

NGO provides sustainable solution

The Green Summer Camps of the *Rodni Balkani* Tourist Society of Varna celebrated its tenth anniversary in 2001. They originated as a response to a real social need at the time. The public institutions in the city, like those in most big cities in the country, did not provide under any form for the recreation and informal education of children and youngsters during the summer holidays. The system



of summer camps organized by the educational authorities was not functioning any more. Adequate means for informal education during the summer were insufficient. Experience in the work with schoolchildren and the availability of a good number of trained and certified tourist guides and teachers on the team list of the tourist society prompted Mrs Jechka Karova, its secretary to organize the first green summer camp in 2000. Its focus was informal environmental education and tourism.

The idea was later supported by a small grant and the first pilot group of 20 children had their wonderful and memorable 'green' summer with Jenya Toneva, professional tourist guide. They hiked along different routes in the vicinity of the city every day, visited the sea gardens, the Golden Sands Park of Nature, museums and the aquarium. Environmental awareness and informal education has been part of the training since the very beginning. In the ten years of their existence the green camps have become a well established and sustainable activity. They have trained 6200 children mostly between seven and twelve years old and have involved 111 tourist guides, sportsmen, teachers, medical workers and volunteers in the process. The camps are now held throughout the summer in fortnight periods. The guides have developed different hiking routes for each day and the youngsters are involved in simple hands-on activities related to tourism, orienteering, climbing, water sports, nature protection, conservation etc. The camps combine the features of informal education and a social service. They have all the features of a well established good practice in the environmental community and the larger local community.