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Slovenian beekeepers will have good memories of July 2012. Within a new humanitarian beekeeping project we have set up an apiary with a garden full of nectar plants and a beekeeping learning trail leading up to it. This is the Centre for Training, Work and Care in the town of Draga. Young people and adults with special needs, who are clients of the Centre, now have an objective that contributes to their well-being and could help them to find a means of living in the community.

Members of the Beekeeping Association of Slovenia had been considering bringing bees closer, not only to pupils in the beekeeping clubs at primary schools, but also to young people with special needs. In collaboration with the Slovenian Convention Bureau, we gained the support of the international congress company IMEX, who financed the installation of the apiary and beekeeping learning trail, and the restoration of the greenhouse in Draga to provide seeds for honey plants. Members of IMEX collected €25,000 (US$32,500) - the evaluated cost of the project.

But that is not all: in early July, fifteen of their volunteers came to Draga for three days, leaving behind their desks and replacing them with picks and shovels.

The Beekeeping Association of Slovenia has contributed to the realisation of the project by donating honey bee colonies to settle in the apiary at the Centre, and publishing the textbook "A bee introduces itself" in a didactically modified form, translated into a format that is easy-to-read and readily understandable by clients of the Draga Centre.

There will be an opportunity to learn close-up about the life of honey bees and how to keep them by using the learning apiary, the beekeeping learning trail, and through the textbook. The learning apiary also provides employment for clients who are entrusted with the management of the bee colonies and feel that they have received a responsible mission: being important and useful is healing for everyone. In addition, they will produce seeds and grow nectar-bearing trees, shrubs and herbs for sale.

We have not heard of any similar beekeeping venture. We have successfully connected beekeeping and the beneficial effects of bee products and bees (apitherapy) with training, work and care of disabled people, and this is the first major international humanitarian project for us at the Beekeeping Association of Slovenia. We are willing to share our experiences in more detail with beekeepers in other countries and we hope to see more examples of such co-operation coming to light across the world.