

Areté Youth Foundation – Sofia, Bulgaria
Chris Voerg-Jones

Organization Information: This summer I will serve as a consultant/intern at Arété Youth Foundation (AYF) working with underserved youth, predominately Roma, in Bulgaria. AYF is a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organization that seeks to build capacity within Roma communities by encouraging active citizenship, and by developing positive role models who support each other in achieving educational, financial, and personal success. AYF implements three different programs: Zaedno Napred (“Together Forward”), the Education Hub for Roma, and the Roma Professional Network. These three programs seek to help disadvantaged Roma youth develop leadership and life skills, assist with their preparations for university, and connect them with institutions and professionals who can help further their career goals. Additionally, AYF provides funding for Camp GLOW (Girls Leading Our World), a program for Bulgarian girls that seeks to increase civic engagement, leadership and life skills, and awareness about current issues affecting Bulgarian society such as drug abuse, sexual health, eating disorders, Internet privacy, and human trafficking.

Project Description: My objectives for this summer are to improve AYF’s social media presence, enhance feedback mechanisms for program beneficiaries, evaluate programs/projects, and assist with implementation of activities associated with their summer camps (Zaedno Napred). The overall goal is the help AYF build organizational capacity so that social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) can be better used to build and maintain relationships with stakeholders (i.e., beneficiaries and donors); feedback questionnaires can be enhanced to utilize more information from camp participants; programs/projects can be improved to better assist beneficiaries; and value can be added to activities at the summer camps. In addition to the objectives I have mentioned, I will seek to combat the effects of human trafficking by partnering with local NGOs to develop and implement a campaign targeted at Roma youth in their communities. My final deliverable to the organization will consist of an organizational assessment that will identify their strengths and weaknesses and offer recommendations for making improvements.

A large portion of my work will be done at the Zaedno Napred summer camps in Sokolitsa, Bulgaria. The camps will take place on three separate weeks in July and August and consist of 177 Roma youth. The topics for the camps include communication, life and professional skills, history of Roma, health, leadership, volunteerism, and addressing stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination of Roma. Besides evaluating the program, I will be assisting the camp leaders with team-building activities and other games that build leadership and social skills. During the camps, I will be investigating ways participatory learning can be more incorporated into the organization’s educational framework, so that the every participant can benefit from and be fully engaged in the activities.