

## 2018 Via Bona Philanthropy Awards Finalists

### Personal Engagement Category

#### **Ludmila Böhmová**

#### ***Helping to educate young people in the Central African Republic to support their future economic independence***

In 2006 Ludmila, her husband Karol and four other volunteers founded SIRIRI, a non-profit organization that helps specific people and towns in the Central African Republic (CAR), one of the poorest countries in the world, through interventions in education, health and agriculture. At that time, Ludmila realized that the only way future economic independence and emancipation could become a reality was to develop greater self-sufficiency among local residents with a focus on young people.

SIRIRI's first project was construction of a day center for orphans in the city of Bozoum. In 2011, Ludmila and her husband made their first trip to the CAR, where they helped build a high school in Bozoum followed by dormitories for the students. SIRIRI provides long-term support for operation of the school. In 2015, Ludmila initiated development of an education program, "School is Fun", in the CAR. To date 399 local teachers have been trained in this approach and an illustrated primer – the first in the local language, Sango – was created for schools.

The project has been hugely successful. Children in the CAR used to learn to read and write in French, a language which is not their own, and the percentage who mastered reading and writing upon completion of grammar school was roughly one-third. In contrast, more than 80% of first graders had learned to read and write after a one-year "School is Fun" pilot project.

Giving back can be passed on from generation to generation: Ludmila and Karol raised six children, all of whom have also volunteered in Africa. And today, the couple has 18 grandchildren...

Nominated by: Tomáš Gago

#### **Maxim Čambor**

#### ***Founder of the civic association "One to One" which helps blind athletes reach their goals***

In 2008, the Leontinka Foundation asked Maxim to accompany a visually impaired client on the "Jizerska 50" cross-country skiing race. Maxim, a former competitive swimmer and enthusiastic athlete, agreed without hesitation and led his first blind skier to the finish line as a guide. Since then he has continuously helped both amateur and experienced visually impaired athletes: as a guide for blind athletes, volunteer, provider of moral support, navigator, transportation unit, repairman and crisis interventionist. Thanks to his help, vision impaired clients are able to participate in domestic and international events such as the

Jizerska 50, VltavaRun, Dragon Boat, Ridderrennet, Engadin Ski Marathon and La Transjurassienne.

Aware that that disabled athletes have very limited opportunities to take part in sports, Maxim founded the civic association “One to One”, which aims to provide quality sports opportunities for visually impaired athletes with the help of sighted guides. Maxim teaches blind people cross-country skiing, acts as a swim coach and guides during cross-country ski races, para biathlons and triathlons. He also fundraises for races and to help make his clients’ dreams in sports come true. He also wants to help blind people take part in cycling, horsebackriding and golf. One to One is the only association in the Czech Republic with a certified sound optic shooting system for blind biathlons and is currently raising funds to buy additional shooting systems.

Nominated by: Barbara Hucková, Leontinka Foundation

### **Olga Štrejbarová**

***Creator of the Santa’s Grandchildren project, which helps fulfill lonely senior citizens’ wishes***

While working on a story in autumn 2016, radio reporter Olga Štrejbarová realized that there are many abandoned senior citizens in retirement homes who haven’t received a gift for years. She sent out an offer to help to all retirement homes. The first to respond was in the city of Třebíč, then Ždírec, and when others saw the success of the project, they joined in and compile lists of their clients’ wishes.

She then set up a Santa’s Grandchildren Facebook group, where people can reserve a specific wish (either a tangible gift or an experience), reserve it and fulfill it for “their” senior citizen. All the wishes on the first list were taken within two hours and the pace accelerated with subsequent lists. Olga began getting requests from people from all across the country. Retirement homes wrote, as well as people who hadn’t been quick enough to reserve a gift to give. Some of these would-be donors began seeking out senior citizens in their own communities to help. In some cases, it went further than one gift, with a visit to the senior citizen and development of a relationship between the “grandchild” and the senior citizen. During the first year, some 600 wishes were fulfilled. Now, thanks in part to the patronship of Czech Radio, the number has reached almost 14,000.

In addition to Santa’s Grandchildren, Olga has another charity project: Love in the City. She collects photos of hearts from all over the world and has them printed on fabric. The fabric is sewn into “love dresses” and the proceeds from sales goes to support other good causes such as special beds for a hospice in Třebíč.

Nominated by: Lenka Čtvrtečková, a Santa’s Grandchild