Increasing Equal Opportunities in Education in Transcarpathia.
Talent Development Programmes of the “GENIUS” Charity Foundation

Natália Váradi
Ferenc Rákóczi II. Transcarpathian Hungarian Institute and “GENIUS” Charity Foundation, Beregszász, Ukraine

The essential condition of the economic evolution in Transcarpathia is the assistance of young researchers, finding the young talents, supporting their development as well as finding those young people with outstanding achievements and with appropriate knowledge. Searching for, identifying, and developing young people with outstanding abilities is a determining key factor of the competitiveness of a given region; in such a work, a prominent role is given to different educational institutions and talent agencies. Thus concerning this reason, “GENIUS” Charity Foundation has been established in 2011. It carries out a wide range of talent management, talent development and research among the schoolchildren, students, and young researchers. Our aim is to create an integrated system of the talent support programs, to assure equal access in promoting talents, and increase the talented youth’s social responsibility. The Foundation among many others, organizes the Conference of Young Researchers, as well as the Conference of Scientific Students, and operates the nine Talent Points where more than 2,000 children, more than 300 qualified teachers, and nearly 90 schools take part.

Keywords: talent development, equal opportunities, best practice, talent management, diversity management

Transcarpathia is a part of the Ukrainian Republic, i.e. the westernmost county of the country. Its territory is 12,752 km² and it is the second smallest county of Ukraine. Its population is 1,251,634 people. The administrative centre of Transcarpathia is Ungvár. The region is divided into 13 districts. People from various ethnic groups reside in Transcarpathia, 80.5% (1,010,127 persons) of whom are Ukrainians by ethnicity, and with a sizeable minority of Hungarians, 12.1% (151,516 persons).

There are only few regions in Europe which were attached to so many countries in the 20th century as the territory of the present-day Transcarpathia. The region, which had belonged to Hungary for more than a thousand years, was detached from the mother country after World War I. Afterwards it was part of the newly-created state of Czechoslovakia for almost 20 years. Since then the name “Transcarpathia” has become widespread in official use. According to the First Vienna Award in 1938, the region was reunited with the mother country and Hungary took possession of the whole territory of Transcarpathia. Until 1944—when the Soviet Army occupied Transcarpathia—the region belonged to Hungary. After World War II, it was incorporated into the Soviet Union. After the collapse of the USSR (more than 25 years ago), Transcarpathia
became part of the independent Ukrainian Republic. So Transcarpathia is a multicultural and multilingual region.

Searching for, identifying, and developing young people with outstanding abilities is a determining key factor of the competitiveness of a given region; in such a work, a prominent role is given to different educational institutions and talent agencies. Thus concerning this reason, in 2011 “GENIUS” Charity Foundation was established by Ferenc Rákóczi II. Transcarpathian Hungarian Institute and by the Transcarpathian Hungarian Teachers Association (THAT), which carries out a wide range of talent management, talent development and research, providing equal opportunities for learning and research among the Hungarian-speaking schoolchildren, as well as among university or college students and young researchers.

The Foundation is a local non-governmental and non-profit organization, established on the basis of the law of Ukraine “On Charity and Charity Organizations” and conducts its activity in accordance with the Constitution of Ukraine. The activity of the Foundation is based on the principles of legality, humanity, common interests, equal rights, publicity, and voluntariness.

The main purpose of the Foundation is to carry out charity activity, charity assistance related to the implementation of educational, social, cultural, and economic rights of the local population.

The aim of the “GENIUS” Charity Foundation are:

1. To create an integrated system of the talent support programs;
2. To assure equal access in promoting talents;
3. To increase the talented youth’s social responsibility;
4. To appreciate the work of those entities and individuals who support the talented youth;
5. To offer more opportunities for talented pupils, students, and researchers to broaden their knowledge and facilities, thus educating the Hungarian intellectuals;
6. To unite teachers who are committed for talented youth thus encouraging them to join forces and work together;
7. To provide assistance in educational services;
8. To conduct courses, quizzes, and competitions;
9. To provide assistance by scholarships;
10. To support youth’s theatrical activity;
11. To provide assistance to young researchers;
12. To provide assistance to youth in obtaining advisory to strengthen and support ethnic, family, and social ties;
13. To organize youth trainings;
14. To practically implement national, regional, local, and international programs aimed at improving the social situation of the local youth;
15. To exchange information on the development of the ethnic, social, cultural, and educational ties to the population of the district;
16. To assist gifted young people (pupils, students, and graduate students) in the form of scholarships and granting of one-time payments.

All our programs are financially supported by the Hungarian government through different grants, tenders, mainly by Ministry of Human Resources, the State Secretariat for National Policy of the Prime Minister’s Office, and Foundation Gábor Bethlen.
In 2011, the Foundation set up two councils to develop and co-ordinate talent support programs: the Transcarpathian Higher Educational Talent Development Council (number of specialists in it is 18), and the Transcarpathian Talent Supporting Council (number of specialists in it is 34). The former manages the talent supporting programs and scholarships of students and young researchers studying in higher educational establishments, and the latter is doing talent research and talent-aiding among pupils in primary and secondary schools. Both Councils meet and confer twice a year.

The tasks of the Transcarpathian Higher Educational Talent Development Council are:

1. Searching for, identifying, and developing those students who attend one of the Transcarpathian higher educational institution, as well as keeping under review their professional development;
2. Operation of the Zrinyi Ilona Vocational College;
3. Organizing the Transcarpathian students’ and young researchers’ scientific conference;
4. Providing the opportunity for publishing for the best works;
5. Helping those students who took part in the scientific conference to participate in international conferences;
6. Developing the Hungarian scientific language and thinking.

The tasks of the Transcarpathian Talent Supporting Council are:

1. Searching for and supporting those Hungarian talents who attend elementary and secondary schools in Transcarpathia, and helping their talent to flourish;
2. Helping to conduct the subject-contests organized by THAT;
3. Regularly organizing lectures for those students who have registered for the contest with the aim to develop their knowledge and abilities;
4. Organizing talent development camps and weekends together with THAT;
5. Organizing and supervising those activities which were created and approved by the board and are connected with searching for talents and with their support (contests, sub-regional workshops, weekend small academies, summer talent supporting camps, appearance at national and foreign events, etc.).

Within a Foundation also there is a so-called professional special lecturers-teachers team who mainly deals with the special program of a given subject or scientific area.

Among many others, the professional special lecturers-teachers’ tasks are the organizational and technical advisory duties concerning the subjects that are taught in nine Talent Points, who should give reports to the Talent Supporting Council. The lecturers should prepare the e-learning materials, the curriculum, the worksheets papers, tests, and they should check the tests and worksheets papers.

The work of the two Councils and the professional special lecturers-teachers’ work are organically intertwined and complement one another.

From March 2017, the two Councils are considered as the registered Talent Development Councils and one can find them on the Talent Map.

The Foundation is an active participant in improving opportunities for the Hungarian minority’s social development programs. Since nine years of its existence, it has been determinative organization for Hungarian talent management. For this purpose, the main programs organized by the Foundation can be divided into two age groups: programs for the 7-17 years and 17-35 years. All of them are unique in our country that is why can be regarded as good practice.
In 2011, the Foundation set up eight Talent Points covering the whole area of Transcarpathia. In this, Talent Points teach almost 2,000 thousand pupils every year with the help of more than 300 qualified teachers. Once a year, we organize Talent Day, where the most talented pupils are invited to show their talent.

The Foundation makes a lot to find and support talented pupils in arts, drama, sports, and folk-music too. That is why we organize “The Nightingale Sings!” Folk Music and Dance Talent Show, the Jenő Buzánszky Football Cup, and József Zupkő International Handball Tournament. We also organize various camps during summer time, e.g. Mária Jankovics Creative Camp, Péter Veres Creative Camp, Dramatic Art Camp, Sport Camp, Folk Dance and Folk Music Camps, etc. The best 24 Hungarian pupils of Transcarpathia are awarded the Endre Ady scholarship by the Foundation.

For the students, young researchers, and lecturers aged 17-35 years, the Foundation realizes the Ilona Zrinyi Transcarpathian Hungarian Specialized Course, organizes the Conference of Young Researchers, as well as the Scientific Student Conference and various other scientific and memorial conferences, which in all cases are linked to prominent historical anniversaries and outstanding people. Besides, it also runs the Kálmán Soós scholarship program.

We are very proud that more and more young people take part in our programs. That is 2,000-2,400 pupils between the ages of 8 and 17 and also 150-200 students and young researchers between the ages of 18-35.

Table 1

| №  | Name of the activity                                                                 | Time interval                      |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1  | “Transcarpathia in art, art in Transcarpathia” drawing competition                   | March-May                          |
| 2  | Electronic talent management                                                         | March-May                          |
| 3  | “The nightingale sings!” folk music and dance talent show                            | April-June                         |
| 4  | Kálmán Soós scholarship program                                                     | May-December                       |
| 5  | Operation of the nine talent points                                                 | September-December                 |
| 6  | Talent development weekends in different subjects                                   | 3 occasion x 3 days                |
| 7  | Transcarpathian talent day                                                           | June                               |
| 8  | Jenő Buzánszky football cup                                                         | June                               |
| 9  | József Zupkő international handball tournament                                       | June                               |
| 10 | Conference of young researchers                                                     | November                           |
| 11 | Summer camps                                                                         | June-July-August                   |
| 12 | Scientific student conference                                                       | May                                |
| 13 | Environmental education talent development program for participants in higher education | September-October                 |

Let us give a brief description of some of our major programs (see Table 1):

(1) Operation of the nine Talent Points

In 2011, six Talent Points were created covering the whole area of Transcarpathia with the centres of: Ungvár, Nagydogrony, Bátú, Beregszász, Tiszajkó, and Aknaslatina. In 2012, another two Talent Points were established in Munkács and Mezővári because of the great interest and huge number of pupils. In 2019, one more Talent Point was established in Körösméző. Hence, there are nine Talent Points now. The aim of these Talent Points is to search for the talented youth and to support them. There are different subjects groups, such as Mathematics-IT-Physics, Biology-Chemistry-Geography, Literature-History-Art History, Hungarian-Ukrainian-English languages, in three age groups: 5-6, 7-8, 9-11 and also Mathematics, Hungarian
language and literature for pupils in the lower school, so in the 3rd and 4th classes. The lessons are held on Saturdays from September to December at the above mentioned places, where more than 2,000 pupils participate in the classes annually. To these nine Talent Points, pupils come from almost all Transcarpathian Hungarian schools (80-90 schools annually). We provide them for buses and lunch. Pupils may participate in the lessons from September till December. The non-school curriculums for the lessons are prepared by the Talent Development Professional Lecturers, so a group of specialists in different school subjects, who are teachers in schools and lecturers at the higher educational establishments. So in the spirit of equal opportunities, pupils in the nine Talent Points learn the same material and use similar equipment. All members of the Talent Development Professional Lecturers are also members of the Transcarpathian Talent Supporting Council and of the Transcarpathian Hungarian Teachers Association.

We consider it important that, from January to May, pupils achieving outstanding results at Talent Points will reach the county academic competitions, organized by the Transcarpathian Hungarian Teachers Association and be measured in different subjects, where one of the competition tasks is selected from the Talent Points curriculum.

The use of the modern technologies is an essential and basic condition of the talent development process in the 21st century. That is why, for a more efficient work we purchase equipment for the nine Talent Points every year.

(2) “The Nightingale Sings!” Folk Music and Dance Talent Show

The program is a competition for tradition-keeping bands and folk dancer between the ages of 7-14; any production can be performed what is tied to any parts of the authentic Hungarian folk music and dance. The competition is announced for active participants in the field of amateur music and dance. The participant(s) should be registered by the educational institution, by the art association; in the case of individual entries, parental confirmation is needed. One institution may enter in several categories, within the categories with several performances, e.g. individual and pair, or group, folk music: individual and group. During the competition, one should perform at least two different performances. The participants may be solely children. The style elements or musical instruments of other genres or their sets of motives cannot be used. During the evaluation, it is an advantage if one introduces the own traditions of his/her landscape, using the proper age characteristics, display of the children’ folk genres as well as the traditional children living habits, authentic folk costumes. The semi-final takes place in April at the Institute in Beregszász and the final takes place in May also at the Institute. The maximum 20 participants who get to the final should participate in a 2-day preparatory-training camp before the final where well-known folk musicians and dancers prepare them for the finals. There are 350-380 participants on the program annually.

(3) Talent development weekends with the preparatory aim for the subject-contests

Between January and March, our Foundation organizes talent-developing weekends, where pupils deal only with one subject (Mathematics, Biology, Geography, Chemistry, Hungarian language, Literature, History, Ukrainian, and English) intensively and are preparing for national, Carpathian-basin, and international competitions. The curriculums, study material, subject program for it are prepared by the Talent Development Professional Lecturers, who are familiar with the appropriate requirements for the competitions. Here we invite pupils who participated in different county competitions from the chosen subject and reached the 1-10 places on them. The program is realized in three times for 3-day workshops. On these programs, usually there are
50-60 pupils in each subject. The main aim of the program is to deepen and expand the knowledge in the given subjects. The workshops are conducted by highly professional teachers. Our aim is to have this programmes in all subjects in the future.

(4) “Transcarpathia in art, art in Transcarpathia”

The “GENIUS” Charity Foundation announces drawing competition under the name “Transcarpathia in art, art in Transcarpathia” in each year for those children who like drawing and like the summer camps. Those children who win prizes on the competition receive invitation to the Mária Jankovics Creative Camp which is held in summer. The participants may be Transcarpathian pupils from 5-9th grades. The drawings may be done without technical award, in the size of A4 or A3 on different themes.

(5) Jenő Buzánszky Football Cup

Jenő Buzánszky was a famous Hungarian football player, Nation Athlete, and Olympic Champion. We would like to make his career as an example for Transcarpathian talented youth. There are 60-80 young football players annually on this program. The first Football Cup was opened by Jenő Buzánszky himself.

(6) József Zupkó International Handball Tournament

The aim of the occasion is the popularization of handball, searching for talented handball girls, providing competitive opportunities, creating international sport contacts and last but not least the tribute before the memory of József Zupkó, the worthy coach who was born in Beregszász. Teams from any countries of the Carpathian Basin can participate in the tournament. There are 50-90 handball players on this program annually.

(7) Summer camps

During the summer, pupils may participate in different summer camps if they show special activities at the Talent Points, or take the 1-5 places at different subject competitions. Each summer camp organized by our Foundation lasts for five days and they are the following:

Folk Music and Folk Dance Camps in Beregszász and Nagydobrony. Every year since 2011, the folk dance and music camp was organized in Nagybereg. Due to the popularity of the camp, we decided to provide opportunity for pupils loving folk music in two camps from the year of 2018, so from this year, we have a folk music camp in Beregszász instead of Nagybereg and another one in Nagydobrony. The musical education does not get proper focuses in the secondary schools thus these camps make up for the shortfall, besides they offer meaningful summer programs. The practical and theoretical training ensures children’s musical development, which includes musical instruments and dance training involving Transcarpathian and Hungarian professionals and artists, besides we offer different free time activities for a good pastime during the camp. There are 60-70 pupils in the camp annually.

Mária Jankovics Creative Camp. This camp is useful especially for those schoolchildren who are interested in fine arts, drawing, painting, and handicrafts. Mária Jankovics was a Transcarpathian artist, who died at a young age; she designed the corporate identity of the only Hungarian magazine for children Irka, published by the Transcarpathian Pedagogical Association, and she was the graphic of this magazine, thus we would like preserve her memory and show her works as a good example to pupils. Children may try their talent in practice besides the theory; they can get to know the production of ceramics, pottery, and sculpture. There are 55-65 pupils in the camp annually.

Drama Art Camp is held for children between the ages of 12-16 who are interested in theatre, art, and drama. The elements of the program are the following: acting, stage movement, speech technology, and
improvisational work. On the last evening of the camp, parents and anyone who is interested in theatre can see a play that has been prepared by the children during the week. The location of the camp is the Ferenc Rákóczi II. Transcarpathian Hungarian Institute. The lecturers of the camp are drama teachers, actors, and actresses from Hungary and Transcarpathia. This occasion is held for those children who want to test themselves on the stage and want to show their theatrical talent in the closing performance of the camp. The maximum number of participants is 35 children.

Pupils between the ages of 12 and 17 are welcome to take part in Sport Camp. We would like to emphasize the importance of sport, and healthy way of life. Sport makes a big influence on health, so we should get pupils used to sport. Of course in the camp, sport is mainly done for fun and new exciting experiences. Children in the camp also develop motor skills and cognitive skills. Being physically active as a child makes it more likely to continue playing sports as an adult. Children who play sports are less likely to experience childhood obesity. Children who participate in sports might also benefit from the social aspect, developing friendships with teammates and feeling part of a group. Children can learn positive mental health skills including accountability, leadership. The maximum number of children in the camp is 40-45 pupils.

What we learn with pleasure is hard to forget. The forest would be also very quiet if only those birds sing who can sing best. We need to believe that we are talented in something and we need to achieve that at all costs! We always emphasize for youths who take part in our program that they should do everything to unfold their talent and ensure them that we are here for their help.

(8) Electronic Talent Management

The author and owner of the on-line talent management program is Dr. Barnabás Szilágyi, whose name is related to MENTORS and SZILENCIUM on-line educational talent management programs, which have been tested and tried several times in Hungary. One of the advantages of this on-line program is that pupils can evolve and reach progress at their individual pace and abilities, without hindering those who are moving faster by solving tasks.

The program provides two development opportunities for the pupils of the 6-11 grades who participate in eight Talent Points. The program provides help in Mathematics, Hungarian language and literature for the participants. The program is an on-line development and contest, which prepares pupils with 100 thousand tasks for the advanced-level graduation exam, and it also catches up the elementary and secondary schools with up-to-date methods. The SZILENCIUM program provides training in three categories: entrance exam, with reading comprehension and theme worksheets, from what each week pupils should solve assessment exercises. The other possibility is an on-line foreign language tutoring program. With the help of what pupils have the possibility to learn a foreign language through such modern methods, which help them to complete successfully the B2 level English language exam.

The program started in 2013, but unfortunately because of the financial lack, it was not organized for three years, but nowadays there are almost 300 pupils in it.

(9) Conference of Young Researchers

For the Hungarian Science Day, the Foundation organizes the Conference of Young Researchers. The aim of this occasion is to assure lecturing opportunity for the doctoral candidates who do researches on different disciplines or for those young researchers who would like to continue their studies at the higher educational establishments. Here, eminent professionals evaluate the participants in different sections and give the useful
advices concerning their further studies and research. There are 30-35 conference lecturers every year in 5-6 sections, from different higher educational establishments from the Carpathian-basin.

(10) Scientific Student Conference

The Foundation, linked to the Ukrainian Day of Science, since 2011, organizes the Scientific Student Conference, mainly for those students who attend one of the Hungarian higher educational establishment in Transcarpathia. Earlier this Conference was organized by the Ferenc Rákóczi II. Transcarpathian Hungarian Institute. The 10th Anniversary Scientific Student Conference was expanded to the Carpathian-basin in 2015, so in the last three years, it became Carpathian-basin conference, because young researchers, students from various different higher educational institutions of the Carpathian-basin participate in the conference. The aim of the conference is to ensure lecturing possibilities for those students who do scientific researches at different higher educational establishments. Here eminent professionals evaluate them in different sections and give them useful advices for their further research work. There are 35-50 conference lecturers every year in 7-9 sections. This is the only one conference in Transcarpathia from where young researchers, if they take 1-3 places in their section, can participate in National Scientific Students’ Associations Conference, in Hungary or in the neighbouring countries’ higher educational establishments where Hungarian minority lives, which is organized every two years, by the Council of National Scientific Students’ Associations.

(11) Ilona Zrinyi Transcarpathian Hungarian Specialized Course

Ilona Zrinyi Transcarpathian Hungarian Specialized Course is a kind of scholarship which was established by Ferenc Rákóczi II. Transcarpathian Hungarian Institute in 2000. This program is organized by the “GENIUS” Charity Foundation since 2011. Full-time, upper-year students who study at the higher educational establishment in Transcarpathia and have excellent result in their studies can apply to it from June to September every year. Each September, there is an entrance exam and the best students can work together with a professor for 10 months on a scientific theme. There are 12-25 bright students in the program annually.

(12) Kálmán Soós Scholarship Program

The aim of the scholarship program is to promote the cooperation of the Transcarpathian Hungarian higher educational institutions. It helps those students who cannot study their specialty in Hungarian, as well as to encourage students to carry out researches concerning our region. The scholarship program consists of the following sub-programs: Transcarpathian Wander University, Making Hungarian lecture notes and Hungarian professional dictionaries, Supporting researches related to Transcarpathia.

The evaluation of the above mentioned sub-programs is done by the Transcarpathian Higher Educational Talent Development Council, and the decision is also made by this Council according to the pre-defined criteria.

(13) Environmental education talent development program for participants in higher education

The aim of the program is to show pedagogical practical methods for the students who want to be Biology teachers what could be used during their work on the lessons. When compiling the technical program, we paid special attention on Botany, Zoology, and Environmental Studies. As a part of the program, students visit National Botanic Gardens, Zoos, Lakes, etc. in Hungary and Transcarpathia. Attending the botanic garden, one can get familiar with the origin of the everyday used plant species. The observation of the representatives of one of the fauna groups at their natural dwelling place can be hardly implemented with the aim of the environmental education. For this purpose, zoos provide good opportunities. An important segment of the
environmental protection is to get to know the fauna elements of our region and of other landscapes and the pedagogical work concerning the respect of the wildlife. The participants enrich their practical knowledge with different experiments from the point of environmental education and Hungarian knowledge, which could be successfully used during their pedagogical work in the future.

We also organize Scientific Debate Evenings, Scientific Days, Scientific Basics Training, talent care and development on different fields of science, scientific conferences on different historical, scientific topics.

The neglect of the talented pupils, youth is an unscrupulous waste of the nation’s and a region’s wealth. The fact that talent is diverse proves nothing better than our Foundation’s multicolored programmes: music, drawing, artists, disciplines that provide opportunities for thousands of talented ones. Every talented child, young people is a miracle and our Foundation does everything to find, support them. We try to open each door for them. Because if we open a door, we give them a chance to unfold their personality, their talent. We always emphasize to be what you were born to be, dare to assume yourself, dare to become a gift, dare to be open, dare to be the best! Whatever talent you have, use it! Talent is a responsibility.

The “GENIUS” Charity Foundation is an institution of national significance since 2012. It also received the Hungarian Quality Product Award in 2013 “for the enthusiastic work committed to the respect of traditions, environment protection and Hungarian awareness—realised at continuously high standards”. The work of Talent Points which has been operated by the Foundation has been acknowledged by the National Talent Development Council as an Accredited Prominent Talent Point in 2013 and in 2017 for the second time. In 2016, it has been included into the European Talent Development Network as the representative of the European Talent Point.

All our projects and the programs are carried out by Hungarian teachers, specialists, and professors who have the appropriate professional background and references for the implementation of the tasks according to the requirements and objectives. Usually there are more than 300 teachers and specialists annually who take part in the work and there are also four colleagues at the office who organize the work and the programs, keep contacts with the pupils, schools, teachers, and give information about the programs as well. For all of our programs, we provide wide press-media coverage.

The “GENIUS” Charity Foundation was founded with the aim to manage pupils’ talent development of the Transcarpathian elementary and secondary schools in a single system. Therefore, as we have seen above, the Foundation has a number of diverse, but closely related, talent-building, talent embracing programs, contributing to finding talent promises and minimizing the loss of talent in Transcarpathia.

Conclusions

The work of talent management and talent management organizations is very important in Transcarpathia, as well as in Ukraine. We, the management and the staff of the “GENIUS” Charity Foundation, believe that nurturing talent is also a key to the cultural and economic development of a region. That is why we do everything we can to find, support, and help talented young people. That is why we organize various talent development programs, like music, sport, art, different sciences, etc. Our results prove that the work of hundreds of colleagues and professionals is important. And also the large number of those who are interested in different programs prove that all of our programs are of a great need, and useful in our region.
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