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Next Generation Citizens: How We Created 23 Eco-Heroes Through the NUDGES Project Adventure

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At a time when ecological crises are becoming ever more pervasive and questions of sustainability increasingly urgent, it is essential to lay the foundations for change where it has the greatest reach – among the youngest. Through the NUDGES project, implemented by the [Development Agency PREDA](#), **23 children from Prijedor successfully went through an innovative educational process and became the city's eco-heroes** – representatives of a generation that understands environmental responsibility begins now, not someday.

At the heart of this process was a series of carefully designed workshops that guided the children through stages of **developing awareness, knowledge, and action** – from recognizing problems to taking on the role of active citizens. Each workshop was more than just education: it was an interactive experience for changing behavior, based on the principles of the “nudge approach” – **gentle yet effective guidance toward sustainable habits**.

Unlike traditional teaching methods that rely on lectures, rules, and prohibitions, this approach works quietly but powerfully – through the design of the environment, emotions, and sensory experiences (hearing, sight, taste, smell, and touch). It doesn't tell children what they have to do, but instead encourages them to choose the right thing on their own.

Within the NUDGES project, this could already be seen at the very first workshop, when the children watched **an animated film** – a story about a planet buried in waste and a small robot tirelessly trying to clean it. Instead of being told about the consequences of pollution, the children felt sadness over the destroyed world and began asking their own questions: “Why did the planet become like this?” and **“What can we change?”**



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That is the essence of the nudge approach – instead of commands, children are offered emotional, visual, and tactile stimuli that naturally shape their behavior.

Right at that first workshop, held in a cinema, the setting was carefully designed to encourage an emotional connection with the topic. Visual messages with environmental tips were displayed on the popcorn boxes, while stickers featuring eco-hero symbols added to the experience. The goal was not just to inform, but to create an atmosphere where children felt they were part of something important.

Another important effect of this workshop was the involvement of the wider community – the children brought their friends, brothers, and sisters. More than 50 youngsters attended the screening and the discussion afterward, making this activity the first moment of spreading the environmental message beyond the circle of workshop participants. This is where the idea began that would later become the common thread of all activities – that every eco-hero has the power to inspire others.

Eco Map: A Young Hero's Path

After the cinema workshop, the children received an “**eco map**” – a visual guide to the adventure ahead of them. Each segment of the map represented one workshop, one skill, one task to complete in order to become full members of the ECO LEAGUE.





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This map was not just symbolic – it was a motivational tool that reminded the children they were part of something bigger. They tracked their progress, adding stickers to their eco map, and felt proud as they moved through each new stage.

In the cinema, they didn't just watch a film – the children became eco-detectives. Through the film's story, they learned that the first step toward change is to notice the problem. A polluted planet, abandoned nature, silence instead of the sounds of life – all of this encouraged them to open their eyes and ask what a world looks like where no one cares about the environment.

Guardians of Nature – When Imagination Shapes Solutions

At the next workshop, symbolically called “Nudgy Seeks Friends,” the children moved on to the second phase of their eco-adventure: imagining solutions. **If a detective looks for a problem, a guardian of nature looks for a way to fix it.**

This workshop began with a story. The children met **Nudgy, the robot guardian of the planet**. Nudgy was no ordinary robot – he was an ecological hero, able to recycle waste, clean rivers, and plant trees, powered entirely by renewable energy through a solar panel on his head. As his power faded, he needed to find allies to help him fight his enemy, the Polluto – the embodiment of carelessness, waste, and the destruction of nature.

Based on a short part of the story about Nudgy and Polluto, children were given the task of inventing new characters who would help Nudgy defeat Polluto – allies of nature fighting for a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment. **By drawing, telling stories, and sharing their thoughts, children used this activity to shape their own relationship to environmental challenges and to the values they wanted to protect.**

Twenty-four original drawings were created and later turned into an illustrated children's eco-book – a publication that not only contains the story of Nudgy but also the characters imagined by the children themselves. In this way, the workshop did not remain just a classroom experience – it took on a lasting form. **The book became a powerful tool for spreading the message that every child, no matter their age, can be part of the change.** If you don't know where to start – start by helping Nudgy find his allies.



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Through this workshop, the children had the opportunity not only to draw but also to shape their own view of the world, recognize the values they want to protect, and feel that they have a role in safeguarding their own future.

The Recycling Wizard

After drawing, imagining, and dreaming, it was time for the children to take real action. In the workshop “The Recycling Wizard,” participants were challenged to change the way they see waste – not as trash, but as a resource that can be reused and transformed into something useful.

The workshop began with a theory session, where **children learned through discussion about different types of waste, the importance of sorting, and the impact of plastic on the environment.** They then discovered how plastic bottles can be turned into filament – the raw material for 3D printing. Instead of ending up in a landfill, bottles became the basis for creating new, useful items.

In the practical part of the workshop, the children took part in every step of the process – from cutting and preparing the plastic to modelling figures in the digital tool Tinkercad, and then 3D-printing finished shapes. Small toys were created: characters like teddy bears, Stitch, and other heroes. But these figurines were more than just playthings – they were a reminder of transformation. Through their touch, form, and meaning, they became a **tangible nudge** – a tool to remind them that change is possible and starts with personal action.

This workshop introduced children to the **concept of the circular economy** – the idea that waste doesn’t have to be the end, but the beginning of something new.

The Eco Gardener

After learning to recognize problems, imagine solutions, and turn waste into value, the children were ready for their final challenge – to contribute with their own hands to the renewal of nature. This final workshop was more than symbolic planting. It represented the practical expression of everything the children had learned: that responsibility for the planet doesn’t end on paper or a screen, but is reflected in real, everyday actions. And the most beautiful way to show that was – to plant something that grows.



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Through this workshop, they were not just planting plants – they were planting ideas, values, and habits that will continue to grow. Three large garden beds and additional stone-framed mini-beds were set up, where the children planted more than 20 different plant species – from strawberries, tomatoes, and peppers to herbs like mint and rosemary.

Alongside the shared garden, each child planted their own pot of aromatic herbs to take home. These small plants were not just a gift – they were personal reminders, a constant nudge at home to reinforce the values they had learned. When children water their mint or watch the rosemary grow on their windowsill, they renew their connection with nature and their sense of responsibility for the environment every day.

In this way, the final workshop went beyond a single day – **it became the beginning of new habits that live on in homes, schools, and everyday conversations.**

Final Challenge: Become an Eco Influencer

After successfully completing four steps – from eco-detective to eco-gardener – the young heroes faced their final challenge: to become eco influencers.

As part of the closing campaign under the slogan “I Am a Planet Protector!”, the children were tasked with recording short video messages in which, through their own example and creativity, they showcased good environmental habits.

This challenge took place both in the real world and in the digital space. **The goal was** not only to show what they had learned but to influence others – **to inspire family, friends, and fellow citizens to change their habits and recognize their own responsibility for the planet.**

These video challenges were posted on the Instagram profile @zajednazaprodu.

Behind this task was a powerful message: a true hero is not only someone who does good themselves but someone who inspires others to do the same. Through this activity, children had the opportunity to step out of the role of students and into the role of leaders of change.



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Little Heroes – A Big Movement

The completion of the NUDGES project program is not the end of this story – it is the beginning of a movement. After becoming eco influencers, the children filled all the stickers on their eco map and symbolically completed their journey from eco-detectives to eco-heroes. **At the award ceremony held on 13 September 2025, the children received badges and diplomas confirming their role as guardians of the planet.**

A special strength of the project lies in the fact that it didn't involve only children. Parents had the opportunity to attend the workshops, get to know the nudge methodology, take part in activities, and continue the conversations at home. Although the children joined the program through their parents' applications to a public call, today – as eco-heroes and ambassadors of sustainability – they spread their messages far beyond their homes. They will now pass on their knowledge, ideas, and habits in playgrounds and in the schools they attend ("Dositej Obradović," "Branko Ćopić," "Desanka Maksimović," and "Petar Kočić" – Prijedor, and "Vuk Karadžić" – Omarska), inspiring their peers, teachers, and the community to take small but important steps toward protecting the planet.

The schools have gained new ambassadors of ecology, and the community has received a clear message: ecological transformation begins with small steps and small heroes.

The [NUDGES project](#) is carried out within the framework of the European Union's [Interreg Euro-MED programme](#), which supports initiatives to create sustainable and green communities in the Mediterranean region. The specific goal of the project is to promote adaptation to climate change and disaster risk prevention, taking into account ecosystem-based approaches.