

Laudation

on the occasion of granting the *Justitia Regnorum Fundamentum* Award to Judit Berki, an expert in equal opportunities, and to the After School Centre of Bánytereny



We are here to express our appreciation to Judit Berki, an expert in equal opportunities, as a winner of the *Justitia Regnorum Fundamentum* Award. She has been awarded it for her outstanding professional work: for decades now she has been tirelessly helping, with excellent professionalism, to improve the conditions of persons in need – especially of Roma children – and has assisted those wishing to make a substantial contribution to creating equal opportunities.

Judit Berki has made excellent use of her degrees as kindergarten teacher, cultural manager, and social worker, and of her qualifications in the fields of social policy, rehabilitation management and mental hygiene. Her different jobs, done with complete dedication and conviction in the fields of public culture, teaching and social work, testify to a rich and varied career. At the beginning she worked as a director of different cultural centres in Mátraverebély and Kistereny, followed by a decade in child protection and care for the elderly as a senior professional. From 2002 to 2004 she headed the State Secretariat for Roma Affairs of the Prime Minister's Office. Between 2004 and 2006 she was in charge of the Equal Opportunities Coordination Office in Salgótarján, while in the next two years she worked as director of the Cultural Centre and Library of Bánytereny. From 2009 until its closing down in 2011 she was a staff member of the Programme against Child Poverty of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. At present she is professional head of the After School Centre of Bánytereny and of the regional network of after school centres.

In the course of her work Judit Berki has acquired excellent theoretical and practical knowledge about children, and especially about Roma youth in a difficult and multiply disadvantaged situation. She has also used her experience as an expert of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, of several ministries, of the Public Foundation for Gypsies in Hungary, of the National Institute for Vocational Education, of the EQUAL Programme and of the Soros Foundation. For her diverse, high-level and exemplary activity she has already been granted several professional awards, of which mention should be made of the Roma Public Life Award received in 1999 and the Award of Tolerance granted in 2003.

It was during her studies in Bayern in 1992 that she got familiar with a special form of educating disadvantaged children outside school, namely the system of after school centres, of which she

became a pioneer in Hungary. She played a significant role in making that system a success in Hungary.

Under her professional direction the Association of Gypsy Minority Representatives and Advocates of Nógrád County managed to set up the After School Centre of Bátonyterenye in 2000. The purpose of the centre was to provide after school and leisure time opportunities for socially disadvantaged children, and since 2011 other centres have been established in Kisterenye, Lucfalva and Mátraverebély as well. The aim of the network is to increase the number of children admitted to secondary grammar or technical schools or to vocational schools where they can acquire marketable skills. The programme is carried out by highly qualified and dedicated professionals, who strive, besides educating the children and organising events for them, to form a partnership between the parents and the schools in the interest of the long-term development and social mobility of the children. The personnel assist these children, coming from deep poverty, with mental hygiene services, individualised skills development, talent management and career counselling. The network often organises family programmes, where relationships between parents, children and their mentors are developed through shared activities, providing an opportunity for the participants to forget, for a couple of hours, about everyday difficulties. Within the framework of the programme some two hundred disadvantaged or multiply disadvantaged children receive care and an opportunity for a better and happier life.

Judit Berki's commitment, expertise, humanity and activity performed in the interest of the enforcement of children's rights and of an equality of opportunity have been exemplary. The After School Centre of Bátonyterenye, set up with her assistance and operated under her direction, has given and is giving the possibility of a fuller and happier life for several hundred disadvantaged, mainly Roma children. With the Justitia Regnorum Fundamentum Award we would like to thank, with warm congratulations, Judit Berki and all the staff and supporters of the After School Centre of Bátonyterenye for their altruistic devotion and work.

Budapest, 15 June 2102