

Melinda Rostás Makula: A woman who raised her child alone – Melinda's interview with Sáríka

Translated from the Hungarian by Hayley Anderson

Melinda is one of the long-term Roma contributors of our participatory research projects in Tiszavasvári. She lives in the central part of the Roma neighbourhood with her husband, young daughter, and some of her sons, daughters-in-law, and grandchildren. Melinda and her husband work as caretakers and janitors in the Magiszter Primary School where Roma children from the bilingual Roma neighbourhood study. Melinda participated in writing a Romani storybook, translating and authoring texts in local Romani, and in the preparatory workshops for the volume summarising the outcome of our translanguaging project (Heltai, J. and Tarsoly, E. (eds.). 2023. Translanguaging for Equal Opportunities: Speaking Romani at School. Berlin: De Gruyter.) She has been a member of Duj Džséné – Two Together's editorial team from the outset.

Sáríka went through many struggles and difficulties each day. Unfortunately, she had a serious operation and was in hospital for a month. Her four children were with her frail mother during this time. She came home from the hospital and was not even able to rest. She went on with her daily routine. Wearing a skirt and slippers, she went into the forest during winter to fetch wood, having to cut it herself. To me, she is a role model, because I know how hard it was for her and still, she did it all – alone.

Melinda asks Sáríka what it was like when her partner was not there for the family. Sáríka replied: It was very difficult to manage everything because I had to be a mother and also a father. I couldn't get help from my parents because they were poor. I took my children to school every day, and while they were there, I washed our clothes with my bare hands because I did not have a washing machine. I cooked, I cleaned, and I went to the forest to fetch wood so the children would not be cold when they came home from school. It was also a great help when my mum could look after the children when they were ill and had to stay at home, because I was then able to complete my other jobs. I did not really have anyone I could count on. But everything I wanted to give my children, I managed to provide.

And Melinda asks: How did you manage to live on the family allowance? Sárka: It was very difficult, especially because you had to pay a lot for school. The first thing was to buy a month's worth of food and cleaning supplies. Monthly, I would also manage to buy clothes for whoever needed it most, like boots or a coat. That's why the winter was harder for me. But summer was easier, because I did not have to go to the forest to cut wood. I could work in people's houses. But my children never missed anything, even though I was raising them alone. I thank God for giving me so much strength and perseverance. Even though I was tired a lot of the time, I knew I must keep going, because if they could not count on me, they would not be able to count on anyone. And for that I thank God, because there were many times I went to bed crying and exhausted. But I never gave up. A new day would begin. I can now say that all the effort was worth it, because I am now a happy mother and grandmother. I thank my Dear God who has followed me through life and has been by my side during these difficult times. I am grateful for this. Thank you, my God.