

## **Title: Sheltered workplace for handicapped as a mean for protected the nature**

**Case study from Rudlov - Eastern Slovakia**

**Written by: Štefan Straka, NGO Svatobor pod Oblíkom**

In Eastern Slovakia, Rudlov village is located sheltered workspace for handicapped citizens called Malina (Raspberry). The workspace is an initiative of local activist who after participating at similar workshops in Europe decided to start its own in Slovakia.

The workspace is located within the buffer zone of protected area Slanske vrchy with hundreds of hectares of very old and valuable trees, especially ash and oak. The forests serve as a gene bank for tree nurseries all across Slovakia. The role which the workplace Malina is playing in the buffer area is kind of “unofficial guard” of these forests. Not only because the workers help the State forestry to cut the bush trees in commercial forests, which reduces number of clearcuts in forests but also they are located at the entry point to these old trees and thus reduce the number of illegal workouts in the forests. The role of the “guard” was originally played by foresters but due to the budget shortages, they left this farm 5 years ago. Within this time the area became an illegal dump place.

The bottom line of the sheltered workspace is an attempt to link ecological farming, usage of renewable energy sources and provision of services for Romas. As for the statistics – out of 650 habitants living in Rudlov, 200 are Romas. The sheltered workspace not only provides employment for 20 local people, but also implements the natural treatment of the clients.

Majority of clients are mentally handicapped people with are in need of medical treatment. By working in the garden and in local woods, cutting off the young trees, the clients receive gardening therapy which respects human dignity. Through the work in natural environment and with natural materials, the clients receive improved quality of life. It is obvious from the results – not only reduced medical treatment to zero, but also cultivated land in harmony between the nature and the humans.

Launching up the sheltered workspace was done in a way that each potential client was involved in renovation activities and there were informal discussions undertaken with them to generate ideas for potential activities of the sheltered workspace. In fact, it was a request of Romas to establish the sheltered workspace, because the first activities were organised only as an informal initiative.

Currently local community (Romas as well as majority group) works together on all activities. In addition to gardening, it is also production and processing of biomass (sorghum for brooms), woodcutting of bush trees in the surrounding forests, construction works during reconstruction of the heating source, fieldworks and establishment and maintenance of composting units. One of the ways for involving disadvantaged groups into activities (handicapped people, Romas, long-term unemployed) is implementation of so-called green economy. This covers usage and processing of biowaste from the workshop in which people produce brooms from birch and sorghum and from agricultural production at the field owned by local NGO Svatobor.

*Pictures:*

*Planting the birch fens*



*Working on composting unit*



*Collection of medicinal herbs*



*Work In the forests*



*Production of brooms from birch*

