

Art fundraiser to empower Roma girls

On December 10th BHeart will organize a fundraiser in Washington DC, featuring works by [Selma Selman](#), a Bosnian and Herzegovinian artist of Roma origin. Proceeds from the event will support the “Get the Heck to School!” project, which will help a group of Roma girls complete their elementary and high school education in Bihać, in western Bosnia, and provide lunches to some of the neediest children attending school.

Selma Selman: Achieving dreams thanks to education

Selma Selman’s works use a plethora of media, including performance, painting, photography and video installations. They embody her life’s difficult path and her community’s struggles. Growing up in a Roma settlement in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Selma faced a lack of resources and a climate of prejudice. Her mother had married at just 13 years of age.

Selma had a passion for the arts and literature and believed in her dreams, which she knew could only become a reality through pursuing her education. Learning from her mother’s hardship, Selma insisted on going to school every day, even if she did not have anything to eat. Thanks to her talent, hard work and perseverance, Selma received scholarships to pursue her dreams. Her example shows that a small effort to empower women and children can make world of a difference.

About the “Get the Heck to School” Project

“Get the Heck to School!” is a straightforward and much needed project. It has two aims. First and foremost, it will support a group of young adolescent girls from the Ružica Roma settlement in Bihać to complete their elementary and high school education. To the extent that funding allows, it will also provide lunches for other disadvantaged children in their elementary school.

The scholarships will be aimed at older girls, who are most at risk of dropping out. Experience has shown that graduating from school is a critical milestone in terms of their potential success. The girls will also join extracurricular activities to develop additional leadership skills. The project aims to reward the girls for the academic achievements they have already made and to propel them forward. The hope is that their success will serve as an example to others that there are benefits to staying in school.

Public elementary schools are free-of-charge in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but kids from poorer families are still at high risk of dropping out because their parents struggle with associated costs, such as school supplies and food. That is why the project will also provide funding to cover the cost of lunches for the neediest children attending school.

Child marriage: a deep-rooted tradition

Discrimination and financial barriers are not the only reasons for a high number of dropouts among Roma children. A tradition of child marriage is an additional complication. According to the Helsinki Human Rights Committee, only 15% of all Roma children in BiH graduate from elementary school. The figures for girls are even worse, due to the fact that so many drop out in 3rd or 4th grade and get married by the time they are 13, 14 or 15.

Experience from NGO Alfa, a project partner, has shown that keeping girls in school can address this issue in two ways. Firstly, girls who finish their basic schooling are more self-aware and less likely to be forced into an early marriage. Secondly, girls who succeed in their education have a better chance of breaking out of poverty, which is also an important factor in arranged marriages.

Links:

BHeart's fundraising website:
<https://igg.me/at/hjPzV32AGJc>

[Selma Selman website](#)