

Shpresa Programme

Introduction

Shpresa, meaning ‘hope’ in Albanian, was set up in 2002 as a user-led community organisation to promote the participation and contribution of the Albanian-speaking community in the UK. It was founded by Luljeta Nuzi and two of her colleagues – all Albanian mothers who had worked together previously. They were increasingly concerned by the extent of the difficulties that their compatriots experienced in settling and integrating into life in the UK having sought asylum in the 1990s.

Having had the idea to form an organisation, they started to develop further links in their community and in November 2002, formally consulted with 120 Albanian speaking people to find out what a community organisation could do to support them. This led to the establishment of the Shpresa programme, based in the Newham, East London. Its remit is to advance the lives of the Albanian speaking people in the UK and support them to take full and active roles in their communities through advice, help and support to access education, training and employment.

Today, Shpresa runs a number of projects in addition to its Supplementary schools’ programme. This includes a women’s health and wellbeing project to address issues of isolation and mental ill health, advice and advocacy in areas such as immigration and welfare, a volunteering programme to increase participation and skills and to support access into employment, and campaigning to raise awareness and address issues that are important to the community. Currently they are campaigning and putting their fundraising efforts towards the development of a GCSE qualification in Albanian.

Shpresa Programme is a registered charity and has an annual turnover of around £230,000.

How the Supplementary schools’ programme began

Shpresa’s Supplementary schools’ programme is well established, providing weekly classes for over 450 children in eight boroughs in and around London. However, it started from modest beginnings as a small pilot project in a community church in Newham supporting six children aged six and seven. It was run by three parent volunteers who were concerned that their children were not able to speak Albanian and therefore could not communicate with their grandparents. As the parents could not speak English well, they recognised that their own ability to communicate with their children was becoming limited too.

Classes took place after school and focused on Albanian language development and dancing. When the nearby Vicarage Primary School (attended by their children) invited them to perform Luljeta realised what else their children had gained from the experience. “We didn’t think about self-esteem and confidence building, but when we saw them up there dancing and reciting poetry, it became clear that we were achieving so much more than we set out to... it was really quite emotional and we knew that we could do more and that others would see how valuable it was.”

Getting the mainstream schools on board

As they expanded their programme, staff started approaching schools that were attended by the children of Shpresa's members to host after-school and weekend classes that would be led by Shpresa staff. However, they have since found that it is more effective to take their parent members to see how Shpresa works in other schools first. This way, parents can directly approach the headteacher of their children's school with a clear request for similar provision. Accompanied by one or two parents, Luljeta then goes to meet with the Head to negotiate a contract. She takes with her: recommendations from parents, children and other schools, as well as photos, a video clip of a session and previous evaluation reports about their work. "I have to do my research on each school and find out how many children and how many families we would be benefitting. I have to put myself in the shoes of the school and ask myself, 'what do they get out of it?' so I can make the case as strong as possible, because if they don't see a clear benefit to them, there's no point."

Sometimes even this has not been enough to get a mainstream school on board because some have remained sceptical about the benefits a supplementary school can provide. Some mainstream schools had already tried hosting other supplementary schools and had not had a good experience – common complaints included classrooms being left untidy, schools leaving later than agreed and not exercising good practice in health and safety. This put them off working with Shpresa to begin with, but persistence and negotiation usually resulted in those mainstream schools coming onboard. Shpresa agrees a trial period of around six weeks (to give them time to show what they can do) in addition to free interpreting services for parents' evenings in return for free premises and caretaker services.

During the trial period, as well as ensuring that rooms are left in the condition in which Shpresa found them, they also try to build a strong relationship with the caretaker, who always reports back to the mainstream school. Parents are informed that it's only a pilot and that they also have a part to play for it to continue. At the end of the trial period, Shpresa puts together a detailed report on what the children have done, the numbers attended and the results achieved, along with lots of photos and other evidence to help make the case for a longer term contract with the mainstream school.

The programme

Shpresa's supplementary schools benefit around 450 children and young people each year aged 6 to 14. The programme takes place in five primary schools, two secondary schools, and a sixth form college across the London Boroughs of Newham, Hammersmith and Fulham, Barnet, Haringey, Enfield, Redbridge, Barking and Dagenham, and Kensington and Chelsea. Each partner mainstream school hosts the sessions free of charge.

The programme has received a Special Distinction Award from the National Resource Centre for Supplementary Education, which in particular recognised how clear Shpresa's mission and strategic objectives are, and how all of their projects complement each other.

Classes take place either after school on weekdays or during weekends. They mainly focus on personal development and maintaining Albanian cultural heritage through language classes, dancing, drama, sports, mentoring and leadership activities. However, more recently they have started running sessions in some schools to support children's progress in maths, English and science.

Finance

Running costs for the Supplementary schools' programme have decreased over the last few years and are currently relatively low - around £45,000 per year. The majority of expenditure (85%) is on staffing costs, which includes two members of staff who manage the programme and teach some classes, as well as 1-3 sessional staff, and travel and subsistence for approximately 60 volunteers.

Costs are mainly covered by grants from trusts and foundations (60%) including BBC Children in Need, Help a Capital Child and John Lyon's Charity. However, they also get a significant amount from local councils (35%) for the work that they do in two boroughs.

Families pay an annual membership fee to Shpresa of £30. The fees do not pay for the direct costs of running the supplementary schools (e.g. tutor salaries, books) but contribute to Shpresa's overall running costs, such as management, insurance or evaluation. This helps to reduce the overhead costs of the Supplementary schools' programme.

Financial Year	Income	Expenditure
2010-11	£89,652	£87,647
2011-12	£53,981	£55,381
2012-13	£42,385	£42,990

*Note: these figures are for the Supplementary schools' programme only.

In addition, they are able to save around £20,000 each year because delivery of the sessions is supported by volunteers. Usually these are parents who have participated in another of Shpresa's programmes – for example, its Volunteering Programme funded by the Big Lottery trains and supports 20 women each year to become qualified teaching assistants or childcare workers. Most of these women work as volunteers in Shpresa's supplementary schools, do a work placement with its partner mainstream schools, and some go on to secure paid employment in mainstream schools as a result.

It is this partnership working that Luljeta thinks is key to their success: "It has to be a win-win for everyone. We are proud that we are genuinely user-led with our community represented in around 75% of our board, and actively taking part in our formal consultations. Our consultations take place over a few months and involve children and parents. They feed in their ideas and then we take it to staff and trustees at an away day which is facilitated by someone external to our organisation. If their ideas fall within our defined objectives, we try to find a way to do it; if not, we look for and work with a partner organisation to do it. In this case, we responded directly to a need that our parents told us and as a result we are able to deliver our programme with their support at a much lower cost than it would otherwise be. They, in turn, gain crucial skills that will enable them to support their children more fully at school and gain employment, something that is really important to them."

What next for Shpresa?

With funding from Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Shpresa has produced a 'how-to' guide for setting up and running Supplementary schools and provides training, mentoring and ongoing support for other community groups e.g. Eritrean, Polish, Somali, Romanian, Portuguese and Lithuanian. They are keen to develop their consultancy services for others that want to set up a supplementary school or would like support to improve their existing school.

"Supplementary education will only become sustainable for as long as it is seen to be relevant, beneficial and complementary to what the mainstream schools are doing. My hope is that, in future, mainstream schools will identify community leaders of the groups with whom they need to engage, and approach us to train them to deliver similarly outstanding results to that which we are achieving."