

## **The Civil Association Český západ**

*Helping Romani Community in Dobra Voda  
u Touzimi and its surroundings*

**Education, employment, free time activities, social services, involvement in public matters, community work, and textile work-shop.**



**český západ o.s.**

### **The mission of Český západ**

Our mission is to develop civil society in the area of Touzim. According to the members of our association, civil society means such a society where social exclusion is curtailed, manifestations of xenophobia and ethnic intolerance limited and in which citizens show interest in resolving public issues.

### **About Český západ**

The civil association Český západ is active in the socially excluded, mainly Romani community in Dobra Voda u Touzimi in the Karlovy Vary region, where it helps the members of this community to take their life into their own hands and not to depend on help from outside. Český západ strives not only to support individual members of the community but also the local community as a whole. It is active not only in Dobra Voda but also in other localities – Nová Farma, Služetín and Bezděkov, where it offers in field social services.

### **The motto of the association**

To take life in ones own hands.

### **The seat of the organization**

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### **Bank details**

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The civil association is a non-governmental non-profit organization which was registered by the Ministry of Interior under identification number VS/1-1/48876/01-R the 17<sup>th</sup> December 2001.

## **Executive council**

The current executive council was elected the 24<sup>th</sup> January 2008 and its members are:

**Mgr. Jan Lego** – president of the executive council

**Ján Dunček** – vice-president of the executive council

**Yves Lauras** (brother Samuel – of the monastery of Holy Mother of God in Nový Dvůr) – member of the executive council

**Ing. Václav Maršík** – member of the executive council

**Mgr. Ing. Lenka Kuřátková** – member of the executive council

## **The history of the association**

The establishment of the association Český západ was initiated by the trappist brothers from the nearby monastery at Nový Dvůr in 2001. During the construction of the monastery they have noticed the difficult life in the Romani community in Dobra Voda and they have offered work to some men while building the monastery. The civil association Český západ, which started its activity in Dobra Voda at the beginning of 2002, came into being based on this cooperation. The trappist brothers offer financial, material and spiritual support to the association up to this day. The founding members of Český západ were Jan Dunccek – representing the inhabitants of Dobra Voda, Jan Lego and Karel Podsednik – coordinators of the employed Romani men.

New employees have been gradually hired and the civil association has begun to offer new activities for women and children. Those activities consisted mainly in free time and educational programs. The children have started to come to the Afternoon club in Touzím which has offered them a possibility to spend meaningfully the time between the end of the school day and the arrival of a single bus connection home. Since the arrival of Jana Kosová the method of community work has been presented which enables the local Romani to learn how to solve their problems using their own capacities and thus to take their life in their hands.

In 2003 the association opened a textile work-shop and begun to sell products of Romani women from Dobrá Voda on various marketplaces. In 2005 Český západ purchased from the city of Touzím a panel house which was in an emergency condition. In 2006 the panel house was repaired and brought back to full operation thanks to financial means acquired from the Government Bureau of the Czech Republic and from an endowment fund Znovuzrození (Resurrection) and also thanks to the willingness of its' inhabitants to participate in the repair works by their own means. A six-member housekeeping board has been established and its' members have gradually acquired skills necessary for the collective housekeeping management which should come into being as soon as the individual tenants purchase their respective flats.

Thanks to the project Development of Český západ aimed at strengthening the inner capacity of the organization, a new strategic plan of the organization was created in 2005. Operation plans of individual projects leading to the goals set forth in the strategic plan are based upon this strategic plan every year. In 2007 a settlement committee (osadní výbor) was established in order to represent the interests of the inhabitants of the municipality of Dobrá Voda during the meetings of the municipal council of Touzím. Its' members have been elected from the

inhabitants of Dobra Voda in a local election. In the same year the employment of the Romani community exceeded the rate of 60 % for the first time since the foundation of the association. In mid-2007 Czech West started to offer field social services in two new localities – Nová Farma and Služetín u Teplé. At the end of 2007 Czech television shot a 20-minutes documentary film called "Český západ: The Romani and the trappists" directed by Alena Hynkova. The film documents among others the opening ceremony of new premises of the Afternoon club of the Český západ in Touzím.

One year later, in 2008, Český západ was awarded the label "Ethnic Friendly Employer" which is awarded to organizations for equal treatment of ethnically different population. Český západ created a project aimed at the renewal of its' community centre in Dobra Voda and begun to collect financial means in order to realize it. By the end of the year a new project called Together in Dobra Voda was launched in order to improve the condition of three public places in Dobra Voda using the forces of local inhabitants.

## **Target group**

Dobra Voda is an administrative part of the municipality of Touzím in the Karlovy Vary region. This area has been artificially repopulated after the World War II by new inhabitants. Out of the total of 95 inhabitants of Dobra Voda 78 are members of the Romani community. The whole relatively numerous community resides in a single panel house consisting of 14 small-scale flats. Some of the flats are inhabited even by three generations of tenants. Until 31<sup>st</sup> October 2005 the city of Touzím was the owner of the panel house. Starting from 1<sup>st</sup> November 2005 the civil association Český západ, whose seat is neighboring the panel house, has become the owner of the building for a limited period of time.

## **Activities of Český západ**

- We provide social services according to Act no. 108/2006 Coll., which consist mainly in social activation services for families with children and field programs.
- We support self-confidence of socially excluded inhabitants and we encourage them to discover their uniqueness, resourcefulness and possible further growth.
- We organize educational and vocational programs, we offer individual education.
- We create work opportunities and we help people succeed on the labor market.
- We organize free time activities as a prevention of pathologic phenomena.
- We involve socially excluded inhabitants into solving problems of community interest, mainly on municipal level.
- We help to raise the standard of social culture (housing, peaceful civic coexistence, etc.).
- We help to overcome communication barriers between the inhabitants of the panel house in Dobra Voda and the representatives of state authorities.

## **Activities for children and youth**

We support children from Dobra Voda in the fields of education and meaningful spending of their free time. We offer them:

- **Petty school** – alternative institution to a kindergarten for Romani children of two to six years of age in Dobra Voda.
- **Individual education** – it helps children to deal with school requirements.
- **English club** – amusing way to introduce basics of English to the children.
- **Ceramics club** – introduction to a work with clay enables the children to develop their creativity and precise moves.
- **Afternoon club in Touzim** – it is an institution open to wide audience which provides place where children may do homework, participate in programs prepared by assistants, listen to popular music, work or play using computers, draw or create.
- **Blue, Yellow and Green Fish in the clubroom** – a creative program designed for children of six to twelve years of age.
- **Other Activities** – including football, trips into the nature, learning and culture trips, movie club etc.

### Activities for adults

We offer the following activities to more than forty adult members of community in Dobra Voda and further clients from Nova Farma, Sluzetin and Bezdekov.

- **Social program** – it provides two kinds of social services: programs in field and social activation services for families with children.
- **Employment** – employment or procurement of work possibilities and the improvement of qualification of members of the community. Český západ operates for example a textile work-shop where it employs Romani women.
- **Educational programs** – we offer for example courses of Czech and English language, computer courses, legal conscience courses, courses of effective communication, discussions with a doctor and other courses based on the needs of community members.
- **Leisure activities** – creative activities and sports, cultural and educational trips, social events in Dobra Voda and other.

### Principles of our work

- While doing our work we believe in the beauty and dignity of every man.
- We believe that diversity is not a threat to us, but on the contrary enrichment.
- We do not wish to do work for others; on the contrary, we wish to enable our clients to solve their problems on their own and thus take their life in their own hands.
- We are aware that our work has to support not only the individual but also the whole community which is a source of substantial creative power. In the course of our work we follow principles of community work which help people to discover their abilities and their power, teach them how to express their opinions and needs, overcome passivity and disbelief and start to develop their potential in society.
- We are trying to attain permanent social change. We try to motivate inhabitants to a common effort when from ideas real plans arise, which are later carried out.
- We support the principle of equal treatment of ethnically different population and we also fulfill this principle in our personal practice in the long term and care for its observance. Since 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2008, we are holders of the label Ethnic Friendly Employer, awarded by the civil association IQ Roma Servis from Brno.

## **The main accomplishments of Český západ**

- Lowering the unemployment rate of the members of Romani community of Dobra Voda from 100 % in the year 2000 to 40 % in the year 2008.
- Lowering the percentage of transfer of children to special schools.
- Support of secondary and extracurricular education, acceptance of several members of the community to secondary school studies.
- Prevention of socio-pathological phenomena – criminality, truancy, chicanery, drug addiction.
- Representation of the interests of inhabitants in the municipal council of Touzim through the settlement committee ("osadní výbor") of Dobra Voda which was established in 2006 and consists of Romani and non-Romani inhabitants of the municipality.
- Reparation of a panel building in state of emergency in Dobra Voda.

## **Further accomplishments of Czech West**

- Creation of new employment, re-qualification and increase of skills of the clients, bigger success of the clients on the labor market.
- Establishment and operation of the Afternoon Club in Touzim which is operating on the basis of a low-threshold facility. This club serves for prevention of criminality and other socio-pathological phenomena.
- Active participation of adults in creative and educational programs in Dobra Voda.
- Organization of the majority of cultural events within the community by a six-member housekeeping board elected from among the members of the community and the preparation of this board for the independent management of a panel building where the community lives.
- Elaboration of the strategic plan of the association and its successful fulfillment for the third year already.
- Being one of the most successful organizations working with the Romani minority, stability and long-term experience.
- Award of the prestigious label Ethnic Friendly Employer awarded for equal treatment of ethnically different population.
- Establishment of a textile work-shop of a nature of a protected work-shop because it is employing Romani women socially excluded from the community in Dobra Voda.

## **What does community work in the Romani community in Dobra Voda consist of?**

The personnel of Český západ apply in their work principles of community work which is aimed at permanent social change. The community worker supports the ideas of the members of community, helps them to come to a decision as to which of the ideas should be carried out, set goals, distribute tasks, search for resources not only within the community but also outside of it, he helps to evaluate risks of the projects, motivates in the course of implementation of the projects and finally helps to look back at the jointly accomplished work, assess the whole process and proceed to a new project with an even bigger appetite and courage.

The active participation of the members of community in the course of execution of their ideas and the experience such effort brings does not only change the participants within - the powerless become powerful, the passives active - but it also brings about social change the fruit of which can be observed from the outside.

In 2007 the community took part on the repair of the panel building which it inhabits and the adjustments of its surroundings. In front of the panel building a parking lot was built by the community itself. The members of the community further carried out their plan to establish fitness room in one of the basements of the panel building and they agreed on the conditions of its use. Most of the inhabitants also participated in the celebration of the International Day of Neighbors and in the competition for the Most Beautiful Window in Bloom in Dobra Voda.

Important investment into education of community members, children, youth and adults, is a precondition of success. Community workers therefore create on purpose such conditions which enable the members of community to acquire knowledge and skills necessary to cope with everyday problems of the community. Thus several courses which directly react to the current needs of the community take place in Dobra Voda every year. To list only some of them: computer course, English and Czech language courses, communication courses, course on legal aspects of employer-employee relationship, preparation for childbirth and motherhood or discussion with a doctor.

## **How to help to Český západ**

For those who consider our activity important and worth of support, we offer several ways of help. You can support us by means of:

- Membership in the Friends Club
- Financial donation
- Material donation
- Rendering service
- Propagation of our organization
- Volunteering
- Purchase of a product manufactured in our textile work-shop

We would like to thank you very much all of you for support in the past or in the future.