

Single Step



About Single Step

Single Step is a foundation that supports, motivates and empowers Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex youth in Bulgaria through the process of recognising and affirming their sexual orientation and gender identity. It was founded by Ivan Dimov in 2016.

Ivan is from Bulgaria, but had been living and working in New York as an investment banker for many years when he was inspired to return to Sofia and set up his foundation after the attempted suicide of a young Bulgarian man who was struggling with his sexual identity. As an openly gay man himself, Ivan recognised the need for resources and support in his home country and set up Single Step to provide them.

“We now have lots of resources for young LGBTI people and their parents, including online chat, a helpline, peer support groups and educational resources,” says Ivan, “But we don’t want to just survive on grants, so we bought an old warehouse in downtown Sofia and converted it into a centre to help sustain the organisation as a social enterprise.”

Designed as an inclusive multifunctional events space for physical and virtual events, ‘The Steps’ finally opened in April 2021 after being delayed for more than half a year by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The impact of Google.org funding

Google.org supports Single Step in its project to create ‘Accelerators’ for young content creators. The Accelerators pair creators with mentors to teach them key skills like storytelling, journalism, critical thinking and digital marketing, with the aim of helping foster a more socially engaged discourse online.

“We’ve had a lot of media coverage over the last 4 years,” says Ivan, “And every time there is an article or video in the traditional media, there is a lot of hate in the comments underneath.”



The need for online chat exploded during the pandemic... We also moved our peer support groups from in-person to online.

He was inspired to set up the accelerator project after the Single Step story was covered by a young influencer during Pride Month in 2019.

“It was really interesting. Where there was hate in traditional media, in this influencer’s YouTube channel the comments became a meaningful dialogue. This really resonated with me and I wanted to replicate it and create more social engagement like this.”

The first Accelerator was planned for the summer of 2020, but had to be postponed due to the pandemic. Single Step realised they needed to adapt, and quickly, to reach out to young people virtually.



we are sharing stories on engaging with hate speech and that can be very devastating for young people. [...] so we support them with mentors.

“We had to focus on first things first. The need for online chat exploded during the pandemic – that need to reach out to a young kid in a small village,” says Ivan, “We also moved our peer

support groups from in-person to online. The premise of our social enterprise is very physical, so over the last year we’ve had to figure out how to provide a safe mix of physical and virtual. It’s been a fast pivot from what was planned to what is doable.”

The Accelerator programme went virtual with a live event in December 2020 featuring the director, producer and executive producer of the award-winning documentary ‘Welcome to Chechnya’, about the purge of LGBTI people from the former Soviet republic.

The physical Accelerator events restarted in April 2021 with 14 young creators selected from a competitive process. Taking place over 5 days, they worked with mentors and experts to develop a pitch, with small grants available to the six most promising concepts.

“The support of Google.org has been very important to us, not just in terms of the money but also because the association with Google brings legitimacy,” says Ivan, “During the pandemic, we had to rethink our spending, purchasing some new equipment and paying for new training. We always stayed within the spirit of the original grant and Google.org were very supportive of that.”

A second Accelerator event was held in November 2021, and included 10 young creators.



Key insights

The first accelerator was planned for the summer of 2020, but had to be postponed due to the Covid pandemic.

Single Step moved their efforts online and hosted a virtual accelerator live event in December 2020.

The event was followed-up with career counselling events and advice on job seeking.

In-person accelerator events restarted in April 2021 with 14 young creators partnered with mentors and experts over five days. The six most promising pitches were chosen to receive grants.

A second accelerator event was held in November 2021.



[...] when someone says: ‘Thank you, you’ve saved my life.’ It’s really amazing. It gives us meaning.