

# Annual report 2024

NGO Ťahanovská záhrada is a space for free informal education and community building, bringing together people of all ages and backgrounds in an inclusive environment. Since 2017, we've been promoting the ideas of community gardening, shared economy, sustainability, and informal learning through various events, projects, and activities. In 2020, we established a private elementary school (<https://slobodnaskola.sk/>) focused on experimenting with free democratic education, emphasizing inclusivity.

We mainly work with families and children aged 0–12, offering a place for free play, movement, socializing, and exploring different sports, tools, and hands-on activities in the garden. As the founders of Slovakia's only free democratic school, we also advocate for self-directed education. We provide free consultations, visits, and internships to students and recent graduates, especially in education-related fields, both at the school and within the community garden.

## The everyday life of our community garden

### Season opening

On March 11, 2024, Ťahanovská záhrada once again welcomed the public, officially kicking off another season filled with learning, discovery, and relaxation in a natural environment on the border between the housing estate and the city district of Ťahanovce. This year, we have once again opened our garden to schools and after-school clubs, offering them the opportunity for free outdoor learning and activities. Children can experience unique lessons where they uncover the secrets of nature and develop practical skills in our workshop.



## Days in the community garden

Throughout the year, we organized special days at Ťahanovská záhrada during different seasons (spring days, June days, autumn days, and regular on Fridays), welcoming the broader public to our community garden. Our goal was to foster a sense of community and offer a space where people of all ages and interests could come together.

These days were focused on creating an inclusive environment for meeting, learning, and having fun in the relaxing atmosphere of nature. Visitors had the opportunity to pick herbs and fruits from our garden beds and mix their own unique lemonades, learning about nature, sustainability, and flavor combinations in the process. They explored the secrets of nature, learned gardening techniques, and enjoyed a friendly and inclusive setting. Whether spending time under the shade of trees, relaxing, or engaging in games and informal education, everyone could find something meaningful and enjoyable in the garden.



Visitors also got creative in our workshop, which is equipped with materials and tools for creators of all ages. Here, they unleashed their imagination and developed their crafting skills. They had the chance to try woodcarving, painting, modeling, and other artistic activities. Guides were on hand to assist and inspire, ensuring that everyone could explore their creativity and hone their skills.

We see these days as an important part of community building, and we're delighted that they resonated so well with our visitors. In the future, we plan to continue organizing similar events and further developing our garden as a space for community life and informal education.

## Temporary accommodation for refugees from Ukraine

Throughout 2024, Ťahanovská záhrada remained welcoming and open to residents from Ukraine seeking refuge in our city. We provided temporary accommodation and support during difficult times, helping them as they worked to find more stable housing, employment, and necessary documentation. Depending on their needs, we assisted some with medical care, translation, and other forms of support. Our organization was also one of the places of solidarity, offering help to those who needed it most.

## Initiatives and projects

### Nomination to the national round – Srdce na dlani

We entered the new year with good news: our Ťahanovská záhrada was nominated for the national round of the volunteer awards – *Srdce na dlani*. The *Srdce na dlani* award recognizes exceptional volunteers and volunteer projects that make a positive difference through their mission. This nomination marked the end of the 2024 calendar year, and in December, two of our representatives attended the awards ceremony. Although we didn't win the award this time, we deeply appreciate the repeated nomination, which we also take as a recognition of our work.



## Donio campaign – Let's contribute to scholarships for homeschooling students in need

In June 2024, we launched a crowdfunding campaign, *Let's contribute to scholarships for homeschooling students in need*

([https://donio.sk/pomozme-domskolakom-vnudzi?fbclid=IwY2xjawHeVU9leHRuA2FibQIxMAABHRmpRaEemuTLXICIBJOjn-37XtXlQuBXhXzjrohZVklMkdoLwb9gy-HqJA\\_aem\\_SyKlcW\\_B7\\_RblB8rJkUzuA](https://donio.sk/pomozme-domskolakom-vnudzi?fbclid=IwY2xjawHeVU9leHRuA2FibQIxMAABHRmpRaEemuTLXICIBJOjn-37XtXlQuBXhXzjrohZVklMkdoLwb9gy-HqJA_aem_SyKlcW_B7_RblB8rJkUzuA)), aimed at supporting families facing challenging situations who have chosen homeschooling for their children. Through the Donio platform, we raised a total of €2,254 for scholarships for children with disabilities, those living in remote areas, from large families, or children of single parents. The generosity of donors allowed us to provide psychological and pedagogical support to the children and their parents. This initiative also contributed to ensuring access to education for children who would otherwise face barriers in the traditional school system.

## Prečítané leto (Read Summer)

During the summer holidays, we took part in the *Prečítané leto* project, which promotes reading and fosters a love for literature among children. As part of the event, we offered a selection of books in our community garden, from which children could choose a book based on their own interests. Research shows that this is one of the best ways to motivate them to finish reading the book they selected. Every week, we refreshed the book selection and focused on a new theme from *Prečítané leto*, with inspiration and a list of recommended literature available on the project's website

([https://precitaneleto.krajinacitatelov.sk/blog/temy?fbclid=IwY2xjawHdFF1leHRuA2FibQIxMAABHVTgtKxZmNf22L-38cXReBht56w-KsxKCE0PvmTHBK0tCi\\_X\\_J1XiXVnNQ\\_aem\\_5qUIAAN0JqVwPW9AVxD1-A](https://precitaneleto.krajinacitatelov.sk/blog/temy?fbclid=IwY2xjawHdFF1leHRuA2FibQIxMAABHVTgtKxZmNf22L-38cXReBht56w-KsxKCE0PvmTHBK0tCi_X_J1XiXVnNQ_aem_5qUIAAN0JqVwPW9AVxD1-A)).

In 2024, the project focused on literature containing words that expand vocabulary in three areas: words about me, about people, and about the world. *Prečítané leto* proved to be a popular event that contributed to building reading habits, strengthening community spirit, and supporting informal education in the pleasant environment of our garden. We look forward to continuing this tradition in future seasons.

## Redesign of the experimental study of self-directed learning.

Ťahanovská záhrada, as the founder of the School of Democratic Education, also plays a key role as a co-implementer of the experimental study of self-directed learning at the first and second levels of this primary school (ISCED1 and ISCED2).

In the summer of 2024, significant changes occurred in the experimental verification of self-directed learning (EO). Initially, all students at all levels of education could be assessed using verbal evaluation. However, the legislation was later amended, excluding homeschoolers from the experimental verification and making grade-based assessment mandatory for them at the second level of education. Subsequently, on June 15, 2024, the Ministry of Education decided that both regular school students and homeschoolers must be graded at the second level. Despite this, after intensive communication with UKF (Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra - our garant), we secured support that allowed regular students to continue receiving verbal evaluations even at the second level. However, for homeschoolers, grade-based assessment remains mandatory.

Starting from September 1, 2024, there was a change in which students educated under special forms of education were excluded from the experimental study of self-regulated learning. For them, curricula for specific grades and subjects became mandatory, which required finding a new control group and adapting to the new conditions.

Overall, we evaluate that during 2024, we had intense communication with the guarantor of the experimental study as well as the Ministry of Education, which required significant capacity from our side. The Ministry placed several requests for both formal and informal changes, which we had to implement in short time frames. These changes brought additional administrative and organizational burdens and pressure on redesigning the process of experimental study to ensure its compliance with current requirements while maintaining its contribution to the development of education.

Following the previous year's redesign of the experimental study, in collaboration with the guarantor (the Faculty of Education of Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra), the following areas are currently being addressed in accordance with §14 of Act 245/2008 on Education:

**a) Goals, methods, and resources of education – primarily:**

- Methods of education and learning as described in the school educational program (ŠkVP), focusing on the acquisition of knowledge and skills, rather than on pre-prepared methodological introduction of new content;

**b) Educational programs of school subjects or their parts – primarily:**

- Integration of subjects within the school educational program for both the 1st and 2nd levels into larger interconnected areas (e.g., subjects are composed of integrated content and performance standards from the educational area, while maintaining the total time allocation for the given educational areas in the given year, as outlined in the ŠkVP);
- Age-heterogeneous groups for both the 1st and 2nd levels (as outlined in the ŠkVP);
- The possibility of transferring a student from a regular lesson to another lesson or to an "assembly class" and other specifics regarding the organization of educational activities;
- Adjusted requirements for spatial and material-technical conditions;

**g) School management and the management of educational institutions – primarily:**

- Self-government with active student participation, self-direction in the educational and social context of the school and its community, as further described in the ŠkVP;

**d) Forms and means of assessment and classification of students – primarily:**

- The method of student assessment includes a verbal description of the student's learning outcomes, the key competencies acquired in the subject, in the form of several sentences for each subject separately, including the results of tests such as Testovanie 9 and Komparo. The assessment will also describe initiative, personal growth, respect for the rights of others, willingness to cooperate, and other aspects, with the goal of providing feedback and maintaining or supporting the student's intrinsic motivation.

## The "Library of Things" – a place where ecology meets concrete actions

In 2024, our most significant project became the *Library of Things*, through which we introduced an environmental approach to ecological and sustainable living.

The *Library of Things* is an innovative concept that combines the traditional library with the option to borrow various items. Here, readers can find not only books but also tools, electronics, games, kitchen appliances, and other items.



### Why the *Library of Things*?

- **Variety:** We lend items for sports, crafting, traveling, and organizing family gatherings.
- **Sustainability:** We promote sustainable living by allowing people to borrow items they don't necessarily need to own.
- **Community:** We bring together people with diverse interests but shared values.
- **Experimentation:** We explore new horizons and learn new skills.

The project involved 6 core team members focused on strategic and operational tasks. 15 volunteers contributed, enabling the effective implementation of the project and its success. We were assisted by 2 partners and approximately 110 active members. Additionally, we reached out to around 160 passive members through social media and PR campaigns.

With the support of the Tipsport Foundation, which provided a financial contribution of €3,980, we carried out the following activities:

- **Establishing a Digital Platform:** We implemented an inventory and borrowing management system (Libib program), allowing easy access to the library.
- **Distribution Points:** We created spaces for the distribution and storage of items at the Ťahanovská Community Garden, the Cultural Center Ťahanovce, and the Košice City Library.
- **Collecting and Expanding Inventory:** We received sports equipment, household tools, board games, and other items as donations from the community and individuals who supported our project.
- **Promotional Campaign:** We sent 5 press releases to local media, several of which published information about our project. We also actively promoted the project on social media, motivating people to get involved.

**Project Launch:** After a trial summer operation, we officially opened the "Library of Things" with public and media attendance at the beginning of September 2024, during the "Slobodný víkend" event, held at Galaktická 9, Košice.

Today, the *Library of Things* offers a wide range of items for borrowing. In the future, we plan to expand the inventory with other in-demand items based on the community's needs, involve new partners such as municipal enterprises and educational institutions, and continue promoting the benefits of the sharing economy. This project has proven to be an effective tool to support sustainability and improve the daily lives of community members. We are grateful to the Tipsport Foundation and our partners for their support and the opportunity to realize this unique project.

We published the press release for this initiative here:

<https://slobodnaskola.sk/tlacove-spravy-2024/kniznica-veci-tahanovskej-zahrady-uz-oficialne-poskytuje-prv-e-predmety/>

## The Tesco Grant Program 15th Edition - You Decide, We Help

In the fall of 2024, thanks to winning €300 in the Tesco Grant Program 15th Edition - You Decide, We Help, we were able to enrich our workshop with new tools. This equipment allowed us to expand opportunities for developing creativity and practical skills among families visiting our community garden. This support contributed not only to the development of children's individual abilities but also to strengthening family bonds and the sense of community in Ťahanovská záhrada. We are grateful to Tesco for their support!

## Visit from Erazim School

In November 2024, Ťahanovská Záhrada had the honor of welcoming a special visit from Erazim School from the Czech Republic. The entire group arrived by bus, which parked right in the courtyard of our community garden, bringing with them a fresh wave of energy, ideas, and experiences.

This international visit was not only an opportunity to share thoughts and experiences but also a way to deepen mutual cooperation and enrich our community. Strengthening international ties is crucial for the further development and exchange of experiences between schools that share similar values.

We thank Erazim School for their kind and inspiring visit and look forward to future meetings!



## Declaration for the Rights of the Child to Education Focused on the Child Itself

In 2024, we were co-authors of the Declaration for the Rights of the Child to Education Focused on the Child (<https://rights-centric.education/declaration>), expressing our support for the idea that children have the right to an education that respects their individual needs and interests. This declaration is based on the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child from 1989, which emphasizes fair treatment, access to education, the ability to express one's views, and ensuring safety for all children, regardless of their origin or background.



We believe that education occurs not only in schools but also in communities and everyday experiences, which help children discover their talents and live fulfilling lives. In the community garden, we protect children's rights by offering them space to grow, explore, and learn in a safe and stimulating environment. This initiative is an important step toward building a fairer education system. We also shared the declaration to encourage others to support it and add their signatures.

## Digital Storytelling for Peaceful Coexistence

In 2024, Ťahanovská záhrada, in collaboration with Slobodná škola Košice and other partners, also contributed to the project *Digital Storytelling for Peaceful Coexistence* (<https://slobodnaskola.sk/digital-storytelling-for-peaceful-coexistence-dspc/>) to support mutual understanding and the building of peaceful coexistence. Through conversations about life stories, documentary films were created in which participants shared their experiences. This project, implemented in Armenia at the Innovation Center for Social Research (<https://www.yasu.am/en/CISR>), in Georgia at the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information - IDFI (<https://idfi.ge/en>), and in Slovakia at Slobodná škola Košice (<https://slobodnaskola.sk/>), collects personal stories from people affected by wars and conflicts. The project was implemented with the support of THE CIVICS Innovation Hub.

## New laptops for Ťahanovská záhrada from AT&T

In November 2024, we had the honor of receiving generous support from AT&T, which donated 15 computers to our Ťahanovská záhrada. This gift significantly aids in integrating modern technologies into our work focused on self-directed education. The computers allow dozens of children to explore their interests more effectively and keep up with technological trends, contributing to the development of their digital skills. We thank AT&T for their support!



## Noc vonku (Night Outdoors)

On November 28, 2024, we participated in the event "Night Outdoors," which took place in Košice. Nearly 50 participants, including students, parents, educators, and the general public, spent the night outdoors to express solidarity with homeless people and raise awareness of poverty issues.

The program included an interactive workshop by the Emergency Medical Service of Košice on the topic of hypothermia, frostbite, and first aid in winter. Presentations were also given by the Archdiocesan Charity Košice, People in Need, and Oáza – Hope for a New Life, with their clients who shared their personal stories, giving insight into the reality of life without a home.



The school principal and executive director of the NGO Ťahanovská Záhrada, Juraj Mazák, emphasized the importance of teaching children social awareness from an early age. The event provided a space for discussions and mutual conversations, which are often lacking throughout the year. Participants, who gave up the comfort of their homes, gained a deeper understanding of the situation of homeless individuals.

"Night Outdoors" was a strong expression of solidarity and a reminder that protecting vulnerable groups should be a priority in our society. With a zero budget and the support of volunteers, it was possible to show that we do not forget the most vulnerable, which is the most important thing.

A report about the event can be read in the Korzár daily

(<https://kosice.korzar.sme.sk/c/23418379/solidaritu-s-ludmi-bez-domova-vyjadri-aj-ziaci-kosickej-skoly-noc-stravili-na-skolskom-dvore.html>), and a video report can be viewed

(<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=899110252406374>), prepared by Regina TV.

## Events where you had the opportunity to meet us:

In 2024, the team of Ťahanovská záhrada actively participated in multiple events. Not only did we attend as listeners, but we also took on the role of speakers and representatives of the civic association, its initiatives, and activities. At the same time, we represented the school founded by the association, spreading its message and values. Here is an overview of the events we participated in during 2024:

- Alumni Meeting of the Sokratov Institute in Zaježová
- Sokratov Institute Colloquium
- Workshop on Sustainable Economy in Zaježová – Alumni of the Sokratov Institute
- Annual General Meeting of the SZOPK (Slovak Union for the Protection of Nature and Landscape)
- Paralelná Polis in Košice, where we had a presentation on experimental study
- Učíme pre život (We Teach for Life) Conference in Poprad, where we presented our research and the school
- Scientific/Hybrid Conference IALS
- Homeschooling Conference 2024 in Bratislava, where we presented on screen times and modern technologies, gave a lecture on self-directed education, and the principal of Slobodná škola participated in a section dedicated to school principals supporting home education
- Children's Day in the Košice district of Nad Jazerom, where children had the opportunity to try various sports equipment and practice whittling with pocket knives.
- USE THE CITY Festival in Košice, where we had a booth and, along with various activities, presented a range of initiatives and projects carried out by Ťahanovská záhrada.
- NGO DVS (Association for Homeschooling in Slovakia) - Meetings on the calculation of costs for individual education
- ASŠŠZ (Association of Private Schools and Educational Institutions) - Active involvement in legislative consultations.



- **School of the Future Conference by SME in Žilina**, where our Executive Director Juraj Mazák spoke as one of the speakers on the topic “Why is Digital Important?”
- **EUDEC Congress in Berlin**, where we participated in the development of sustainability and growth strategies for EUDEC
- **EUDEC 2024 Conference in the Netherlands**
- **Darujme.sk Conference** - Presentation of the “Library of Things” project in Žilina, where Deputy Executive Director Lenka Mazáková and NGO member Katka Vassová had the opportunity to present the project.



- **EDUKOŠICE 2030 Conference**, where we contributed to discussions about the future of education.
- **ASSZZ (Association of Private Schools and Educational Institutions) Anniversary in Bratislava**, where our Executive Director Juraj Mazák was one of the speakers and participated as a guest in the WorldCafe discussion format.

## Team, Volunteers, and Finances

In 2024, our team consisted of four project managers, one office manager, a pedagogy researcher, a maintenance worker, and a PR specialist. Their effort and professional work were key to the successful implementation of our activities and projects. The total personnel costs for the year amounted to €26,989.97.

A significant portion of our activities was made possible thanks to the generous support of donors who contributed 2% of their taxes. We received a total of €8,496.59 from the Financial Administration. This support is incredibly important to us, and we sincerely thank our donors for their trust and generosity. With their help, we can continue our work and further develop our projects.

Volunteers are also an inseparable part of our activities, assisting us in the realization of projects and preparation of events. Every year, a wide range of volunteers joins our activities. This year, approximately 20 students, around 40 educators and psychologists, 5 migrants and refugees, about 50 parents, and around 10 seniors contributed. Their help encompasses various tasks such as garden work, repairs and maintenance, workshop activities, and direct support for children's programs. The involvement of volunteers often has far-reaching significance. For many, it's not only an opportunity to gain valuable experience but also an important step towards social inclusion. Thanks to their dedication and cooperation, we can overcome challenges and bring about positive changes in our community. We are immensely grateful for their support.