

# VAIKO VARTAI Į MOKSLĄ / CHILD'S GATE TO LEARNING

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Dear benefactors,

Happy New Year! To keep you informed, we're providing you with highlights of 2008 activities and accomplishments. Each year since 1998, our organization has continued its mission of helping Lithuania's neglected children, by creating an appropriate environment for the pursuit of education and character building. We thank all of you for your support and we hope you will continue to keep our organization and its supported centers in your thoughts.

Sincerely, "Child's Gate to Learning"

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## 2008 HIGHLIGHTS

### **FIFTH CHARACTER BUILDING PROGRAM**

The editorial group completed the fifth character building program, "SPARNAI-Socialinių problemų apžvalga ir įveika" (Wings- identifying and overcoming social problems). The program's themes were suggested by the supported centers' directors- bullying, loss, suicide, etc. Upon her arrival in Vilnius, the organization's Lithuanian program coordinator, Rita Venclovas, completed pre-publication work. Later at the Kaunas seminar (May 23-24), attendees were familiarized with the program. The seminar featured specialists' lectures, discussions, and various exercises, selected so that attendees could become familiar with the program in preparation for using it at their centers. During the seminar, attendees expanded their knowledge base, networked, and shared experiences. Also in attendance at the seminar were a few social workers who don't work at organization-supported centers, but who had expressed interest in "Child's Gate to Learning" and its programs. *(Support for the publication of the fifth character building program and for the Kaunas seminar was received from the Lithuanian Foundation.)*

### **VISITS TO LITHUANIA**

The Kaunas seminar in May was organized by Rita Venclovas and the organization's coordinator in Lithuania, Žydrūnė Liobikaitė. Also attending the seminar was officer Ramunė Kubilius and Teresė Landsbergis, the coordinator of the Washington, D.C. support group. During their longer stay in Lithuania during the summer, "Child's Gate to Learning" president, Aldona Vaitys and treasurer Ramojus Vaitys visited a center in Druskininkai, later added as a supported center (effective Jan. 2009). In September, officer Aldona Kamantas and Cleveland support group coordinator, Stasė Kazlauskas, visited the two Vilnius centers, "Vilties Angelas" and "Senamiesčio šv. Kryžiaus", the "Žaliakalnis" center in Kaunas, and the temporary shelter "Šaltinėlis" in Marijampolė. "Annual visits to supported centers in Lithuania, in our opinion, are very helpful, since we are able to get an understanding of how the centers are operating, what are their challenges, and what they need most. It is also useful for us to observe how the centers are using the five character building programs prepared by the organization." *(Translated from a letter written by officer Aldona Kamantas to the U.S. support groups.)* It should be noted that officers and support group coordinators cover their own travel expenses to Lithuania.

### **VISITORS FROM LITHUANIA**

On November 30<sup>th</sup>, an informal gathering took place at the home of Rita Venclovas. The guests were members of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (švč. Mergelės Marijos Nekaltojo prasidėjimo vargdienių seserų kongregacija), who highlighted their work in Lithuania, especially with young people and families. One of the visitors was Sister Daiva Kuzmickaitė from Kaunas. She is the current Mother Superior of the order, who as a social worker and doctoral student in Chicago, was one of the initiators of

the group that later grew into the organization, "Child's Gate to Learning". Sister **Jolita Matulaitytė** provided an overview of the varied activities of the Caritas after school center, "Vilties Angelas" in Vilnius. "Child's Gate to Learning" has worked with the sisters of this congregation since the organization first started work in Lithuania in 1998. Currently, the organization supports 4 after school centers and a temporary shelter run by the order- 2 in Vilnius, 1 each in Marijampolė, and Rumbonys.

### **TENTH ANNIVERSARY**

The organization commemorated its tenth anniversary in 2008. In **May**, during the Kaunas seminar, a montage of photographs decorated the walls of the hall, and seminar attendees enjoyed a special torte. In **August**, photographs were displayed in the „White House“ (Baltieji rūmai) of Camp Dainava in Michigan, during the Lithuanian Catholic Association „Ateitis“ week for adults and their families. In **November**, during the XIV Lithuanian Symposium on Arts and Sciences in Chicago, three officers prepared a presentation (read by Ramunė Kubilius) on the five character building programs written by the organization's editorial committee. In **January 2009**, the annual fund-raising lunch was called "10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Year Harvest Lunch" (Dešimtmečio derliaus pietūs). The Lithuanian-American newsletter, *Bridges*, published a two-part article in the Dec./Jan. 2008 and Feb. 2009 issues.

### **PACKAGES TO LITHUANIA**

In the fall of 2008, Rita Venclovas and several members prepared and sent to Lithuania 27 packages containing children's clothing, shoes, sports supplies and games. More packages will be sent in early 2009. Support groups in other U.S. cities consult with officers about which supported centers need what kinds of supplies, and their packages are sent directly to those centers.

### **SUPPORT GROUPS AND SUPPORTERS**

„Child's Gate to Learning“ appreciates the work of its support groups. Coordinators select and plan the fund-raising activities and projects. **Detroit, Michigan:** Coordinators *Rita Giedraitis and Rasa Karvelis* organized an informational session and showed the first „Child's Gate to Learning“ documentary film, „Dievo vaikai“ by Agne Marcinkevičiūtė. They also worked with the Lithuanian Saturday school, „Žiburys“, which conducted a school supply drive. **Cleveland, Ohio:** Coordinator *Stasė Kazlauskas* organized the annual pre-Easter fundraising lunch, while **Sunny Hills, Florida** coordinators *Bronė Nakas* and *Judita Mamaitis* in December organized an annual pre-Christmas lunch. Coordinators *Teresė Gečys (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)* and *Teresė Landsbergis (Washington, D.C.)* participated in their communities' Lithuanian American fairs. They provided information about the organization and accepted donations.

It is quite impossible to list all those who support the organization, its work and projects. „Child's Gate to Learning“ appreciates its supporters- individuals, families, funds, and organizations that have provided financial support, donated time and volunteer work. Here are two examples of 2008 support. The **St. Casimir Lithuanian Saturday School in Los Angeles**, through the efforts of one mother, Vaida Mikuckienė, coordinated a shoe drive. Families donated 100 pairs of new shoes now being sent to 3 supported centers in Lithuania. At **Camp Dainava**, during the 2007/8 winter break seminar of the high school division of Lithuanian Catholic Association, „Ateitis“, participants donated the proceeds of their seminar t-shirts sales to „Child's Gate to Learning“.

### **2009 VOLUNTEERS**

Four Lithuanian-speaking high schoolers have expressed interest in serving as 2009 volunteers at "Child's Gate to Learning" supported centers in Lithuania. In the past 10 years, a number of student and high school-aged volunteers have spent weeks and months in Lithuania. The former volunteers often continue to stay in touch with the centers at which they worked. They send letters and small packages and if they are in Lithuania, they visit the centers. Lina Jarašius, a 2006 volunteer in Marijampolė has written- „Volunteer work can change your life“ ... Child's Gate to Learning“ will continue its work for Lithuania's children in 2009.