents, and at the same time they had the responsibility to represent their country, Macedonia, in front of an Albanian audience and representatives from all the countries that took part in the festival. Some of the students had previously gone to Tirana, and they were their friends' guides during the walks around town. The best part was that the Albanian students were translating for their Macedonian and Turkish friends whenever necessary. It was a time of cheer and happiness for all of them. Sharing rooms and having meals and going sightseeing together was a once-in-a-lifetime experience for them, since they hardly see each other outside choir practice. They study in different shifts, different buildings, and in different languages. This time it was different. They did the singing part perfectly, and Maestro Burim,



together with three of his students, was even invited to appear on Albanian National TV to talk about his choir and their performances. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zRYsfaWYaC4> ).

Meeting new friends from Albania, seeing new places, and representing Macedonia by singing abroad were unforgettable experiences during their visit of Tirana. This was only a one-night trip, but it is something that all of the students will remember forever. Our thanks to the Macedonia School Project for helping to make this happen.



### **BOARD MEMBER VASJA JORDANOVA'S STORY**

I was born in Bitola in 1964, shortly after the devastating earthquake in Skopje. My family had to temporarily move to Bitola where my mom, a pediatrician, found a job in the local hospital. My dad, as a civil engineer, had to stay in Skopje to help rebuild the city.



My Family in Bitola, circa 1964

After my family from both sides lost everything following the end of World War II, as part of the bourgeoisie my parents decided to create memories instead of material wealth. Throughout my childhood, adolescence and growing up, I was inspired by all the travels we did together, exploring new horizons, meeting people, and trying different cuisines around Europe.

I graduated college as a young civil engineer, but it was very challenging to find a job in Macedonia if you or your family weren't part of the Communist party. I decided to explore different ways to build my future.

When the opportunity appeared in the early 90s, I came to continue my graduate studies at Boston University, Boston. Moving to Boston was a culture shock, but moving to Portland after that was a different level. I missed home and wanted to find a familiar environment, and this led me to Podkrepa, a Bulgarian-Macedonian Association established 1939, which eventually led me to Tom Lineham and MSP. I still reside in Portland after 30 years and have been working at Intel as a layout designer engineer in different departments for over 28 years. Currently, I work in the advanced design department where we develop new technologies.

Raised in an environment where education and intellectual success was prioritized, I was immediately connected to MSP. I was thrilled to find an organization that shared my values and my vision. I am happy to help less fortunate kids reach their goals via good education. I have been trying to connect with our liaisons and encourage them to create clubs where kids can develop creative interests outside of the school curriculum. I feel that is very important to help kids discover and develop their passions.

Through MSP I can give back to the society that shaped me into who am I today, in addition to my family, which gave me a free high-quality education that opened doors for the life I am enjoying today.



Boris Agapiey, Vasya Jordanova, Sasha Agapiey

Please become a member of the Macedonia Schools Project by making a donation to help the youth of North Macedonia. Your tax-deductible contribution will enhance the growth and impact of our program. Check out our website, send us an email, or join us on social media for more information.

Website: <https://msp.charity/index.php/donations>

Email: [macedoniaschoolsproject@gmail.com](mailto:macedoniaschoolsproject@gmail.com)

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/macedonia-schools-project/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/macedonia.schoolsproject/>

