

## **Příloha 1 k aktivitě „Najděte pět rozdílů“**

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### **Roma children perplex local educators**

They are Europe's Least Wanted – reviled for their unorthodox ways, hounded by white supremacists. Now the sudden arrival of Roma "gypsies" in Ontario has teachers here grappling to connect with some of the most perplexing students in the world.

With no English, limited education and an often shaky regard for school, the wave of Roma children give fresh urgency to the term "at-risk." Schools across Toronto and Hamilton, caught largely by surprise, are rushing to educate staff, hire more ESL teachers and find Hungarian and Czech interpreters for everything from report cards to welcome kits.

"We've got major problems with this wave of students and we need help – we've had more than 100 kids show up this fall and our staff are scrambling," said Trustee Irene Atkinson at a recent crash course on Roma culture organized by the Toronto District School Board, one of several this fall in Toronto and Hamilton.

"We need to develop curriculum for Roma teenagers in Grade 10 who are working at a Grade 4 to 6 level," she said.

It's not just about academic catch-up. What sets Roma apart from most immigrants – and has Canadian educators desperate for help – is that many don't seem to care about school. Roma students can seem lukewarm to learning, even suspicious.

Puzzled teachers say many Roma children seem unfamiliar with routines such as the school bell. Some plunge into fist-fights, show little respect for teachers, ignore homework and skip school for days at a time, even in elementary grades.

Not all feel this way; more than 25 Roma parents jammed into a breakfast meeting Friday at Queen Victoria Public School to learn, through a Hungarian interpreter, about the report cards and parent-teacher interviews coming next week.

But Czech translator Jan Rotbauer also was asked to visit a Scarborough grade school Friday to translate for Roma parents the importance of sending children to school each day.

"I have done this many times because teachers are asking for help," he said. "Roma parents do love their children, but education has not been high on the priority list."

Little wonder, said community leader Paul St. Clair, who ran the recent Parkdale session for teachers.

Excluded for generations because of their darker skin and roving lifestyle, Roma in eastern Europe continue to be streamed into classes for the mentally challenged and often bullied at school.

As a result, families from this ancient Indian culture, wrongly nicknamed "Gypsies" after Egyptians, are seeking asylum in Canada.

"It is one of the reasons we came; our children were being treated badly in the Czech Republic because they are Roma," said Katarina Polyakora, through translator Rotbauer. Her children are in Grades 3 and 8 at Precious Blood Catholic School in Scarborough.

"Our younger child has darker skin and was called racial slurs like Blackface – even the teacher would sometimes rip up her artwork," said Polyakora, whose family came here in February from the Czech Republic seeking refugee status.

"Our older child has lighter skin, so they did not discriminate against him until they discovered he was Roma, and then they kicked him off the school soccer team," she said.

"But here in Canada, the children are friendly. Everyone is friendly. It is a multicultural country."

Roma families from the Czech Republic began seeking asylum in Canada late in 2007 after Ottawa lifted a long-standing visa requirement. But when Canada brought back the visa requirement for Czechs this summer, Roma refugees began arriving from Hungary and Slovakia.

"It's street smarts, not book smarts that's been their priority, so you have to make school a place where they want to go," suggested St. Clair, executive director of the Roma Community Centre. "Roma parents sometimes don't care a lot about their children's education because they got the same treatment when they were little."

St. Clair is swamped with calls from schools struggling to understand Roma students.

One principal asked St. Clair to find out why a 14-year-old Roma girl stopped coming to school. He learned the father felt school no longer was necessary because his daughter was old enough for marriage. One Don Mills-area teacher at the session noted a 14-year-old Roma girl in her class is married.

St. Clair also warned teachers Roma parents may keep their children home for weeks if they get sick because they may blame the school environment for making them ill. Attendance can even be spotty in kindergarten, because it was not always mandatory back home.

St. Clair urged teachers to make Roma children feel valued, possibly for the first time in their lives, by profiling their culture in class and by urging them to join after-school clubs and teams.

Queen Victoria Public School in Parkdale has registered some 70 new Roma students this fall, and quickly set up two special half-day classes for children with limited schooling (called LEAP classes; Literacy Enrichment Academic Program). The class of 12 is starting to make headway, said teacher Rosanna Reutter, through a mix of mime, pictures, and running translation into Hungarian by one of the few children who knows some English.

Huddled on the carpet with white boards in their laps, Reutter's class focused on fractions one recent afternoon.

"No stop, teacher, no stop! One more please," pleaded a 10-year-old Roma girl, asking for one last math problem shading in pie charts.

"It's been six weeks and I'm starting to notice an improvement; less talking to each other, less fighting and better attendance," said Reutter.

There now is a waiting list for LEAP classes across Toronto fuelled by the arrival of Roma refugee claimants, said program coordinator Betty Ann Taylor.

"Roma children don't face gaps in their learning," she said. "They face craters."

Roma parents back home have also faced accusations of pushing their children into street crime rather than schooling. Rotbauer chose carefully which documentary he showed during a recent sensitivity session for about 100 teachers.

"The National Geographic one was okay, but a BBC documentary about Roma parents putting children out to rob people at ATM machines? I thought it was too negative and not balanced."

Such highly charged cultural baggage should not matter to Canadian schools, said Paula Markus, coordinator for English as a Second Language at the Toronto District School Board. "Our job is to help children who, through no fault of their own, have had gaps in their prior schooling, whether it's from war or persecution," she said.

"One student wrote the most touching composition about how great it is they're not beaten up in Canada just for being Roma.

That's why people come here."

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**Zdroj:**

<http://www.parentcentral.ca/parent/education/schoolsandresources/article/732028--roma-children-perplex-local-educators>