

Pikler Institute's Doors Remain Open

Joyce Gallardo

In January, the world became aware of the devastating financial crisis which threatened to close the doors of the Pikler Institute, also known as Loczy, in Budapest, Hungary, a residential home for forty-five infants and children under the age of seven whose families are unable or unwilling to care for them. The Pikler Institute is a research and training center for early childhood professionals as well as a residential home for children, founded by Dr. Emmi Pikler in 1946 at the request of the city of Budapest.

By early February, the Pikler/LoczyFund USA reached its goal of raising \$100,000 for Loczy in just three weeks! Contributions came from all over the USA and even from Mexico, Canada, Australia, and Israel. Anna Tardos, daughter of Emmi Pikler and director of Loczy, in a letter to the board of the Pikler/Loczy Fund USA, wrote of her gratitude and joy at the support given by all who helped keep Loczy's doors open. She was astonished that it took only three weeks to reach the goal of \$100,000.

"As the Hungarian saying goes, 'He who gives quickly gives doubly,'" Anna wrote. "We are touched by the encouraging letters we have received expressing appreciation for Loczy's past, present and future. Our thankfulness is also manifested in our continuing work for improving the quality of life of infants and small children throughout the world."

Several of our colleagues in Waldorf early childhood education have taken trainings at the Pikler Institute. Susan Weber, director of Sophia's Hearth Family center, wrote after her return from a training course at Loczy, "Traveling to Budapest, I joined a group of fourteen, . . . to experience daily life at the Institute as well as to study with the training faculty of physicians, therapists, psychologists and pedagogues. The combined years of faculty experience must have been over two hundred years! Contact with these extraordinary people brings forth tremendous gratitude. We each came away changed from our experiences with them."

I also attended the Pikler Institute training and wrote in an earlier *Gateways* "It was a life-changing experience. I am very grateful to Anna Tardos and her dedicated, wonderful colleagues who made the course possible. The human encounters were permeated with warmth, friendship, and collegiality as we gathered in the tiny conference room on the third floor of Loczy each morning... And always, the cries, the shouts of joy, the tears, and the laughter of the children playing in the garden were in the background."

Several steps are being taken to ensure that such an emergency as the one that occurred in January does not arise again. The question of why this emergency and others have occurred in the past few years has come up. After all, the Institute has been in existence since 1946. Why now? The first answer that comes to mind is the fast-paced economy of post-communist Hungary. This economy, while it has created an environment for quick-footed entrepreneurs and foreign capital, has been devastating for the old, the handicapped, and the very young, as well as for the institutions that serve them. Money for these most needed social services has become scarce. Government financial support for Loczy has been drastically cut in the past few years.

The Pikler/Loczy Fund USA is hoping for foundation support, as well as individuals who make a commitment to give a donation on a monthly or annual basis. Please go to their website, www.pikler.org and open the "Sponsorship" link to give to Loczy on an ongoing basis. Help to keep this beacon of light, of sensitive, respectful care-giving, glowing brightly for the benefit of all children worldwide.