

**Project:** Live to Learn – Learn to Love

**Place:** Bosnia – Herzegovina

**Sponsoring college:** Hood College

**Student:** Ana Filipovic, Bosnia – Herzegovina, Hood College '16, UWCiM '11

<http://prozor-rama41.weebly.com/about.html>

## Section I

The main goal of the project was to promote cooperation and understanding among young people living in multicultural societies. The project entailed volunteer opportunities in the local community, creative work through a variety of workshops, as well as educational field trips while fostering a spirit of openness, understanding, and acceptance of the diverse nature of Bosnian-Herzegovinian social landscape.

The Peace Project “Live to Learn – Learn to Love” took place in Prozor-Rama, Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the form of a summer school from July 9-July 31, 2014. Sixteen students, Bosniaks (Muslim) and Croats (Christian Catholic), were selected to participate through an application process. In addition, ten volunteers who went through a two-day training program (July 7-8), took part in the project.

In the course of the summer school, students visited a mosque, a Catholic church, and an Orthodox Church. For most students, this was their first time visiting a house of worship other than one of their own religious denomination. Father Ivan Jelić, a Franciscan priest, Nemanja Đurđinović, an Orthodox priest, and Nihad Ahmetović, a Muslim Imam, introduced their respective religions to the students. The summer school took place during Ramadan. In this honor, we had a special Iftar dinner and two days off during the Eid celebration. The day we resumed our work, Muslim students brought cakes to share and celebrate with Catholic students.

Students went on four fieldtrips of which the first one was to the city of Mostar, where they learned about Mostar’s history through a scavenger hunt. The second trip was to Gornji Vakuf-Uskoplje (GVU) where students met with representatives of the Youth GVU Center and the PRO-future project, which entails a variety of activities related to reconciliation and understanding in 32 municipalities throughout the year. The third trip to Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina, was hosted by the Association of High School Students of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ASuBiH). They introduced us to their work and encouraged the creation of a local ASuBiH team in Prozor-Rama. During this trip, I had the honor of hosting Ms. Kate Emory, an advisor to the Peace Project from Hood College. For the last trip, the students hiked to Draševo Mountain with Rama Rowing Club, to raise awareness about the importance of preserving Rama’s natural beauty. Zvonimir Faletar, editor-in-chief of EKORAMA, an environmental magazine, explained why conserving nature matters and why it is important to get involved in that cause on an individual basis.

Educational workshops and volunteering were an important aspect of the project. The Red Cross of Prozor-Rama conducted a First Aid workshop and students regularly volunteered with the association “Children of Hope”, an organization helping individuals with disabilities. Antonio Džolan, a fine arts professor, did a workshop on Roman Catholic and Muslim art history. Through a short skit prepared by our volunteers, the students learned about the respectful conduct on social media towards all nationalities and religions during a social media workshop.

The summer school hosted a number of speakers. Selma Dumpor and Medina Rahimić, law students in Mostar, familiarized the students with laws of Bosnia and Herzegovina pertaining to human rights and what they can do individually to improve the future of this country. Marko Petric, vice-president of Apollo Association and a senior at Hood College, introduced the students to the work of his association and the challenges of running an NGO faced in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

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War veterans Janko Samouković, Stanislav Krezić, and Amir Omerspahić presented another side of the Balkan conflict, titled “My Story: Let's Choose Peace”, which focused on their experiences and values of reconciliation. Their native languages are Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian, but they aspire to speak the language of hope and compassion, carrying a message of truth and peace to the generations to come.

"Children of Hope" received a donation of school and art supplies from the Peace Project "Live to Learn - Learn to Love", as a token of appreciation and an encouragement to continue with their creative workshops. Since participants ultimately established ASuBiH in Prozor-Rama, they also received a donation of supplies for their successful start.

I remain hopeful that funding will be available for future endeavors regarding this project. I am currently working on improving the website for the project, as well as reaching out to organizations that might be interested in supporting the work that has been done. I believe that this project helped the community in a myriad of ways, from supporting local businesses, to teaching the participants that they can create strong friendships outside their ethnic group and that differences should be something that connects people, rather than divides them. The project faced challenges during the planning process with location and space, but the community was very open to working with students and those challenges faded away once the project began. Potential partners that seemed ideal for the project, failed to see the greater mission blinded by cultural prejudices. One of the Muslim students shared that she thought she would not be accepted into the summer school because I am a Croatian Catholic, especially because she wears hijab on daily basis. I believe it is absurd for youth to be afraid of being who they are. Analyzing the survey at the beginning and the end of the project, students with initial cultural prejudices felt richer in knowledge about other nationalities and religions living in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

## **Section II**

I have learned that being comfortable expressing who we are as individuals with all the things we think define us as such (ethnicity, culture, religion, sexual orientation, etc.) and accepting others for who they are, is the foundation of peace. My project connected 16 students who, traditionally, would have probably never interacted with each other. The students formed new friendships, learned new skills, and founded the first ASuBiH organization in Prozor-Rama. They also continued volunteering with the “Children of Hope” and the Red Cross of Prozor-Rama. The impact will definitely be long term and I will contact students regularly to encourage their work in ASuBiH. There were no intended fund-raising efforts, but the project went so well that the Tourist Board covered all unforeseen expenses at the end of the project. This project confirmed my wish to work in leadership across cultures. Working in my own community and in the place where I grew up, helped me improve my organizational, managerial, and human resource skills in a comfortable cultural setting. It also encouraged me to accept the obstacles and understand that it will not be easy to make a change in our communities, but all the hard work and effort will be worth it in the end.

The only way to *Live to Learn* and *Learn to Love* the differences that exist among us is by encouraging and motivating the youth to become an active part of our society. Being a change you wish to see in the world is an excellent start of contributing to the creation of a worldwide peace.



1) A collage created by one of the students after visiting a city mosque and a local church



2) Students visiting the capital of Bosnia- Herzegovina with Ms. Kate Emory



1) Closing Ceremony "Live to Learn – Learn to Love"