TOY FOR INCLUSION

FOR INCLUSION

Take a peek into a child's world. Learn about their lives, dreams and their potential.

SOCIAL INCLUSION BEGINS WITH YOUNG CHILDREN'S EAGERNESS TO PLAY TOGETHER

Take a peek into a child's world. Learn about their lives, dreams and their potential. During the past year and a half at the TOY for Inclusion Play Hubs we came across many stories that deserve to be told. We have selected a few that we really want everyone to know about. These are stories of children who are at risk of being put at the margins because of their ethnicity or their social and economic situation.

TOY for Inclusion moves away from the perspective that some children and families are harder to reach than others. Instead, we make services easier to reach, by promoting inter-sectoral work, flexible solutions and contextualized responses to the specific needs of young children and their families. The Play Hubs offer inclusive spaces where children and families from different backgrounds are encouraged to play and learn: while children are allowed to borrow toys, information about child rearing, health, early learning and development is passed on informally to (grand) parents. The Play Hubs provide opportunities for children, adults and communities to integrate and develop.

Why is that important? Judge for yourself and get to know these children and their potential. Meet ten-year-old Lan from a Roma settlement in Slovenia who prepares breakfast for his little brother every morning; get to know three-year-old Marta, who jumps around like a tiny cricket in the Play Hub in Rome (Italy) and learn how Ivano from Croatia made friends at the Play Hub.

To learn more, go to www.toy4inclusion.eu
and follow the hashtag #TOY4Inclusion on Twitter.

SAŠA **Play Hub Murska Sobota (Slovenia)**

She might seem a bit shy, but Saša is a great performer of fairy tales. She is seven years old, and loves to sing and dress up. Together with her little sister Evelina she turns the small flat of her grandparents into a theatre, and grandma into a one–person–audience. Saša starts off with a famous tale, then improvises along – sometimes completely losing track of the original story.

Every weekend Saša and her sister stay at their grandparents in Murska Sobota, in Slovenia. During summer, they spend more days there. “So their parents can focus on their work”, explains grandma Ana.

Saša likes staying at her grandparents. “They let us eat on the couch!”, she giggles about this strange and rather naughty habit. Grandma is an excellent playmate. Their new favorite game: hair salon. Grandma – although she doesn’t have nearly as long hair as the sisters – sits still while Saša and Evelina endlessly change her hairdo.

Grandma's flat doesn't have much space; she prefers to take the girls out. And so the TOY for Inclusion Play Hub in the library became a bit like their 'living room'. "Since Saša and her sister are not from here, they do not have any friends in this city", tells grandma. "At the Play Hub they can meet other kids."

One day the cat Micha came home with a big wound on his face. Their grandpa took care of the cat, and made the wound heal. That's when Saša decided she wants to be a veterinarian. Until then, she prefers to play with the stuffed animals. "They are easier."

Sometimes at home, when her mother is working a lot, Saša grabs her stuffed animals and puts them on her desk. "They want to play with you, mom", she would say. Then Saša and her mother pretend to be veterinarians. "But I know well when mom is too busy", Saša says wisely. "Then I leave her working, of course."

IVANO **Play Hub Sisak (Croatia)**

In a sports team you always need someone who motivates the group, cheers them up, and gives encouraging instructions.

That someone is Ivano.

Ivano is nine and a half years old, and he is a rugby player. His team is big, 25 kids. "Three to five players are not so good", he says very seriously. "But the rest is great."

He has been playing rugby for two years now. That is because his father is a rugby player as well. His father is a number fifteen, which is super important in the game.

But actually, his father is ill now. He stays in bed a lot, and his hands

are shaking all the time. His father has difficulties cutting food, but Ivano is not allowed to help him. His father says Ivano is too young to use the kitchen knife.

So sometimes they call Ivano's sister for help. But she lives in the big city Zagreb with her boyfriend. Ivano has counted them: she has had 11 boyfriends. One of them, number 9, she broke up with, but they got back together. So number 9 is also number 11, you understand? It's a hard job to remember all their names, but Ivano does remember this last one: Ivan – almost like his own name.

After school, Ivano often goes to the TOY for Inclusion Play Hub in his school building. Teacher Refika smiles softly at him when she says: "He is one of the most popular kids, everyone likes him." It hasn't always been like this. "I think I used to be naughty", he says. "My father tried to teach me how to behave well, but actually, I mostly taught myself." This is Ivano's trick: he offers advice to other kids on how to play the games. It works, it's how he made a lot of new friends.

Sometimes he brings a board game to his mother's house, but to play their favorite game they only need a broken laptop. It's a make–believe game in which they pretend to be bank clerks.

That's not his mom's real job, though. She works as a bartender, often 'till very late. Ivano has been to that bar many times. He watches his mother, or helps her out. Putting cream in the coffee, he sure feels like a real bartender. But he has to admit he cannot imagine himself doing that job for real. It's always 'hurry, hurry' – and then you spill the coffee.

No, Ivano wants to become a teacher. He wants to give assignments, just like Refika. And if a student doesn't know how to solve them, Ivano will come and help. Just like Refika.

Tomorrow Ivano will play a tournament far away outside of town. It will be the first time ever he spends a night away from home. Of course he is not nervous – just excited, because he will be sleeping in a hotel. He has packed his bag already. "I just need to add some sandwiches and juice for the trip", he says with this wise gaze of his. Refika wishes him good luck for the match. Before he leaves, she slips five cereal bars in his bag.

LAN **Play Hub Murska Sobota (Slovenia)**

When you meet ten–year–old Lan, it won't be long before you also get to know his little brother Žak. Lan spends a lot of time with his six–year–old brother. They play football in front of the house, they draw, they play badminton together.

This is how the roles are divided: Žak is the extrovert, the funny kid, always making jokes – a bit like their father. Lan is the serious one. He thinks carefully before he speaks, and then says something wise.

Lan would like to become a football player. Or, he says, knowing

that football is a job only for the lucky few, he'd like to become a blacksmith, someone who forms steel. He has seen it on TV. "I like the process," he explains. "The fact that you start with a drawing, then you work until you have the final product. It's all done by yourself."

While Lan is explaining, Žak opens the freezer and puts his hand in there. After a while, he silently walks towards his older brother, suddenly lays his cold hand on Lan's neck – and burst with laughter. Lan shivers, then smiles without saying anything. He knows these jokes.

For a year, Lan and his family have stayed at his uncle's place in Pušča, a Roma settlement in Slovenia. The house has two rooms and nine people – so every night, Lan, Žak, his mother and father sleep on the kitchen floor.

Žak usually wakes Lan up early in the morning. He pokes his older brother gently, or even lifts up his eyelids. While the rest of the house still sleeps, Lan gets up to prepare his little brother some

breakfast. “I am the chef in the house”, he says proudly.

His father Alen sometimes wonders how his son became so responsible. “Lan is taking care of his little brother all the time. We didn’t even ask him to”, says their father. “When he comes home, he immediately starts with his homework.”

Lan likes school, mostly because of his schoolmates. He has a group of four friends, they always hang out together. Their main activity? Football. Talking about football, playing football – football all the time. Lan feels good around them. Unfortunately, they can only play at school. “After school it is not possible, the others live in different areas”, Lan explains. “It’s just not possible.”

Recently, Lan got a phone. He’s been hoping for one for a long time, but his parents told him that he had to wait. They finally gave him one as a reward for his good school grades.

Now, after school he can talk with his friends on the phone. “So we can keep up.” That’s important, tells his father, “because they are the only friends he has.” In the settlement, his father doesn’t want the boys to go around on their own. So it’s hard for them to make friends. That’s also why the parents like to bring the boys to the TOY for Inclusion Play Hub.

“I know how to count to thirty!”, shouts Žak unexpectedly. “That’s because of Lan. He teaches me everything.” And what does Žak teach his older brother? Žak smiles. “I should teach him some more jokes.”

DARIJA **Play Hub Sisak (Croatia)**

The first thing you see, is her big smile. Mouth open wide, in pure enthusiasm. Then you see her mother, always behind her, holding her up. Darija's mother carries a handkerchief in her hand. She notices before anybody else, that Darija's mouth needs to be wiped.

Nine–year–old Darija can not speak, but knows perfectly well what's going on. More important: she has an opinion about everything. She'll make sure she is being understood. Maybe that's the first thing you see when you meet Darija: her strong will.

What makes Darija happy? She forms a cone with her hand, brings it to her mouth. "Ice cream", says her mother. Darija waves her arms, jumps up and down in her seat. "Playing", explains her mother. Darija gestures a rocking movement with her arms. "The doll?", asks her mother. Darija nods her head, brings her hand to her mouth. "Feeding the doll", interprets her mother. Darija touches

her own hair: “Combing the doll.”

Darija and her mother borrow toys at the TOY for Inclusion Play Hub to bring home to their house in the Roma–settlement in the Croatian city of Sisak. Often Darija plays alone, though she prefers the company of Mariana, her older cousin and best friend. Darija’s smile gets even bigger now. “Mariana accepts her the ways she is”, says Darija’s mother. “Aaaah”, shouts Darija angrily, her arms swaying towards her mother. Her mother smiles. “She doesn’t want me to talk for her.”

Darija gets up on her big white basketball sneakers, her knees a bit bended. Her mother, alarmed, immediately gets up too. She carefully watches her daughter taking a few unstable steps. “Sit down, Darija”, she tries. But Darija doesn’t have any intention to obey her mother. She wants to stand on her own feet. Darija wants to be a traveller when she has grown up. She wants to explore and see other places.

“We are always together”, says her mother. “I accompany her to school and wait the whole time outside her classroom, in case she needs to go to the toilet. Sometimes we go home earlier, depending on how exhausted she is.” It’s hard to imagine Darija ever being tired, as she is so full of life, energy and initiative. She heads for the chalkboard in the Play Hub, writes down slowly, in long square letters: DARIJA.

EMANUELA **Play Hub Rome (Italy)**

Dolls and princess toys? Not for three–years–old Emanuela. She prefers cars, trains, airplanes and other machines to play with. The best toys are the ones she can assemble, disassemble, and assemble again – every time a bit quicker.

Emanuela loves the chocolate eggs of Kinder Surprise: it's not the chocolate that interests her, but the tiny toy inside to put together. In the supermarket, her mother Charlotte has a hard job avoiding the aisle where these eggs are, she tells smiling.

Emanuela lives in Rome with her mother and her older sisters Cindy (15) and Jordane (20), who were both born in Cameroon. Every now and then Emanuela visits her father, who also lives in Rome. He works with trains.

Emanuela's sisters take a good care of her. They love to dance with her – they teach her all kind of moves. On return, little Emanuela

imposes her family some specific rules and habits. Every evening at dinner time, she makes sure everyone raises their glasses and toasts. She won't be happy until they have performed this ritual.

Last summer Emanuela and her mother found a dog on the beach. They took her home and called her Lido, after the place where they found her – or 'Dido', as Emanuela pronounced it. Emanuela was thrilled to have Dido and took care of her, but her mother asked around on Facebook whether someone had lost their dog. After two weeks the owner came to pick up the dog. "Months later Emanuela is still asking about Dido", tells her mother. Maybe in a few years Charlotte would consider having a dog, but right now the house is quite full already, she explains apologetically.

Little Emanuela demands a lot of energy, her mother says. "I don't recall my other daughters asking for so much attention", she laughs. "Sometimes, when I'm talking to one of her sisters, Emanuela grabs my face, and turns it towards her: 'Look at me, mama!'"

MARTA Play Hub Rome (Italy)

In the TOY for Inclusion Play Hub in Rome, they use to call little Marta 'grilletto' (a tiny cricket), because she likes to jump around. Marta is all over the place with her endless energy.

Marta is the kind of child that eagerly runs towards the world: without fear, without shyness, and without thinking twice. At the Play Hub she jumps on any slide, tries every tunnel and swing. She loves being outside.

Maybe it's because of her uninhibited approach to life, that her playmates often do not realize that Marta only has one hand. She was born this way and it doesn't seem to bother her, explains

her mother Iryna. Marta never wears her prosthesis. It is such an uncomfortable thing; she can handle things perfectly without it.

Marta makes friends easily, even though she cannot speak as well as the other kids yet. The speech therapist says that might be because Marta was born premature. Also, Marta has two languages to learn: Italian, the language of the country she was born in – and Ukrainian, the language of her mother's country.

At home, it's just Marta and Iryna. Marta's father is not there. "We don't have a father", explains Iryna. Iryna recently started to work as a cleaning lady. Before she had Marta, she worked as a nanny in Rome for ten years, taking care of other people's children.

Marta likes to imitate her loving mother. She caresses her doll just like her mother caresses her and she sings her doll the same song as her mother sings to her, before she goes to sleep.

MARIANA Play Hub Sisak (Croatia)

Mariana has polished her nails. Of course she has. She is always taking care of her looks. Every morning she gets up early to think thoroughly about what to wear, which necklace to match with her blouse.

What does Mariana like most about herself? She thinks for a while. "I like my style", she responds. "And I am smart." With her big dark eyes, ten–year–old Mariana seems to look right through you. Often she finishes her sentences saying "and that's it", to make her statements even more firm.

Mariana lives with her parents, little brother Armando and baby sister Leona near the Roma–settlement in the Croatian city of Sisak. "I love both my parents, but I do love my mother a bit more", she states out of the blue. "We are very much connected. You know, my mother gets bored sometime driving the car by herself, buying groceries. So she takes me with her. And sometime we sleep together as well." Also, her mother's style is a great source of inspiration to Mariana.

Her mother – polished nails, her hair tied up in a high ponytail like her daughter – smiles when she hears her daughter's comments about style. "We do not always agree on what to wear. But she is definitely very keen on looking good for the outside world", she says. She is proud of her daughter. "Mariana remembers everything. She hears conversations from adults, memorizes them, and comes back to them even after a long time. She understands a lot."

Mariana's mother often brings her kids to the TOY for Inclusion Play Hub in Sisak. "With a newborn it's harder to find some time to spend alone with Mariana", her mother says. Sometimes Mariana bluntly asks her: 'Is Armando/Leona your favorite now?'

How did Mariana feel when her younger sister was born? "Well",

Mariana says, “excited and a bit worried. Worried that something would happen to her. I’m the oldest, you know. I help my mother, taking care of the others.” She feels like an example, she says.

Mariana wants to become a teacher. “Just like my father.” Her father works as an assistant in her school, he is an intermediary between the school and the Roma–community. In her own decisive way, Mariana adds: “I’d like to be a teacher, because teachers are responsible. And that’s it.”

TOY FOR INCLUSION

FUNDED BY:

With the support of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

colophon
concept, design and stories: Autres Directions and Aldus' productions
interviews and stories: Aldus' and Liza Titawano, **graphic and spatial design:** Tijl Akkermans
audio: Emmie Kollau **photography:** Federico Lanzo **production viewboxes** Anything is Possible,
technical development Sylvain Vriends **voice-over:** Eileen Graham **music:** Free Music Archive
studio: Studio van Bart