



# 20 20

---

## CHILD RIGHTS AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

WORKING TOGETHER  
WITH CHILDREN –  
WHAT HAVE WE  
LEARNT THIS YEAR?

# TABLE OF CONTENT

01

Introduction

02

What happened in 2020?

06

How do we evaluate the program?

07

Main conclusions

11

Future directions



# INTRODUCTION

The “third season” of our Child Rights Ambassador Program finished in 2020. We were working together with the third group of students participating in this long-term volunteering program. This report on the experiences of this common work presents the project roles and phases the Child Right Ambassadors participated in, the way the program was evaluated, the challenges we have faced and the possible directions for 2021.

Hintalovon Foundation has been working together with children since 2016. The methodology and focus of this cooperation have shifted every year, sometimes even twice a year. During this time, we have learnt a great deal from the children, from the expanding international literature, from Eurochild and from inter-professional co-operations. By hereby sharing the lessons learnt of the methodology and the evaluation criteria our aim is to promote the understanding and development of programs with child participation and encourage others to share good practices as well.

The report was prepared with an analytical and evaluation approach in mind, focusing foremost on the challenges. You can read more on the projects implemented with the ambassadors here: [www.hintalovon.hu](http://www.hintalovon.hu)

# WHAT HAPPENED IN 2020?

## Who did we work with?

The Child Rights Ambassadors of the Foundation are our 14-17 years old volunteers. In January 2020 we were still working with a five-person ambassador group who have joined the Foundation in the summer of 2018. Our goal for 2020 was to involve children in as many areas of our work as possible, moreover our numerous projects also lead us to think about the need for expansion. Consequently, we announced a call for ambassadors in December 2019 to open the program for more children. Following the interviews and a workshop in January our team was welcoming 10 new members. Further changes happened, which lead to 11 ambassadors working at the Foundation in the second half of the year. You can read more about our ambassador group [here](#). During the summer of 2020 we also cooperated temporarily with child volunteers who had joined in the work of the Foundation for predefined periods and tasks.

## What projects were the children involved in?

Our child volunteers have a very diverse and colourful work because they review documents for children, share their thoughts on various topics, participate in research, give presentations at conferences, respond to journalists' queries, raise awareness of current problems and difficulties and advise adults at the same time.

- Participation in research:
  - peer researchers in INCLUDE, a program dealing with international child abductions
  - review, dissemination and promotion of the InternetMost research supported by Magyar Telekom
- Campaigns and awareness-raising:
  - sharing their opinion about the NAT (NCC - National Core Curriculum) published in 2020
  - preparing materials on the Covid situation (family contract, Yelon-article, „What kind of parent are you?“ quiz)
  - supporting international consultations (EU strategy, Covidunder19)
  - Instagram campaign on language learning/distance learning
  - participating in the international conference on child-friendly justice (ChiLLS conference)



- Review and advising:
  - the child-friendly version of our Child Safeguarding Policy of the Foundation
  - cooperation with NMHH (National Media and Infocommunications Authority) about gyerekaneten.hu pages
  - materials on child-friendly justice with the aim of supporting professionals in providing information to children (ChiLLS program)
  - helping to test the Foundation's chatbot and preparing the FAQ on children's right
  - materials for the webinar on safe use of Facebook
  - materials on questionnaires for children
  - proofreading articles published on yelon.hu from a child perspective
- Representing the Foundation and the Child Rights Ambassador Program:
  - participating in an accredited training on internet use and internet safety
  - media relations, interviews
  - representing the „How you see it?” campaign at the award ceremony of Civic Award
  - participating in the meeting of the government's thematic working group responsible for child rights
  - participation at the 13th European Forum on the rights of the child through Eurochild
- Communication, sharing their thoughts on:
  - articles published on yelon.hu
  - operating an Instagram account: @gyermekjogi\_kovetek

## How did we work with the ambassadors?

The ambassador team has joint meetings every two weeks, focusing on team building and knowledge transfer. We had 18 meetings in 2020 (online and offline). Other than that, we have a project-based cooperation with the children. Every project starts with a call which the ambassadors can apply to. Children participated in all the projects mentioned above. The project team worked separately in these and had separate meetings as well. In 2020 we had approximately 50 meetings with the children.



It is the mentors who work directly with the ambassador group and the child volunteers. In 2020 three, from September two mentors supported their work. The mentors plan the purpose, course, and programme of the joint meetings, attempting to adapt the purpose as much as possible to the preferences and interests of the ambassadors. They are responsible for the well-being, safe environment, and support of the children. The other colleagues at the Foundation work with the children occasionally, related to a project or by sharing information in meetings. We follow our Child Safeguarding Policy, when working with the children, paying special attention to their safety.

## On what levels did we involve the children in our work?

Children participated in the projects on various levels, having different roles and responsibilities in each. We differentiate three levels of participation:

**Consultation:** Adults ask children of their opinions on issues affecting them. Adults raise the issues and guide the joint work.

**Cooperation:** Adults and children work in partnership. Normally it is still the adults who raise the issues and guide the joint work, however, children can directly influence the project, not only by being listened to, but also by providing concrete proposals and through direct participation.

**Leadership:** Guided by and based on the thoughts of the children, adults are rather supporters than leaders.

CONSULTATION	COOPERATION	LEADERSHIP
InternetMost	INCLUDE	opinion about the NCC
international consultations	accredited training	yelon.hu articles
the Policy of the Foundation	Covid situation related materials	Instagram-page
NMHH: gyerekaneten.hu	distance learning campaign	
ChiLLS child friendly material	yelon.hu articles	
chatbot	representation, interview	
Facebook webinar	ChiLLS conference	
questionnaire for children		
yelon.hu proofreading		

As demonstrated, in most cases the children took part in the Foundation's work in a counselling or reviewing role (consultation). However, the responsibilities and tasks were more often evenly distributed between adult and child staff thus we worked rather in partnership on projects (cooperation). In the latter cases children may have had independent, leading role in certain sub-tasks (for eg. awareness-raising video for the ChiLLS conference) but had no or only consultative role during planning or implementation.

## In which phases of the project implementations were children involved in?

**Problem identification:** specifying the topic, aim and course of a project.

**Planning:** specifying the methodology and schedule of the project, defining sub-tasks and responsibilities.

**Implementation:** completing and solving the scheduled and ad-hoc tasks.

**Monitoring, evaluation:** evaluating the project and providing feedback on the cooperation.

**Feedback:** identifying the result and the impact of the project

The following table shows the project phases children participated in per project. Lighter colour indicates limited participation.

	PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION	PALNNING	IMPLEMENTATION	MONITORING, EVALUATION	FEEDBACK
INCLUDE					
InternetMost					
opinion about the NCC					
COVID situation related materials					
Distance learning campaign					
ChiLLS conference					
accredited training					
review/consultation (see the pervious table)					
Instagram page					
yelon.hu					

It is notable that in many of the projects implemented in 2020, children had the most significant role in the implementation phase. Our ambition is to conclude and provide feedback to each other following every project, as well as to provide information to children about the impact and visibility of their work. However, most of the time, it only becomes clear well after project closure.

# HOW DO WE EVALUATE THE PROGRAM?

## The quality of participation matters

The results of the program and the work of the ambassadors are not only assessed according to the achievements or traditionally quantifiable criteria, as their participation itself is as important as the outcome. Therefore, we also place great emphasis on the quality of the participation during our evaluation. The essential question is how much the ambassadors felt that their opinion really mattered, that they have received adequate information on the purpose, framework and results of their work, whether they felt safe, whether they were able to participate voluntarily and well prepared in the topics of their interest, without any discrimination. It is important that they feel comfortable and safe in the team, that they feel free to share their opinion, to voice their difficulties and to make comments. These principles are also laid down in the Child Safeguarding Policy of Hintalovon Foundation.

## Questionnaires

We evaluated the opinion of the ambassadors every six months by online questionnaires including one anonymous and one signed version. The program staff assessed the feedback first, then they reviewed and discussed them together with the ambassadors.

## Discussions during the year

We tried to give as much space as possible to the ambassador's feedback throughout the year as well. At the closure of larger scale projects, we had debriefings and evaluation meetings and made sure that we were accessible online to the ambassadors both before and after these meetings as well.



## Signalling

Complaints and concerns may also be reported to the group responsible for compliance with the Child Safeguarding Policy but there was no such case in 2020.

### Main feedback of the ambassadors:

- In general, they feel treated with respect, their opinion is heard, and they are given enough opportunities for cooperation. They are satisfied with how things are organised. Participating in the program does not take up too much time.
- Coronavirus has an extraordinarily strong effect on participation in the program and motivation.
- Both the teamwork and communication between ambassadors were found to be challenging
- They find their work less useful compared to the previous semester, motivation is decreased.
- They would need more specific feedback.
- Thematic presentations and workshops held by adult staff were considered to be useful.
- Following the autumn semester 11 out of 11 ambassadors would like to continue volunteering even if they turned 18 in the meantime so they cannot stay as ambassadors any longer but would like to continue to help the work of the Foundation.

# MAIN CONCLUSIONS

## Joint project

There is a need for projects in which every ambassador is involved and which they feel their own as a team. The ambassadors choose voluntarily the projects they join. In 2020 there was no project in which they could all participate as a team, except perhaps the one after the appearance of coronavirus but there too, children soon split up into smaller working groups. This is due not only to their different interests but primarily to optimising their capacity and the large number and nature of the projects (which did not necessarily require a large team). A joint project would help to strengthen team spirit and strengthen their own responsibilities, their "ownership approach", especially during teleworking.

## Review

The best way to draw lessons from the subsequent reviews of the prepared materials, articles and brochures was - after having seen them in advance - to have discussions together with those who developed them. It should be explained to the children what reviewing means (for eg. what is their room for manoeuvre) and the reviewing session should be organised accordingly just as other children will encounter the material. The earlier we had the opportunity to involve the children, the better their advice and feedback could be applied. In the methodological description related to the ChiLLS project we also described separately the challenges of reviewing.



## **Ambassadors`initiative**

Neither the program nor the children had any spare capacity for their own initiatives. Discussions on the ideas had low participation and were often delayed, which also undermined the motivation of those initiating. Supporting initiatives also means leaving enough time and capacity to plan these. It should also be considered that just because the children have initiatives, those do not necessarily fit into the profile of the Foundation or a project. Adults often filter these initiatives reducing the motivation of the children even more. It is therefore important to set the cornerstones already at the very beginning and decide on the direction of the brainstorming in view of what could/could not fit well with the Foundation or projects.

## **Projects led by children**

There were only a few projects where the ambassadors could have had a leading role, for reasons similar to that of the initiatives. Experience showed that this only works if the children have ownership both of the initiative and the aim of the projects. The level and depth of participation should be defined once everyone has acknowledged the Foundation's aims and the children's room for manoeuvre, respectively.

## **Balance**

Establishing the right level of participation in each project required a lot of attention and consideration (see table above). We had to balance the capacity of adults and children, the interests of the ambassadors, and understand how much space we need to give the children for them to have substantive role and independence. We would have liked them to have a more profound participation, however we had to find a compromise between the urgency of the Foundation's tasks and the naturally slow progress of having quality participation. In addition, educative and research phases mix quite naturally in participatory projects, thus a balance needed to be found between interesting and exciting work for the children, which was also in line with the aim and purpose of the project and the Foundation. This draws our attention to the importance of planning and transparency.

## **Methodology**

Describing the methodology of the work with the ambassadors increases the consciousness of the program staff and the transparency towards the public, thereby also improving the quality of child participation. In 2020 we had already prepared separate written methodological summaries or drafts for several projects, and we were continuously reporting on the work of the ambassadors on the website and on social media. This is worth expanding and strengthening in the future.

## **Project evaluation**

At the end of projects there was not always enough time or attention to discuss the experiences with the ambassadors. These evaluations were lacking not so much in terms of the children's well-being but in terms of project effectiveness.

## **How did the cooperation go?**

When working together with the ambassadors we aim to ensure that they can co-operate well also as a team. To this end we organise joint meetings every two weeks attended by the ambassadors and mentors, inviting specialists whenever the topic requires it. These meetings are scheduled already at the beginning of the semester to keep planning easy for everyone. The main goal of the meetings in 2020 was team building, due to the team growing from 5 to 15 members in early February.

## **Difficulties due to the coronavirus**

The virus made our work challenging as well, because in person meetings turned into mostly online connections almost all year long. After only three in person meetings, we had to move to the online space, organising team meetings via video chat. Team building and motivation were difficult without the real presence and spontaneous togetherness. However, project meetings did continue remotely, and small groups could co-operate relatively well.

A large part of our communication already happened online before the coronavirus: we have our Facebook group and chat, our Drive folder where we upload all the important information. Moving yet another part of our life to the net made online noise around us more intense, we could feel quite often that information is lost, and it is difficult to continuously navigate everything (school, keeping in touch, hobbies, playing, volunteering, etc).

## **Recruitment**

It is worth to have wider diversity when choosing the children working with us. We would like to cooperate with children in a wide range of responsibilities and in varying intensity and our ambassadors also joined the Foundation from diverse backgrounds and motivation. The expectations of the two sides were essentially met but the limitations of the child rights ambassador's general recruitment process became visible. We have always had specific calls to choose who joins what project.

However, it would be important to consider persons beyond the inner circle of the ambassadors who could be most relevant to achieving a specific aim or project. A stable, prepared and committed team that is closely related to the Foundation comes with many advantages (for eg. stronger trust, quick access) during longer projects and preparation. Still we should consider involving others in a flexible manner. On the one hand this would prevent overburdening and overwhelming the ambassadors on the other hand it would contribute to more inclusive child participation.

### **The motivation of the ambassadors**

The children's motivation, commitment, the time and energy spent on work varies, which can easily lead to disagreements within the team, due to their different level of participation in the tasks. They go to different schools, are of different ages, they have a wide variety of extracurricular activities and hobbies, thus it differs significantly how much time and energy they have left to volunteer at the Foundation. Some have worked at the Foundation for two and a half years, have experienced a wide range of work ethics, have worked with several mentors, have been part of a variety of teams. Others have joined the program in 2020, having experience with the working styles and projects only of that year. These factors further contribute to already existing major differences.

### **Workload**

The large-scale, long-lasting projects are often implemented at the same time, so the workload is not the same throughout the year but comes in waves especially due to the international projects the schedule of which we are not able to influence.

From a mentoring side it is also often difficult to determine precisely what to expect from our child volunteers: whether we overprotect them, whether we overload them or not with work. Continuous monitoring, conversations and feedbacks are necessary for the right balance. To this end, setting a preliminary framework and its continuous review are essential and therefore we establish common rules at the beginning of each semester. In 2020 due to the coronavirus, following these rules, and also having a clear understanding of the situation and workload of the children was certainly more difficult.

### **Mentors**

The attitude of the ambassadors is greatly influenced by the personality of their mentors. In the spring of 2020, a new mentor joined the team in the middle of the online work, and the integration period was more challenging. Then in the autumn we had to say goodbye to one of the mentors. Changing of mentors is always a difficult and sensitive process, as children must accept someone new and let go someone whom they grew close and accustomed to. It was much more difficult to keep up team spirit in the online space under the coronavirus than planned at the beginning of the year after the expansion, so the aforementioned difficulties also became more apparent and more challenging to deal with. Despite all the difficulties children like to work at the Foundation as reflected in their feedback as well.

# FUTURE DIRECTIONS

## Children who worked with us over the years

Some of the ambassadors working with us in 2020 are turning 18 years old, therefore can continue to work for the Foundation as young adult volunteers instead of ambassadors. In parallel we can give new momentum to the team who started working with us as children in 2016 and now they are our past and/or present volunteers.

## Occasional child volunteers

We will reinforce the project-based recruitment of child volunteers. With the intensified online presence due to the coronavirus there's possibility to work with children not only from Budapest but all around the country. To this end, we seek to form partnerships with institutions and communities where children may be interested in participating in children's rights projects.

## Personal focus areas

We support our ambassadors in finding topics or areas in child rights that they would like to explore in 2021. Participating in projects that address similar topics would increase their sense of competence and enable them to represent a given field more confidently. Finding personal focus may also help to avoid frictions caused by the ambassadors' different activity levels.

## Way of participation

We would like to bring the ambassadors even closer to the entire organisation, help them to work more and deeper with the staff of each of our programs. This also means that mentors primarily facilitate the participation of the ambassadors, ensure their well-being, their preparation, maintain team spirit, support colleagues but they would not always direct the ambassadors' work.





## Initiatives by ambassadors

We would like to provide more opportunities for the initiatives of the children and for the projects they lead. The reduced number of ambassadors in 2021 will allow that the initiatives of the children to coincide with the projects that the ambassadors are implementing together as a team.

## Risk analysis

When planning projects involving children there is also a need for a stand-alone risk analysis that assesses both child participation and child protection aspects. International risk analysis tools focus primarily on the latter, therefore our plans include the development of a tool that in addition to preventing harm and abuse of children, also follows the aspects of child participation with its user, and ensures the conditions of genuine child participation.



WRITTEN BY:

BARBARA NÉMETH  
LILLA PALOTAY

HINTALOVON CHILD  
RIGHTS FOUNDATION

2021.



---

**HINTALOVON**

Child Rights Foundation