

## The Polgár Foundation for Opportunities (PAE) and its Objectives

The **Polgár Foundation for Opportunities** (hereinafter: PAE) is a private foundation established in 2007 with the aim of improving the situation of the most deprived social groups, with special focus on the Hungarian Roma population. Our purpose is to support local initiatives where the Roma can utilize their existing resources and make their own ideas work at the grassroots level. All programs of the Foundation are inspired by our target group; we do not want to solve problems for them, but we work on finding the most efficient way of problem solving by thinking together instead. This approach differentiates our programs from most governmental and civil programs in Hungary, and adds value to its results and sustainability.

In addition to supporting external programmes, we have launched some very successful **local development programmes** in the recent years, such as the reconstruction of family houses at Alsóvadász in Borsod county; a vegetable growing project at Igrici (also in Borsod county) where we support the establishment of a communal agricultural project. Within this project, we organized local meetings, entrepreneurial training courses and the setup of a vegetable growing and sales coop. An adaptation of the Grameen Model in Hungary within the framework of the Kiútprogram (Way Out Program) was also introduced by PAE in 2010, which includes providing micro loans and business counseling – this project is also supported by the European Committee as its **Roma micro loan pilot programme**. The Foundation also launched a **football talent programme**, thus becoming a Talent Point (Tehetségpont) member of the National Talent Development Council.

The employees of PAE are experienced professionals in Roma integration who are active participants of the civil scene. The director of the Foundation, Dr. Judit Szóke is a member of governmental councils (National Forum for the Coordination of Talent, National Talent Council). Under the direction of the PAE, several civil organizations – including the Autónomia Foundation, Foundations for Roma Civil Rights, Open Society Institute and the “Integration” non-profit Kft. of the Maltese Charity Service – published their **strategy document to improve the integration of the Roma** that aims to improve the Roma’s access to development resources.

### The Objectives of the Football Talent Programme

While working on employment and local development programmes in mostly segregated villages of disadvantaged areas, we found that there is one place avoided by depression and nihilism: football fields. We realized that football is **the mass sport of the poor**, and the following question came automatically, namely, why there are no Roma players in the best professional teams. To find this out, we launched a study to explore the existing system of football talent management. At the end of 2008, we launched a talent survey among talented, disadvantaged kids in primary schools. We developed a **new talent finding method** together with social workers familiar with the target group and trainers/coaches who are interested in innovative ways to find new talent. We invited István Pison to a talent finding event in Miskolc who is a leading expert of talent development for the Hungarian Football Association (MLSZ). Mr. Pison said that it is unclear to him **why these kids don’t play in the youth teams of the professional teams** because they should.

In the football elite of the world, there are several examples that kids from the most disadvantaged social groups manage to achieve worldwide fame and earn millions of Euros. In Hungary, this seems unattainable. We lack Roma football players not only because they are unable to become professional adult players but only a very few Roma children are selected into the system of talent identification. The nature of talent training in Hungary does not assist the inclusion of children whose parents can’t afford the financial costs of the advancement of their child. Nowadays it is not enough to spend a considerable time on football fields to become a professional player. Modern professional football requires full physical, technical, mental and tactical preparation, and the most efficient institutional framework is found to be **football academies**. These football boarding schools utilize a complete training system where knowledge for today’s football can be acquired. However, there are no academies or programmes in Hungary that support socially disadvantaged young football players whose skills amaze their families and surroundings at a young age of 12 or 13. Access to quality training and appropriate sports infrastructure is not available to these kids, thus their chance to become professional players is close to minimal.

### The Target Group of the Football Talent Programme

We search for 11 to 12-year old boys with exceptional football talent of disadvantaged background who do not have access to high-level sports infrastructure and professional support due to their place of residence and their financial or other circumstances.

**Why football?** On one hand, sports activities teach discipline, cooperation, perseverance, increases stamina, improves physical condition, decreases deviances, improves learning skills and enables the early identification of exceptional talent. Football is popular, the mass sport of the Roma. On the other hand, football is a **breakout opportunity** for poor children who are discriminated against, and it is a promising tool of social ascent. Undereducated parents have an easier way of understanding the necessity of development efforts in comparison with other fields, thus they can provide better support to their children. According to our experiences, the motivation of the

selected children is very strong, they are capable of beating teams that have trained with professional coaches for several years and are otherwise successful. In addition to the equal opportunity aspect, it is also the interest of the wider society to include children of disadvantaged background in the next generation of Hungarian football players.

**Why 11-12 year olds?** Beyond sports education at schools, it is necessary to participate in regular and age-specific training to make the most of someone's talent after the age of 10 to 12. The age of 12 is considered to be the "last minute" of starting football talent development. At 12, children start to become independent from parents; their attention is directed to the peer group. It is a huge challenge for parents and teachers to motivate youth - especially boys - of this age in the right direction.

Our objective is to launch a complex professional programme that could provide the following: regular and nationwide **talent search; training camps** to further explore children's skills, thus preparing personal development; **survey of needs** to identify the best talent development centre for the child and the family with the cooperation, support of the professional manager of PAE; and operating a scholarship system. The financed costs include travel, sports equipment, sports association membership fees and mentor services.

### **The Role of the Football Talent Programme as a Social Model**

The story of the Roma population is that of the status loss after the regime change. The Roma masses that lost their jobs in those years did not have a chance to rejoin the legal employment market. This phenomenon had led to fatal social progressions that has not reached their possible outcome yet. Most of the Roma born and socialized since the regime change experienced desperate circumstances that offer no progress whatsoever, regarding their own life chances. Due to social and lifestyle reasons, the health situation of the Roma is much worse than that of the general population. The desperate employment situation of the Roma is a health risk by itself. Their mobility chances are decreased by the mental and physical deceases that occur very early among the Roma.

Football could be a very efficient tool of **increasing the social acceptance** of this group that lives in extremely poor circumstances and are also discriminated against based on their race. Presenting football players as positive role models has a higher effect than in case of other sports. The general attitude of the Hungarian sports public is definitely prejudicial and discriminative, thus having Roma professional sports players could enhance a more tolerant behaviour. It could have a great effect to have three or four Roma football players in the national team by 2025. Roma and non-Roma players striving side by side could have a symbolic meaning - unimaginable as of today, this could have a huge effect on public thinking of the future.

### **Effectiveness and Efficiency of the Football Talent Development Programme**

We search for talent continuously, and sent our announcement to 2866 places (village, school, local Roma minority government). We narrowed our announcement to children aged 11 to 12; still, we received 551 applications. We selected 50 children for both age groups who were invited to the training camp with our professional coaches in 2010. 10 of the most talented children receive a scholarship from the Foundation - today they play in NBI and NBII teams (national championship class I and class II). Our mentors facilitate the achievement of these children with development and support nationwide. Our objective is to increase the number of participants to 28 within a month - we have the resources to achieve this goal.

The professional importance of the programme is introducing a more exact method of football talent selection. According to current Hungarian practice, talent managers select candidates in a subjective manner - by observing them at football matches. The method used by the Foundation and developed by István Kun, a professional football coach (certified UEFA Licence A) is different from this tradition. During the selection process, we ask candidates to perform a complex series of tasks. These tasks were developed by applying the most recent results of sports research that also consider communication techniques necessary for positive thinking and inner motivation. By using this method it is possible to establish a measurable evaluation system. In this system, it is not only possible to compare candidates, but also to **evaluate performance** compared to the age cohort.

Developing football talent is only a part of our talent care work in this programme; we also emphasize **academic success, mental education, developing communication and other skills** supported by our professional staff, mentors and volunteers. We consider our efforts successful if children in our programme get accepted into local or international football academies, or similar high-level talent development programs by the age of 14. In a longer run, we consider our efforts successful if these children not only get accepted at football academies but also hold for their own there. A sign of long-term success is seeing them have a **professional sports career in Hungary**.

## **The Scope and Cooperation of the Football Talent Programme**

The headquarters of our Foundation is in Budapest, however, our operations are nationwide. In our database, we have children from 238 settlements of 52 smaller regions, located in 14 counties. During our talent searches, we focused on schools where the proportion of disadvantaged children is high (we contacted 761 such schools). In addition, we contacted 376 Roma minority governments (CKÖ), 19 child protection agencies and 32 study halls. We also build relationships with institutions potentially accepting talented youth, such as youth sports clubs at the county level, NB (national championship) clubs, football academies and sports schools. The director of this programme has been voted into the minority committee of MLSZ.

As an effect of this programme, exceptionally talented children escape their immobile, ethnically segregated situation – move to a dormitory in a town, change school – and move to integrated circumstances where their task is not only learning about traffic or time management but also learning communication skills with people of different backgrounds. They are extremely dedicated, thus the supporting adults (coaches, teachers, dorm teachers) assist them with extra enthusiasm. The programme influences the surroundings of the children, the family, even local sports associations and teachers. Another important objective of our programme is to make regular football available to as many disadvantaged children at their villages as possible. We organize a movement for this, starting in Tiszakarád as a starting point. We may join the **FIFA programme “Football for Hope”** and establish the Eastern-Central European centre of this initiative. The **movement called “Football against Racism”** could be a tool of promoting social peace – this is important because of the increasing anti-Roma attitudes and racism that grew during the economic crisis.

The **international conference and sports workshop “The Role of Talent Management in Roma Integration”** organized by the Polgár Foundation and the Hungarian Genius Programme Bureau will take place 12 to 15<sup>th</sup> of May 2011. This event will be an important milestone in our football talent programme launched in 2009 and other similar talent programs. Some participating partners of this conference include the Cross Cultures Project Association of Denmark, the Roma Institute of Slovakia, the National Roma Centrum of the Republic of Macedonia, the FIFA Football for Hope, and the UEFA Social Responsibility. In addition to this event, a **documentary** will be made about the programme, and we'll launch **an Internet campaign** to popularise the programme and volunteer work.

## **Financial Sustainability, Self Reliance**

Polgár Foundation is a private foundation, thus we cover the costs of our Talent Programme 1) from our own resources, 2) from money awarded at Hungarian and international tenders, miscellaneous donations, sponsor fees, and 1% dedicated donations of individual income tax payments. In addition, several volunteers support this programme with their high-level work, and in many cases, local governments support us with free services. The programme has a budget of HUF 30 million. The sponsors of the programme include TÁMOP-3.4.4, Open Society Institute (OSI), and EACEA.