

# Organize and Get Organized



**COMMUNITY ORGANIZERS ANALYZE THE COMMUNITY  
ORGANIZING PROCESS AND THEIR ISSUES WON**

Project Closing Study of the Civil College Foundation's  
2018/2019 Community Organizing Program



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They halted primary government investments. Stopped the construction of the coastal dam. Achieved a large increase in the allowance for home care parents. Mayors made commitments to them in green and disabled matters. Billions of forints has been ordered for train track renovations that they fought for. They brought light to their city, asphalt to their streets, playgrounds to their settlement. They activated their environment and gained representation in local governments.

They formed a community, became experts, made their affairs visible, and worked hard to achieve their goals. They are affected themselves. They, who have strengthened their grassroots initiatives through the method of community organization. We are proud to have been supporting them in all of this work, through our one and a half year community program with the Open Society Initiative for Europe (OSIFE).

Each of the groups presented in our publication has achieved amazing results in their field in national and local level issues. The history and struggle of these communities can be a source for further organizations and actions, as it proves that there is a way and a sense for us to raise our voice and take action in matters that affect us. Whether we belong to any minority, we have been harmed, or being threatened by any danger to our environment even when we have to work against the waves...

The team of the Civic College Foundation.

# Understanding, Learning and Changing

– In many local communities where community organizers participating in the program worked, a huge civil society victory occurred at the municipal elections. Can this also be considered an organizational success?

– In terms of mobilization, by all means. In these local communities, for example in Szentendre, turnout was noticeably higher, with more people voting than at the last elections, and more accountable representatives getting a mandate than before. Also, many NGO people assumed different roles in local governments.

– And the civil sphere has suffered losses as a result...

– Yes, civil society is now starting to realize that. Many opportunities have opened up for civil society control over local governments and for co-operation with them,

which is also a task. And many activists have been siphoned away by municipalities. Many of the defenders of the Romai Bank, the members of C8 in Józsefváros and the dozens of civil activists in the Danube Bend are now municipal employees or assist local bodies and committees as experts, and the present Chief of Staff of the Mayor of Budapest is one of the Defenders of the Little Forest...

This has triggered a reorganization process, and it poses a challenge for organizations to reorganize themselves, turn into strong local organizations from informal groups, and transform their goals.

– Has success increased respect for, and the power of, citizen activism?

In terms of power, it has greatly strengthened local NGOs, as they had to make up for the shortcomings of political actors. Civil

society delegates can be a good match for representatives of political parties. Local organizations don't want to grow nationally, so their work is not influenced by national interests. They need to find a balance, in the long run it is in everyone's interest.

– Can traditional self-government be renewed altogether?

– That's exactly the stake for the next four or five years. A big challenge for totally new local politicians coming from the civil sphere is that they need to have quite different qualities in municipal work than in a campaign. Office bureaucracy is very limiting to action, which is why it is an important task to understand it, learn it and change it. If it doesn't happen in five years, these new municipal teams may lose the next election.

– The new local governments have

mayors who have signed the Green Minimum, which our green organizers have also been involved in. The antecedent of this is the maturing collaboration of green area defenders in Budapest, with our supported groups among the initiators. Is this organizing thread within the CCF becoming stronger?

– Yes, local green groups strengthened by community organizing methods are becoming more and more successful - as is the case with the Római group or the Defenders of the Little Forest. These communities are increasingly recognizing the importance of working together and are setting an example for other local groups with their determined action, mobilization of locals, and expertise. These groups are increasingly becoming essential players in their local communities.

– What other national movements are emerging?

– Already in previous funding cycles, a Roma organizing thread has started to develop, and is now becoming more and more articulate. It represents a completely new voice in Roma organizing, as the minorities of the minorities have now been given representation - the people living on the estate, the subjects of negative prejudices. Moreover, our Roma organizers are typically women. They work with a special set of tools and framework, addressing and mobilizing those whom no one has really managed to mobilize so far.

– What other organizational directions have been outlined in the program cycle now closed?

– Three strong directions have been identified by the lead organizers who have filled this new position in this grant cycle. Building on the experience and successes of previous community organizing grant programs, we supported three strong orga-

nizers: Anett Csordás, to capitalize on the success of the nursing benefit campaign to build a network on disability. We motivated Anna Kiss, who had achieved nationwide advocacy successes with the Szeged LGBT Group, to strengthen other rural groups as well. We supported Levente Lintényi to help form regional groups.

– To what extent could lead organizers separate their activities from their own group?

– They weren't expected to. A kind of balance had to be found between the work of a leading organizer and support provided by a part-time community organizer working in his/her own group. This was difficult to achieve in all three cases, but the lead organizing activity itself was very successful in all three cases.

– Obviously, success for an LGBT movement does not mean the same as for a group dealing with infrastructural issues in Szabolcs County.

– Of course, it is difficult to put the three achievements side by side. The national organizing work within the LGBTQ movement meant, for example, organizing national events, giving relevant responses to the attacks on the movement and strengthening rural groups - the latter was eventually achieved in Kecskemét.

Levente Lintényi, the founding community organizer of MátészalkaLeaks, was able to create seven or eight seeds in the region, and achieved success regarding several local or intercity infrastructural issues, as well as environmental issues. This is also important for MátészalkaLeaks, as



their network, reputation and regional role have been strengthened. It turned out that both the group and the community organizer could be further strengthened in this regional leadership role.

Anett Csordás, president and former community organizer of the Step by Step Association, has made, as lead organizer, great strides in the area of coalition building, also building her own organization further. Under the former, she set up working groups with active and successful cooperation in areas such as education and housing. She also organized major professional events, while her organization has found new resources and grown significantly.

– Were there any other collaborations between the groups supported in the framework of the community organizing program?

– There were a number of points of contact among the grantees: neighborhood groups were able to help each other mainly through the sharing of knowledge and experience, such as in the public hearing campaign or even mobilizing for the elections. Green groups and disability organizations have formed coalitions, with several groups participating in joint events on housing issues. In the local elections campaign, our groups working in different fields performed activities promoting civic awareness and the accountability of candidates in a way that strengthened each other's work. This also shows that community organizing processes affect each other and can lead to change in society as a whole.



# Fighting on Together for the Római

The ‘Let the Trees Stay On the Római’ group has been working for years to protect, and make prosper, the Római Bank with the involvement of locals. Their main goal is to ensure environmentally friendly flood protection and to develop and renew the Római Bank through community planning. The action against the mobile dam planned along the riverbank, and the associated felling of trees, brought the group to life, and they were not left without plans even after the danger was over. The team, which has developed into a strong community over time, continues to work for the development of the Római Bank, the boosting of local sports and community life, and is also one of the founding members of a movement made up of local groups working for a livable, green Budapest.

The plan for mobile flood protection walls right along the riverbank has come up again and again over the past ten years. Budapest NGOs and professionals have repeatedly voiced their counter-arguments against the structure, which would have been com-

pleted by cutting down 1,500 trees, only to protect properties that had been built illegally in the floodplain. Everyone agrees on the need for flood protection, and most environmental and flood protection experts say strengthening the dam on Nánási Road / Királyok Road is a safe and environmentally friendly way to do this.

The first demonstration took place in 2013, but an organized protest only became necessary in the middle of the decade: in 2016, the threat intensified as the plans were being outlined. As part of the community organizing program running at the time, a group was formed that brought together previously protesting organizations and wanted to take action and prevent the construction of the mobile dam through a systematic and powerful campaign involving locals.

During two consecutive community organizing program cycles, they have essentially succeeded, using effective campaign tools - demonstrations, expert materials, freedom of information requests, engagement programs, and base building. ‘Let the Trees Stay

**ISSUE WON:**

The trees on the Római Bank have been protected: no mobile dam is being built on the riverbank

On the Római’ has become a well-known and recognized group, both among the locals and for the people of Budapest. During their tradition-forming events, the riverfront was full of people: they have shown what the riverside could be used for. During the fight against the dike, the group also “found” other issues: they took successful steps to renew the shore (eg they planting trees and shrubs, having the municipality replace luminaires and install rubbish bins) and even actively participated in renewing the riverside through their engagement programs.

Serious research has been done on the values of the floodplain, with more than 100 pages of recommendations on how the group envisions community functions on the riverside.



THE COMMUNITY ORGANIZER:  
**Szilvia Kaprinyák**

She joined the group in 2016 as a volunteer activist and affected local resident. She previously worked in tourism and commerce, but has always been interested in environmental protection and grew up near the Római Bank. In 2018, as part of GLC’s experience exchange program, she traveled to the United States; in her work she has also drawn on her experiences obtained at a large environmental organization.



**THE COMMUNITY:**

The group was started by Judit Schänz, an activist formerly engaged in city planning. Previously, mainly intellectuals and green experts from Budapest protested against the mobile dike. During the organizing work, many set goals have been achieved, and the group has formed into a real community which considers the preservation and development of the riverbank to be a matter of the heart.

By the end of the program year, the “hard core” of the group consisted of around 20 people, with 50 people belonging to their circle and several community leaders emerging. The circle of sympathizers is very big, with hundreds of people turning up at events and 14,000 people following the group’s activities on Facebook.

The group continues to meet on a fortnightly basis and is progressing systematically on their issues: they want to see effective flood protection in Csillaghegyi Bay implemented by fortifying the Nánási Road, and to have the Római Bank renewed based on community planning. Their goal is to formalize the group and make it self-sufficient.



## THE PROGRAM YEAR:

The group has been supported by the most recent community organizing program for two quarters.

One of the important goals, therefore, was to strengthen the group, make it self-sustaining, and create a framework for formalization, besides achieving community planning and the fortification of the Nánási Road/Királyok Road dike.

The summer rowing programs organized by the group brought the interest groups closer together.

„These events have also attracted people who have not been involved so far, such as the many young college students who joined our rowing programs.” (Szilvia Kaprinyák)

During the 6 months, the plan for building the flood protection dike along the bank line was permanently removed from the agenda. However, a survey similar to the one carried out during the preparations for building the mobile flood protection walls has not yet been prepared for Nánási Road/Királyok Road. Only when the fortified dike at that river section is completed can we state that the threat to the Római Bank is over - as it is located in a valuable area and the local real estate lobby is gaining ground in areas close to nature.

The group submitted a budget proposal to the municipality for tidying up the riverside and the embankment, and raised, in the wake of a summer program, the idea of a free beach, to which the municipality was also open. (However, in 2019, following local observations, the group drew attention to the fact that, in times of heavy rain, sewage flows into the Danube in Békásmegyer. Therefore, they are now lobbying for a rain-water reservoir and a free beach with a water quality indicator flag).

In the fall of 2018, members of the group

also attended and spoke up at local and metropolitan public hearings for the protection and development of the riverbank, and participated in community planning regarding development. The latter was announced by the district and was deemed insufficient by the group.

The ‘Let the Trees Stay On the Római’ group has taken several steps towards independence and formalization, aided by participation in targeted training.

Already during the program year, green protection groups in Budapest started “making friends” and laying the foundations for cooperation. The groups exchanged their experiences at several events, and a tree protection alert chain was launched. Also, a Green Minimum program was born before the municipal elections, in which many MPs and mayoral candidates who have since held positions made commitments regarding environmental issues.

## THE MENTOR SAID

*“By this period, the power relations between the parties had already been rearranged, but a declared victory had not yet come. We focused a great deal on what kind of organizational operation and scope of activities would be expedient and sustainable in the long run to carry forward and preserve the results of the team, and how to transfer the energies manifested during protest into cooperative strategies.”*  
(Péter Peták)





# Representation Obtained

The group was formed as part of the 2016 community program by Fruzsina Balogh, who has local ties, with the aim to allow people living in the old vineyard area of Pilis to come together and take action on issues that affect them - issues that make their lives almost impossible, such as the lack of an asphalt road or sewerage.

On the outskirts of Pilis, hundreds of Roma and non-Roma people live on plots without utilities, in old press houses and cottages - often illegally, in deep poverty. It is important that they, themselves, take action on issues that affect them, such as infrastructural issues. There is no sewerage or water supply in the area, the farm roads are unpaved, so in rainy weather the children living there often do not even get to school. However, the situation of local

Roma is difficult not only because of their housing conditions. There is a high level of unemployment in the town, which affects them the most. There is no shortage of extremely racist manifestations, which always intensify when local Roma try to stand up for their rights and improve their situation.

In the 2017 program year, the group got strengthened. The 'Don't Sell Your Vote!' campaign succeeded in mobilizing local Roma for the parliamentary elections. Regarding the most important issue for them, the issue of asphaltting, a vague solution was reached. One of the 12 farm roads in the old vineyard was asphalted, but in the absence of sewerage, rainwater streams into the gardens, washing away the foundations of the houses.



**THE MENTOR SAID:**

*“Formalizing and strengthening the organization was not realistic, because due to the increasing local government pressure, very few people were ready to stand up publicly. Instead, we looked at the potential of the local elections to create new opportunities for the team, both in terms of organizing and the issues represented.” (Péter Peták)*



**RESULTS:**

political representation of the people living in the old vineyard area of Pilis; saving the group



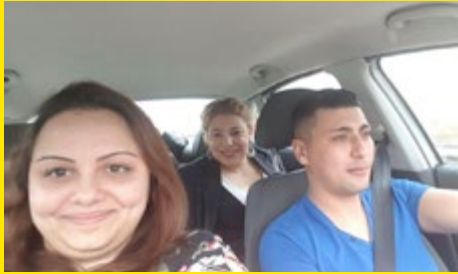
**THE COMMUNITY ORGANIZER:**

**Fruzsina Balogh**

She is a well-known Roma activist who often makes her voice heard on equal opportunities issues and helps preserve Roma culture and traditions through programs organized for children. She is one of the founders of Dikh TV and for many years worked as a host for the channel. Her grandparents lived in Pilis, and she still has relatives in the community. Even before her present involvement as a community organizer, she held regular cultural and community programs for local families, including children's day programs and traditional dance events. When she was approached by people in Pilis a few years ago to address the problems of people living in the old vineyard area on Dikh TV, she felt she wanted to help them more seriously. The community organizing grant program announced at the time gave her an appropriate framework to do so.

**THE COMMUNITY:**

At the beginning of the program year, the group was very much shaken and battered by a report dealing with them, which intensified negative voices in the local community against the Roma living in the vineyards. With a lot of work, she managed to rebuild the group somewhat, with the current core consisting of 4 people. The group has a total of 12 members, but there are many more sympathizers and local people participating in the programs.



**THE PROGRAM YEAR:**

The group won 6 months of funding in this program cycle, which aimed to eliminate injustice related to the communal tax and achieve local political representation.

Following the above-mentioned media report, the most important task for the period became, on the advice of the mentor, reinforcing the weakened group, which was largely successful.

A sudden tragedy also redrew the plans: due to the poor road conditions, the ambulance arrived late to a heart attack patient who lost his life as a result.

It became clear: renovating the roads is of utmost importance because it takes up to 45 minutes for the ambulance, firefighters or police officer to follow up an emergency call. In the previous program year, it turned out that the mere paving of roads without sewerage would only worsen the situation. However, there is no chance of sewerage yet, as not even land ownership is settled in the area. For this to happen, all people living in the vineyards must accept the inconvenience of land settlement and the possible loss of land. Therefore, the group is trying to get the municipality

to use a different technique while annually 'pounding' the road, and to fill it up with slag.

Nevertheless, another important goal set at the beginning of the program year was achieved: a local man finally ran in the local elections and got into the Roma local government. Also, there is a good chance that he will become the Roma coordinator of the community – meaning he can finally be a real representative of the Pilis poor.





**INTERVIEW WITH LEVENTE LINTÉNYI, WHO HAS BEEN HELPING THE FORMATION AND STRENGTHENING OF GROUPS IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES OF SZABOLCS-SZATMÁR-BEREG COUNTY DURING THE 2018-19 COMMUNITY ORGANIZING PROGRAM.**

# Self-Confidence Comes with Success

**– With what sort of commitment did you get to the task, which was not only new to you, as previously the lead organizer role did not exist within the CCF.**

– As usual, I had great expectations of myself and others... I wanted to assist the formation and strengthening of 10-20 groups, and well, almost succeeded. Groups and to-be-groups have been born in 10 places.

**– How did you get in touch with the mobilizable locals?**

– The MátészalkaLeaks group has been receiving inquiries from the surrounding local communities through social media for years, and with increasing frequency. We are known as solvers of problematic issues, and we try to embrace and support such initiatives. We are happy to share our knowledge with them, e.g. in connection with filing freedom of information requests. Now, in my new role, I've focused on these requests for help, I've talked to people on the phone, and then in person. I told them my own sto-

ry of how I became a community organizer, what I'm getting from this job, and why it's worth doing it with heart and soul, the way I do it. If I manage to address a person this way, I ask them to connect me with people they know who might be affected by the given problem. Then, we go and talk to them.

I mean, I have gone up to people on the train who later joined our fight for the renovation of the Mátészalka-Debrecen railway line. It is possible to organize people anywhere, the point is to contact them and point out their self-interest, which - given it affects several people - can become a community issue and can be resolved together.

**– Are there any groups that have identified a problem well and are working effectively to solve it?**

– Csenger and Csengersima are located near the Hungarian-Romanian border, with the last bus stop situated 3.5 km from the border, where only a bike path leads. It would be important for locals to be able to

cross the border by public transport. I am well aware of the problem because I have taken that path many times, too, for I once courted a girl there. When I shared this with the others, they felt it to be authentic and took my advice: we wrote a request for a timetable change, in response to which we were asked for a draft timetable, and numbers on how many people would use the service. This issue is likely to be won by locals, as the Transport Management Agency has forecast the launch of the service for the summer of 2020, which is now likely to be delayed due to the epidemic.

**– Is there a plan in place for the 10 municipalities to start a joint campaign?**

– Public transport, more specifically the related problems, is what brings these local groups together. A typical problem in many local communities around Mátészalka, Nagyecsed and Vásárosnamény is that there are only one or two bus services on week-

ends - while in local communities around Budapest or in Transdanubia this number is 10-12 for a local community of similar size. This makes the lives of the locals very difficult - in the smaller local communities, there are only convenience stores, and even if people manage to get to a bigger town to do their grocery shopping in the morning, they can only come back late in the afternoon. Commuting to work is also a problem - it says a lot about the situation that employers have to operate bus services to pick up their employees.

**– Are 'usury taxis' a thing in these places too, the ones that transport locals by car at unrealistic prices?**

– It's absolutely typical due to insufficient public transport. Nyírkáta is situated 20km from Mátészalka. If someone needs to get to the city urgently, they will be asked for 4-5 thousand forints - without an invoice, of course. Plus, we're talking about very poor people, and for them it's an awful lot of money.



## Levente Lintényi

Levente Lintényi had been involved in advocacy even before his work as a community organizer: for years, as a trade union steward and a member of the factory council, he defended the interests of employees in the factory where he works and from where he started the MátészalkaLeaks group. His motivations can also be seen in his work: he once wanted to become a professional football referee and pursued the profession at a high level, while in the factory he ensured efficient and quality work as a process inspector. He worked as the group's community organizer for three program years before taking the lead organizer position.



**– MátészalkaLeaks also started with transportation issues, but today it is also active in many other areas. Are the newly formed groups also open to other issues?**

– You can't tell yet. Community organizing

is a slow process and most of these groups are not even one year old. MátészalkaLeaks also needed 3-4 years to have members who would dare to get involved regarding various issues. You have to gain self-confidence first, and that comes with success.



# They Have Heartened People

The MátészalkaLeaks informal group was formed in the summer of 2015 from the employees of a local factory. In recent years, the group has expanded, become more heterogeneous in its composition and has become a specialist in public transport related issues and local issues to be resolved. Thanks to their witty actions, the group characteristics, their chosen issues and their efficiency, they have gained national recognition and inspired and supported the establishment of many similar groups in the region. The main goal of MátészalkaLeaks is to create, using the method of community organizing, a community core

in Mátészalka which has a manifest opinion regarding the public affairs of the city and the county and can also shape them. To strengthen local media, the MátészalkaLeaks blog was created, which provides city residents with authentic local information. In addition to many local issues, their main goal is to achieve the modernization of the Mátészalka-Debrecen railway line.

## ISSUES WON:

renovation of the railroad section between Nyírmihálydi and Nyíradony; renovation of the Mátészalka-Debrecen railway line between Apafa and Nyírbátor; modifications of the bus service route between Mátészalka and Debrecen resulting in a reduction in traveling time; launch of a morning bus service between Mátészalka and Nyírbátor.



## THE MENTOR SAID:

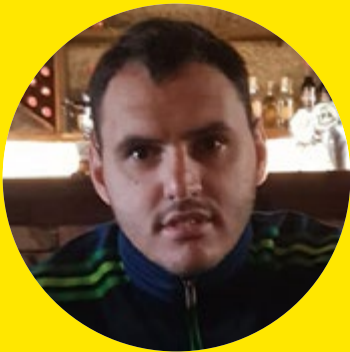
*“They conducted interviews systematically – that’s how you find self-interest that allows you to involve people who then start becoming active and gainning self-confidence from the many small victories, and dare to think on a larger scale.”*  
(Péter Giczey)



## THE COMMUNITY ORGANIZER:

**Tünde Nedávnyi**

She graduated from college as a general social worker. She works in the factory where the group was formed and was among the first members. “Community organizing proves to me how together, uniting our forces, we are able to perform important and significant actions regardless of nationality, age or party sympathy. If we want, we can achieve anything with perseverance, attention and working together.” (Tünde Nedávnyi)



## THE COMMUNITY LEADER:

**Richárd Szabó**

He works as an operator in a factory in Mátészalka. Married, his hobbies are football and community organizing. He joined the group about two years ago, drawing the attention of MátészalkaLeaks’ community organizer with his extremely strong voice. The group needed such dominant voices at the time, so she tried to recruit him and he said yes right away. Since then, he has taken increasing ownership of the method of community organizing. It was during the past year that he fully found his purpose in the group. He is now one of the best known group members. “I enjoy the fact that I have an important role in the group, and I consider it a good thing that many people from Mátészalka and the surrounding area have been involved in public life with the method of community organizing” (Richárd Szabó)





THE COMMUNITY:

The group, which continues to be based on a core group of colleagues working in a factory, has grown steadily over the past year, with approx. one person joining the group each month. About 15-20 people attend the bi-weekly group meetings on a regular basis, and usually seven to eight people take part in actions. The successes of the MátészalkaLeaks group are inspiring an increasing number of people in the region. Levente Lintényi, the group’s former community organizer helped establish and strengthen seven groups in his new position as a regional lead organizer. (see our interview with him on page 14).

THE PROGRAM YEAR:

At the end of the summer of 2018, when the program started, national awareness of the MátészalkaLeaks group grew very much thanks to their “Snail vs Train” campaign and the short film about it. In another short film, Dr. László Mosóczi, Deputy Secretary of State, was invited to a Szatmár (name of the region)

lunch with the stipulation that he would arrive in the city by train. All this was done in the framework of a long-term campaign aimed at making the renovation of the Mátészalka-Debrecen railway line happen. The goals also included the introduction of the promised passenger wagons, having the trains clean

(providing soap, hand towels and toilet paper) and coordinating the train and bus timetable. The group’s new community organizer also wanted to put considerable of emphasis on recruiting members and mapping out new issues.

The above goals have been largely achieved. The snail action was repeated by the group in the fall: this time, snail kids competed with the train on the worst rail section.

In December 2018, the group participated in the public hearing of the Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County General Assembly, where they successfully drew attention to the unfortunate conditions prevailing on the Mátészalka-Debrecen railway line. Oszkár Seszták, the chairman of the county assembly, described the group’s demands for the renovation of the road section as legitimate.

The county assembly then sent a joint letter to Hungarian railway company MÁV and the Ministry of Development and Innovation in charge of the matter. Following that, Oszkár Seszták went to Budapest together with the chairman of the Hajdú-Bihar County General Assembly to negotiate with the leaders of MÁV and decision-makers at the ministry. Following the signal from MátészalkaLeaks,



the chairmen of the county assemblies managed to achieve that HUF 1.67 billion in the central budget be allocated for the railway line in question, of which 10 kilometers would be renewed.

In 2019, the section between the Nyírmátyi and Nyíradony stations, where the snail had run faster than the train, was renovated, making it suitable for train traffic at a speed of 80 km/h.

The renovated trains have not yet arrived - their introduction was tied by the railway company to the introduction of Flirt commuter trains around Budapest.

At the same time, MÁV has installed hand sanitizer dispensers in old trains so that basic hygiene can be achieved even during the winter, water-free period.

The group also had success with two timetable changes in the past program year.

The group managed to get the Northeast Hungary Transport Organization Office to change the timetable of the bus service between Mátészalka and Debrecen - based on suggestions by people using the line -, so that some buses could travel in a shorter time us-

ing the Hajdúsámson bypass. The amendment affects 10 bus services and also results in traffic calming, with travel time reduced by nine minutes.

There used to be no bus service between Nyírbátor and Mátészalka in the early morning hours, so going to work was a problem for many workers, including nurses. As a result of the timetable change initiated by the MátészalkaLeaks group, an early morning service was introduced at the end of 2019, so the issue of public transport was resolved in many surrounding local communities.

„We are very popular at the local level, and at the national level we’ve managed to bring the issue of the Mátészalka-Debrecen railway line into the public consciousness with the Snail Races.” (Levente Lintényi)

The group gained even more exposure and popularity with its action organized jointly with the Mass in Transit Association. It involved the first passenger demonstration, at which stakeholders expressed their views on the state of rail transport in front of the Budapest Eastern Railway Station building.

The start-up of several new groups in the

region was supported, for example in Nyírbátor and Nyírkáta. They help new communities with their experience and knowledge so that they can exercise their civil rights.

The MátészalkaLeaks Group continues to undertake to publicize smaller and larger local issues and seek solutions to problems (such as replacing hospital waiting room chairs). Promoting local transparency is a priority for the group, and submissions by local elected members are regularly reviewed, analyzed and made public by them. They regularly attend council meetings and public hearings.

“The group has always had a catalyst role in the city and the region, and this has been no different in the last program year. We mobilized residents, and following their signals we are making more and more public interest announcements/submissions, and were are filing more and more freedom of information requests. People have been heartened: while in the past they were even afraid to like a post on social media when it came to public affairs, now they even file submissions with their name on.” (Levente Lintényi)





# They mobilized with their own stories

The Living Independently - Living in a Community group has been operating as a disability advocacy group since October 2017. The previous year, a participatory action research project was carried out within the framework of the School of Public Life, in the course of which they examined what was necessary for a person with reduced mobility to live independently in Hungary today. The research identified a number of systemic problems, both in terms of barrier-free public transport and independent housing. The group set

themselves the goal of finding systemic responses to all of these problems in the coming years, seeking to bring about positive change in the regulatory environment that determines housing opportunities for people with disabilities. The year of 2018-2019 was their second one in community organizing. In the previous cycle the group was strengthened and given serious ammunition by a huge joint victory in connection with the full accessibility of Metro 3, achieved together with several other advocacy groups.



**THE MENTOR SAID:**

*“The very existence of the group itself and their continuous engagement can be considered a victory in itself, as the activist group consists of people for whom it is a challenge to have more than three of them in the same physical space, because there are no such physical spaces and it does not have a tradition in Hungary. What’s more, they own this victory and it makes them confident, which is essential in advocacy work and embarrasses decision-makers.” (Balázs Horváth-Kertész)*



**SUCCESSES:**

making the need for barrier-free train access and a 24-hour support service visible



**THE COMMUNITY ORGANIZER:**  
**Zóra Molnár**

Her work as a community organizer in the group has been guided by the same intent as her joining the participatory action research: she had first-hand experience of having significantly limited options - both in terms of studying and working - in the absence of adequate housing opportunities. Zóra was born in a small town where she could not attend primary school due to lack of accessibility. She graduated from high school and then from the university’s psychology department after a great struggle. As she always excelled at her studies, the challenge for her was not studying, but the circumstances. She was CEU’s first wheelchair-bound student, graduating from the university with a Master in Public Administration. She wants all areas of life to be accessible to people with reduced mobility. During the program year, she consciously handed over her responsibilities to other group members to prepare for her withdrawal. All this work was greatly boosted by the fact that in 2018 she spent two months in the United States under the GLC Experience Exchange Program.

**THE COMMUNITY:**

Most group members are stakeholders themselves, people with reduced mobility who are very determined to fight for the conditions of independent and self-determined living. Giving them significant motivation is the fact that they have already achieved it for themselves. The group has a membership of around 25 people, 80 percent of whom are affected. Weekly group meetings are attended by 10-12 people on a regular basis, with several others joining the work online. An increasing number of group members are taking on public appearances (in the media and at events), drawing attention, through their personal stories, to the need for independent and barrier-free living for people with reduced mobility, which is an important tool for raising awareness and putting pressure. The members of the group are also becoming more and more independent regarding organizational tasks.







## THE PROGRAM YEAR:

During the 2018-19 program year, the 'Living Independently - Living in a Community' group was active in connection with the three issues they had identified for themselves. However, the significance of these issues did not allow a group of this size and capacity to give each of the same attention and level of activity.

The topic of self-contained housing was thus somewhat relegated to the background, but the group was very active in the area of barrier-free transport and the 24-hour support service.

In the area of barrier-free public transport, they had tasks to be done in relation to

the previous grant cycle. In 2018, the promise of complete accessibility related to the renovation of Metro 3 was achieved through a wide-ranging collaboration. Its implementation - based on experience - needs continuous monitoring. To this end, the group submitted a freedom of information request, the results of which were analyzed and published. The implementation of barrier-free access has been monitored and accounted for in other ways as well.

During the grant year, the issue of accessibility of railway transport came into focus, based on the signals of group members and other stakeholders. A popular,

thought-provoking article was born in which the group gathered train transport issues from the perspective of wheelchair users. At the end of 2019, in connection with World Day of People with Disabilities, they organized a forum to discuss the issue. With decision-makers also attending the event, a common platform was created for decision-makers and stakeholders to launch a dialogue. Among other things, they were promised that a pilot project would be launched for setting up information points at the busiest railway stations, where passengers with reduced mobility can ask for help for their journey.

"My experience in the US has confirmed that accessibility issues should be framed in a way to articulate that the problem affects not only people with reduced mobility, but also other groups such as pregnant women or the elderly. If we can show how big the circle of stakeholders really is, we can mobilize more easily, as we're not only targeting people with reduced mobility, who are difficult to mobilize." (Zóra Molnár)

In addition to public transport, the issue of accessibility is also of paramount importance to the group in terms of the constructed environment. This is especially true for community spaces where activists can meet

and expand their knowledge. In this spirit, group members took an active role in making the CCF's training center in Kunbáony accessible. In 2019, the two organizations organized a joint community fundraising campaign to make the building increasingly accessible to wheelchair users.

The other big issue, the campaign targeting a 24-hour support service, also received a lot of attention thanks to the organizational collaboration and the stories of stakeholders showcased through them.

The group also took independent steps in a campaign organized jointly with two large organizations, the Step By Step Association,

also participating in the Community Organizing Program, and the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (HCLU): they conducted a large-scale poll on the issue involving stakeholders. As a result of the research, a professional publication was prepared based on a detailed analysis of responses from a total of 120 stakeholders. To help raise visibility of the problem, the group also announced a literary contest, which received nearly 50 entries. Last December, the above-mentioned professional publication was presented at the same event, and the most outstanding works of the literary contest were awarded. In the wake of the campaign, a set of policy recommendations is being developed for providing support to people in need in their homes 24 hours a day, and thus a chance to live independently.

A petition signed by many was launched during the campaign, with the Living Independently - Living in the Community group participating effectively in the dissemination. In parallel, they presented the problem and the possible solution at different professional forums held in Budapest and the countryside before the municipal elections.

Also in collaboration with the HCLU, the group also set up an exhibition based on the principles of participatory art, and the two organizations also developed a professional workshop on different areas of independent living, with a focus on independent housing and personal assistance. These programs were implemented in the spring of 2019 in six towns in the countryside, which also provided a great opportunity for the group to map the situation of stakeholders in rural areas and build relationships with them.

Regarding both major issues - accessibility and 24-hour support services - the team members undertook to visualize their own problems and stories, which is a huge step towards achieving the ultimate goals.



INTERVIEW WITH PÉTER GICZEY, CCF'S  
PROFESSIONAL LEADER, MENTOR OF THE  
BÉKE ESTATE ACTION GROUP, ELEVEN GYÁL,  
MÁTÉSZALKALEAKS AND THE NATIVE GROUP

# A Year of Textbook Success

– What do you see as a major textbook success in community organizing during the past grant year?

– Many real, classic community organizing successes - issues won, breakthroughs and partial results - were achieved during the year. I would highlight the final outcomes of the public lighting campaign in Gyál, the rescue of the Római Bank, the activities of the Little Forest Defenders, Native's public hearing campaign, and the operation of the Béke Estate Action Group.

These groups and successes have demonstrated - and as such, they are really textbook examples - that if a community applies the methods of community organizing systematically and consistently, the results will not fail to arrive. That was a key aspect in every case. They interviewed people, filtered out the problems, shaped them into an issue, and planned a campaign in

which they used community organizing tactics and actions.

– Although the methodology of community organizing is global, there are certainly local peculiarities - historical, traditional, social characteristics, the power situation - that require the tools to be shaped. What are those specifics?

– Due to the peculiarities of social development, society is more atomized in our country. People here turn to each other less than in Western Europe or North America, where it is typical to work together to solve a problem. For us, this takes a lot more energy, and it is a great challenge for an organizer to make people with similar problems come together, share the task, pay attention and adapt to each other for a common goal, because together they are more likely to achieve their goal. In Hungary, people are used to doing things individually - in one



## ABOUT

Péter Giczey is a sociologist who works for CCF as a professional leader, community organizing mentor and trainer. He has been involved in the activities of various civil society organizations since the change of regime, and has been an active member of international organizations since the mid-nineties. As an external lecturer, he teaches community work at the Department of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Debrecen.



way or another, through relationships and their own resources - that could affect others as well. For example, the members of the action group set up at the Béke Estate in Eger came together to clean up the junk and trash accumulated over the years and solved the problem by involving financial and labor contributions from individuals.

– The other important feature, which also influences community organizing processes, is that in Hungary the power relations intertwine everyday life more pronouncedly. People in power who are assigned to represent people leave their mark on local social conditions much more than in more developed democracies. They hinder the formation of grassroots initiatives, dismantling groups with different power techniques. If a strong relationship of trust is built between people, and if they see that their efforts bear results and are successful, it will be much harder to drive a wedge between them. It takes time, hard work, a lot of encounters and joint action, as demonstrated by the success of Eleven Gyál.

Many good initiatives die because of the above two characteristics.

– The community organizer must also prepare for his/her own departure at the end of the organizing process. Is a single grant year enough for a group to remain viable without a paid organizer?

– How long a group needs to be able to be left without a community organizer depends on a lot of things. What is sure is that you need good community leaders. Out of the two Hungarian specifics explained above another one follows: a community will disintegrate sooner if they do not have the power to strengthen themselves, and this usually takes 3-4-5 years. What is needed is not one good community leader, but several of them, so that the tasks can be divided, because - and this is also a Hungarian characteristic - in our roles we are socialized in a way that some people are reluctant to share the work that they do, while others do not engage because they see that someone else is doing it for them anyway.

– The MátészalkaLaeaks group, for example, has become so strong in recent years that they can operate much more independently.

# Water After Light

Living Gyál was established in 2016 within the framework of the community organizing grant program running at the time, so that the Living Memorial project could be implemented at the local level as well. Over time, however, it became clear that finding a common solution to local issues could be the something that really forges the Gyál group together. The ever-expanding membership of the group found the common values along which they formed into a true community through their work for local goals involving action, engagement, confrontation, etc. In addition to working on major infrastructural issues, the group also conducts sensitizing and fundraising work in the town.

At the start of the Living Gyál group, during an interview marathon involving a hundred people, it became clear that the residents of the small town were most disturbed by two prob-

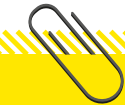
lems: insufficient public lighting and the condition of the sidewalks. Therefore, the group decided to address those two issues.

During the previous two program years, the group managed to draw the attention of locals to problems through freedom of information requests, light measurements, the publication of the results, and street actions (e.g. putting out stickers, painting sidewalks), even gaining national recognition.

Encouraged by the activities of Living Gyál, about six or eight local residents in Vecsés began to organize in order to find solutions to their town's problems. They contacted the community organizer of Living Gyál with the suggestion that they created an advocacy community similar to Living Gyál. Therefore, the two small town groups jointly applied to this program. In Vecsés, the main goal was to strengthen the group and map out local issues.

THE MENTOR SAID:

*"This great win demonstrates it well: if a group perseveres and carries through a campaign systematically, sooner or later it will achieve success. The Gyál group and the results it has achieved are a real promotion for the methodology of community organizing." (Péter Giczey)*



VICTORY:

A Review of Public Lighting in Gyál

THE COMMUNITY ORGANIZER:

Andrea Homoki

She is a born activist. Her work in the Living Memorial community brought a turning point in her life and made her committed to civil society issues. She gave up her job as an accountant to help enhance citizen activity as a community organizer. Through her work with Living Memorial, she gained experience in the field of street activism, involvement, organizing a community, establishing its sustainable operation and fundraising-based self-sufficiency. She has also attended a number training courses organized by CCF and other NGOs, and is now invited to many such events as a speaker herself. The Living Gyál, and then the Living Vecsés communities have been established on her initiative. "It's a constant challenge for me to work with volunteers, who are not paid employees, and need to be asked about tasks with a helping attitude." (Andrea Homoki)



THE COMMUNITIES:

Living Gyál

The Living Gyál Group focuses on solving local problematic issues, while its members are also active in connection with several other public issues at the national level. In four years, the group has swelled to 26 people, with 16 locals at its core and several dedicated community leaders working on the team. 110 people belong to the Living Gyál community, and 1484 people follow their activities on Facebook.

Living Vecsés

The group got stronger during the program year. It became more structured and currently has 10 active and 7 supporting members, with 472 followers on Facebook. Meetings have become regular and the community has identified several issues to address.



THE PROGRAM YEAR:

Vecsés and Gyál are neighboring communities with similar features and problems. During the program year, the two groups worked with a community organizer who felt it was her responsibility to coordinate the activities of the two communities, to establish cooperation, and to find common - even regional - issues.

For Living Gyál, the most important issue for the program year continued to be insufficient public lighting. Regarding their other main issue, the condition of sidewalks, they carried out some awareness-raising activities (the Sidewalk Commando was constantly active in the local community: they laid cold concrete and painted the potholes on pavements) rather than problem-resolving activities, as the group just would not have been able to cope with two issues of such magnitude.

„If we want to provide relevant answers to an issue, it is inevitable to delve deeply into the subject: requesting and analyzing data, browsing regulations and studies, becoming experts.” (AH)

During the year, the group appeared, spoke and organized actions at a number of forums (public forums, Q&A sessions, public hearings, council meetings, etc.) on public lighting. They prepared popular videos warning of accidents caused by insufficient public lighting, started a petition, and carried out creative actions (e.g. organized a blind date).

As a result of their years-long campaign, which featured countless tools and deep expertise, they were promised in early 2020 that the issue of public lighting in Gyál would be settled, voted for unanimously by local elected members. (See our detailed article on the victory on page 64)

“It’s a huge achievement that’s hard to process, to believe, to live as a success until

the more than 600 missing luminaires are fitted. We will follow and monitor the process until the implementation, promised for 2021. But in the meantime, we have to believe that we have been able to show strength, we are not small, we cannot be ignored.” (AH)

In addition to the two infrastructural issues, Living Gyál continued to consider it important to sensitize locals and help those in need. Together with the Gyál Family Point, they launched a program called Food Commando, which involves collecting donations on Sundays at the local market for those in need. They continued their series of public talks, organized awareness-raising programs by joining the Citizen Participation Week before the EU elections, and created a Facebook series titled What Has Gyál Got from the EU?. In preparation for the municipal election, the candidates were addressed, an online forum was organized for them, and they were “examined” with a questionnaire.

Several joint issues have been addressed in cooperation with the Vecsés Group. A study conducted in the local community with the participation of 1425 people made it clear that a new bus service was needed. This was partly achieved with the 578 service launched due to the metro renovation, which, however, has an inadequate route and schedule, so very few people use it. Consequently, public transport between Vecsés and Gyál is still problematic. The two groups embarked on a joint campaign to change the route, addressed municipal leaders and the decision-makers in charge at the Ministry for Information and Technology, launched a petition and also produced a popular video about the importance of the right route in the lives of locals.

In Vecsés, the local aspect of another national problem was also outlined as an issue to deal with: water suppliers are bled by the state with various tax burdens and overhead



reductions, so they do not have money left to maintain the water network. As a result, there are more and more problems occurring with old pipes and thus drinking water in general. The Vecsés group wanted to highlight this problem through a community-funded water quality measurement. For the two groups, this theme, which can be shaped into a national campaign, is increasingly being outlined as an issue.





INTERVIEW WITH LEAD ORGANIZER ANNA KISS,  
WHO HELPED CREATE AND STRENGTHEN LGBTQ  
GROUPS NATIONWIDE DURING THE 2018-19  
COMMUNITY ORGANIZING PROGRAM

# We Have Given Hope through Our Victories

– What were your plans for your work in your new position starting in the summer of 2018?

– My goal was to help strengthen the LGBTQ movement by assisting the birth of as many LGBTQ organizations as possible, and by supporting existing organizations to get involved in advocacy processes. I think the latter is really powerful. I'm not talking about specific local issues, but rather about national campaigns, as you have roughly the same problems in Pécs and Miskolc as in Szeged. It is therefore useful for several groups, large or small, to take action along certain issues together in a coordinated manner.

– Are there more active LGBTQ groups in Hungary today - as a result of your activities - than two years earlier?

– Yes, new groups have been formed, and it's a great pleasure to see special groups

among them that are trying to amplify the voices of a certain minority within the LGBTQ community. An example is a group of HIV-positive people in Budapest. What's equally important is that previously existing groups have also become stronger and engaged in advocacy work.

– How did you start working in your position as lead organizer? How did you find LGBTQ people in different parts of the country who want to organize?

– Lead organizer work - although we did not call it that at the time - actually began during the previous community organizing program. Organically. Our activities were covered by the press - our successes such as our lawsuit against the New Generation Center, our "Safe Spaces" campaign or our inclusion in the local equal opportunities program have made us known throughout the country in LGBTQ circles, but even

beyond. Several groups, such as the Nyíregyháza community, have approached us to help them develop their organization. In the countryside, LGBTQ communities feel more hopeless, and the Szeged group must have given them hope with their victories, perhaps that's why they turned to us. Others, such as the Székesfehérvár group, have approached us saying they wanted to create a group, because no significant organization had operated there before.

– The groups needed many different types of help from you, had you been expecting that?

– This kind of nationwide organizing work in the LGBTQ field was so new that there was nothing to expect. There were groups that had to be helped to start from scratch - with them, organizing tasks obviously dominated. Some groups required only mentoring, from time to time, to review



Anna Kiss

She has always been interested in social issues, attended a social science class as a high school student, and worked as a volunteer with several disadvantaged groups at various organizations during her university studies. She joined the local LGBTQ organization because of her being a stakeholder herself, but not only because of that. She saw the work of the group as filling a gap, and she has stayed in the organization for so long because she felt it was there where she was most needed. She worked as the group's community organizer for three program years before taking the lead organizer position.

their strategy together, the advocacy tools they could deploy. Others needed training or were seeking advice in a crisis situation.

– Did the groups end up addressing a common, national issue?

– Inclusion of LGBTQ people in local equal opportunities programs can be considered national, but can be implemented at the local level as well. This has been achieved - with substantive commitments - for the first time in Hungary by the Szeged LGBTQ Community Group. The process, which is very long and complicated, also started elsewhere, so it's worth covering it in the long-term strategy - that's what I suggested to the groups.

– What do you see as a success or victory regarding national organizing?

– I would rather use the term 'result' at the end of such a cycle. Especially because I believe in processes - some people say I'm a female type of organizer. I think meticulous organization is not spectacular, but it's all the more important in terms of advocacy.

The fact that there are so many active LGBTQ groups in the country at the moment, and that they are influenced by each other's activities, is a very important result of the program. We have worked together for the democratic functioning of these groups and the representatives of the groups meet regularly, share experiences and coordinate efforts.

– What are you most proud of personally?

– I'm very proud of the Kecskemét group. A rural group getting stronger at a time when many people think advocacy makes no sense - it's a great thing. For many, having a right-wing government is an ideological barrier to raising hopes regarding equal opportunities issues. We usually say we shouldn't give up our aspirations because of this: we've also had difficulties enforcing interests with the left-wing Szeged local government, and the issue of the New Generation Center was national, but we still won.






# The LGBTQ Community Is Following What They Do

The group has been working using the community organizing method since 2015, and they also achieved significant successes in the previous program year. In 2017, following pressurization by the Szeged LGBT Community Group, the Equal Treatment Authority ruled that the group had been illegally banned from the community spaces of the New Generation Center. They also managed to have the protection of gender minorities included in Szeged’s local equal opportunities program. Both results

were of national significance. Their “Safe Space” campaign, which started in Szeged in 2016, has been made national: in 2017 restaurants and public spaces in five cities (Szeged, Budapest, Pécs, Győr and Gyula) joined the “Safe Space” sticker campaign. The group is one of the most significant LGBTQ advocacy organizations nationally. Their victories benefit the entire community and inspire the start-up of many groups in the countryside.

”  
**THE MENTOR SAID:**

*“One of the main elements of the LGBTQ sector’s public reach is the Szeged group, which constantly keeps on the agenda the issues affecting the community and their possible solutions. One example is the victory over the New Generation Center. Through winning issues like this one, they can strengthen any member of the community, not just in their city, but also across the whole country.” (Balázs Horváth-Kertész)*

  
**ISSUE WON:**

The group won a lawsuit at the Metropolitan Court of Budapest against a state institution called New Generation Center, which allowed all NGOs back into its premises as a result of the legal remedy.

**THE COMMUNITY ORGANIZER:**  
**Mercédesz Kovács**

She moved to Szeged from Budapest to continue her studies there. There, she got to know a freer and more accepting university environment and soon became involved in the life of the group. For her, the most important thing is to eliminate all forms of discrimination. As a community organizer, her goal is to connect the members of the group.

**THE COMMUNITY:**  
**The Szeged LGBT group**

A group typically consisting of young people, but also very diverse one, has developed in Szeged. Minorities within the LGBTQ community are represented in the community (through transgender, queer, intersex, non-binary, asexual and polyamorous members), and the mindset, age, background, religious beliefs, and political affiliation of group members are also diverse. In addition, the group is strongly in solidarity with other oppressed social groups. Anyone can turn to them if they are discriminated against in the workplace, in health care or in education because of their sexual orientation.

It is difficult to get into the core of the group, with the road to membership leading through strictly defined levels. At the same time, almost every group meeting is public, and there are many opportunities to get involved. There are two types of membership: paying and voluntary-based. Everybody can decide for themselves whether to offer the group a membership fee or voluntary work, or possibly both.



**THE PROGRAM YEAR:**

During the program year, the “Safe Spaces” sticker campaign launched by the group continued, with more night clubs and community spaces in many parts of the country joining it, to send a message of condemnation and intolerance of discrimination.

The group also organized its ‘traditional’ programs: the LGBTQ Historical Month and the attention-grabbing Rainbow Week.

The highlight of the previous program year, the lawsuit against the New Generation Center, ended with total victory. After the Equal Treatment Authority ruled in the summer of 2018 that the NGO had been illegally banned from the community spaces of the New Generation Center in 2017, they won a lawsuit at the Metropolitan Court of Budapest involving a judicial review. The court ruling states that state-maintained community spaces must be open to all non-governmental organizations - all this was achieved by the group through an 18-month struggle.

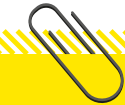
The group also received a lot of media attention in connection with an ugly incident: a Roma LGBTQ film screening organized by an activist was disturbed by the far-right group called ‘Youth of Our Country’. The obviously deliberate violent action just before the European elections shook the group, but also forged them together, and even brought them new sympathizers, supporters and members.



# Common Experiences, Common Struggle

The 55-acre Little Forest between Wekerletelep and the József Attila housing estate situated along the Illatos Ditch is the lungs of the area, a popular place for dog walkers, joggers and families with small children which greatly reduces pollution by the busy surrounding roads. In 2017, locals learnt from a newspaper article that the forest would be cut in half, as part of a major government investment, by a four-lane road as a continuation of the Galvani Bridge in Pest. At that time, on the initiative of a local elected member from Kispeszt, a residential group was organized with the participation of citizens and local elected members from Kispeszt and Ferencváros. The group began

to inform locals and protest through various channels. After the initial successes and the ensuing cessation of government communication related to the road, the group was given a framework and new impetus by the community organizing grant. The interests of the locals had to be defended against a huge opponent, and successful action required experts, great media attention, spectacular actions and innovative solutions, as previously decision-makers failed to respond to protests.



## VICTORY:

Stopping the Planning Process of a Road Cutting Through the Little Forest



**THE MENTOR SAID:**  
*“The area lies at a border point that connects not only municipalities but also different social groups, people in different life situations. Without bringing these very different people together, the forest cannot be protected. This diversity, as well as overcoming it, is a very important shaping factor in such a process.”*  
(Balázs Horváth-Kertész)



## THE COMMUNITY ORGANIZER: Krisztina Németh

As a social worker, she knows a lot about the importance and opportunities of advocacy. When the plan for deforestation was made public, her own interests and surroundings were endangered, as the Little Forest is an integral part of everyday life: she walks her dog there, and often goes for a walk with her family as well.

“In the beginning, I got engaged with the issue as a simple outraged stakeholder, but I quickly got into the mainstream. I learned more and more about opportunities in civic advocacy and wanted to use them. Since then, my experience has shown that luckily, there are many more who feel the same: if you become passionate about an issue, you also have the responsibility to win it. In the meantime, we learn a lot from each other, our approach is expanded, and we become able to see things from several perspectives and think creatively. And you don't have to be good at everything, it's enough for everyone on the team to be good at something. You know, on the go, it will turn out that everyone has qualities that can be useful.”  
(Krisztina Németh)

## THE COMMUNITY:

A real community has been organized from the residents of the József Attila housing estate and the Wekerletelep, with environmentalists and engineers, journalists and local green politicians among the members. The seven-member core has expanded to 13-14 people during the program, and the number of people that can be mobilized to dozens. Thanks to their high-profile activities, the circle of sympathizers now comprises several hundred people, and they are followed by 2,500 people on Facebook.





## A PROGRAMÉV:

The group's main goal is to prevent the construction of a road through the Little Forest and, at the same time, improve the living conditions of residents living along the already busy Határ (Border) Road, next to the forest. To do this, the group focused on strengthening the community, informing and mobilizing the general public, and drawing decision-makers' attention to the problem. Amidst the "silence" ensuing in 2018, locals believed the investment would not materialize, while decision-makers were ignoring protest voices.

After the reorganization and strengthening of the group, stakeholders were addressed and mobilized through programs implemented in the Little Forest. The Forest Halloween and Dog Beauty Competition events have now become a tradition, but there have been garbage collection events, family days, and an amateur photo contest was also organized, accompanied by a traveling exhibition.



„If people get closer to the issue, if the area becomes a venue of shared experiences, many will become interested in defending it.” (KN)

In addition to local engagement events, the ever-expanding group held public forums, conducted polls, launched petitions, and sought social consultation from decision-makers, who promised this and a temporary halt to the planning process.

However, by the autumn of 2018 it became clear that planning was continuing – something the group learnt accidentally, again.

„We reckoned that if decision-makers refused to talk to us, we would try not to be part of their game, but to set our own agenda.” (KN)

They took an unprecedented step: they put a serious expert material on the table, in which they indicated an alternative route that does not harm the interests of any population group, protects green spaces, but also takes into account the builder's considerations.

The material was presented in early 2019 at a public forum to which decision-makers and the press were both invited.

„We tried a new kind of communication, a form of awareness-raising towards decision-makers and also residents, through which we mostly wanted to show that a problem can be solved in several ways, if there is an intention.” (KN)

Miklós Mártonffy, the chief architect of Budapest at the time, experts from the Budapest City Planning Company, local elected members from Kispest, Ferencváros, Kőbánya and Pesterzsébet, both MPs of Kispest and the mayor all appeared at the forum for presenting the alternative route. Participants, experts and politicians unanimously believed that the alternative route could indeed be a solution. Máté Kocsis, Member of Parliament for the affected constituency, announced that „no roads are being planned in the affected area and we have agreed not to.” However, the planning did not stop, it was only postponed: a government decree was issued postponing the finalization of the route plan until June 2022. However, Sándor Fegyvernek, appointed negotiator of the Center for Priority Government Investments, said that citizens concerned about their environment were able to stop a government investment with their action for the first time ever.

Meanwhile, the Defenders of the Little Forest became a similarly known local green defense group as the City Park Defenders or the Defenders of the Római Bank. They sought to form alliances with these groups to lay the foundations for a partnership to preserve Budapest's green spaces and inform and sensitize residents for a liveable capital city.

As a result, at the end of 2018, they invited the Let the Trees Stay on Római group and the City Park Defenders to attend a stately public meeting to draw attention to their problems which have similar backgrounds, i.e. that the interests of large-scale investors and their top-down goals override public needs. They met again in the spring of 2019,



with additional NGOs joining the green advocacy alliance. At another Little Forest Picnic in mid-September, the green area protection groups, complete with representatives of the FFF, XR, Clean Air Action Group, the Cycling Club, and Farmer Bálint, who was present as a guest of honor, jointly drew attention to planned investments in the capital city about which residents have not been asked.

In the run-up to the municipal elections, more than 20 NGOs joined the Accountable Decision-Makers for a Green Budapest initiative, created jointly with the Clean Air Task Force, which lists the 25 criteria that must be met in Budapest to avoid a climate emergency. One of the points was specifically about the Little Forest.

„We wanted to ensure that the issues that were important to us were endorsed by the candidates running for election, thus making them accountable.” (KN)

Not only have the Defenders of the Little Forest managed to halt the planning process involving cutting down the trees of the Little Forest, but also made the area an important place for many people, the home of a community. They successfully drew attention to the importance of preserving Budapest's green treasures and the important role of locals who take responsibility for their environment. However, the fight is not over, it will be decided by the end of this year whether the route from the Galvani Bridge will eventually affect the area or whether the Budapest Public Development Council will choose another route.

„Wherever the road goes, we definitely want the voices of affected citizens to be heard, their views taken into account, with a forum for listening to their voices created and a dialogue established.” (KN)



# Back on the Field

‘The City is for All’ Pécs was founded by community organizer Gyula Balog five years ago as a local division of the organization active in the capital city. Their main goals are to make housing problems visible and offer solutions to them, educate those affected about their rights and opportunities, and raise awareness among city residents about the issue. In previous years, they collected a lot of data and gained comprehensive knowledge about the housing situ-

ation in Pécs through freedom of information requests, surveys and interviews. They formed a broad picture of the functioning of the institutional system and, for some time, even found allies within it. Their expertise became obvious to the Municipality of Pécs in connection with the amendment of the housing ordinance of May 2018, with the local leadership inviting them to take part in professional coordination work.



**THE MENTOR SAID:**

*“With a stable membership, the Pécs group of ‘The City is for All’ has developed into a strategically and systematically working team. As a new development, they organized those sympathizing with the organization into a permanent platform. Among the institutionalized actors with a municipal or civil society background affected by the housing crisis, they have become experts of the Pécs context of poverty and housing policy and are ready to negotiate.” (Péter Peták)*



**ACHIEVED RESULTS:**

becoming an expert on housing issues; effective provision of assistance through street forums; strengthening of the group

**THE COMMUNITY ORGANIZER:**

**Fanni Aradi**

Since 2010, she has participated in and organized several initiatives in Pécs, and as an activist she has mainly dealt with educational, green and urban issues. In 2015, at the invitation of ‘The City is for All’ in Budapest, she helped involve and train the members who eventually formed into the homeless advocacy group in Pécs - she has been working with them ever since. She previously studied Slavic studies at the university and switched to sociology as a result of her work with ‘The City is for All.’ Since the summer of 2018 she has also been working as a community organizer for the group. Her work is motivated by flexibility, constant challenges and the group itself.

In her position as a member coordinator, she considered the organization of internal membership training, the organization of field work (e.g. door knocking), base building and task organization to be her main tasks during the program year.



**THE COMMUNITY:**

After several renewals, the group membership can be said to be stable, with seven active members, most of whom are affected. The circle around the group is bigger: about 15 people can be counted on when it comes to performing organizational and other tasks. Thanks to the parent organization in Budapest and its own work, ‘The City is for All’ Pécs is widely known in the city, its circle of sympathizers is wide, with over a thousand people following their activities on Facebook. The group places great emphasis on training members and expanding their knowledge.



## THE PROGRAM YEAR:

‘The City is for All’ Pécs started the program year with a complex program, in which systematically reaching out to municipal tenants struggling with housing problems and accumulating debt was given special emphasis. They also aimed to change the amendment to the local housing ordinance threatening these people through participating in a civil society reconciliation forum.

The group looked for individual issues that can thematize the functioning of the internal round table and help sensitize and involve the local population.

Participation in the civil society reconciliation forum to reform the municipality’s housing policy put ‘The City is for All’ Pécs in a delicate situation. The group, which otherwise defines itself as a movement group, could not use their natural movement tools (demonstrations, flash mobs, petitions, etc.) during this period, so that they would be able to cooperate with the municipality for the sake of those represented by them.

“We had to handle this situation carefully so as not to jeopardize the opportunity we saw in the reconciliation forum, so we sought to build a base quietly. It was a serious strategic task to know what we could stand for and what we couldn’t stand for, and we had to share our capacity in the right way.” (Aradi Fanni)

In the winter of 2018, it became clear that no matter how much energy and expertise the housing working team put into working with the municipality, an amendment to the regulation would not be achieved.

“Two members worked continuously in the working group, which required serious professional training and a lot of energy, as they also had to constantly consult with the group. Despite all the failures, it was an important learning process: the group experienced how to work with several professional players simul-

taneously, knead recommendations together and come up with their own.” (FA)

The professional group came up with a set of recommendations that would have required another amendment to the regulation, which the municipality refused to do. Therefore, the conditions of the professional cooperation were questioned and the reconciliation process was interrupted. At that time, it was not yet possible to guess the end result of the municipal election, that a political environment could be created in which this type of cooperation is feasible.

After the collaboration with professional organizations ended, the group was able to focus on its activist work and field work again. Street forums started again, receiving very positive feedback.

In addition, they embarked on an awareness-raising, sensitizing guerrilla campaign: they used stencils, chalks, stickers and organized public engagement actions all over the city of Pécs.

In addition to working with stakeholders

and decision-makers, organizing events that sensitize people, raise awareness, and engage others was paramount. Such was the case with the “We Live Here, We Live This Way” program series, which presented, through roundtable discussions, the layers of housing poverty in Pécs from street homelessness to those renting apartments.

The „You Need a Place to Live!” program is an annual event that draws attention to the research findings of the February Third Working Group. This was commemorated in the project year by building a public installation.

Another annual event is the Night of Solidarity, which aims to create an opportunity for people living in homelessness or housing poverty, and people who are solidary with them, to meet, talk and cook together.

A national issue assigned new tasks to the group: “The regulation materializing the criminalization of homelessness had a huge impact on the focus of our work, we had to respond to it.” (FA) Authorities started a legal action against a homeless man in Pécs twice, and the



group organized an action in court both times.

“The criminalization of homelessness did not have a long-term impact on the operation of the group. During that period we took the necessary steps, contacted the institutions and organizations concerned, assessed its impact among stakeholders, and submitted a freedom of information request, but it turned out that no legal action has been taken apart from the case mentioned.” (AF)

Organizing forums brought the most results for the group during the year: they expanded their base and were able to give tangible help to those in trouble with their advice.

At the same time, members were able to capitalize on their accumulated knowledge during their field work.

The group got stronger during the program year, and during their summer retreat, they began to think about an operating model that relied much more on membership than on a project built around the resources of a community organizer. This effort is based on their independent fundraising work, as well as the training of community leaders and the allocation of responsibilities within the group. Thus, their work can become permanent and sustainable.





## INTERVIEW ON OPPORTUNITIES IN DIGITAL ORGANIZING WITH MÁTÉ VARGA, PRESIDENT OF THE CIVIL COLLEGE FOUNDATION.

# It Only Works Together

– Can we say that we are living a revolution in community organizing thanks to digital techniques?

– Digital organizing will become increasingly important in the coming years, as evidenced by the effectiveness of organizing during the coronavirus epidemic. Large member-based organizations are not yet typical in Hungary, even though membership size is one of the keys to organizing. Nevertheless, digital tools can help us catch up in this area.

– What do we mean by digital organizing, by the way?

– When we talk about digital organizing, we usually think of a petition, even though the tools and techniques that are already part of everyday work belong here as well: telephony and e-mailing make up the bulk of our work, but in the current period online meetings or online interviews are becoming more common, too. Where digital

organizing can play an amazingly important role is actually the foundation of any organizing: database building. You need a good list! The cleanest, the most up-to-date and segmentable possible, so you can easily and confidently find the people you can count on. The stronger the list is, the stronger the organizer will be, and the more efficiently they will be able to use it. More serious changes can only be achieved with a large member base, which requires a good list and proper communication.

The success of coronavirus-related fundraising campaigns in recent months have made it clear how much a good list matters and how organizers have been able to reach a wider audience. So, a good database is also extremely important from a fundraising point of view, because if we address 10 thousand people, the number of people who react will be between 100 and 1000. If we only ad-

dress 100, we can draw in about 10-20 people. It's simple math.

– And national campaigns cannot really be implemented without digital organizing and campaigning anymore.

– There is a revolution - you have just brought up this world - in truly visible campaigns that reach and mobilize a wide range of people and are made possible by digital tools and new organizing techniques.

So far, the problem has not been about people not being interested in the problems of others, or not wanting to change things that also affect them negatively. They simply did not know about these efforts, or they did not see an opportunity to get involved.

And it's not just national campaigns that can address masses of people. Our experience shows that people are also happy to join superlocal campaigns because they have a similar problem or are sensitive to the issue - such

as the issue of the Samsung factory in Göd, which is now current.

If we can come up with a way of communication that can make the issue understandable and visible to a wider audience, it will help boost the campaign a lot and increase the chances of success. Having thousands of people joining in are essential when it comes to national issues, and a huge feat for a local issues.

At the same time, we shouldn't forget that while it is very important to be able to demonstrate as many supporters as possible, the initiative must have a root, a local, truly involved group that gives credibility and, in many cases, expertise to the cause. Those campaigns perform best in which both threads are strong and there is a conscious plan to reach out to the masses.

– The biggest success of community organizers in recent years, the drastic increase in the benefit for caring for a sick child at home, was preceded by several years of preparatory work. In recent months, digital campaigning has opened up to the masses. Would this be the winning strategy?

– In recent years, we have achieved wins that were not preceded by several years of preparatory work, but offline organizing is definitely important regardless of the issue. Digital organizing does not really exist in itself. Mobile phones and computers are now essential tools in community organizing, but organizing cannot be totally digital. However, communication reaching the wider masses can only be done digitally. The more mutually supportive and intertwined offline and on-



line techniques are implemented - which also means the composition of the people they can reach and address -, the stronger the organizing will be. We need a dedicated, expert core that can only be organized in person. At the same time, the message needs to be made clear and communicated to as many people as possible so that a great deal of support can be demonstrated towards decision-makers - but this does not happen without digital organizing.

– Digital organizing also gives sympathizers a tool for action at different levels.

– Where we do offline community organizing, the point is to have the person just come to the meeting first, talk to you, and then you can get them more and more involved in the action. This is actually the case with digital organizing as well, only maybe there are even more options, and there's a lower entry threshold. First you sign the petition, then you are driven along towards giving some money, coming out on the street with us, joining the narrower organizing group. Then, we see that the person who started out just by signing a petition, is driving around in a car with "home nursing benefit" stickers on and wearing a "home nursing benefit" t-shirt.

And those who, due to their physical limitations or their situation, are unable to engage in offline organizing may find more opportunities for action in the digital space (e.g. mass mailing, sharing, etc). They drop out sooner than later in the case of offline organizing, because they wouldn't find themselves useful.

– To what extent have the communities participating in the program seized

the opportunity posed by CCF having a digital campaign organization as partner?

– Almost all groups have started petitions on the SzabadaHang (The Free Voice) or the aHang (The Voice) platforms, but MátészalkaLeaks, for example, has used the online surface in a number of other ways, such as for promoting videos. Several campaigns included mass mailings and mobilization, and even fundraising.

We encourage participants in the new program to consider digital opportunities when designing their campaigns, and to build the strategy from the outset in a way to identify the point in time when these can be used to boost the campaign.

And there are times when it is apparent from the very first moment that there is a strong digital component in the campaign DNA, such as in the case of the Balaton collaboration in the current program, where 35,000 signatures have been collected in a few months. At the same time, the building of partnerships is going on there as well, and so are the involvement of experts and other classic elements of offline organizing. When they get to a certain point with their partners and obtain the expertise to move on, they will be able to mobilize the tens of thousands of people who have signed their petition.

– It is no longer necessary to start these signature collections from scratch, as the signatories of previous petitions can also be addressed - with the help of databases. This can really reinforce organizers.

– Yes, if there is a local campaign, we can reach out to locals - or those committed to the issue - who have signed previous campaigns. But as I said before, all of this cannot replace traditional organizing. Online and offline organizing are a complementary, mutually reinforcing process. Because the focus is still on the organizing itself.



# A Movement Is Born

The association was founded nine years ago by parents raising children with injury to the central nervous system (CNS). Their goal is full accessibility: in education, regarding services, in transport - in all areas of life. The myriad achievements over the years have brought newer and newer challenges for the ever-expanding organization. As a result of their activities, not “only” have they sought and found answers to specific and general problems of children with disability by providing immediate help and achieving systemic change, but they also made affected parents increasingly aware of the value of standing up for their own and their children’s rights. Their activities have thus formed into a movement that has inspired the birth of a number of other advocacy groups and also involves the cooperation, joint and thus effective action of organizations working for a barrier-free life.

For the past nine years, the Step by Step Association has built its organization and community advocacy work using the community organizing method. This most recent community organizing program was already the second one in which the associ-

ation participated. In a somewhat “unconventional” way, both a full-time lead organizer and a part-time community organizer have been funded. Their tasks include further expanding the organization through their joint work, as well as achieving, in line with the original campaign goals, the recognition of nursing for a sick relative at home as a job (including raising all home nursing benefits to the current minimum wage).



  
**VICTORY:**  
Creation of a new category for the nursing benefit, thereby greatly increasing the benefit for parents caring for a permanently sick child at home; launching a national network; pledges by new mayors

**THE LEAD ORGANIZER:**  
**Anett Csordás**

She is a drama teacher by education. As an affected parent, she was among the founders of the organization. She is a well-trained and experienced community organizer, an emblematic figure in the field of disability issues.

“Everyone is responsible for their fate. Relationships and cooperation with people are important to me. I believe that by working together, we can do great things.” (Anett Csordás)



**THE COMMUNITY ORGANIZER:**  
**Kata Juhos**

She has been concerned with issues affecting people with disabilities since she was a teenager. Already at that time, she worked in homes and subsidized housing, and after a decade of “detour” she started volunteering in this field again.

“I’m not personally affected, but seeing the commitment of parents raising a child with disability to implement campaigns, I wanted to be a part of this fight. During the grant year, I learned a lot about community organizing work from Anett, who has been my mentor. We talked a lot about the techniques, and participating in the process was a huge learning experience for me as well. Plus, I had the opportunity to participate in an American study trip under the GLC program. (Kata Juhos)





## THE COMMUNITY:

A community of affected parents. Parents raising children with disability used to be “invisible” and feel helpless. The successes achieved together have mobilized more and more members, and the organization, which is growing and accumulating more and more knowledge and contacts, has an increasingly strong advocacy potential.

The organization has 97 members, and 16 different organizations have been established by members and partners in the last five years. The number and activity of the members has also increased as a result of the community organizing work carried out during the program year.

For most parents, personal presence poses a problem, for which the organization offers alternative solutions and provides countless ways to get involved in the work it performs.



## THE PROGRAM YEAR:

An overarching goal for the program year was to build coalitions with other organizations, as disability organizations are much stronger when performing joint actions together. Furthermore, different organizations can become the primary experts and administrators of specific topics.

„No one should work in isolation, crippled by the need to constantly tackle needs and shortcomings, but through sharing the burdens and creating a common flow of information, everyone should grow according to their own objectives and resolve issues together.” (Anett Csordás)

The organizers set a number of other major goals for the program year: to continue the home nursing campaign, build coalitions and achieve change by involving and

training as many association members as possible.

“Our goal was to involve and ‘reactivate’ as many association members as possible, and we have succeeded. We involved a lot of parents in the work, and it was good to get to know them, to see what the points where change needs to be achieved were.” (KJ)

The home nursing campaign, which has been going on for 5 years and was “amplified” in the spring of 2018, had a huge mobilizing force not only for the parents involved, but also for people committed to disability issues. It moved society as a whole, becoming a cause that stood above all kinds of political convictions, worldviews, and forged people together.

“Many elements of the campaign focused on mobilization, both online and through demonstrations. Media appearances, vid-

eos, events all helped both parents and unaffected people join our work. It helped us meet stakeholders and people working in other NGOs, groups we have allied with. So the campaign and the networking work supported and complemented each other, and through the campaign we managed to activate members, but the activity of members was also needed for success.” (KJ)

In the first quarter of the grant period, the group achieved a huge victory: the campaign to settle the issue of the home nursing benefit brought an unprecedented civil society success, for which the organization later received the Civil Society Award in the advocacy category.

Thanks to the social movement that followed the home nursing campaign, the amount of the benefit for caring for a permanently sick, dependent relative at home was raised in all categories starting from 1 January 2019. Following a government decision in October 2018, the amount of the benefit after children in need of home care was raised uniformly to HUF 100,000 per month in the form of a new category, the Child

Home Nursing Benefit (CHNB) for parents with children who are unable to provide for themselves. The increase will continue in the coming years, reaching the minimum wage by 2022, according to promises. The home nursing benefit is also increasing in those families where the dependent sick relative is not a child. In such cases, the nursing benefit has also increased by 15 per cent - also starting from 2019 - and then in 2020, 2021 and 2022 the amount will be raised by 5 per cent every year. Families that raise more children who are unable to support themselves receive one and a half times the child nursing benefit from 2019.

The social campaign, which required several years of preparation and has been going on for 5 years - including an intensive period of five months, has shown that a well-thought-out strategy can mobilize stakeholders and thus increase social solidarity. And proper channeling of the power of social cohesion can lead to effective advocacy.

The nursing benefit campaign continued in several directions during the program year.

The unprepared introduction of the CHNB, for example, gave the association a lot of work, as an inadequately thought-out set of criteria (which only took into account physical disabilities) could have left many eligible people without the benefit.

The association collected parental reports and expert opinions for months, and together with several other organizations, sent a letter, based on parental feedback, to Attila Fülöp, the Secretary of State in charge. Thanks to their activities, the CHNB criteria have been rationalized by the Ministry of Human Capacities in several respects.

In the 2018 summer phase of the home nursing campaign, campaigning organizations extended their claims to include everybody caring for a dependent sick relative at home, but the increase in the benefit was much smaller for those caring for a relative other than their child(ren). In order to carry on with the campaign, the association entered into extensive consultations with organizations and stakeholders who could reach and mobilize those caring for elderly relatives, but could not find a partner who would take on the task in earnest.

The organization also approached addressing the situation of people caring for a permanently sick relative at home, and those in need of care, from other directions.

In the summer of 2019, the association launched a spectacular campaign with the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (HCLU) and partner organizations for making 24-hour support services available.

As part of the campaign on December 10, World Human Rights Day, the HCLU, the Step by Step Association and affiliated organizations handed over their open letter in the parliament to Secretary of State Bence Rétvári and members of parliament. They requested that unused budget funds from the year be used for people with disabilities, those in need of help due to their





health, family members caring for a sick relative at home, and social professionals. This was intended to draw the attention of decision-makers, and society as a whole, to the general situation of people with disabilities.

During the application year, the Step by Step Association held forums and professional events prior to both elections (EU and local governmental), with the aim of engaging and making candidates commit to the issue of disability and make pledges.

In May 2019, before the EU elections, the 3rd “Our Common Affairs” Conference was organized as part of the Citizen Participation Week program series. The event revolved around disability-related legal issues within the European Union, reviewing the situation in Hungary. At the event - which was attended by representatives of 36 organizations and institutions - EU parliamentary candidates expressed their opinions and made pledges regarding various topics. For the event, the organization prepared a Hungarian-language publication of the European Disability Forum entitled Your Rights in the European Union.

In the autumn, in preparation for the municipal elections, a letter and a statement were sent to the mayoral candidates of every local community in Hungary with a population over 10,000. By signing the statement, candidates had a chance to make pledges regarding disability issues.

In Szeged, Pécs and Budapest, at events organized jointly with partner organizations (e.g. ‘Living independently - Living in a Community’ group), the mayoral candidates also made pledges in person.

The program year ended with a huge success achieved through several years of hard work:

“We have officially established the national network with the participation of 30 parents’ organizations, informal groups and professionals from different parts of the country. Participants representing different disability areas emphasized that only together can we make lasting changes to improve the care system and the situation of those affected, our children and our families.” (ACS)





# They Stood Up for Themselves

The Eger Foundation of the Fund for Supporting the Poor (EFFSP) has been performing support work on the Béke Estate in the Felnémet district of Eger for decades. Through calls for proposals in community organizing, the focus has been on community affairs instead of solving individual problems. Over the past three years, a previously formed local informal group has been “revived” and expanded with young people.

The neglected area has disturbed many locals for a long time. There are many derelict buildings in ruins and there is a lot of junk in the gardens. In addition, the townspeople use the border of the estate as a waste disposal site. The everyday life and self-esteem of the people living here have been largely determined

by these circumstances, so the members of the group primarily aimed at bringing the estate’s environment into order. In the 2017 program year significant progress was made regarding this matter: after many years, the stairs at the site were given a railing, and the storage of wrecked cars in public places has been terminated. A campaign was launched to clean up uninhabited derelict houses - the derelict home of a 7-member family was demolished and families were accommodated. The results have created additional demands and spurred action: an increasing number of people in the Béke Estate now find they want to live in a more orderly environment and are willing to make financial sacrifices and do community work in order to achieve this.



**THE MENTOR SAID:**

*“They have shown what it’s like when people turn into actors. When they come together, they can find solutions to problems that bother them individually but are otherwise common. They have had a serious impact on the entire segregated housing area.” (Péter Giczey)*



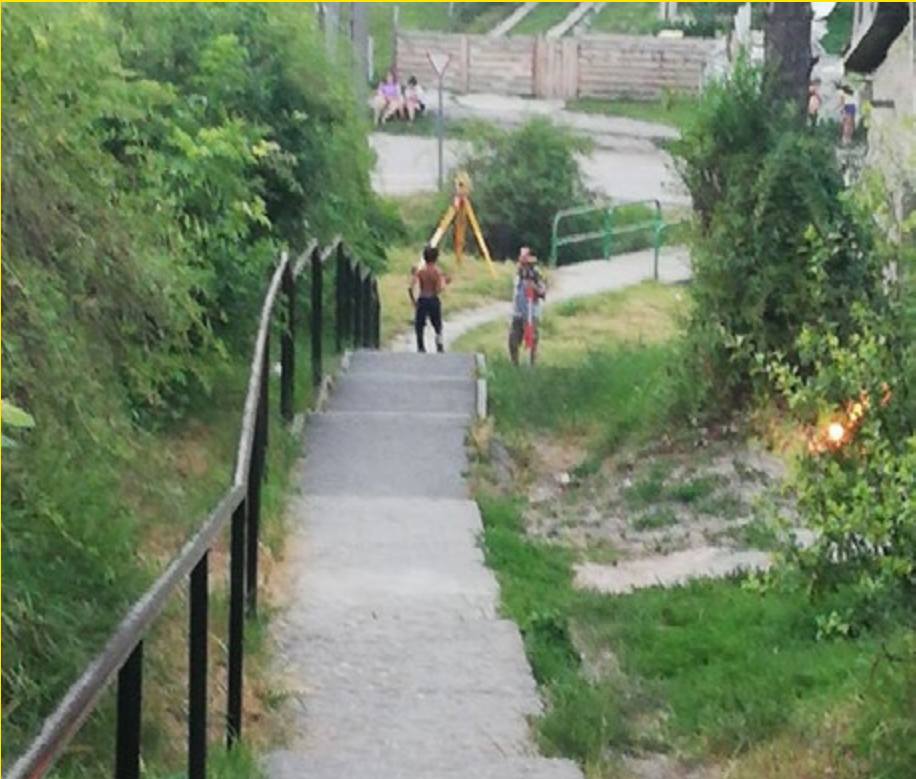
**ISSUES WON:**

promise to build a playground and recreation park, to be implemented in 2020

**THE COMMUNITY ORGANIZER:**

**Dr. Zsuzsanna Farkas**

Zsuzsanna is the professional leader and founder of the EFFSP. In addition to being a social politician, she is a real field worker who has been working on the Béke Estate in Eger for 24 years. She is in daily contact with those living there, and is well-aware of their problems. This was her second cycle in community organizing.



**THE COMMUNITY:**

The action group was formed in 2017, with the core being made up of locals who were already working together for the estate at the time. Between 2004 and 2006, they successfully fought for a sewerage system and land settlement. This group was strengthened by the community organizer, and many young people also joined their ranks. In the last grant period, the group has expanded further, with a stable core of 10 people, but with many more participating in the work of the action group, usually in the framework of campaigns affecting them.





#### THE PROGRAM YEAR:

During the past program year, the group have essentially managed to achieve all the set goals, not only in terms of working together with the municipality and mobilizing the people living in the local community, but also regarding specific issues.

An important aspect in the communication of the campaigns was to make it clear to the local government and residents of Eger: Béke Estate is also part of Eger, and this must also be taken into account when distributing public funds fairly. Furthermore, they wanted to make the community understand that the problems of the community (garbage, rain-

water drainage, ruined houses, etc.) are not Roma "issues" but problems of poverty. The city management can play an important role in resolving them, but the involvement of locals is also essential.

Their message has reached its target: the circle of sympathizers is growing, with many people appreciating the fact that citizens living in this street speak up for their own benefit.

As a result of several years of work, the implementation of the playground and recreation park at the Béke Estate has reached its final phase. Planning is underway, and construction will take place in 2020. A great deal

of consultation preceded the selection of the right site, as there is very little municipal space in the area.

"There were useful conversations taking place between the neighbors. Even tensions are OK in this kind of situation, because they mean people are living the situation, it is important to them, they are involved. That way, they will feel ownership of the outcomes much more in the end." (Zsuzsanna Farkas)

In addition to the parks, the municipality will also renew other green areas.

The campaign to demolish the derelict houses continued.

The elimination of the illegal waste disposal site significantly mobilized the locals. The large amount of illegally dumped garbage has been removed, to which the people living on the estate also contributed. They also loaded 4 containers with garbage themselves.

The waste disposal campaign already was aimed at removing waste from private areas, which was also achieved with the financial contribution and activity of the locals. „As a result of the two campaigns, the activity of the locals has increased and their thinking about their environment has become more responsible and conscious - the actions have resulted in a real change of attitude." (Zsuzsanna Farkas)

Another huge step in civic awareness was that the Béke Estate people represented themselves at several political fora.

In 2019, they attended a public hearing for the first time, and residents of Béke Estate were able to watch their peers live on city TV, who also spoke at the event.

„They saw that progress was being made regarding some of the issues reported there, which was an important confirmation that it was worth reporting problems." (Zsuzsanna Farkas)

An important milestone in civic awareness was organizing Europe Day on the Estate in preparation for the 2019 European Parliament elections.

„At the community program, many people became aware of why it is important and good for Hungary to be a member of the European Union, and so we managed to arouse interest in the election." (Zsuzsanna Farkas)

In a way unprecedented in Eger, before the 2019 municipal elections they managed to have all the candidates sit at the same table. "At the event, some remarks were made that were offensive to the people living on the estate, but the poor people present were able to react to them very grittily, preserving their dignity, which was another step towards becoming conscious citizens." (Zsuzsanna Farkas)





# They Have Shaken Up Szentendre

The ‘Civil Society Sheet Music’ group in Szentendre was established in 2016 within the framework of the Civil College Foundation’s community organizing program, as a continuation of the Living Agora community platform. Its founders were community leaders, artists and activists, and over the years the group has become increasingly heterogeneous as a result of neighborhood organizing. Their goals are to promote the culture and practices of neighborhood community organizing, achieve civic awareness and participation on the side of both the power and

the citizens, and foster cooperation between local communities at the municipal and regional levels. They consider it an important task to achieve the full transparency of the local government, that is, ‘the glass local government.’

In addition, they mobilize on specific local issues. In the previous - 2017 grant cycle - the group played a significant role in having the town leadership develop the only contiguous green area in the area, Sztaravoda Park, for recreational purposes instead of giving way to building construction.



**THE MENTOR SAID:**

*“Something has been proven once again about organizing: people themselves know best what is good for them. The Postás Beach campaign has moved the entire city, bringing residents to a common platform, which set the scene for civil society success at the municipal elections.”*  
(Balázs Horváth-Kertész)



**THE RESULTS:**

an investigation has been launched into the Postás Beach case; a large-scale mobilization was carried out, contributing to the huge civil society victory at the municipal elections in Szentendre

**THE COMMUNITY:**

The core of the group has expanded during the program year and now consists of about 15 people who work with several urban neighborhood groups. The ‘We Won’t Let You Take Postás Beach’ campaign and the municipal campaign greatly increased the number of people joining the group, as well as awareness of the group and the network of contacts.



**THE COMMUNITY ORGANIZER:**  
**István Szulovszky**

“I’ve lived in Szentendre since I was born. I’ve always wanted to make the world a little better. I’ve been interested in advocacy, followed public life and couldn’t stand injustice. Since the fall of 2016, with the establishment of Civil Society Sheet Music, I have really become active in the local public. I took part in training courses and gained a lot of practical experience as a community organizer, so I was able to help citizen organizing and initiatives more effectively.” (István Szulovszky)





THE PROGRAM YEAR:

In recent years, responsibly thinking citizens of Szentendre and its surroundings have shared their thoughts and experiences on local public affairs in open, moderated conversations of the Public Life Workshop organized by the group. These events also facilitated cooperation between residential groups and provided an opportunity to plan joint campaigns.

An example is Civil Society Sheet Music's most important campaign, 'We Won't Let You Take Postás Beach!,' which received national publicity.

"The plot is protected by a dike - in this sense it is separated from the public space, but due to its location it is by no means independent of it. The planned building would tower the immediate vicinity of this area performing public functions. Moreover, the construction of the building was not allowed by the current building regulations. Building plot exchanges (including exchanging public property) and changes to the building regulations were required to implement the project, which took place without consulting with or even listening to those affected." (LSZ)

Civil Society Sheet Music used the door-knocking method to approach and ask locals, who made it clear that they were against the plans.

The petition launched by the group on the subject has already been signed by more than a thousand people, and many were also interested in the spectacular demonstration they organized: protesters demonstrated in front of the municipal building dressed as beachgoers.

Filing freedom of information requests and applying other methods, the group examined the relationship between the municipality and the owner company, as well as



how and why the company was getting the opportunity to make such an investment.

The issue resonated nationally, with the media covering it several times and in detail, and it even generated a parliamentary address. They managed to have the State Audit Office launch an investigation, and even though the building has been demolished by the owner, construction has not started.

Civil Society Sheet Music has also mobilized the public on smaller-scale issues: e.g. regarding the conversion of a protected floodplain forest and construction in the immediate vicinity of a Natura 2000 site.

In addition, programs on the right to vote and municipal transparency were organized and they also mobilized for the two elections (EU and municipal) in several ways: door-knocking, street presence, information brochures, and leaflets.

They took an active part in the Civil College Foundation's citizen awareness campaign titled "I'll Have a Say": several members of the group helped create the "ideal representative" and write an information booklet.

Mobilization by the group, along specific issues and framed by awareness-raising activities, greatly contributed to the huge civil society success at the municipal elections.

"We feel we have contributed to this success, for example, by mobilizing less active communities along different issues. We have made visible several issues that used to be visible for small groups only, we have shown in what ways public life in Szentendre is problematic, and also that this can be changed if we exercise our civil rights and use the means at our disposal." (LSZ)

The group considers it a task to achieve a transparent 'glass local government' and to take part in regional cooperation, as joint action can bring greater results, for example in infrastructural matters.





# They Have Made Public Hearings Fashionable

The Native Group in Debrecen was established in 2015 under the auspices of the community organization program launched at that time, as a community of local alternatively thinking young people. This grant cycle was already the third in Native's life. In the first two years, they worked on a number of local infrastructure and environmental issues. Their 2017 program year was thematized by the issue of Putin's honorary title.

The group is well-known among local young people and implements joint programs with a number of NGOs (e.g. Trans-

parency International, Political Capital, etc.) to make young people active citizens. Over the past two years, they have organized many election forums and other events to mobilize local voters.

Their main fields of activity are monitoring the work of the local government, the issue of transparency, especially with regard to developments, and green issues and culture.

**THE MENTOR SAID:**  
*„They did a good job finding and consistently pursuing the issue of the public hearing, so that this democratic institution can finally fulfill its function in Debrecen as well.” (Péter Giczey)*



**SUCCESS:**  
renewal of the institution of public hearing in Debrecen



THE COMMUNITY ORGANIZER:  
**Bendegúz Tikász**

He graduated from the University of Debrecen with a degree in philosophy. He got to know Ágnes Molnár, the first community organizer of Native, at the university. She invited him to be part of the group starting in 2015, and he became an enthusiastic volunteer. Over the years, he tried to learn as much as possible about organizing, and then, from the 2018 program year, take over Ágnes' role in the life of the group.

“Community organizing is not a set of tools, but an approach. It takes time for a person to examine people and problems around them in this way, until they can initiate conversations with this kind of attitude. It's a change of glasses, and I've already changed my glasses.” (Bendegúz Tikász)

**THE COMMUNITY:**

The group consists mainly of students studying in Debrecen. This special composition has resulted in a constant changing of members, as a consequence of which the focuses and chosen issues change from time to time. The core still consists of about 10 people, but the circle of sympathizers is relatively wide, with nearly a thousand people following Native's entries on Facebook.





## THE PROGRAM YEAR:

One of the main goals of the group in the community organizing program was to better structure its operation, which has basically been achieved: despite the strong fluctuation that has characterized this program year as well, they have managed to create a framework that facilitates the effective functioning of the community.

This fluctuation made it difficult to select issues to address, but as a result of the CCF's national public hearing campaign, group members examined how the institution of the public hearing functions in Debrecen and found an important issue. It turned out that for ten years, no one had not spoken at the mandatory annual event, which had the original purpose of allowing citizens to ask questions about matters that concern them.

As a result of the group's campaign, in 2019 four citizens spoke at the public hearing in Debrecen, and even the mayor was willing to sit down with the members of Native to talk. He listened to how, according to the young people, the system of public hearing in Debrecen should be changed so that it really fulfills its role prescribed by

law. The group also submitted a request for amending the organizational and operational rules related to the subject.

„We saw it as a successful campaign, and even a victory, that we informed the public about the institution of the public hearing and that, as a result, many people turned up at the event.” (Bendegúz Tikász)

The group has also achieved success regarding an issue that has been on the agenda for several years: after several unsuccessful public procurements, the skate park in Debrecen - for which Native has been fighting from the very beginning for the benefit of local young people - has finally been implemented through a city company.

The group also made itself visible in connection with another “youthful” but all-encompassing issue: the Fridays for Future movement has made its debut in Debrecen with their help. They have carried out two climate strikes in the city together.

The group is planning further actions and steps with FFF and also wants to function as a watchdog in Debrecen: it will continue to watch what is happening at the town hall.





**INTERVIEW WITH BALÁZS HORVÁTH-KERTÉSZ, MAIN ORGANIZER OF THE 2019 NATIONAL MEETING OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZERS, MENTOR OF CIVIL SOCIETY SHEET MUSIC, DEFENDERS OF THE LITTLE FOREST, LIVING INDEPENDENTLY/LIVING IN A COMMUNITY AND THE SZEGED LGBT COMMUNITY GROUP**

# We Have Organized People, Not a Program

– Organizing the second edition of an event is both a grateful and ungrateful task. The strengths of the first one can be retained and lessons can be learnt from potential weaknesses. And there is strong pressure on the organizer to fully do so.

– To talk about the second national meeting, it's worth first recalling the first national meeting and its antecedents - because it's indeed true that identifying lessons learnt was a defining element of the organizing process.

The national meeting was brought to life in 2018 not by the desire to camp together, but by the organization's need to find some special form of solution to the challenges and needs that arose in connection with the organization at that time.

When organizing the second meeting, I tried to thoroughly research these needs and why the organization had found this answer. To develop, you always have to understand the origins.

And the community organizer researches by asking. I conducted 30 interviews with people within the organization and external participants, and their evaluation yielded a formula that showed three "tracks of intent".

The first track is strengthening communities, belonging together, experiencing the warmth of the fold. The second one was marked by the fact that the need for a kind of civic cooperation in society was growing.

The third track was born out of the desire to have organizing threads - the birth of which had been assisted by the CCF - go in one direction and create something in common. The program developed according to different needs: there were academic

guests who gave lectures on organizing the resistance, we had common brainstorming sessions, and in the meantime, we tried to feel good in each other's company.

– What have you taken over from that to the second national meeting?

– I personally did not want to keep or discard anything. I wanted an organizing team to determine what the 2019 national meeting should look like through an engagement program, a community planning process.

In addition to the interviews mentioned, I also conducted a questionnaire survey and "invited" those I reached to think together, which was happening for almost a year. A big chunk of knowledge was created, from which I tried to



extract the system of expectations that helps navigate in this threefold dimension. The idea of saving the world was let go, while the warmth of the fold was put in the foreground.

An important aspect of the organizing process was introduced by Csaba Madarász. In order for something to "happen" in Kunbábony, it's important that we don't talk about it there first, and also, we should give it an after-

same time, an investment into channeling in voluntary energies later on and making the process participatory.

– How did that all look in terms of programs and location?

– The usual, and yet exciting, Kunbábony location was the perfect terrain for the realization of our plans. We moved the fixed elements, trying to display the activist field in

course. They are the ones we need to invite and present: the Greens, the Roma, LMBT organizing. They "occupied" thematic tents, platforms where movements could showcase themselves.

– How did you move the participants?

It was a great experience to be able to build on ourselves. We didn't need outside guests, stars, to be able to mobilize, to have fun, or to produce and pass on knowledge. We had everything. The event incorporated processes of reflection which gave out the product. For example, we properly celebrated and analyzed the success of the home nursing campaign.

– The upcoming municipal elections could not be ignored either...

– Although we started organizing a year earlier, we knew people would be preoccupied with the elections, so we also built on that. A key part of the programs included planning, analysis, sharing experiences, such as Tessza Udvarhelyi and Samu Balogh talking about the Barcelona movement and Ada, whose campaign team they had been part of. A photo was taken, which can be said to be iconic: it has people who went on to win the elections, become chiefs of staff or representatives, sitting inside the municipalities today. So the national meeting had a serious afterlife, and not just in terms of the elections. A fundraising campaign that is currently underway is showing amazing social solidarity. In this campaign, the words of our Roma organizer, Zsanett Bitó-Balogh, are repeated by experts in various media. Also, RTL has presented the situation of residents in segregated housing through the video of Norbert Bitó, who had taken part in the video training at the national meeting...

And there we get back to the warmth of the fold, in which our organizers get encouragement, reinforcement, and empowerment to do great things.



life. Let's not end it by writing our thoughts on a flipchart. The story shouldn't start and end there. This was in line with my original intention: I didn't not want to organize a program, but a community - which then implemented a large-scale meeting. We have moved national meeting design closer to the way community organizing processes take place. It was an exciting attempt and, at the

space, from the various movements to the big supporters.

Bernadett Sebály, the organizer of the previous national meeting, spent a year focusing on the topics and areas in which we are strong. Using her research outcomes, I came to the conclusion that, when we talk about major social change, we talk about emerging movements or ones that have run their



# They Have Brought Light to Gyál

Local civil society in Gyál has achieved a tremendous community organizing success: not only have they proved that there is insufficient public lighting in the town, but as a result of their three years of work, **real lights could finally be lit in the community. In addition, a civil society group was born in the town as a result of the fight.**



Not “only” the problem of public lighting was brought to public attention by the civil society of Gyál through their three years of hard work: by organizing themselves, they also initiated other changes - in their own lives. According to Andrea Homoki, community organizer for Living Gyál, they have found their active self that is willing and able to act for the community and for itself. The story of their formation and the first great success of Living

Gyál stand as a textbook example of community organizing.

## An Organizer is Born

“The 2014 election brought the strengthening of Jobbik and an intensification of the far-right voice. It was the first time that I felt I had to go out on the streets to fight racism and

the falsification of history” - so begins Andrea Homoki her story of becoming active, without which the Living Gyál group would not exist today and the issue of public lighting in Gyál would have likely remained unresolved for many years to come. “I got up from my armchair, got involved in the work of the Living Memorial Group, and soon realized that this was my way: I had to deal with community issues. I gave up my job as an accountant that



provided a secure livelihood, and in 2016 I submitted my application to the joint community organizing program of the Civil College Foundation and the Hungarian Environmental Partnership Foundation. My winning application included the creation of a group in Gyál. Since then, I have applied twice and won support within the framework of the Civil College Foundation's community organizing program, thanks to which I have been able to continue my organizing work in Gyál ever since.

Since then, my story and the story of several members of Living Gyál have shown that when someone gets involved in the work of a democratically functioning community, it “turns something on” for them: they will find the most important issue for them and do something about it. Here’s an example: one of our members, who is raising an autistic child and who has not previously been involved in any civil society work, has now become an activist for an civic advocacy group, taking on tasks in this area of our town as well.”

Andrea started building a group in Gyál in 2014 - from scratch. She approached the citizens of the town who were active in civil society issues - of whom only one person eventually became a member of the Living Gyál, so she had to search further for locals who could be organized. An important result of the discussions that took place was outlining the two main problems of the town: it turned out that the inadequacy of public lighting and the catastrophic condition of the sidewalks bothered the people of Gyál most. In addition, the two problems were mutually reinforcing.

## The First Action & The First Public Hearing

“One of our founding members came up with the slogan: No lights - No sidewalks, No seeing - No walking,” Andrea recalls. “A community organizer friend of mine suggested that we



organize a street action to promote the slogan: we placed candles on a few selected dark street sections. They were just enough to illuminate our A4 sheets with that slogan on them. I shared pictures of the action in Gyál online groups.”

Living Gyál already had its own Facebook page under a similar trading name, which the group later developed into its final form, with the circle of followers growing steadily. “It was there that I found people who could be involved. If someone posted a good comment, I wrote them,” Andrea says. „Most members of the group got involved through the social media platform.”

Their NGO booth at the local market, as well as the council meetings and the public hearing brought the group new contacts. They organized a poll to map the condition of public lighting and local sidewalks.

The first official manifestation of Living Gyál, who were now working more and more consciously and using an increasing number of civil society tools, was rather unpleasant for the local government: at the 2016 public hearing, they were requested to make public the

Elios contract for public lighting in Gyál.

Gyál was one of the victims of the Elios case in Hungary, as it came to light during the research the group conducted. In 2015, Elios developed public lighting in Gyál from HUF 260 million in EU funds - as a result of which the already insufficient service deteriorated further.

The municipality subsequently made the contract public, yet to no avail, because without the annexes it was incomprehensible - so the next task was to have them make those public, too.

Following the public hearing, the mayor of Gyál invited the members of the group to a face-to-face meeting, during which he told them that there was no problem with the public lighting in Gyál, or if there was any, they should prove it. And they proved it – even if it took them three years.

The footage by RTL Klub's program “Out of Doors”, which showed the mayor being unable to read the light measurement protocol due to the insufficient street lighting, gave a special touch to the mayor's words.

## They Got Immersed in the World of Lumens

To prove their truth, Living Gyál ordered expert light metering and, with the help of activists, counted exactly how many luminaires were missing. They kept the public informed about their work and results through social media and the media in general.

“In 2017, we took to the town's side streets to explore where the problem might be. We realized that there were poles where there were no lights installed, so we started compiling a street database, writing down which street has how many light poles without a luminaire. We were surprised ourselves when we counted 654 absences. From that point we had two main goals:

1. Instalment of missing luminaires
2. Revealing data from the Elios contract that is highly suspicious of corruption.”

## Blind Date and Light Switch

„In addition to submissions, freedom of information requests and official tools, Living Gyál also organized witty awareness campaigns: together with Hungarian joke party MKKP, we put out stickers, placed light switches on the poles, and arranged a blind date with candlesticks,” Andrea lists.

“In the fall of 2017, we invited our mayor for a joint walk. He accepted our invitation, and although the long walk didn't start in a pleasant way, by the end we got to the point that yes, there are indeed dark crossings, and in case we listed their locations, they'd allocate money from next year's budget for that. Alright, let's go -, we walked the streets of Gyál again,” Andrea recalls. “A database of dark corners was created with 144 such intersections identified. Back in October 2017, we sent the results of our survey to the municipality.”

At the public hearing at the end of 2017, two members of Living Gyál rose to speak, handed over the light measurement protocol to local elected members and even gave them flashlights as a gift.



After nearly 9 months, the survey conducted by local civil society finally yielded results: the municipality promised to install luminaires on 12 out of the 144 poles, which was only realized after another year. All this did not discourage the group, and they continued to lobby for the modernization of Gyál's entire public lighting, as well as for the disclosure of the potentially corrupt Elios contracts.

With help from the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union, they tried to get the National Data Protection and Freedom of Information Authority to make a statement regarding the classification of the annexes to the Elios contract.

In 2018, the group also spoke at three public forums and public hearings. In 2019, they presented an increasing number of videos and Facebook streams in their group which has been getting more and more followers.

Three short films featured accidents as well as a burglary that ensued due to insufficient public lighting.

From 2018, they collected signatures offline, at the marketplace, and they also published an online version of the petition on the aHang interface as part of the Campaign Service program, through which their campaign received professional support. They managed to collect a total of 1,600 signatures.

## Victory!

“In 2019, we took evening photos of another 25 streets, turning the photos into a banner. We then organized a street photo exhibition during a council meeting in front of the municipality. While the exhibition was taking place outside, we handed over the signatures inside when our public lighting-related submission was on the agenda. We had prepared the proposal, together with a budget, for the council meeting in June 2019 with the help of a construction engineer and one of the deputy notaries. We asked Members in a letter to

support our initiative. It was postponed without any substantive discussion,” points out Andrea, listing the steps taken by Living Gyál last year. „At the end of 2019, we went to the public hearing with a banner and, in addition to several other topics, we again asked for a substantive discussion of our proposal as soon as possible.”

And in January this year, after three long years of struggle, they finally achieved both their goals:

“Then, after we wrote letters to the Members in January 2020, something tangible started,” Andrea says. “At the end-of-month council session, they unanimously supported our proposal and a timetable was drawn up to replace the missing luminaires.

Meanwhile, in cooperation with Transparency International Hungary, they managed to obtain, by legal procedure, Annex 5 of the Elios contract, which contains the individual purchase price of the installed luminaires, the dismantling costs and the price of the construction plan.

“Over the three years, we have attended and raised questions at countless Q&A sessions and in-person consultation sessions with the mayor. We have made several hours of video footage, and had countless actions and media appearances. In each election period, we participated through educating and mobilizing the public, organizing public fora, conducting a survey, and we also tried to smuggle the topic of public lighting into each campaign period. This holds for the 2018 parliamentary elections, the 2019 EU elections, and the 2019 local governmental elections, too. We now have a strong 15-member core group that we can always count on. People in the town know us, they count on us. Our work is not over here: we will be following the tendering and implementation process, too, and will try to achieve changes regarding new public issues as well,” says Andrea in conclusion.



# If You Just Grumble at Home, They Will Decide without You

One of the greatest community organizing successes in the history of Hungarian civil society is a process which ended with local activists and their sympathizers rescuing hundreds of trees along the Danube bank. This process resulted in the formation of a group that feels responsible and acts for a natural and livable Római Bank. We interviewed Éva Tóth-Kalló, one of the key members of the ‘Let the Trees Stay on the Római’ group, about the years of struggle and the impact of individual involvement.



– Can we say that a civil society victory has been achieved regarding the Római Bank?”

– We can definitely say that the involvement of civil society has contributed to the protection of the Római Bank. If we hadn’t acted in such an organized and vigorous way in 2016 and then in 2017, irreversible destruction could have begun with the implementation of ill-considered planning. The example of

the Aranyhegyi stream and the Pünkösdfürdő dike clearly show what it means when ideas are born at the design table, without local knowledge. With the Római Bank, it has also been proven that no one who knows the area better, its features, its potential, than the locals. That’s why we want to take the matter of not only the dike, but also that of the riverside, into our own hands.

Regarding the other part of the question,

whether a victory was born: we do not yet dare to say it. We will achieve our original goal if the current dike is developed at Nánási and King Roads, and the Római is renewed through real community planning. We are getting closer and closer to it because at the last General Assembly of the Municipality of Budapest, a decision was made to draw up a feasibility plan for the Nánási Road/Királyok Road route. No such plan had been made for this area before, as the



A group of approximately 12 people are posing on and around a bright blue lifeguard stand on a sandy beach. The stand has a red flag flying from its top pole. The people are dressed in casual summer attire like tank tops, t-shirts, and shorts. In the foreground, a woman sits on the sand pointing towards the group. A sign with Polish text and duck illustrations is placed on the sand. The background shows lush green trees and a glimpse of the sea.

A group of approximately 12 people are posing on and around a bright blue lifeguard stand on a sandy beach. The stand has a red flag flying from its top pole. The people are dressed in casual summer attire like tank tops, t-shirts, and shorts. In the foreground, a woman sits on the sand pointing towards the group. A sign with Polish text and duck illustrations is placed on the sand. The background shows lush green trees and a glimpse of the sea.

A group of approximately 12 people are posing on and around a blue wooden lifeguard stand on a beach. The stand has a red flag on top. The group is diverse in age and appearance, dressed in casual summer clothing. In the foreground, a woman is sitting on the sand, pointing towards the sign. The sign is white with black text in Polish and features four small duck icons at the bottom. The background shows a line of trees and a glimpse of the beach and water.

A group of approximately 12 people are posing on and around a bright blue lifeguard stand. The stand has a red flag with a white cross on top. The group is diverse in age and appearance, dressed in casual summer clothing. In the foreground, a woman sits on the ground pointing towards the stand. A sign with Polish text and duck illustrations is placed on the ground. The background shows a beach, trees, and a body of water.

A group of approximately 12 people are posing on and around a bright blue lifeguard stand. The stand has a red flag with a white cross on top. The group is diverse in age and appearance, dressed in casual summer clothing. In the foreground, a woman sits on the ground pointing towards the stand. A sign with Polish text and duck illustrations is placed on the ground. The background shows a beach, trees, and a body of water.

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A group of approximately 12 people are posing on and around a bright blue lifeguard stand on a sandy beach. A red flag with a white cross is flying from the top of the stand. The group consists of men and women of various ages, some wearing swimwear and hats. In the foreground, a woman sits on the sand pointing towards the group. A sign with Polish text and duck illustrations is placed on the sand. The background shows lush green trees and a glimpse of the beach and water.

A group of approximately 12 people are posing on and around a bright blue lifeguard stand on a sandy beach. A red flag with a white cross is flying from the top of the stand. The group consists of men and women of various ages, some wearing swimwear and hats. In the foreground, a woman sits on the sand pointing towards the group. A sign with Polish text and duck illustrations is placed on the sand. The background shows lush green trees and a glimpse of the beach and water.

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# Organize and get organized!

## HOW THE COMMUNITY ORGANIZING PROCESS IS BUILT UP

We tend to think that power is inherently evil and that possessing it we become corrupt and evil too. But, as the above examples show, power is not inherently evil or benevolent but a kind of force that can be used in a good way or a bad way. In community organizing this power is mainly constituted by well-organized communities of people who can act jointly - that is, protect their interests - in relation to issues where there is a need to enforce cooperation from local decision makers. Power is, thus, the ability to act, which everyone is entitled to. When a service or a form of support is not available we can organize its provision ourselves (we can open a school, organize food distribution, start a community radio, etc.) or through community cooperation and providing the resources needed, we can solve the problem ourselves (if there are no green spaces we can create a community garden; if there are no residential homes for those in need we can establish one, etc.). In Hungary, a large percentage of non-governmental organizations function following this logic: they perform tasks the state fails to perform, or outsources, and in most cases the do so from dwindling resources.

But what happens when, to achieve our objectives, we need the cooperation of local decision makers who are not willing to do anything for us? Or what can we do when achieving those goals would require a more efficient use of local or national budgets, and the provision of new resources? What happens if we get a negative response from a decision maker, but we are not willing to give up? It will be necessary to effectively apply

pressure and show that we represent an issue that is important for many. In Hungary a very small proportion of CSOs fulfill this advocacy function, and even fewer do so in a form that devotes enough time and resources to membership involvement, training, and mobilization. So in this respect community organizing is an important opportunity for mobilizing civil society in Hungary where citizen involvement is at a low level. Community organizing is, in a nutshell, the process of systematically developing contacts with people in the community, identifying issues, mobilizing people around the issues identified, and building a long-lasting a democratic organization whereby winning is at least as important as the process of building. In this context, community does not primarily stand for a supportive company of people that is based on personal contacts, but a community of interest in which people become players in (local) public life while enforcing their interests on. Community organizers are professionals who assist in the birth, or support the existence of, such groups. As the examples presented in the first chapter revealed, this is a cyclical, organic process (see Picture 10.) One-on-ones help organizations take on issues that reflect the needs of the community, so that advocacy can be done as teamwork. Through listening to 100-200 people, a community organizer can establish a core group of initiators and a circle of members and sympathizers, and come across issues that affect - and are considered important - by many people in the community. Hence the one-on-one is an important tool for building a base, and it is therefore an ongoing task. From what

we learn in the one-on-ones we can prioritize issues and the organization can decide which ones to begin with. An important criterion is to choose an issue that suits the organization in terms of capacities and can be settled within a reasonable amount of time so that the members have a chance to experience success and be motivated for further organizing actions. We collect background materials which are helpful when it comes to planning. We carry out a power analysis and check who the decision-maker in charge of the given issue is (who has the power to give us what we want) as well as who our allies and opponents are. We plan a campaign, and after setting our goals we design our actions, that is, the steps in the campaign through which we can increase the stakes (i.e. put more pressure on decision makers) if necessary. The ultimate goal is, of course, to sit down at the negotiating table and reach an agreement. The actions are evaluated as a group and we never forget about celebrating our victories!

Building a democratic organization is at least as important as victory itself. Hence we continuously provide opportunities for people to join our work so that an increasing number of people can learn what practicing democracy is all about. To do this we create a framework for democratic operation and support the development and engagement of the most active members of the group whom we call "community leaders". Community organizing provides a wide spectrum of political participation opportunities from local issues to national ones and one of the priorities is to have locally active groups connect to national level issues.





# Sustainability and Community Organizing

## – What does sustainability mean in the organizational life and work of the Civil College Foundation?

– Sustainability appears in the life of the organization on several levels. The transfer of the approach of sustainability has been integrated into all our training programs - be they community organizer or community leader training courses - but we also have a separate training program on sustainability. In our community organizing program, we have supported several groups whose activities and issues are related to environmental protection, e.g. the Little Forest Defenders or the “Let the Trees Stay on Római” group. The third dimension, which is also the objective of community organizing, is the promotion of social justice, which, in turn, is one of the main aspects of sustainability.

## – How does the sustainability aspect appear in practice?

– Sustainability is also one of the main aspects in the design and operation of our training center in Kunbábony. There is an

equal partnership between the owner foundation and the cooperative running the house - this provides a basis from the outset for us to talk about sustainable operation. We are mobilizing community resources that have enabled us to build an infrastructure that includes the pursuit of sustainability in its elements. Examples are the garden structures, which have been built using local materials and know-how. The structures - composting toilets, garden showers and ovens - are capable of demonstrating environmentally friendly operation.

We have a community garden where chemical-free vegetable growing based on companion planting takes place, on a small



scale. We also use recycled materials in our buildings for interior architectural and design elements. The new furnishings of the café, the rooms, the dining room and the classroom are all made of recycled materials. We place great emphasis on having these prepared and maintained by local knowledgeable people. Much depends on the house being in the hands of a community where many people with different resources work, and energy efficient device use is feasible. We also serve sustainability economically by operating our own café. Here, too, we strive for environmentally friendly solutions: we

sell redeemable bottled beverages, selectively collect garbage and compost. We offer our guests locally made jams, syrups and scones, thus shortening the journey of food.

– **The biggest instance of recycling is the building itself: the fact that it has become a training venue and alma mater for communities is but some kind of survival of the old school function.**

– There may indeed be a parallel in the sense that old photos show the building being maintained through community work. The people of Kunbábony are seen in the area as a good community. There has been

community organizing activities going on in Kunbábony, as a result of which garbage collection has been resolved and the playground has been renewed. There is an active community representing and resolving local issues.

– **Can community organizing itself, as a method of advocacy, be considered sustainable?**

– It can be considered sustainable in two ways. On the one hand, our community organizers put issues on the agenda that serve social justice: they fight against discrimination, and for equal access. On the other hand,





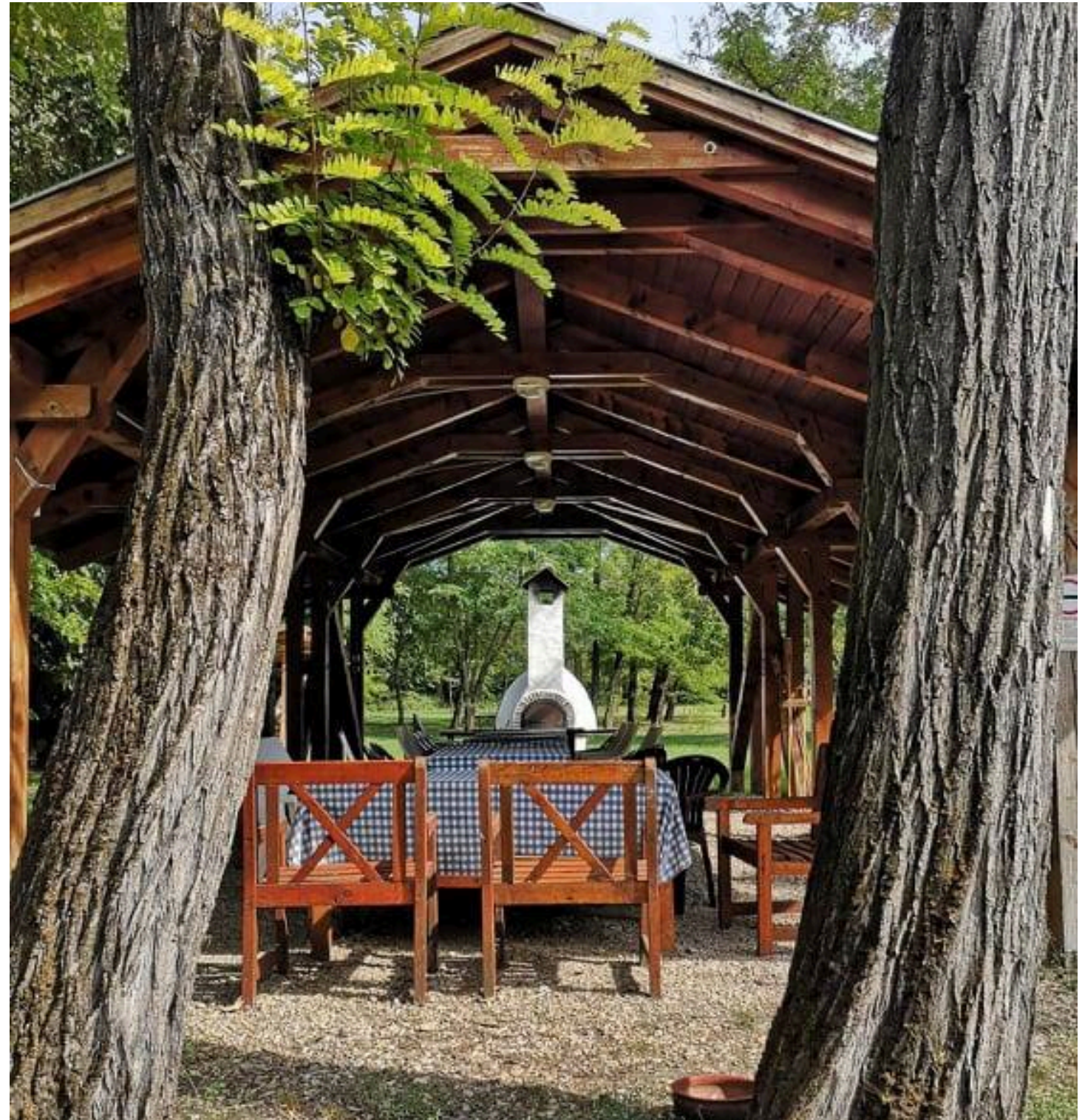
they work involving local residents, organizing in a democratic way. The functioning of the local community or the people who

come together for a cause does not depend on whether or not someone is helping the process from outside. At the same time, the

organizations are surviving and resolving further issues.

– **Do these visits to Kunbábony change the mindset of the community organizers who regularly turn up at the training center?**

– They do, but slowly. We are constantly developing the part of the training courses that frames what visitors can experience through providing a theoretical background. We have everything that can serve sustainability in a household: short-chain food supply, equipment rental, material recycling, local labor. These are all things that can be done at home, which are good to see during operation and, with the knowledge assigned to them, can shape the attitudes and lifestyle changes of organizers.





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