

Elizabeth Wofford

JJCF Update #2

In my last update, I talked about how a group of Roma women in the Czech Republic are creating a quilt to be displayed alongside quilts created by Roma women from France and Kosovo at the Council of Europe in an effort to increase awareness of Roma women's issues and to encourage the creation of proactive pan-European policy to help advance the situation of Roma women.

The number of women I have been working with has slowly dwindled to only six. However, these six women have each created one to four panels and have worked together to create a large central panel. The panels represent everything from their cultural values to their hopes for the future. The women have been wonderful, and many of them are profiled on the website I created for the production of the quilt, www.quiltingforadvocacy.wordpress.org.

The weekly meetings to Mimoň, where the women live, have been extremely productive and I have found myself becoming extremely attached to the six women who have been so brave as to challenge the status quo in the Czech Republic. Our last meeting occurred on Wednesday, August 17th, which was an emotional experience for everyone involved.

I have since returned to the United States, and will be assisting in the construction of the quilt, along with volunteers from my home town of Ellicott City, Maryland. We decided to construct the quilt back in the US in order to both cut costs and to allow the women more time to work on their individual panels.

I still have a lot of work ahead of me involving this project. The quilt must be put together, the final profiles of the women are still to be compiled, and I must deliver the quilt, profile, and financial records to The Advocacy Project's headquarters in Washington DC. (Luckily, my new internship's office is located just a few blocks from AP's headquarters, so the transition of materials should be an efficient one.)

In addition to the logistical work of putting together the quilt and delivering the items mentioned above, I also am planning on working on community outreach to raise awareness of the work I did with the Roma women. I have found that European issues involving human rights are often underrepresented in the Public Policy forums I have attended, and I hope to work on rectifying this issue by putting on an awareness evening at my home institution, the Maryland School of Public Policy.

In addition to the awareness evening, I hope to work with The Advocacy Project and The Council of Europe in order to establish a long term, income generating program for the women in the Czech Republic. One of the largest issues facing the female Roma population is their inability to secure employment. By creating an outlet for these women to market their

embroidery, it would be the start of intense social change for their community. By enabling these women to make money, they hope to show their peers about the possibilities for change, and hope to encourage other women to seize such opportunities to question their situation and do something about it.

In terms of my host organization, it seems as if the Dženo Association is closing its doors for an unknown length of time. My supervisor, Ivan Veselý, closed the office in the beginning of August in order to spend time with his family in Slovakia. As of right now he does not see much of a future for Dženo, and is seeking gainful employment elsewhere.

Although I was a witness to the collapse of one community based organization, I was lucky enough to help create another, this time helping women directly in the community instead of indirectly while stationed in the capital.

Although I have left the Czech Republic in order to return to my studies here in DC, I plan on delivering another update to JJCF about the completed quilt and subsequent awareness raising activities. If all goes well, another report should be delivered with stories of success in influencing policy change on the pan-European level!