



Among the tireless and regular supporters are undoubtedly the Bochoř firefighters, who have been supplying drinking water for our summer camp over the last years. Their presence at the site is always very appreciated by participants of all ages.

7. OUR SUPPORTERS

I know it's a bit of an obsession, but I'm so busy and immersed in ministry to the Roma that I don't have time to maintain relationships outside of this context. So, when I think of my friends, I think of either sponsors or volunteers or moms of our Roma children.

“Money solves everything.”

This almost heretical statement is recorded in the Bible, in the book of Ecclesiastes, chapter 10. But to me, it means that the concepts of the Bible, God, life, and truth must always be understood in their wider contexts. There are no simple solutions, no simple recipes for a good life, nothing is ever black and white. To me, the only “certain” truth, love and life is Jesus Christ.

Despite the controversy surrounding the statement “Money solves everything”, we cannot deny that money is indeed much needed in a variety of contexts, and can help

a variety of noble goals. A lot of amazing things can be achieved without money – just like our first 20 years of ministry to the Roma children. At the beginning, I was simply a girl from a poor family who liked to take Roma children to church services and trips. When I wanted to organize a summer camp, I asked the church community to collect some money on a voluntary basis, or I helped families to apply for a one-off benefit from the government. I was a stay-at-home mom for 16 years, raising five children of my own. Apart from summer camps, the best activity I could offer to the Roma children at that time was swimming pool. Because we often got a discount there. We are very grateful for the generosity provided to us back then!



At that time, I was watching out for opportunities that did not require entrance fees or tickets. For example, on the Children's Day, there was a one-off opportunity to get a free entrance to the Zoo if the children brought a picture they made at home. There were occasionally discounted entries to museums, free entry Science Days, and so on.

When my youngest daughter, Marie, wanted to explain to me how hard it was to play a certain tricky piece on her clarinet, she used the following comparison: “Mom, it's so hard, as if something were for free, and you couldn't take a single Romani child there.”

It would sound weird to say that I founded the organization “Close Neighbour” because of money. But it really was the main reason. After twenty years of trying to do everything without funding, paying everything out of the pocket, even I, the idealist, had to admit that it was no longer sustainable.

Establishing an organization gave me the opportunity to raise money from sponsors, and to expand our activities in ways we could not previously imagine. We now have suitable premises, several staff members, and can impact over 300 people each year across many families. We have worked with families extensively for over 10 years. Every year, we run



regular leisure activities and organize over 50 one-off events.

In retrospect, founding an organization was the only way to keep all of that going. And yet I did not like the idea for several years until 8 different people suggested that I do that, independently of each other and within a short time frame. Honza Libotovský and Katka Tůmová, who, together with me, became founding members of the organization Close Neighbour, were the most prominent supporters of the idea. I am very

grateful today that these people helped me make the right step back then.

My reluctance to establish a formal organization back then had a lot to do with my aversion to paperwork, rules, planning and formal structures in general. But the hardest part was overcoming the initial reluctance. Gradually I learned how to do my accounting, how to make a website, write grant applications... My wonderful children got involved in these unpopular activities as well. My oldest daughter, Pavla, learned how to shoot and edit videos and she manages our Facebook page.



She is also great at writing and managing large Norwegian or European projects. My other daughter, Johana, edits photos and helps with administration tasks. She has a degree in Education Studies and wrote her thesis on the education of socially disadvantaged children. The third daughter, Ester, prepares project days and workshops. She is a dentist and patiently works with extended families whose members have often been unable to find a dentist for decades and require urgent dental treatment. My youngest daughter, Marie, graduated from the Business Academy and has been helping with accounting for many years. She now studies Social Work and is expanding the skills, knowledge and connections that will be very valuable to us! My husband, my son and sons-in-law are helping with the maintenance, repair and construction works at the summer camp, they provide technical support and help with graphics. I will never be able to thank them enough for what they do!

Our sponsors

In the 13 years following the foundation of our organization, we have received several individual donations, as well as government and corporate grants. We feel deeply responsible for using the donated money for the intended purpose. People who made the first donations occupy a special place in our hearts. The first donation from the company Garris, the first big discount from Hannah, the first regular individual donor Tomáš Kuba or the first big sponsor Vojta Kraus. Once, at the beginning of 2016, I noticed that a large amount of money had landed on our bank account. We didn't know the donor, but we

knew he previously liked our Facebook page. My children told me: "Mom, don't contact him, he must have made a mistake and will want the money back." We really did not expect anything like this. Our professional self-esteem was quite low at that time. Since then, I sometimes have lunch with Vojta. He is one of those sponsors who not only sends money, but also takes an active interest in what is going on in the organization. I know that as a religious person, I should have a deep confidence that whatever I need, God will provide for me. But there always was the nag-



ging uncertainty that one day, I might have no money for food, the rent, that I would need to pay a fine because of an error in paperwork. This uncertainty was dispelled when we met Vojta. Vojta has supported us generously on a regular basis, yet he is a very modest person and has no desire to be on the front page of our book.

We decided to organize a summer camp with the theme "American Indians", because I had a pair of Indian boots that I received from our Austrian Christian friends as a part of their regular clothing donations. And I wanted to use these boots somehow. We applied for a donation with the American Embassy in the Czech Republic. To build some mutual trust and friendship, my husband

and me visited the American Garden in Chudenice. They weren't pleased, in fact, they didn't care. Our second attempt to impress and build friendship was even worse. We thought that if we tell the Americans that we are going to talk about Native American people and culture at our summer camp, the Americans at the embassy will be excited that we are teaching Czech children about their history. But they were not happy about it, they were angry. The head of the cultural department, which was in charge of allocating the grants, was furious. He said that the history of Native Americans was genocide and America's greatest shame, and that he certainly wasn't going to support someone who wanted to teach others about it.



Fortunately, his subordinate, Megan King, had a different opinion. Megan fell irrationally in love with us before she even met us. She told her boss that if he does not support the summer camp, she is going to quit, because she loves our project and the idea of helping the Roma children is worthy of support. As a native American, Megan was familiar with the Scout organization, and our summer camps were similar to the Scout summer camps. Megan's boss eventually gave in and we received the funding we needed. It was a comfortable amount of money for us back then in 2015 and besides the necessary camp supplies, we were able to buy our first printer as well. Megan came to visit our sum-

mer camp personally, together with her family, and she has remained loyal to us and our summer events ever since. She comes to visit us and gives donations to us to this day. We were touched when she said: "I've worked in the non-profit sector all my life and I've never given a penny to anyone but you, Pavla!" When her mother turned 70, Megan gifted her a certificate of donation towards our next summer camp. Her mother must be an amazing person, because she loved it! That was a great honour for us. Megan is similarly passionate like me, and we are very close. Because of my rather hectic lifestyle, my friends are either volunteers, sponsors or mothers of our Roma children.



The less conventional ways

In addition to the conventional funding opportunities, such as grants, we sometimes use less conventional ways to raise money for our activities. For example, in 2012, I went with my children to see the potential venue of our summer camp near Konstantinovy Lázně. The police stopped me because my car lights were off. We had a nice chat, I didn't receive a ticket or penalty points. The police officers came to visit our summer camp and organized a demonstration for the children of the police work with dogs.

Another place, another time, I was hitchhiking on the highway, and pastor Sylvain Romain from Austria picked me up. Ever since

our ride, his church community in Austria has been sending us clothes for the Roma families. As we talked in the car, he kept asking how big vehicle we need to get the clothes over to us. "This car?" He pointed at a huge truck. "No, too big, this car!" I replied. My English skills are not exactly impressive, but I can get by.

In 2019, I got a call from the TV studio, saying they wanted to do some footage with us about the work of volunteers in our organization. We were at a summer camp with the kids and there was a lot of noise all around, so I did not hear what exactly they said. The filming was to be in the middle of the holiday season and coincided with a planned event for the kids. I thought we will show for a few seconds on a programme in a local TV, and I readily agreed to everything. A volunteer

called Tomas came with the crew and he was a great person. The filming took place over a few days. We ended up being part of a show called "Millionaire Among Us" and they aired about 20 minutes of us. This helped us get additional friends and sponsors. And the children were excited to be on TV!

One day, we were setting up the summer camp, and an owner of the company Seos rode by on a quad. We had a chat, and ever since, Jan, the owner, has had our backs whenever we had an emergency. When our car

breaks down, when we need a pump to inflate the ball for a soccer tournament on Sunday, he'll stop doing whatever he is doing and he will come and help us out – thank you very much!

I really enjoy these random and unconventional ways of getting support, as opposed to paperwork, but I have no control over them. I think of them as God-sent!



Bits and pieces of life

"I wonder... what are you doing with the kids?"

A strange-looking Hungarian man in an even stranger hostel asked me. This hostel where I picked up the kids was located between a train station, a factory and a morgue. A junkie tried to punch me there recently, and someone also stole my new bike. I tried to answer the question politely. "I take the kids out, to the ZOO, to the swimming pool, on trips, to church..." "That sounds great, I have children and grandchildren in Hungary and Romania." Then the Hungarian pulled out his wallet and gave me a banknote. This made me feel rather uncomfortable. But don't get me wrong. Extra money is always great, and if you want to support us with a small amount monthly, you are welcome to do so! It would be great help and encouragement for us.

"I was the best!!!"

Matthew won his age category at the Sports Afternoon and was immensely excited. He got a shiny trophy and a backpack. Small prizes and treats were given to all the children who participated. We try to join events that others organize, such as the Sports Afternoon called "Show What You Can Do!" organized by the Social Department of the City of Pilsen, or the Leisure Time Festival organized by Pilsen Children's Council or the beautiful performances of the Paprsek dance group, which some members of our team attended as dancers for many years.

"Pavla, I would never steal from you!" This confession by the 14-year-old boy made me feel honoured. Stealing was otherwise, well, a part of his life. Joining us really is meaningful!

"And we will buy toothbrushes and toothpaste for the children!" "Mommy's coming up with ideas again..." my children noted during one of our internal family meetings. My middle daughter Ester is a dentist and suggested we do a little oral hygiene campaign for the children. It seemed logical to me to also hand out toothbrushes and toothpaste on that occasion. A lot of my ideas are spontaneous and based on current situations and needs I happen to observe. Most of the grant applications are written six to twelve months in advance, which is why we are so grateful to our spontaneous or individual sponsors who support us regularly. They make it possible for our spontaneous plans to happen!

"I want a sleeping bag for my birthday!" This was Vojta's idea. Before his birthday celebration, he told his friends that he wants a sleeping bag for a summer camp, but he did not really want it for himself. In the restaurant where he was celebrating, many pieces of camping equipment were collected and donated to our organization. Thank you so much, everyone!

"And why don't they simply go to the post office?" My then six-year-old daughter asked me when I tried to explain to her why some people beg on the streets for money. I realized I need to work more on the financial literacy of my own children, and I was also encouraged to work on this important area of knowledge with the Roma children.

Bits and pieces of life



"They bought me a typewriter..."

replied a beautiful young Roma woman, the chairwoman of IQ Roma servis, o. s, when I congratulated her on winning the title of the Nonprofit of the Year 2013 and asked her how she managed to succeed in life. Coming from a poor family, she was unable to practice her typing at home while studying at the secondary school of economics and almost dropped out. And then she got a typewriter from a sponsor, she practised and passed her exams.

"We have a new room for our Children's club!"

This was definitely the biggest news of 2019. It was great that we were able to start furnishing and refurbishing it right away thanks to individual donations and we didn't have to wait a year to see whether or not we would get grants for it. We received enough donations and grants to make the place cozy and beautiful - thank you so much and come visit us and see for yourselves!

"I want the piggy bank! I'm going to save up money for Close Neighbour!"

Tomas, one of the participants of our summer camp, exclaimed when prizes were being handed out. He indeed knows how to make us smile! ☺

"They still have faith in us!"

That's what I am thinking every time I see the list of regular donations. It's a huge encouragement for me. As well as, for example, the amount of Christmas presents for the children we get each year so we can give something to all children. The gifts and contributions from individual donors, foundations and the government are tangible proof that we are not the only ones who care. They are proof that our work is meaningful because when our children grow up, there will be many people in our society who will love them, will root for them and maybe even offer them jobs or rent them an apartment. We are infinitely grateful for every single one of you out there!

"I will support Close Neighbour!"

While on a trip, the boys were telling us what they want to buy when they grow up, get a job and become rich. The things they mentioned included a house, a car, trips with their children, and supporting Close Neighbour. We were very pleased and look forward to their support! Then we spent some time calculating how many years it would take before the kids get rich, and if I am retired by then... Of course, we reminded them that to achieve all this, they need to study well at school, and get a qualification of some sort. We genuinely hope that the boys will achieve their dreams!