

Balkan Children & Youth Foundation



International Youth Foundation



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This e-newsletter is produced on a regular basis by the Balkan Children & Youth Foundation and the International Youth Foundation to keep you informed of their activities in the Balkans.

Focus Albania:

Youth Entrepreneurs Get Their Start

Imagine that you are a smart, talented young person in Albania with a dream of starting your own business. On the plus side of the ledger are your energy, creativity, and sheer drive to make it happen, which is reinforced by the scarcity of available jobs on the market. On the minus side are the extremely high interest rates of up to 30% offered to young people taking out loans, the price you will have to pay to register your business, and the knowledge you will need to develop it and ensure its success. To top it all off, your parents were employed in a state company during the communist era and have no experience to share with you.

Matching the ambitions of aspiring youth entrepreneurs with the resources they need to realize their dreams is the goal of Youth Business Albania, a joint initiative of the Balkan Children and Youth Foundation (BCYF) and Youth Business International (YBI), a unit of The Prince of Wales International Business Leaders Forum based in the UK.



The programme reflects BCYF's strategic goal of increasing the opportunities for young people to become economically engaged by stimulating and supporting the growth of youth entrepreneurship throughout the Balkan region. Working collaboratively with YBI and IYF, BCYF is actively encouraging the creation of partnerships among the public, private, and civil society sectors aimed at supporting the growth of youth business enterprises.

In addition to the Albanian programme, a similar initiative is in the planning stages in Bulgaria, and will be gradually extended to other countries throughout the region.



Progress to Date

In less than five months, Youth Business Albania (YBA) – which is being implemented by the “MJAFT! Foundation”, a local NGO with strong ties to the business community – has made significant progress. Among the more than 100 applications received for the first round of loans, seven proposals were approved, following a rigorous review process that included interviews with all 15 finalists in which they presented and made the case for their business ventures.

With the first seven participants in the programme selected, the MJAFT! Foundation has:

- Offered toolkits and guides to the young entrepreneurs
- Provided technical and business planning assistance
- Issued all legal requirements and licenses from the central Bank of Albania
- Provided start-up loans to the youth ranging from US\$1,500 to \$4,000 with an annual rate of interest of 6%
- Built a support system of business and trade associations, service clubs, and chambers to recruit mentors from successful businesses around the country
- Established one-on-one mentoring relationships between local business leaders and participating youth

To further strengthen opportunities for participating youth, the programme has established an exchange with the British Council – Albania, which operates the “Business Without Borders Programme,” an emerging network of 50 trained young business leaders in seven countries of the region. Through the exchange, YBA participants will be able to attend business development workshops offered through the Council and will benefit from a regional database being established to enable youth-led enterprises to share information. In addition, an alumni network is being developed to enable programme “graduates” to mentor participants in the future.

Guiding YBA’s growth is a five-member Advisory Board. Members include:

- Mr. Luan Bregasi, Head, Albanian Chamber of Commerce
- Mrs. Milva Ekonomi, Director, Statistical Institute
- Mr. Artan Hoxha, Director, Contemporary Studies Institute
- Mr. Artan Santo, Head, Credins Bank
- Mrs. Klotilda Ferhati, attorney-at-law



Board members have oversight over the programme’s Revolving Loan Fund and determine the type and level of awards to be given to programme participants and the terms of repayment. They also develop the programme’s fundraising strategy and identify potential partners within the government, among local NGOs, and the education system.

“This project is a good initiative for the employment of youth and their family members. We will help them to become strong business owners. After some years, I see them beside the big businessmen that have started their business the same way that we did.”

– Luan Bregasi, Head, Albanian Chamber of Commerce

Meet the New Entrepreneurs

Selecting the first round of seven participants for the programme was far from easy, with more than 100 creative business ideas presented. Each of those business concepts selected has a huge potential for development and – more importantly – for hiring other young people, with a very modest start-up loan. Below are stories of those youth who are helping to launch and refine the programme through their experiences.

An Audio Engineer Turns Business Owner

Twenty-eight-year-old Florian Canga’s passion is music and ensuring that people can enjoy it. It’s a subject he knows well, having studied audio engineering in Milan, Munich, and Hanover. As a DJ and audio engineer in Tirana, Florian was successful in obtaining work



at live concerts and various types of events needing a sound and light system; yet having to rent the equipment he needed posed a significant barrier to getting his business off the ground. Now, with a US\$4,000 loan from YBA, Florian has purchased much-needed equipment

and can offer potential clients a comprehensive package of services.

Says Florian, "When I started, it was just me, two speakers and one DJ set. Now, I finished with a sound and lighting system and two people who work under me... This kind of loan goes to the people whose ideas will work and takes away the constant pressure because it is flexible."



A Summer Camp Takes Off

An experienced travel guide, Ened Mato has spent more than two years developing his idea for a summer camp for youth, ages 18 to 25, into a reality. The 24-year-old established the camp in the coastal town of Jala. To keep costs down and foster a youth-friendly environment, Ened set up tents for accommodations and devised low-cost entertainment in the form of ping-pong tables, swimming, dance parties, and movie nights. For travelers with more money to spare, Ened also led scuba diving excursions to nearby underwater caves.

Yet with limited funds to invest in upgrading the camp, Ened was restricted in being able to expand its offerings and maximize its potential. With a US\$4,000 loan through YBA, he was able to purchase additional tents and recreational equipment, and improve the camp's electrical and hydraulic infrastructure. The improve-

ments are paying off, with the camp fully booked for two months this summer.



Launching a Video Production Business

At 28, Gentian Shkurti had proven himself to be a skilled graphic designer who developed into a talented video producer. A graduate of the Academy of Arts, Gentian spent two years working at one of Albania's top advertising firms before deciding to go out to produce his own advertising videos. While he found he was perfectly able to generate business as a freelancer, much of his profits were consumed in renting expensive computer editing equipment he could not afford to purchase on his own. Despite his vision and talent, Gentian found himself stuck and was poised to give up his dream. Now, however, with a US\$4,000 loan, Gentian has been able to purchase the equipment he needed and with a grant to pay for a license to officially open his business.



A Fast Food Restaurant is Born

Having spent years working in his brother's fast food restaurant, 19-year-old Luis Lleku knows the fast food industry well. His plan? To open a fast-food outlet in the Lapraka district of Tirana, between two schools and a cluster of banks – a prime location for people seeking quick, low cost meals.



To further enhance the desirability of his restaurant, Luis came up with the idea of serving gyros, a popular food item, not available in the area. With a YBA loan of US\$3,950, Luis is laying the groundwork for his business, which will also employ another young entrepreneur as his partner. Wait until he opens his second fast food restaurant!

Creating a Multi-Use Cafe for Tirana's Youth



As a 19-year-old, Anduela Brahimaj knows well the types of activities that Tirana's youth enjoy and what's missing from the local options available. She also has a strong business sense having worked at her parent's restaurant since she was 10. Her dream? To create a dynamic youth center in the city, where young people can access the Internet, read books, sip coffee, hang out, and watch films. The center would be supported with revenue generated from Internet access fees and the sale of food and beverages. Access to the library and weekend movie nights would be free. With start-up capital of US\$2,800 provided by YBA, Anduela is now turning her dream into a reality. Lining the shelves of her youth center will be foreign books, with funky chairs made available for reading. The space is designed not only as a trendy destination, but a place for studying, discussing and sharing ideas.

Expanding Internet Access for Local Residents

People living in apartments located on the outskirts of Tirana have few places to go to recreate, and limited Internet access. To help meet this need, Adriatik Allamani, 25, conceived of an Internet center that would offer, not only computers and coffee, but would serve as a classroom for children and youth seeking to learn computer skills. To further increase the center's revenue potential, it will also provide computer repair



services and international calls using the Voice over the Internet technology. To get his idea off the ground, Adriatik was awarded US\$3,400 from YBA. The Centre will not only enhance the education of local youth, but increase their employability through improved computer skills.

Starting a Barbershop

Having completed a professional course at a beauty institute, Panajot Nastu was looking to apply his skills in men's haircutting; yet knew he wanted to work on his own. After conducting his own market research into existing barbershops, Panajot identified a location next to the Komuna Paris in Tirana that could benefit from such a resource. To help get his barbershop off the ground, Panajot was awarded

US\$2,400 from YBA. His goal is to create a neighbourhood business whose strength is its quality of service and community appeal. He has already hired an assistant and is contemplating hiring a second one to make highlights.

