STRONGER ROOTS

## ORGANISATION: GÓLYAHÍR FOUNDATION

# Building on values: grassroots development and communication on new foundations

Case study of a Hungarian organization supported under the Stronger Roots 2023-2025 Program.

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## Organisation description:

The **Gólyahír** (*'Stork news'*) **Foundation** was established to support adoptive families, recognising that adoption is not about closing the door on loss, but often about starting the process of coming to terms with it – both for the adopted children and their adoptive parents. Parents face many special challenges, so it is particularly important for them to have a supportive environment they can turn to with confidence. The organisation provides comprehensive assistance: it runs screening programmes for the early detection of developmental problems, organises therapy and workshops for parents, and carries out social awareness-raising work. The organisation deliberately operates with a small staff of three employees, a network of external experts and a team of 110 volunteers.

## Case study introduction

**The Gólyahír Foundation recognised that the increased demand for its services could only be met in the long term through a broader social base and conscious communication. Building on comprehensive research, it developed new strategic foundations, brand values and a communication toolkit, and expanded its circle of supporters with targeted campaigns and a newsletter system. The rebranding process relied on volunteers, external experts and internal reorganisation. The process was long but well-founded and successful.**

## Moving to a new level: why was change necessary?

The Gólyahír Foundation supports adoptive families and, thanks to many years of dedicated work, has achieved a level of stability that has enabled it to maintain its daily operations. However, the organisation found that demand for its services – workshops, camps, screening tests – was growing rapidly. More and more families wanted to participate in the programmes, so it became clear that the current funding structure was not able to support the desired expansion.

Apart from donations from the community and unpredictable grant funding, there was no possibility of predictable, regular income. The organisation therefore decided to broaden its social base and reach out to people who were not directly involved in adoption but were open to the topic. This was not just a question of funding: one of the fundamental objectives of the Gólyahír Foundation is to raise awareness in the wider community. More conscious communication thus served both the sustainability and the mission of the organisation.

However, in order to expand its target group, the organisation needed new knowledge, tools and strategies. It recognised that its previous communication had not been effective enough: its social media presence was inconsistent, its newsletters were random, and its website was outdated. The Gólyahír Foundation therefore embarked on a comprehensive development process, completely rethinking its strategy, brand values, target groups and communication tools.

## From a change of mindset to programme development: how did the relationship become a partnership?

The development was based on their own research, which was led by an adoptive parent who is also a practising sociologist. The questionnaire he prepared was completed in person by the people concerned, with the help of 20 volunteer interviewers, based on quota sampling. Although data collection was slower than expected, the personal interviews yielded deeper and more valuable responses. The second part of the research consisted of two focus group discussions: separate discussions were held with participants who were already in contact with the organisation and those who were familiar with it but not yet actively involved.

The discussions highlighted the sense of security that support and community provide to adoptive parents. One mother, for example, said that only the professional and community support provided by Gólyahír gave her real stability when she adopted her third child. This experience – „having somewhere to turn“ – later became a key message in the organisation‘s communications.

Following the research results, the brand-building work began. The organisation first redefined its values and goals with the help of external experts. This resulted in a „brand value map“ and a strategic document that laid the foundations for future communication. Target groups were identified, messages tailored to them were developed, and the most appropriate channels for reaching them were selected.

This was followed by practical implementation: a new website was created and two types of newsletter structures were established. One was aimed at the adoptive community, with professional content and programme information, while the other addressed a broader social group with awareness-raising content and donation opportunities. The organisation reached 12,000 new subscribers through offline and online campaigns.

During the process, the Gólyahír Foundation relied on a variety of resources: volunteers, external experts and temporary staff helped with the work. The internal team was not expanded; instead, tasks were reorganised and several activities that did not fit into the long-term strategy were discontinued. This allowed existing capacities to be concentrated on the most important goals.

## Strategic clarity and practical lessons: what was needed for success?

The Gólyahír Foundation encountered several unforeseen difficulties during its development process. Some external experts did not prove as helpful as expected. There was also disappointment with a technical issue: the search ads planned under Google Ad Grants did not deliver the expected results. As the website evaluation only allowed for a very limited advertising budget, this was not enough for the ads to generate sufficient reach. The foundation also learned that digital presence requires significant resources and that not all platforms are effective. Facebook‘s organic reach was weak, so paid ads were necessary. Instagram yielded few results, but newsletters performed exceptionally well, with high open rates and effective fundraising, and thus became the main communication channel. In addition, TikTok proved surprisingly effective in recruiting volunteers, especially among younger age groups.

However, in addition to the practical challenges, an important realisation emerged within the organisation: a shared understanding of the organisation‘s mission and values is essential for further development. The operation of communication channels and the production of content can only be effective on this common basis. As the organisation put it: *„There is no point in producing TikTok videos and Facebook posts without thinking about who we are, what values we want to offer, what we want to communicate, and what we want to attract followers with. So until we have decided this, until everyone agrees, until we have written it down, there is really no point.“*

The research-based rebranding was a long and complex process, but it also offered significant learning opportunities.

Not only did the organisation‘s image become more consistent and conscious to the outside world, but its internal operations also became more transparent and focused.

As the head of the organisation summed it up: *„We know much more clearly what we want. Now it‘s really routine what we do, what we don‘t do, what we spend money on, what we don‘t spend money on, who we communicate with and what we communicate. That was the biggest benefit. It‘s not even about how many followers we‘ve gained, how many donors, or how many volunteers. It‘s about the fact that we now have a confident vision and a set of tools that will enable us to move forward very well in the coming years.“*

## LESSONS AND USEFUL ADVICE FOR OTHER CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

1. **First, clarify who you are and what you represent.**
   An organisation's communication can only be credible and effective if it is based on clear, commonly accepted values and goals.
2. **Research-based planning is essential.**
   Internal intuition is not enough to understand target groups – external feedback and structured data collection are necessary.
3. **Not all communication channels work equally well.**
   It is worth measuring and testing: while some platforms may not yield results, other, less visible tools, such as newsletters, can be surprisingly effective.
4. **Conscious brand building pays off in the long run.**
   The biggest benefit is not the number of followers, but the fact that the organisation knows who it wants to communicate with, what it wants to say and how it wants to say it.
5. **Choose external experts wisely.**
   Not all advice is valuable – it is only worth working with professionals who can truly contribute to the development of your organisation.
6. **Don't underestimate the technical background of digital developments.**
   Good content is not enough for a successful online campaign: technical compliance (e.g. website optimisation) is just as important.
7. **Most importantly, focus on what matters in the long run.**
   Even alongside your daily tasks, it is worth setting aside time for strategic thinking – this is what enables real progress.

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