



Eliška Brotánková

Co-worker and supporter

Age: 23

Field of study: Social Work
student at Hussite
Theological Faculty

Personality portrait

I first learned about Close Neighbour in high school from a classmate, Marie. Over time, however, she went from being just a classmate to one of my closest friends and I wanted to learn more about organization she practically grew up in.

What I like most about this work is the sense of belonging with the other workers. Even though we differ in age, gender, ethnicity or fields of study, we share a common goal: "Helping kids be kids so they can grow up to be better adults!"

I have had a desire to help people since I was a child. It was

"I have no idea what the future holds, but one thing I know for sure - this organization will forever have a place in my heart!"

also one of the reasons for my decision to study Social Work. When I helped someone, it was always within the family or friends, but I never worked for an organisation before. One day, a friend of mine contacted me and asked if I would

like to join a trip with the children they were taking care of, and I knew immediately that I wanted to give it a go! Amazing trip to the Prague Zoo took place on August 16, 2021. We met early in the morning and took a bus we booked before. There were a lot of children, so we divided them into smaller groups as soon as we arrived and then walked around the zoo with them. Many of them were at the Zoo for the first time and I was glad I could be there with them.

I became very interested in what the organisation does, and I decided to continue cooperating with them.

I regularly visited the childrens' club, I tutored the children, helped them with their homework, played games or went on walks with them. My involvement in activities for children or even whole families became more and more frequent. Some of the

non-regular activities I participated in were trips, art workshops for children and food drives.

After these experiences, it warmed my heart to know that I was doing something that was helping others and making their lives better! In retrospect, I regret that I didn't start volunteering sooner. Today, I continue to work for this non-profit. The kids, even some of the adults, have grown very fond of me and are always happy to see me.

Working with people can be challenging, but it makes me feel happy and rewarded. I have no idea what the future holds, but I know one thing for certain. Even if for whatever reasons I stop working here, and I sincerely hope that I will never stop, this organization will always have a place in my heart. It has taught me so much more than how to interact with people or run a kids club. I am convinced that I have personally grown a lot during my cooperation with this organization, not only as a social worker, but more importantly as a human being!





Tereza Šašková

Co-worker and supporter

I first learned about this organization when “The Secret Millionaire” was aired on Czech TV, because organisation Close Neighbour participated in the show. I was intrigued by what they do, and noted the name on my phone. About three years later, I was reading through my phone and saw the note. I felt this was the right time to ask if they needed an extra pair of hands. And surprise, surprise! They did need it!

As soon as I walked into their premises for the first time, I felt peaceful and comfortable. Working at Close Neighbour absolutely fulfilled my desire to selflessly help those in need, and it was compatible with my studies. What I find the most fascinating is the love and pas-

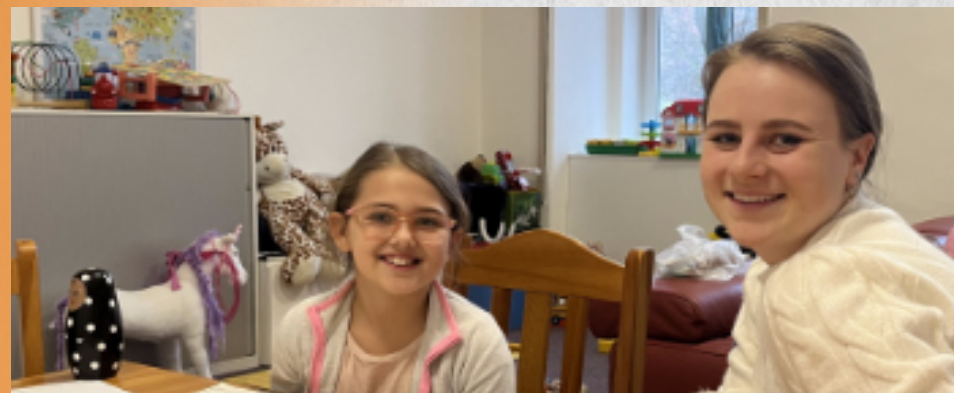
sion that Pavla and her children have been giving to their work, even in times things were difficult. They are able to help a lot of other people at the expense of their own comfort, which is something that deserves respect and admiration! Working with the Romani people may not seem very popular nowadays, which is what makes the work of the Close Neighbour team even more admirable. They do not listen to prejudice, on the contrary: they promote mutual respect and try to build bridges between the majority population and the ethnic minority.

At first, this kind of work was very challenging for me. The stories of children and families that I got to know

were sad and sometimes hard to believe. At one of the tutoring sessions, I was helping a 10-year-old boy with his homework. He lived with his mother and other siblings in a shelter. One of the questions he had to write an answer to was “Do you like your apartment and the place where you live?”. He answered “yes”. I asked him what he liked most and he said: “We are all there together, me, my mother and my siblings”. Hearing his answer, I understood that no matter what environment a child grows up in, family ties and community are the greatest security that children need.

This experience made me realize that having someone to support you, someone to share your worries with, is one of the most important things that give us the needed security in life. Close Neighbour also provides a kind of “security”, a safe environment for those who otherwise don't have it available.

Working at Close Neighbour has completely transformed my worldview, given me an opportunity for tremendous professional and personal growth, a lot of new friends, and made me believe that big changes do not require major initiatives and actions, but rather small steps, made persistently over time. These small steps can gradually make a huge difference for the whole generation of people. I hope that, in the future, I will be able to give back to the organization at least a small part of what it has given me!



Personality portrait

Age: 24
Field of study: Faculty of Economics of University of West Bohemia
At Close Neighbour: Fundraising manager



Jana Ferková

Co-worker and supporter

Four years ago, I moved to Pilsen with my children, and I hardly knew anyone here. I was recommended to check the organization Close Neighbour by Sonia Horváthová, who used to participate in their activities and seemed very excited about it.

What I like most about working at Close Neighbour is how kind everyone is and how they try to help the children. Many families couldn't afford to pay the entrance fee to the Jump Arena for their children, for example. It's like one family here – everyone can help each other mutually.



I am very grateful for the opportunity to work at Close Neighbour. My daughter got her high school courses paid for, as well as regular tutoring and preparation classes for her entrance exams! Before I learned about Close Neighbour, my children were just sitting at home. At Close Neighbour, they have a regular schedule, tutoring, dancing classes, etc. On behalf of the whole family, thank you so much!



Ondřej Medve

Co-worker and supporter

I found out about Close Neighbour from Marie Papazianova. She approached me once asking if I wanted to help out on a trip they were organizing, then later, to help with tutoring children, and so it all started...

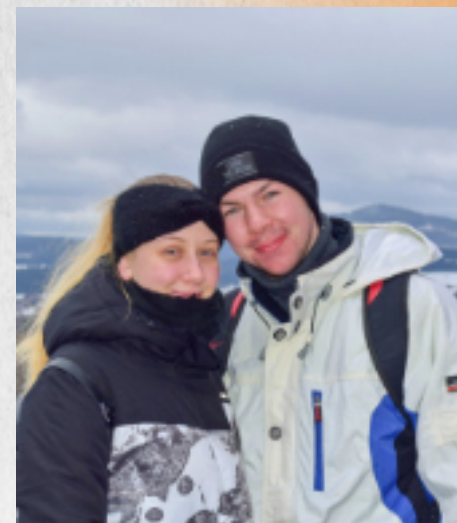
One of my best memories is the Teambuilding trip that gave me the opportunity to get to know my future colleagues and their partners and children. We spent our time walking around the area, and holding bobsled and sled races. I also enjoyed the ski lessons when I taught Juri how to stand on skis - while I only went skiing



about five times in my life myself. But we did a great job!

We were served “colourful” lunches and dinners, which I found slightly funny, because what I got was, for example, a piece of chicken with a side dish. They tried to make the dish more interesting by adding things like cheese on the chicken (I am gluten-intolerant).

I will continue to be in touch with the organization, but only help out at major events. I have always known that working with children is not really my cup of tea. I wanted to give it a try and do something good.



Age: 22

Career: Controller in Pilsen heating plant

Personality

portrait

Personality

portrait

Personality portrait



Ivana Sušilová

Co-worker and supporter

I first learned about Close Neighbour in my previous job. In the past, I worked in a furniture company. This company provided the organization with office cabinet organizers as a donation. One day I noticed a bulletin board with a flyer promoting a donation to an organization. The intermediary between the company and the organization was Pavla's husband, who worked at the same furniture company at that time.

It was Pavla's husband, who was a close colleague of mine, who introduced me to what Pavla's organization does. He mentioned his wife and her organization a few times and told me they take care of Roma children. I still remember his words: "You and my wife would definitely get along!" One day, I showed up at their children's club and met Pavla.

"The work that this NGO is doing is both unusual and unique because of its focus on the Roma minority."

First impression? The environment, the children and the room were all great, but it was nothing compared to

Pavla's radiating personality! That was really something that left a deep mark on me. Her friendly and warm welcome, her enthusiasm and joy that I visited her, her positive attitude, her beautiful words about Roma children, it was an unforgettable experience. The second meeting is also worth mentioning. I was walking through the streets of Pilsen and suddenly Pavla on her bike, with a smile on her face, shouted at me: "Hi... how are you doing?" This little thing made my day.

What impressed me the most about working here was the enthusiasm and passion radiating from Pavla and the kids. I was impressed by how they managed to align their personal lives with their activities in the organization, how they adapted their family relationships to their work

relationships, how they chose their fields of study and jobs in a way that benefited the organization.

The work that this organisation is doing is both unusual and unique because of its focus on the Roma minority. They dedicate all their efforts to the development and growth of potential of Romani people. They are trying to point Romani people in the right direction and make them appreciate values that they originally did not consider important, even though they are important! For example, the value of education, a career, decent housing, quality leisure time activities, the value of status in society, and faith.

I have been active at Close Neighbour for about five years now. My family and me started visiting the organization in our free time. As immi-

grants from Slovakia, we were unaware of other services in the city, so I was grateful to have found the organization, especially for the sake of my then five-year-old son. Together with them, we took our first trip to Karlovy Vary and another to a beautiful castle. Thanks to the trips we got to know the Roma community in Pilsen, which was a great benefit for me and my son. Over time, I became an active member of the community and participated in the activities run at the organization. I was doing various things, from cooking at the summer camp to preparing, organizing or carrying out trips and events. Within the organization, I now independently organize trips and events for children

and families from Nýřany, because my close family and me live here. This also demonstrates that the activities of the organization expanded beyond Pilsen as such. Thanks to organisation, the Roma community of Nýřany, which also faces various kinds of challenges, can experience many beautiful moments!

My relationship with Pavla and CN is "bearing its first fruit" Never in my dreams would I have imagined that I would one day study at university in Pilsen, that I would work in Social and Health Care, have a leadership position, or that I would be able to help other Roma people. I would not have achieved all this on my own.





Karolína Kamenická

Co-worker and supporter

I have known Pavla, or rather Close Neighbour, for many years. We met thanks to my classmate and later best friend, also called Pavla, who is Pavla's eldest daughter.

What I admire about Close Neighbour is the care they give to children who do not have it readily available in their lives, and who must grow up in a difficult environment.

Close Neighbour gives these children a lot of joy and valuable experience that they might not otherwise have the chance to get. It helps them build a useful basis for their future life.

My wish for Pavla is that she continues to create smiles on children's faces and keep her enthusiasm for the cause in the next decade!



Age: 28
Career: Data analyst

Personality
portrait

Radek Macháň

Co-worker and supporter

I first met Pavla and the Romani children from Pilsen at the Pathfinder summer camp in 2010. A group of four Romani children attended the camp organized by our club from Prague. We did typical scouting activities with the attendees. To tell the truth, it was sad to see how big the difference was between the level of knowledge and skills of most of the kids and the kids from the Close Neighbour organization. It was obvious that these kids were not used to spending time with a group of other kids or being in nature at all. But even after one week, there was visible progress. The Romani children started integrating into the group, their ability to follow the camp routine improved, and so did their practical skills. I became so interested in working with these children that since 2013, I have been directly involved in organizing the summer camps for Close Neighbour.

What I like about Close Neighbour the most is how it positively impacts children and their families. You can see how the organization itself is evolving, too. I've had the opportunity to watch the organization

evolve from the very beginning and there has been noticeable progress. The group of active volunteers has expanded, and the organization now even has permanent employees. Our friends from the Roma community have also joined the activities.

The work is very unique, and enormously physically and mentally demanding. You get to see children in very poor conditions, which they could not influence. They can only try to use the help at the organization and slowly build a better life than their parents have.



Age: 34
Career: Project manager

Personality
portrait



Václav Vondrášek

Co-worker and supporter

My name is Vašek Vondrášek, I was born in 1971, I'm a pastor of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and I was involved in the work of Close Neighbour in the years 2011 and 2012.

When I think about it today, it was a great journey that taught me new depths of humility and patience. When we took Romani children to summer camps, where I played my part, it was always an adventure, often moving on a very "thin ice", but fortunately, it always had a happy end... When we started organizing Romboch (Romani church service) events, I was always nervous for a few days, worried about how it would all turn out. Transporting the children by car was always challenging. More than once, they jumped out at me while driving, so I often (which I rarely do) had to raise my voice to keep them seated. It was a bit of a miracle they managed to arrive alright... The sermons themselves were great, I felt everyone was able to cooperate and enjoy the time, but still, as soon as I dropped them off at their homes and drove back home, I always

breathed a sigh of relief. I always felt emotionally drained. Each time, I was reminded of Jesus's words: "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me..." And that's why I'm also very grateful for this whole experience. I greatly admire everyone who takes care of these children, like Pavla and her whole family. I wouldn't have been able to do it for such a long time and with such a passion as they do it... With respect, gratitude, admiration and prayer for this whole ministry. Vašek



Václava Smetáčková

Co-worker and supporter

Vendulka is our ray of sunshine. She is truly admirable and serves as a role model for many people around her. Despite her age and the challenges of her youth, she continues to dedicate herself to volunteer work, offering support to seniors in day care centres and nursing homes. Her vitality is something many would envy!

Pavla's father is my relative and childhood friend. That's probably why I became little Pavla's godmother at her baptism. Life took us down different paths, and it wasn't until years later that I reconnected with my goddaughter and her beautiful children. I remain in awe of what they dedicate most of their lives to - the Close Neighbour organization.

My first invitation to the Christmas "Romboh" event left me deeply impressed by the incredible outcomes of Close Neighbour's activities - after-school clubs, trips, theatre performances, tutoring sessions, and summer camps. Everywhere I looked, I saw the smiling faces of children they lovingly call "their" children, or "their Roma children."

Over time, everything has continued to grow and flourish. Their patient, tireless efforts have borne

fruit - whether through new collaborators among the children's parents, the joy of seeing some children excel in school, shine in music or dance, or simply grow up with the understanding that kindness and responsibility are values worth upholding in life.

Thank you, Close Neighbour, for allowing me to be part of your world. You have my deepest admiration.
Godmother Vendulka



Age: 74

Career: Volunteer

Age: 53
Career: Seventh-day
Adventist Church preacher

Personality
portrait

Personality
portrait



Valerie Jelínková

Co-worker and supporter

Age: 31
Career: Pharmacist

Personality portrait

It was June/July 2013, just after high-school graduation, and I travelled to attend baptism of my friend Ada from Jeseník city. Ada arranged for us to travel together with the Papazian/Fáber family from Prague, who were also attending the event. Ada also told us to look for people whose hair looks like “curly sheep” and who are impossible to overlook.

I think we were often 5-10 rested adult leaders short every year (and don't even get me started on the budget in the first years).

And she was right. We soon began to suspect that the uniqueness of this family didn't stop at hair genetics. When Pavla later talked about their organization and plans for the summer, we knew immediately we want to be on board. Two months later, we arrived at her summer camp. I was so confident, having experience from organizing summer camps from before. But... Uhh... This was truly something different! If you haven't experienced it, it's hard to imagine how hard it is to handle children who are not used to obeying anyone else

beyond their parents (and who knows if they obey even them). But we managed to pull it off, and neither of us, neither the children were discouraged.

Next year, we attended again, with an ambitious plan to build our own campground in a bare meadow (more accurately, a dried-up swamp). Luckily, we had Aleš! Another

challenge was convincing the children that our tents and teepees are not medieval torture instruments. Back then, I think none of us knew what we are up for. I remember that some children arrived wearing only dress and flip-flops, but with bags full of chips. It was an adventure, both for them and for us.

Since I was studying in Hradec Kralove city, and my sister in Prague, our activities with Close Neighbour were limited to helping during summer camps. The curiosity of what

new adventures we would face, and the realization of how much more challenging the camp would be for the rest of the team if one volunteer is missing, these two things always motivated me to come again and again each year. We were always amazed at how much the girls and their brother Koli managed to organize and do in the past year (on top of their own studies), and how far the kids have come since we last saw them. We are still amazed.

The camps were better and better every year. The more experienced camp attendees were able to help with the activities and enjoy themselves. The summer camp was their reward for working hard the whole previous school year. Younger children learned from the older ones. But not only kids were developing - so were we, the adults, and our whole camping site. The camp was located in a truly magical place, surrounded by forests. In the evening, when everyone is asleep, it is truly beautiful.

But I must also admit that every camp I attended left me exhausted. Thinking about the sometimes very harsh life stories of the children and their families, but also the constant attention, trying to prevent conflicts between the boys, who wanted to deal with each other

“their way”, or the feeling of helplessness when some situations escalated too much - each day left me physically and emotionally drained.

These difficulties never discouraged Pavla. Every year, she made it happen, no matter the circumstances. Discussion on how many more children we can take on, were often very difficult.

When I started my first job, I decided to support Close Neighbour financially. I am aware that I have only seen a small part of all the hard work that is needed.

In 2022 and 2023, we were successful in our application for the DiscoverEU Erasmus Travel Project. Because of it, I have had more opportunities to meet some of the organisation members, and some of the parents of the children as well. We meet on Sundays in Pilsen, read the Bible, and discuss the preparation for the trips.

Close Neighbour has become my second family during these few years, and I am very grateful for all the moments we spent together. I'm still amazed at how this whole thing can work, all thanks to the effort of one family, and the people that were inspired by their passion!





Valentina Jelínková

Co-worker and supporter

I met Pavla and her family for the first time in 2013, on a trip to Jeseník city, where we attended the baptism of our common friend. My friend arranged that my sister and I could travel together with them in their car, because they were coming from Pilsen and their car was big enough. It is quite a long drive from Prague to Jeseník city, and Pavla was excited to share with me what she does. I don't remember the details, but we knew in that moment that we want to come and see their next summer camp. Ever since, we

must be evident to everyone by now). But can you imagine anyone sane who would throw themselves into such a task, and with such enthusiasm and patience? Pavla has an invaluable ability to entertain children and to pass on values or advice for life through stories. From personal hygiene, financial literacy, avoiding addictions, to choosing a high school or choosing a partner... and many other useful topics that one would usually expect parents to discuss with their children.

“Pavla is, how to put this... completely crazy. (This much must be evident to everyone by now). But can you imagine anyone sane who would throw themselves into such a task, and with such enthusiasm and patience?”

attend their camps regularly! Every year during the summer camps, we try to at least show up, do a little here and there, make some nice pictures. :)

Pavla is, how to put this... completely crazy. (This much

Aleš, Pavla, Johana, Eka, Koli and Marie make up the rest of Pavla's team - they compensate for whatever Pavla might not possess. With their skills and talents combined, they all co-create and continuously improve the organization. It's

actually an absolutely fascinating family.

To be able to watch the transformation process, to get a little insight into the subculture of Roma and socially excluded families, is an amazing and valuable experience for me. Moreover, I don't have to spend a whole year with these children, picking them up from dangerous-looking, shabby apartments and exposing myself to various potential risks arising from contact with their families. That's what Pavla and her family do! And you can clearly see this at the camps. It's hard to say what such a summer camp with these kids would be like if the children and the team didn't know each other

and did not already have mutual trust established between them. I think it would be much more challenging, to put it mildly.

The biggest benefit of the work at Close Neighbour, in my opinion, is showing kids (who often have nowhere else to see this) how the ideal parent cares for their kids. They take them on hikes to nature, trips to castles, trips to the Zoo, to the swimming pool... they help them with school and find suitable extracurricular activities for them... If they understand this, then maybe, some of them will choose not to have six kids, while they take little care of them. They will be able to nav-

igate a little better through life in a society that otherwise mostly ignores them. And they will also know from their childhood that there are a lot of "gadjos" who are quite friendly.

Working with this specific group of children offers many surprising moments. At one of the camps a few years ago, we were out in the field. I noticed that a little girl of about seven years old had something crawling up her leg. I told her to hold on for a moment and went to see if it was a tick. I wanted to remove it before it bites. The little girl jumped up and started screaming. I was surprised and looked at her in confusion, while Pavla ran over to me with a first aid kit and a few



Age: 31
Career: Currently in Maternity Leave

Personality
portrait

Valentina Jelínková

Co-worker and supporter



other frightened camp leaders. "What happened?!" Everyone thought that something terrible happened. "Well, um... I wanted to remove the tick from her leg before it bites." I blurted out, puzzled. The two of us had to hold the poor girl, who was scared to death, while Pavla removed the tick. A bit later, Pavla explained to me why the girl responded so hysterically to the incident. Some of these families are generally terrified of the forest because they only know it from horror movies and commercials on encephalitis vaccine. These commercials often look like a short horror movie themselves. "Beware! A tick is coming for you!" Some of the commercials feature a man dressed in a scary tick costume... The children naturally have no idea what a tick is, and how to deal with it. They have an ingrained fear that something absolutely terrible will happen if a tick bites them.

Another memory that comes to mind is a part of a conversation between two children aged 9-10, both around 60 kg, which I overheard: "My grandmother loves me the most, and every time I visit her, she

makes a chocolate cake just for me!" Or a request from another child: "Can't you sometimes cook some normal meals? Like bread soup?!" We were also amused by the statement of an 11-year-old girl: "I take after my daddy, only my butt is like my mommy's, because we twerk together!"

On the other hand, I have to say that thanks to this organisation, I also met very nice Roma people and their children. Some of them even cooked at one of the camps. Many of the camp attendees were also very nice. It always warms one's heart to see a group of Romani boys competing to see who can pull the biggest tree branch from the forest, and then cut it into smaller pieces with a hand saw, with pride!



Ester Papazianová

Co-worker and supporter



Age: 26
Career: Dentist

I've been involved with Close Neighbour since it first started operating in Pilsen. At the beginning, my contributions were minimal due to my young age, but as time went on, I began helping with organizing workshops, supervising kids at summer camps, and even cooking meals.

Work in organisation has always been, and always will be, very challenging. In the early days, much of the difficulty stemmed from the fact that my mom had to manage many things on her own. This meant certain areas, where she wasn't as skilled, naturally fell behind. Over time, this pushed us to develop skills that would enable us to build the most efficient team possible. Thanks to these efforts, we've evolved as



an organization – from sporadic interactions with kids to continuous and structured work. One thing we've never truly mastered is separating our family life from work matters, which I see as both our greatest strength and our greatest weakness. I can remember countless birthday celebrations where the main topic of discussion was the upcoming events of our organization.

The biggest challenge, however, comes from the people we are trying to help. Over the years, I've met many incredible individuals who strive to better themselves and overcome life's obstacles, who only need a little nudge. But with others, the work can be extremely difficult. No matter what you do for them, it's never good enough. They don't know how to ask for help or say thank you. There have been many times when our family became the target of cruel gossip from the very people we're trying to help. Each incident is emotionally draining and demotivates us from continuing this much-needed work. A burnt-out person can no longer help anyone, and we should always remember that.

Personality
portrait



Age: 52
Career: CEO Skyhøyt live scene Manager

Personality portrait

Pål Henning Iltstad

Co-worker and supporter

We met Pål in the spring of 2021, when we were preparing to submit our project Family Teaches Family to the Norwegian Funds. At that time, we were looking for a Norwegian partner who would not only give us plus points in the application evaluation, but also ensure enriching cooperation. Pål fulfilled and even exceeded all these expectations thanks to the amount of inspiration he provided for our work, the initiative for other forms of cooperation, and the interest he showed in our efforts and progress.

Pavla's commitment at Close Neighbour has embarked on a mission to foster community solidarity and support through social projects. With a core value centred on humanity, the organisation has spearheaded initiatives to assist individuals with some "extra needs".

just a common purpose. This meeting underscored the universal language of mutual respect and the desire to make a meaningful difference in the lives of others.

As the language barrier diminished, it was overshadowed by Pavla's commit-

"This cooperation serves as a testament to the idea that even organisations working in distinct fields can find common ground in their foundational beliefs, leading to successful and meaningful collaborations."

Our first digital encounter in 2021 swiftly revealed a profound alignment in our core values. Despite some initial "challenges" due to the language barrier, it became evident that our organisations were united by much more than

ment to aiding those in need and fostering community solidarity. This early interaction laid the foundation for a robust partnership and the potential for collaboration across cultural and linguistic divides, driven by shared humanitarian values.

Results are created through commitment and often manifest as "hidden knowledge", rather than in the form of titles or qualifications. This serves as a tribute to Pavla and Close Neighbour, who contribute to the lives of others on a daily basis.

The collaboration between Sky High Live and Pavla's Close Neighbour is underpinned by a mutual recognition of our core values; a deep respect for human life

and a commitment to providing help wherever possible. These principles have been crucial in forging a strong partnership and have been thoroughly tested.

This cooperation serves as a testament to the idea that even organisations working in distinct fields can find common ground in their foundational beliefs, leading to successful and meaningful collaborations.

Sky High Live, with its inception rooted in the ambition to revitalise the cultural scene, has always prioritised innovation and community engagement. Beyond its primary aim of creating unforgettable experiences, the organisation upholds the core values of respect for others and a commitment to offering support wherever possible.

Stay safe, keep on dreaming!





Sylvain Romain

Co-worker and supporter

Sylvain Romain loves God's Word, he is a free pastor and bridge builder between religions, and is the author of several books. He knows how to overcome prejudices between cultures and draw people closer to the heart of God. Above all, his knowledge of Islam has removed false fears of contact for many and opened up opportunities for life-changing relationships. Sylvain is a brave man who stopped his car when Pavla was hitchhiking on the highway between Brno and Prague.

Age: 67

Career: Seventh-day Adventist Church preacher

One day in Vienna, I talked with someone who always travels by hitchhiking. To me, it was funny because when I was young, I did the same. But these days, nobody does it anymore... Except for Pavla.

Two days later, she was standing on a busy highway. I pulled the brake so the whole mess on the back seat fell on the floor. "Hi, my name is Pavla and I am going to Prague". As we talked, we discovered more and more things we had in com-

"Do not forget! Next time you see someone raising his thumb on your way, it might be another Pavla – or maybe just her!"

mon - not only hitchhiking, but travelling, and the desire to help others. Finally, I asked her what Church she is a member of. It was the same as mine! We were truly a spiritual sister and brother!

From that moment on, she visited me regularly to pick up some clothing that people from my church collected in Austria. I am happy to keep her in my prayers and support her in brightening the lives of people she cares about!



Megan King

Co-worker and supporter

My first meet with Close Neighbour team was in summer 2015. I was then grant manager of the US Embassy in Prague. This year I visited the Summer Camp as a grantee.

I was inspired by the work of Close Neighbour. This team operates with a deep empathy and understanding of the life challenges that are faced by children and families.

Organisation works with a wide family of volunteers that give their time and energy. Costs are low and extremely reasonable.

As a grant supervisor, I was impressed by the competency and administration side of the organization. As a person, I was impressed by the spirit, love and dedication of the team.

"In the future, I wait for the day when the children who have been part of the programs for so long can step into leadership roles. I can only imagine how they will shape and inform the projects in the future."



Age: 58

Career: CEO Fairventures worldwide

Personality
portrait

Personality
portrait



Johanka Bělohoubková

Co-worker and supporter

Age: 28

Career: Coordinator of project activities

Personality portrait

I have been in contact with the Romani community since I was born, my mother has always been interested in Romani people and wherever we moved, we were in contact with Roma families. When we moved to Pilsen 17 years ago, my mother used some of her contacts from before, and we started visiting local Romani families, taking their children on trips or to the swimming pool. I was 10 years old then. But this lifestyle was nothing new to me.

“Although a person knows that he cannot help everyone and cannot completely change the lives of all children, the weight of individual problems still falls on him.”

I have long been impressed by the cheerful mood that prevails across the community. The children and parents are cheerful and, one could say, generally happy, despite enormous physical and mental exhaustion and challenging living conditions. This is a very inspiring attitude, especially in times when it's popular to complain about everything. I also like very

strong family ties and the way family members stand up for each other – this is certainly something we could learn from!

What I find most worthy of following about the whole project is the surprising selflessness on the part of my co-workers. They often come and ask what more they can do, how they can help, I see how the particular situations of children and entire families touch them deeply and how much

they care. This is something we should all learn! Unfortunately, this also has a flip side. When we maintain very intense and deep relationship with the community, we are constantly close to burnout. Although we know that we cannot help everyone, and improve the situation of everyone, it's hard not to be affected. We are constantly concerned about their life situations and we often



feel exhausted. That's why I would like to advise everyone, including myself, that sometimes you need to take a step back and not take everything too seriously.

There is a story that comes to mind most often when someone asks me about my experience. But I rarely tell it, because it's not very “representative”. We were taking the kids from the children's club back home. It was late afternoon, overcast and a little dark. We entered their house and climbed up the stairs to the 7th floor, cigarette butts on the stairs, laundry drying on the railing, broken doorknobs, dirt everywhere, empty bottles on the floor and the smell of urine everywhere. This is the home the children return

to every day. Suddenly, a dad of one of “our” kids walks from the other direction. His walk is unsteady, a syringe in his hand. The stairs are narrow. The children know what's going on. They simply keep walking past him. I try not to look too frightened in front of the children and walk on. Luckily, there was no incident. The children returned to their parents safely, and we also went home. I always think of this experience to remind myself what kind of environment these kids live in, what sorts of people they come in contact with. This is their “standard”, whether it be housing, number of relatives, substance abuse, financial background, etc. It is completely different from what an average person can

imagine. It's always easier for me to understand what they need, why we are dedicated to them, what we are trying to save them from. It's a great motivation to keep going, but also a source of anxiety about what these little guys have to face.

Close Neighbour gave me a lot, but also took a lot from me. It has helped me to shape my values. It taught me to be grateful, humble, understanding and non-judgmental about the situation of other people. It helped me make many long-lasting friendships among my colleagues, but also some members of the community. But at the same time, my mother's passion, which I share to a large extent, took away a big part of my childhood. We spent most of our free time and finances working towards the good of the community, even when we were living on social benefits ourselves. I took it for granted at the time, but growing up and especially in retrospect, now that I'm a mom myself, I regret it on several levels and have to somehow process it within me. However, I still strongly believe in the work of organisation, as it changes lives of these children. It is an amazing project.



Pavla Macháňová

Co-worker and supporter

As the eldest daughter of the founder, Pavla, I came into contact with the activities of Close Neighbour before the organization itself was founded. At first, we brought the children to the Sunday worship meetings for Roma people, and prepared a program for them: songs, craft activities, games and shorter speeches on various topics. Later we began to cooperate with the asylum house "Hope" and asylum house

For me personally, the most important thing is knowing how meaningful the whole Close Neighbour project is. While it is often challenging, knowing that we can help change the lives and futures of children in need for the better – it is something that continually gives us new energy and motivation.

I always used to say, that my team are not the children, but

"It's nice to see what a diverse team of people we have around us and how everyone contributes in their own way to the functioning of the organization."

of St. Zdislava. Every week, we organized scout group meetings in those houses. We expanded these regular meetings gradually, and added first larger events: visits to the pet shelter, swimming pool, the aqua world, and trips to nature... Later on, we held events over the week-end and summer camps. The number of children attending our events grew day by day, as siblings, classmates, neighbours and other friends joined the original group.

the leaders. Even now, as part of my job, I mainly take care of good working conditions and equipment for the staff, so that nothing stops them from fully devoting their time to the children and their families. I am glad that in recent years, we have enough time and space not only for the usual work for the Roma community, but also for our internal needs as a team: external and internal training sessions, experience sharing sessions, mentoring, team

building and other useful activities that we need to keep going.

Since the times of my studies, my most intense efforts in the organization have been the preparation and management of summer camps. As a program leader, I prepared workshops, team games, quizzes, bulletin board materials, and more. During the summer camps, I mainly made sure that the program ran as planned (or at least otherwise than planned), that everything needed was available on time, and everyone knew what was going to happen and what their job was. In this position, I have been able to use my natural aptitude for systematic planning, organizing and managing a team. With clipboards in hand and a whistle around my neck, I always liked to be in charge. But at the same time, the unpredictable situations and specific challenges of our summer camps taught me to be more flexible, collaborative and to communicate better.

After I started my maternity leave, we were able to launch larger projects that expanded my role from a summer camp supervisor to an almost permanent staff all year round. In my role as Project Manager, I am once again dedicated

to planning projects and implementing them in a systematic, timely and efficient manner. And I'm still learning to be more flexible, tolerant and kind. It's nice to see the diverse team of people that came together thanks to Close Neighbour, and how everyone contributes to the organization in their own way, whether it's by running a program with the kids, tutoring, bookkeeping, or working in the club garden.



Personality portrait

Age: 29

Career: Project manager

Personality portrait



Marie Papazianová

Co-worker and supporter

Being a part of Close Neighbour has impacted my entire life. When I was four years old, my parents divorced. In 2007, my mother, siblings and I moved to Pilsen. From then on, my activities within the Roma community began. I have to say, I practically grew up surrounded

and events and gradually started organizing and managing them myself. I was a camp leader, cook, and even a program leader for several years. Last year, for the first time, I was leading our group within the DiscoverEU project, which is a project that allows us

“Motto: Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life!”

by the community. At first, we invited the Roma children to join various trips with us, mostly to the nature, or to a church service. We paid for everything out of our own pockets, which was unsustainable in the long run. For this reason, my mother founded the organization Close Neighbour in 2010.

I gradually learned new skills and gained experience, and along with that, I was able to expand my activities and engagement. My current role in the organization is a financial literacy and employment specialist. But initially, I was an assistant for the extra-curricular activities, then a leader. At first, I participated in the organized trips

to travel around Europe by train together with socially excluded young people. I set up an Instagram profile for the organization



and started promoting our activities not only on social media, but also at various seminars, meetings, conferences, at the Czech National Agency for International Education and Research, the Platform for Roma Inclusion and many other places. I promote our organization not only for the public, but also among my closest friends. Thanks to this, Adel, Eliska, Ondra, Maky and Filip, who are, without doubt, my close friends, started working for us.

My time spent at organization had a great influence on my choice of the field of study, both in high school and later university. When choosing a high school, I felt the need to help my mother with accounting because I felt it was too overwhelming for her. So, I enrolled at the Business Academy in Pilsen to learn accounting and to be able to support her. Gradually I started helping her with accounting. After some time, however, I felt that this job is not a good fit for me, and I don't want to do it long-term. So, we found someone else to help out with accounting instead of me. My choice of university was influenced by many factors. For a long time, I didn't know what academic path I want to pursue. One day, at an event called “Pilsen courtyards”, one lady

helped me identify what I want to do. After I finished my presentation, she said that “it was evident that I study social work and wanted to be around people, because I was passionate about it”. I was quite surprised because at that time, I was in my fourth year at the Business Academy and had no idea where to go next. This lady helped me identify a field of study that might be the best fit for me, and indeed, I eventually chose social work as my field. I believe it was one of my best decisions in my life, because I feel I am in the right place, and I really enjoy studying most of the subjects.





František Veličkov

Co-worker and supporter

Age: 48

Career: Freelance
Developer

Personality portrait

I met Pavla for the first time at the course “One Plus One” (evening sessions for married couples), which took place on 25 February 2016 under the guidance of Karel Řežábek in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Pilsen. I was lucky enough to be seated at the table where Pavla and Aleš were tutors.

Karlovy Vary back home, I visited the venue of their summer camp. This is where I saw the this team in action and got an opportunity to help. This experience left a deep mark on me, and I decided to visit again after a few days. I saw how Pavla worked with the children. Most of the children did not

“This might be hard to believe, but some of these children saw certain flowers and animals for the first time - before the camp, they only heard about them at school.”

We started by introducing ourselves, and I received a business card with contact details of Close Neighbour. During one of the weekends in the Czech Ore Mountains, I got to know the attending members of the Christian community as we spent a lot of time hiking together. Pavla was telling us about the activities in her organisation. One of their biggest events was the summer camp for children at the Slavkov Forest mountains.

During the summer holidays, as I was travelling from

know how to swim. Before the week was over, Pavla managed to help some of the kids stop being afraid of water, and teach them to swim in the nearby pond! This might be hard to believe, but some of these children saw certain flowers and animals for the first time - before the camp, they only heard about them at school. In her work, Pavla followed the principle of John Amos Comenius - School by Play, as well as Christian values.

Every camp had a specific theme. I remember Pavla

telling the kids that it's better to be the policeman than the criminal in life. This might have surprised some of the naughty boys, but also might have resonated with them and made them reconsider their own values. After experiencing the summer camp, I decided to donate to the organization and starting in July 2016, I have been their regular donor. When circumstances allow, I still sometimes attend their events. In 2018, I attended a Christmas party, where children were dancing and singing, and received presents, which made them very happy.

Pavla's work, as well as the work of her whole team, has been inspired by Christian values and can be unbelievably challenging. As for me, supporting them financially is the best investment I have ever made. I wish the organization to flourish and stay active for many years to come! I look forward to helping again with setting up or closing up the summer camp!





Zuzana Jencíková

Co-worker and supporter

Age: 34

Career: Customer Service Team Leader

I first learned about organisation Close Neighbour about 4 years ago when I was looking for a non-profit organization to support together with my colleagues. At that time, we approached several similar organizations, but Pavla responded the fastest, and so, she was our unofficial “winner”.

When she came to meet us for the first time, she immediately impressed me with her passion and enthusiasm. At the same time, what I liked about her is that she is very practical and honest, she says things as they are, not trying to “sugarcoat” it.

Like I already mentioned, I am very impressed by Pavla’s passion. I like the goal of Close Neighbour, which is to support children and their families, to educate them and set an example they can follow. They teach the children that their life, their fate is in their own hands. They can influence what their lives will be like, and how the rest of the society will perceive them.

I will never forget about the “Bear Walk” which we organized for the children from

the club, and for the children of our employees. Each participant took one or two children, and walked with them a prepared route, searching for pine cones. The event was a success, and we hope to organize something similar again.

For the last few years, we have been preparing presents for the Close Neighbour children as part of the “Christmas Shoebox” event, and every year since November, my colleagues have been asking if this event will take place again. It always makes me happy to see how many people remember Close Neighbour.



Karel Řežábek

Co-worker and supporter

The first meeting with Pavla I can remember took place in 1992, the same year I started working as a pastor in Pilsen. We met at a student apartment, and I still remember how passionately she talked about Roma children and what she wanted to do for them.

I have been following the work of Close Neighbour basically since the beginning. I am deeply inspired by Pavla’s vision to help Roma children simply “be children”, so that they can grow up to be better adults. The children she was once involved with in the early days have now become adults. They have children of their own and are encouraging them to again partici-



pate in the activities run by Close Neighbour (and these children will probably continue the tradition).

Pavla has a strong personality, and she can achieve great things (and has achieved many great things already), but sometimes, the cooperation was challenging. However, I have had the same experience with many other strong personalities, and I have no doubt that many have had the same experience with me! At the same time, I appreciate that Pavla has the ability to develop her personality and use her talents in a mature and healthy way. I respect her a lot!



Age: 57

Career: Pastor, lecturer, personal and relationship coach

Personality portrait

Personality portrait



Eva Ištoková

Co-worker and supporter

I first came across the organization in 2018 during a “Neighbour’s Day” event at John Hus Square in Pilsen. I noticed from my window that there was an event for kids going on outside, so I went down to check it out and got involved right away. The kids were going from activity point to activity point and had so much fun with activities like face painting. When I found out they offered free tutoring and clubs, I immediately agreed to have my kids join. I was overjoyed that my children had a chance to learn and participate in activities because, with my financial situation, I could never have afforded paid clubs.

I’m so grateful to Close Neighbour for making this possible. Every time my kids came home, they were excited to tell me what they’d done and what they’d enjoyed most. Their positive energy lifted our whole household for the rest of the evening. That’s why I said yes when they wanted to continue attending. At first, my four oldest kids attended, and now, all seven of them are regular participants.

Over the past six years, my kids haven’t just been going to tutoring sessions and hobby-based activities, they’ve also been on outdoor trips, zoo visits, and other outings. As



a reward for their participation in tutoring, they’ve enjoyed activities like laser tag, the Jump Arena, go-karting, and theater performances. But the highlight for them is the summer camp, which they’ve attended five times. During the warm summer days, we’ve gone swimming together. They’ve also taken part in non-residential summer camps, with trips to places like a goat farm and the aquapark in Beroun. A truly special experience for us was a family trip to Šumava, where we stayed in a large cabin. At first, we didn’t know what to expect, but we were thrilled to spend time together as a family. It was an unforgettable experience we could never have afforded on our own. The kids were amazed by the beautiful house and the huge bathroom with a bathtub - they loved it! We enjoyed our time together and felt so at ease, like we were

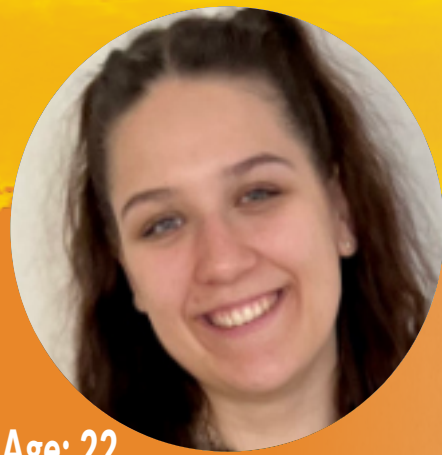
part of a family. My favourite moment was our hike to Black Lake. It was 8 km away, but the view made every step worth the effort!

Three years ago, we moved from Pilsen to Hradec near Stod. We were afraid this would mean losing contact with the organization, but they didn’t abandon us. They regularly come to visit us in Hradec. My kids have grown especially close to their leaders, Maruška and Johanka. They’ve built a bond of trust that’s still strong today. Whenever they couldn’t visit us, the kids would be heartbroken and even cry.

I’m so thankful my family got to know your organization. Without you, we never would have had these amazing experiences. I’m happy to be part of this and wholeheartedly recommend your events to other families!



Personality portrait



Adéla Spěváčková

Co-worker and supporter

In the past, I was considering a career path in finance, where success is measured by bank account balances and career progression. My ambitions were towards entrepreneurship and financial stability. However, everything changed when one of my classmates introduced me to a world that was far away from my original ideas.

The non-profit organization run by her mother opened my eyes not only to other possibilities, but it also showed me how rewarding it can be to work towards helping others. Laughing children, their smiles and their innocence, made me see the world in a new light. Although my new dreams were

met with misunderstanding and resistance from my family, who were concerned about my future prospects, my heart was set on following my newly discovered path.

I am not living aligned with the desires of my heart, and I know what I do is meaningful and rewarding. Despite all doubts and concerns, my heart remains deeply connected to this path. When I see how the children develop under our care, I am feeling happy, and I know I am where I should be! My life may have diverged from my original plans, but it is now filled with love, purpose and children I have come to love as my own.



Jakub Planer

Co-worker and supporter

My first contact with Close Neighbour was in the summer of 2017. I was then completing my scouting education at the Gemini Forest School, where we prepared a three-day program for children from an excluded area living in Pilsen. Close Neighbour was the organizer. This is when I learned that Close Neighbour takes care of the children on a regular basis, whether it is summer camps or various free-time activities throughout the year. I was intrigued, and in June of the next year, I wrote an email to Pavla, asking if they need a hand for their next summer camp. We exchanged a few short emails and all was set. I arrived as an assistant, prepared a workshop and a few other activities. The summer

camp took place near Karlovy Vary, and also near an interesting rocking stone, well-known to all camp attendees. Next year, I arrived again. This time, I stayed for the full duration of the camp and took on more responsibilities.

The best memories? It was the moments that may seem quite ordinary and dull to most, ...playing soccer outdoors, Morse code workshop, sleeping outside along with the older boys, laser activities (the children will know), morning prayers, swimming in the pond. What made it especially rare and extraordinary for me was the people I had the chance to cooperate with - my friends from Close Neighbour, who made all this possible for the children, who would have normally not had the opportunity to enjoy many of these activities. It was exciting to be part of the adventurous (and maybe even a bit crazy) mission of Close Neighbour.



Age: 31

Career: Scientist

Personality

portrait

Personality

portrait

Age: 22

Field of study: Student of Teaching for Elementary Education, University of West Bohemia in Pilsen



Natálie Schertlerová

Co-worker and supporter

I first met Pavla in 1992. I was a little girl and Pavla offered to take me to the church. At that time, the organisation Close Neighbour did not exist yet. Pavla took us on trips and to church. In 2015, I started working at Close Neighbour as a volunteer.

The strongest experience is from summer camps, which are often very challenging. I remember visiting a children's rope centre. There was a cable slide that I was incredibly scared to jump off. Pavla persuaded me to jump for about 5 minutes. In the end I overcame my fear.

„Pavla's like my second mom that I can tell just everything. Thank you so much!“

What I enjoy most about working at Close Neighbour is being in contact with children. I have 3 children myself and I know very well how important it is to spend time with them. For Roma children, this is even more important!



Age: 39

Career: Healthcare
Mediator at the Czech
State Institute of Health

Personality
portrait

Igor Bandy

Co-worker and supporter

I first came across Close Neighbour when my girlfriend Natalie Schertlerová started working there.

What I like most about Close Neighbour is that they help children and their families. I wouldn't change a single thing. Everything they do, they do very well. Hats off to all the staff and volunteers!

The most memorable moments come from the summer camps. I like how everyone works together. That's

something I find extremely powerful! Overall, I have experienced many wonderful things with the organization. For example, last year I went on a trip to ZOO with my whole family to Dvur Kralove. I am grateful to be able to spend quality time with my family in this way.

I would like to thank the whole team for the trips, cooperation and free-time clubs for my children. Especially for all the support for my whole family.



Age: 37

Career: Worker

Personality
portrait



Julie Hlaváčová

Co-worker and supporter

I first met Pavla about 15 years ago when she took my children to church. My relatives knew her. As we got to know each other personally, my own children started attending their events. I joined some of their trips and events as a volunteer volunteered, and then my husband started working at the organization. Pavla saw that I enjoyed the work, that I could be counted on, and so I was offered the opportunity to work here as well.

I was delighted to see that we make progress in our personal lives, and that working with families really makes a differ-



ence. Some families that looked like they will never change, begin changing. We have a great team, and you can see that the work truly brings fruits!

I would like to share a personal experience: I was going through a rough patch, and the whole team supported me. We were all going to work, but I never felt alone. The team was constantly around and supported me whenever I needed it.

Thank you for all your support and for giving me strength to go on!



Jan Tišer

Co-worker and supporter

I met Pavla about fifteen years ago when my children were attending activities run by Close Neighbour. It was my partner who introduced us. The first job I did for Close Neighbour was to redo the entire garden – leveling the ground, digging a hole for a sandbox, building a fence, compost bins, etc. In 2019, I started to work there as a football instructor. I gradually worked my way up and became the children’s club manager and supervisor of the Physical activities (darts, table tennis, etc.).

I like working with children, I have many children myself. There's an excellent team and boss at Close Neighbour. The kids who come here would never be able to go elsewhere for activities and tutoring.



The fact that the organization provides this free of charge and also provides the children with what they need, is very appealing to me. Over the years that I have worked here, Pavla has helped a lot of families change their lifestyle and taught them how to cope with various challenges that they might not have been able to tackle without help. You can see that the children make progress as well.

All of my children come to an organisation and we see how the organization helps them grow. The tutoring helps them improve their results at school and makes them better prepared for the life ahead. Not just my family, but many other families benefit from this. One story that comes to mind is about one of the families. The dad was a heavy drinker, and the kids grew up with almost no parenting. After meeting with the team, the dad stopped drinking so much, got himself a job, and you can see a lot of progress in the children as well.

I still enjoy my work and am very happy for the opportunity to work here. I hope that our collaboration will last for many years to come.



Age: 59
Career: Maintainer

Personality
portrait

Personality
portrait