

Macedonia Schools Project Newsletter December 2023

Welcome to the third issue of the Macedonia Schools Project (MSP) Newsletter. Our current president (Blazo Mitasev) and our founding president (Tom Lineham) were visiting schools this past October in Macedonia. They saw firsthand the impact MSP grant funds were having on students and teachers. We are happy to share their experience with the readers of this issue of our Newsletter.

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Macedonia Schools Project Board Members Visit to Partner Schools by Blazo Mitasev & Tom Lineham

In September, the new MSP President, Blazo Mitasev, our Founding President, Tom Lineham, and MSP Board members, Stojan Kocev and Vasja Jordanova, embarked on an informative mission visiting all current MSP partner schools. Over the week of September 18, we met the MSP school liaisons, directors, and many of the schools’ staff to better learn the challenges each school faces. It was truly a rewarding experience. Our school visits took us on a unique journey across the Republic of North Macedonia. We visited schools in Skopje, Stip, Lakavica, Podaresh, Prilep, Bitola, Leskoec, Ohrid and Struga. The school sizes ranged from a small village school of only 11 students to one school with over 1,400 students.



Music teacher & MSP school liaison, Aleksandar Temelkovski, MSP President, Blazo Mitasev, MSP Board member, Vasja Jordanova, School Director Maja Buklevska and Board member Tom Lineham.

Several schools have diverse student populations including Roma, Turkish, Albanian as well as Macedonian.



Some of Highlights Included:

- Two schools greeted us with exuberant student choirs.
- In a satellite school in the small village of Lakavica, we received many thanks for providing much needed heating equipment when the school's original heating system went down.
- Every school represented a unique personality based on the community and local traditions. We never knew what to expect as we entered the front door.
- All welcomed MSP interest in their schools. Even the MSP's relatively small donations mean a lot to them.



Vanco Nikoleski School, Leskoec: School Director Sasho Kimoski and MSP President Blazo Mitasev discussing gazebo project.

- We observed workmen building a learning gazebo funded by MSP at Vanco Nikoleski school in Leskoec.

- We appreciated the marvelous beauty Macedonia offers travelers, and the generosity of our hosts

Some of the Common Issues Schools Face:

- Special education. Most schools need more space and supplies to accommodate a growing special education student population and related governmental requirements.

- Projector-based smart boards are failing at a very high rate and need much more maintenance. In 3 of the schools, they are being phased out as they fail. Computer-based interactive smart board showed enthusiastic usage by all students; the interface is like an iPad or smart phone.
- In all cases, schools lack books for certain subjects. Books were promised to be delivered in October.
- Like elsewhere, North Macedonia schools suffered from the impact of the Covid pandemic. Teachers and students are now called upon to make up for the lost time.
- Funding for elementary schools is ~18% less than for middle schools. Most of the schools are dependent on donations, such as the ones from MSP, because funding from the educational ministry is limited to the basic needs.
- Most of the schools are losing population, mainly due to strong migration out of Macedonia.
- The MSP has selected very strong, dedicated school liaisons, who demonstrate a strong passion for their work and schools.
- MSP has made significant impact contributions over the years and is recognized and appreciated. In the Leskoec School all items donated by MSP were labeled.
- We were invited back for future visits in all schools.



MSP President Blazo Mitasev, and Tom Lineham talking with school's IT teacher Goran Matesk, far left, and Director Sasho Kimoski, far right.

- The word is spreading. There are other schools reaching out for help.

In conclusion, our delegation was impressed by the high level and passion exhibited by the school directors and staff. Despite the challenges, the Macedonian schools are dedicated to providing the highest quality of education each can provide. Even though resources are often limited, the teachers have learned to be innovative and creative in the use of the MSP donations.

Visiting Teacher: My Experience with the Macedonia Schools Project by Ted Speroff, MSP Board Member

Ohrid, North Macedonia, July 2016. Vesna Terzioska greeted my wife Colleen and me, oriented us to Ohrid, and helped us settle into a local bed and breakfast style apartment run by my MSP



hosting family whose English was limited but more fluent than my Macedonian. Over the next days, our hosts served us with morning and afternoon greetings, phrases of Macedonian, outdoor courtyard breakfast, and casual talk. They learned a bit more English and about my family, and we learned

about their love of dance and tradition.

On Monday day one, fourteen high school students gathered in Emilija Paunkoska's classroom at the Bratstvo Edinstvo School. After breakfast, I walked to school with material in hand for the start of a two-week curriculum. I had already decided to leverage and rely on my everyday work knowledge and skills. Neither I nor the students knew what to anticipate nor expect. But I knew I arrived prepared.

I designed a practicum where the teens would complete a personal quality-improvement project. The curriculum would teach step-by-step methods for identifying an area for personal improvement, exploring the factors contributing to and the variables influencing current baseline behavior, testing strategies for improvement, designing and choosing measures of process and outcomes, using statistical tools for evaluation and displaying feedback of progress, and a grand finale of organizing and giving an oral presentation with PowerPoint slides of their completed projects to the class. In brief, my course was a fundamental experiential learning of the science of quality improvement that is applied across various industries, schools, institutions, and my area of interest – academics and health care services. I was uncertain on how receptive the students would be.

Allowing the teens to choose a project important to themselves engaged them in conversation with me and with each other, mostly in English of course. At each step, the students reported to the class their plans and documented their work on the computer to build their projects for final presentation. The apprehensions were gone. The course was a success for the teens and for me, and I gained a bit of insight into teen life in Ohrid, Macedonia. The students revealed that Macedonian life is about relationships. The students were optimistic toward their future, kind and helpful to each other, and courteous and respectful to teachers and adults. The teens revealed loyalty in their responsibilities toward helping their parents, siblings, and grandparents. At the end of two weeks, on the final day, we had a pizza party. I spoke of my Prespa Macedonian heritage, and we danced to celebrate the award of their Certificate of Completion.



Evenings and weekends allowed time to immerse in UNESCO World Heritage Ohrid and converse with its people. Macedonian time unravels leisurely amidst traditional evening walks, meals, and music. We visited historical sites, the market, lakeside restaurants, and old town shops. We mingled among the crowd and paths of modern-day Macedonia and sought the old

paths of traditional Macedonia and customs. We spent hours, for example, with a leather works artisan talking about his craft, family history, and hopes for the future. We went swimming in Lake Ohrid and drove to cultural sites with Emilija and her friends. We had dinner with Emilija's family where we were engaged in a lesson in making zelnick. Vesna took us to



nearby Struga where bobbing watermelons refrigerate in the aqueducts and to local wineries at quaint historical churches.

The Macedonia Schools Project Visiting Teaching Program seeks volunteers who are looking not only to contribute through on-site teaching but also for an experience to immerse themselves in Macedonian culture. This rendering is my adventure. It could also be yours.

Volunteer Teacher Contact Information: Email- makschools@yahoo.com
Phone- 360-977-2237



Meet Hristijan Zafirovski, MSP Board Member

As I sit in a colorful café in the Ohrid old town, I am starting my time travelling – helped by the powers given to me by sipping premium Turkish coffee. My journey takes me in 2008, to a warm summer morning in Ohrid. I was engrossed in a game of basketball on an improvised hoop when I noticed an intriguing figure approaching my front yard. Fueled by curiosity, I extended a friendly greeting, and thus commenced a fascinating conversation. The man before me, Tom Lineham, patiently engaged with my imperfectly spoken English. Little did I know then that this chance encounter would mark my venture into studying foreign languages and personal development through education.

Over the years, Tom's visits to Ohrid opened a window into the remarkable work of the Macedonia Schools Project (MSP). I was impressed by the organization's relentless efforts to provide essential school equipment to underfunded schools. Inspired by MSP's noble mission, I took the plunge and co-founded a non-profit organization in 2016, dedicated to human rights education and community activism training. Our endeavors, propelled by successful programs and a cost-effective model, earned us recognition from the Clinton Global Initiative University in 2018.

This early success brought me to the United States, where I had the privilege of visiting Oregon and meeting Dr. Leon Speroff, a key contributor to MSP. Witnessing his unwavering enthusiasm and dedication to improving Macedonian schools, I grasped the significance of these projects and how they bear fruit in Macedonia. Macedonian Americans, along with the broader Macedonian diaspora, have exemplified their commitment to enhancing educational facilities in our homeland.

In the midst of these experiences, I completed my legal education in Macedonia with the highest honors. An opportunity that humbled me beyond measure arrived when I was awarded a French Government Scholarship for Excellence, enabling me to study at the Sorbonne Law School in Paris, one of Europe's oldest and most prestigious institutions. Now, a year since I officially joined MSP as a Board Member, I

am filled with gratitude and satisfaction for being part of this organization. I am keenly aware of the profound impact it has on the lives of Macedonian students.



Hristijan Zafirovski

And now, I decide to put an end to my time travelling due to the harsh reality in Macedonia. Despite ongoing efforts to reform the educational system over the past decade, classrooms remain tarnished, and conditions for personal growth and development are far from appropriate. In a nation where a mere 0.8% of the national budget is allocated to education and science, organizations like MSP are more vital than ever.

MSP has always demonstrated integrity, transparency, and a commitment to meeting the needs of the schools it partners with. Therefore, I seize this opportunity to encourage individuals from all walks of life to support MSP's invaluable work and actively participate in its endeavors. Together, through collective efforts and well-structured projects, we can provide more Macedonian students with the conducive environment they need for learning and growth. Who knows, our actions might inspire another student to engage with their community and pursue their dreams in a similar fashion.

Please become a member of the Macedonia Schools Project to help the youth of North Macedonia. Your tax-deductible contribution will enhance the growth and impact of our program.

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

Email: macedoniaschoolsproject@gmail.com

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