



# Annual report 2020

## From the Executive Director

*Whatever is said about the past 2020, it will inevitably include words such as "difficult", "challenges", "new normal", "distancing", "closeness". All of them separately and together describe an indisputably different year.*

*Still, I would like the word of the Association ELA for 2020 to be CHANGE. It fully describes our understanding about efforts, opportunities and moving forward, not because it is easy or necessary, but because it continues to make sense - in children, in nature, on the planet, today, in each of us.*





## Who are we

**Association for Shared Learning ELA** is an organization that has been supporting child development for over 20 years now.

Once being Save the Children UK - Bulgaria Programme (1997 - 2007), we looked for alternatives to the institutional care of children and urged the government to take measures to close down the so-called “care homes for children”.

Later on, being Centre for Inclusive Education (2007-2019), we succeeded in affirming inclusive environment as a value and as shared responsibility in Bulgarian schools.

Our efforts are now focused on supporting children and young people in the process of learning and going their own way. We also work together with schools, parents and teachers who consciously support children to build their social and emotional skills.

## Our beliefs

We believe that every child must be accepted and valued, and that every child deserves support to grow up as a responsible adult to herself/himself, to others and to the world around them.

Nowadays, it is important that children have critical thinking and are able to connect with themselves, with other people and with everything that surrounds them. They should be able to build their own perspective of the entirety of the living world and their place in it. In other words, the world needs conscious and responsible persons, and we want to help as many children as possible to become such. As trite as it sounds, we do believe that education changes lives for the better and we are only glad to be part of children’s learning.

Because the beginning of any child’s road should not determine how far she/he can get.

## What we do

Most of the children we meet are not deprived of qualities but of opportunities. They need role models to guide them, so that they can build qualities such as teamwork, patience, confidence, persistence and analytical thinking, all of those not being part of the school curriculum. They also need to have a clear picture of what they can do with their lives and how to get to that point.

We work with children and we encourage them to be responsible both to themselves and to their surrounding world, to improve their strengths, to feel significant, to be giving persons, successful and happy.

We build our knowledge by carrying out studies, research and analysis, both in Bulgaria and abroad, in the field of education, children’s attitudes and child wellbeing.



We share our knowledge and experience with schools, parents and teachers, by working together in the interest of children's wellbeing.

## 2020

### **Pedagogical practices, repairs and mentoring during a pandemic**

We will hardly soon forget 2020. It was colorful in terms of emotions, at times quite difficult, but it also gave us the opportunity for new, bolder ideas.

It separated us first, then made us more inventive in our ways of being together. New ideas are born from the challenges, so we transformed all the planned activities and implemented them, albeit in a different way than originally planned.

Let's start from the beginning. And it was in full swing. In January we met with over 100 people from all our partner schools under the project "One school for all". We remembered the many shared moments and lessons learned over the years, unaware that in just two months such a meeting would no longer be possible. The project ended formally, but the most important result of it - The model for building a supportive school environment "One school for all" has developed confidently.

The model received an international award for innovative practice from the Zero Project platform and continued its journey, being applied in Portugal, Greece and Romania, thanks to the Smile project. In February, we met with partners from the three countries to discuss the action plans they will work on during the year in the four priority areas of the Model - school management, child protection, partnership with parents and pedagogical practices. Unfortunately, just a month later, schools around the world closed and plans were redesigned for the online environment as much as possible.



Changes were also required in the work of the 27 school teams that participated in the competition "Students in Action" under the program "School makes sense". Some had started, others were waiting for spring to ennoble the spaces around their school, and had to postpone their plans for the fall.



In May, we launched a long-awaited national campaign to promote the School Makes Sense program as a good practice throughout the country. A short video directed the viewers of BTV to the project page [s-misal.eu](http://s-misal.eu), where you can find all the information and guidelines for the implementation of the program from any school that wishes to do so. For a month, we shared memories of the program, good practices and stories from the nine schools that have implemented it over the years.



The summer was favorable and we managed, in compliance with all measures, to organize two camps. The first of them, traditional - under the program "The school makes sense" with sixth-graders from the partner schools in the program. We held the second camp with young people between 16 and 29 years old. It focused on the Sustainable Development and Migration Goals.

Within the project "My fingerprint. My voice. My choice." we worked on a campaign to collect children's creative proposals to breathe new life into old things and show care and kindness to people and nature. We received dozens of proposals, and 35 children from all over the country were honored and awarded, and their works were included in a collection. We also published a manual with developed ideas for environmental protection and guidelines for their implementation. It is a suitable guide for all teachers and parents who want to take care of nature, involving children in it.

In the Association for Shared Learning ELA we have many years of experience in working with students from pedagogical and other humanities and preparing them for direct work with children. Thus, we naturally came to the project "Ready for tomorrow", in which together with students, in the fall of 2020, we created a Mentoring Program for young volunteers who want to work with children and help them develop their abilities. We tested the program at 156 Vasil Levski Primary School in Kremikovtzi, where students had meetings with fifth-graders dedicated to goal setting and planning the path to realising their personal dreams.







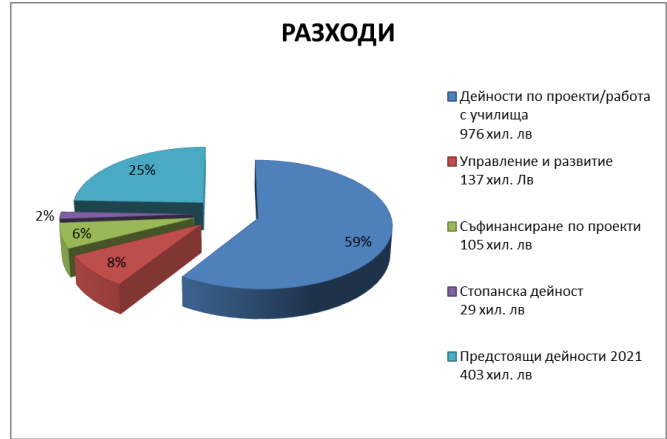
We have taken the first steps to expand the National Program for Overcoming Violence. We started selecting trainers and preparing their training. The realization of the training meetings themselves had to wait for a time when the present activities will be possible again, which we hope will happen soon.

In November, we gathered more than 180 educators from all over the country in the third conference "Inclusive Educational Practices". For the first year, the event was entirely online, but that did not stop the conference from being a forum for exchanging ideas, good practices and contacts. Twenty educational professionals from 14 settlements told more than 160 spectators for almost five hours which practices make their schools special. These and over 40 other practices were published on the priobshti.se platform within the project "Priobshti.se in new partnerships".

And all these things were happening while the village of Sturgel was undergoing intensive repairs to the old school. The project to build a Green Education Center 50 km from Sofia, at the foot of Zvezdets Peak is our boldest dream so far. One day, we hope soon, when the Center opens its doors, it will be a unique place for Bulgaria, where children and adults immersed in nature will develop their creativity, confidence and analytical thinking. I will present renewable energy technologies, ways of peaceful coexistence and care for nature and countless workshops such as carpentry, beekeeping, programming, gardening, cooking, orienteering, mechanics and sports. In 2020, we took a few giant steps closer to realizing this dream by clearing the yard, strengthening the school, replacing the windows, running miles of cable to provide power, and building the plumbing system. The construction of the workshop at the Center has also started.



## Finances



## Thank you!

We thank all our established and new supporters and friends, whose goodwill, generosity and joy give us energy and faith that together we will continue to succeed a little more every day!

