



SWISS FOUNDATION OF THE
INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL SERVICE

Social and vocational integration of young people leaving residential care

Care-Leavers Integration Programme (CLIP)
Ten years later

Life's a Journey... Let's get prepared!



Life is a journey... What about your luggage? Are you ready?
How is it going? Was it expected? Did nice things happen?
Do you make contact? Friends? Build relationships?
Was it difficult? How did you cope with it? Were you prepared?
Are you prepared? Do you talk? Did you learn?
What did you experience? Everything is possible?! ...

Entrance Exit Entrance Exit Entrance Exit Exit Entrance Confidence
Super Good quality Wonderful Discontinuous Family Creative Impetus
Independence Help Good beginning New life Self-respect Respect
"Very good start in life... in my life!"

Editors



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FOREWORD

Celebrating the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the International Social Service - Bulgaria, we also mark ten years of constructive partnership since the launching of the Care Leavers Integration Programme (CLIP), a common Swiss-Bulgarian programme aiming to prepare young people leaving institutionalised care to integrate socially and professionally in Bulgarian society.

On this occasion, it is of utmost importance to reflect on our common activities and their results. In order to do so we have re-established contact with the young people that took part in the programme trying to retrace their life and achievements. We are happy to see that years after their participation in CLIP they still remember with a smile the trainings, the visits and the support they have received. The support measures implemented within the CLIP's model have helped them to develop important skills allowing them to integrate socially and professionally in Bulgarian society, despite the lack of parental care.

We are aware that the portraits highlighted in this publication represent only a few of these young people. However, they point out important issues, such as the need for continuous and individualised long-term support in order to fully realise their potential and enjoy a positive future despite their difficult past. The testimonies also show that if the model established by CLIP (preparation, transition, after-care) is observed, integration is facilitated.

The model of action promoted in CLIP favoured a positive behavioural change in the attitude of the professionals toward the young person by encouraging an individual approach based on the potential of the young person rather than on his/her deficiencies. CLIP's experience has shown that the opportunity to have a trustful relationship with a reference person, allows the young person to develop confidence, to catalyse her/his potential and thus to increase his/her chances of success in life.

The vision of the International Social Service is that every child has the right to receive protection and an environment matching their particular needs. We have observed that children and young people growing up in social institutions, particularly girls, were an easy target for human trafficking and exploitation. In collaboration with local authorities and organisations, the ISS sought for the prevention of these practices by encouraging alternatives to specialised institutions, by improving professionals' capacities for better accompaniment of every child and by strengthening young people's own resources to tackle life. We are glad the partnership organisations have continued to build on our common experience.

The last decade witnessed positive structural and legal changes in the child protection system in Bulgaria. New services and alternatives to institutionalization have emerged ensuring that children and young people who do not have the chance to live with their parents or who live in difficult social and economic conditions, receive support in the family or in alternative services allowing them to fully develop their resources. Even though the number of children in institutions is declining and consequently there are fewer care leavers, the measures and structures established should adapt to the new social realities and benefit other young people in difficulty and in need of support.

Equal opportunities for everyone may only become reality in Bulgaria if a strong advocacy moves forward the Bulgarian social system in order to meet the needs of the most disadvantaged groups, especially young people.

Sabina Sabeva
Executive Director of ISS - Bulgaria
Rolf Widmer
Director Swiss Foundation of the ISS

According to the 2011 UNICEF report, the situation of the children in Bulgaria is worrying. Even though decreasing, the number of children in the specialised institutions continues to be high (more than 5000 children) and the poverty is determined as the major factor.

It is also important to take into account the general decrease of the child population in Bulgaria, which indicates that the relative decrease of the number of children in specialised institutions is not at all that drastic and the number of Roma children –still high.

In the recent years significant changes are being made for modernising the facilities and the organisation of the institutions for children deprived of parental care. Alternatives to the specialised institutions have also been developed.

During the “transition period” there were difficulties in overcoming the “collective” approach to these children, each of them with their own personal story and specific needs. In order for them to grow as young people of full value, providing good facilities is necessary, but far from enough. To be able to make achievements and for their dreams to come true, and to even start dreaming, they (like any other child) need a supporting and positive environment, a support from society.

Only a decade ago, children and young people in institutions were cared for one way or another, but rarely acquired social, household or professional skills. After turning the age of 18 or after graduating from high school, the young

people left the institution regardless of their preparedness to do so. Some return to their families. However, for most of them the “Home” is their only home, and the tutors - the only family they knew.

In 2002 the International Social Service started a programme for social and professional realisation of young people leaving HRBCDPC (Care Leavers Integration Programme, CLIP), to fill a gap in the social system existing for more than 10 years after the beginning of the transition period. The main objectives of the project are to create equal opportunities for children and young people raised in specialised institutions; to apply individual approach and to ensure psychosocial support; to create a social environment and support for their professional development.

The positive results of achieving these goals could be seen when the children and young people, included in the project, are able to give an answer to the question of what they intend to do after they finish their education. A particular success of the programme is when the young people have developed the competences and skills that can help them cope with life with their own resources. An undisputable success is when after a few years the young people have achieved sustainability in their social and professional relationships.

In order to promote the vocational abilities and the social integration of children raised in institutions, cooperation between the educational system and future employers is necessary. In this respect, the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) and of Labour and Social Policy (MoLSP) developed a National Programme officially adopted in 2000. After the ratification of the Child Protection Act and the creation of a State Agency for Child Protection, a series of national and international social care and social work projects were developed in order to put the "Child Act" into practice, among them being the Child Welfare Reform Project addressing children in Bulgaria.

The Care-leavers Integration Programme (CLIP) was developed by ISS within these dynamics as none of the above mentioned initiatives were addressing directly the issue of youngsters (called care leavers) between 15 and 20 year old who were leaving institutional care to start an autonomous life in the Bulgarian society.

CLIP was developed to facilitate the social and professional integration of the care-leavers, through a fruitful collaboration between SSI-Switzerland and SSI-Bulgaria and through the exchange of expertise between the two countries. CLIP was implemented with the financial contribution of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the two Bulgarian Ministries already mentioned, in 3 pilot municipalities: Lovech, Sevlievo and Veliko Turnovo between 2003 and 2006 and became a national model comprising methodological and financial standards.

ROMAN: "At first, we didn't believe that anyone would do something about us."



We meet Roman a day after his birthday. He tells that he celebrated with friends, some of which he knows from the Home in Sevlievo. Roman has spent most of his childhood and adolescence in specialised institutions and these were hard times for him. He graduated in Sevlievo and lived in the HCDPC. Because of the specifics of the school which he was transferred from, he needed to catch up in order to go to a regular school and ended up in a class with younger high school students. He has

successfully graduated from the Professional High School of Ceramics and Furniture and would like to deal with design and interior architecture. His dream was to study in the National Art Academy.

After leaving the Home, Roman was in the same delicate situation as any young people with his destiny: to find a job and a place to live, since he had no one to go to. He was accepted to settle in the Protected Home, established by the CLIP programme in the same year. He has found a job with employment contract and has been working in the same company in Sevlievo for nearly seven years now.

While working to support himself, Roman was preparing hard for the exams in the Art Academy. He did not give up on his dream. With the support of the social workers at the Centre for Social Rehabilitation and Integration, Roman was planning to sit again for the exam. His teacher was Motko Bumov – an artist from Veliko Tarnovo – and a year later he attended classes in Sofia, but was not admitted in the elite school. His only regret is he wasn't able to thank properly the big artist before he passed away last year.

"CLIP allowed a lot of beautiful things to happen".

Artistic and charming, Roman was the media star of the project and has participated in a number of shows and meetings, but does not like pomposity. For several years he was a volunteer at the HCDPC, where he talked to children and adolescents and shares his life experience. „CLIP allowed a lot of beautiful things to happen“, says Roman with a smile. He remembers even today what he learned during the programme. “At first we didn't believe that anyone would do something about us and when we were asked what we need we didn't know what to answer” he says. “Nobody asked us that before. The training and meetings in different cities put us together and helped us to know ourselves and the other young people we thought we knew.” The young man says they keep in touch with each another even though they live in different cities.

Today Roman continues to be occupied with art, though not professionally. He has made several exhibitions in Sevlievo and is preparing a new one for this summer. He hopes one day to show his paintings outside Bulgaria, too. Some years ago he tried to receive guidance from an artist about what are the procedural steps for organising an exhibition. He met lack of understanding. “Fortunately, other people stood behind me and I had my first exhibition, my first solo exhibition!” he says.

For several years now Roman participates as a designer in the performances and competitions of the vocal formation Upstreamvoices under the direction of Tsenka Goralska, whom he calls his spiritual mother. He says he learned a lot from her and receives a lot of support. He tells me about the design and explains that it is like working with children. Unexpected things happen. After each concert they meet and talk. They discuss any issues and so have them fixed for the next concert. „But there will be new problems and we'll talk again and we'll find new solutions. And so the last concert went smoothly, simply floating... but there was no audience” he finishes the story ironically. „The problem is with us“, he claims „it's just the organisation“. According to him it is the same with the children from the specialised institutions and it is important to work as a team, to be willing and, of course, to be honest.

OLEG: "If you just sit and wait, nothing's going to happen".

Oleg spent most of his life in specialised institutions. When the CLIP started "I saw something was being done, something that was really of a great help for people leaving the institutions", he says. What impressed him the most was "the closeness with the children... the attitude, the way of communicating with the children... the explanations about what awaits us in the future, how to approach... and mostly they treated us like normal people." It has taught them to respect, listen and treat others well, as well as some social and household skills and how to achieve a professional career. He remembers the last months and the moment when they taught them how to write a motivational letter, "what is described in, what to emphasize on... and how to apply."

Recently he has seen on the TV a material about young people who were delving in the trash bins and he has recognised the children from the specialised institution he was in before he went to Veliko Tarnovo. "If it wasn't for programmes like CLIP, I probably wouldn't have made it, too", Oleg says sadly. "It's very important to have people you can talk to." He thinks that the volunteers from the university have a special part in this, too. He finds the organisation of trainings and travels to be very good. He also liked it when they would gather in groups during the breaks, they offered them coffee and the chance to know each other and continue the discussions, describing, perhaps unconsciously, the European corridor diplomacy. "This is a big, very big plus for the children" Oleg adds.



"It's very important to have people you can talk to."

Since his graduation and until now he is working in a production company. He found this job all by himself after applying for several ads in the newspapers and internet and is pleased with it in general. Very interested in computers, he applied to the university in Veliko Tarnovo in 2004. He failed the math exam, but he does not give up working with computers. He learned alone to install, to program and to support a network. Enterprising and confident of his abilities, Oleg registered his own company for computer support with the idea this to be his principal occupation. He took care of his company's advertisement, too, but the financial crisis had played a trick on him and there is less work now, but still, "people know me and call me", Oleg adds.

According to Oleg, the young person leaving an institution should not despair and should work actively towards their goal in order to succeed, because "if you just sit and wait, nothing's going to happen".

GALINA: "I want to give a better life to at least one child and I believe I can do it".



Eleven years old, Galina was brought by her grandmother to the Juvenile Delinquency Commission (JDC), after running away from home and from her mother's abuse. In this very critical moment in her life, she received a crucial personalised support from a professional in the JDC who was sensitive to the opinion and the needs of the young person. After the determined refusal of Galina to go back to her mother, this person accompanied her and helped her to find a better living environment.

"At first it was scary at the Home" admits Galina, who believes she has a difficult character. This is the first reaction of most of the children when they enter a specialised institution. Over time they get really close with the tutors and with the other children. "That was my family and it was hard for me to part from them." She thinks the graduates of 2003 and 2004 were especially united.

She graduated from high school with major of "Design in the silicate production" with excellent grades in history and literature and was admitted to study law in Veliko Tarnovo University. "Afterwards, things turned out differently" she says. She started to work and a few years later she received an offer from a friend for a job in Switzerland. She was not seeing any chance for advancement in Sevlievo, so she decided to go. Her disappointment was big when she arrived there and saw what kind of job it was. Tenacious and confident, she does not despair. With some help from acquaintances she has found another job and accommodation in Switzerland.

Galina would like to work in her specialty. Since she needs an additional diploma from Switzerland, she continues to study German intensively. She is also determined to adopt a child from Bulgaria in a few years. "I want to give a better life to at least one of these children and I believe I can do it."

To be able to succeed, any young person should in the first place "believe in themselves" Galina says.

"At first it was scary in the institution."

MINCHO wants to study Pedagogy to “help young people whose path is difficult, like mine”

The life brought Mincho to Lovech, where he graduated from the high school in 2003. Initially, the individual plan after leaving the institution he discussed with the social workers was to settle down in Gabrovo and work there, as this was his native city. During this period of reflexion about the future and preparation for the further step to do, Mincho got interested in continuing his studies. Simultaneously, he did not find his place in Gabrovo and in just three days he returned back to Tarnovo. “I didn’t know anyone and I didn’t want to stay there and start everything all over” he says.

His dream after leaving the Home was to study Preschool and Primary School Pedagogy in the University of Veliko Tarnovo, “so that I can help young people whose path is difficult, like mine” he says. His independent life did not start as expected, since he was not admitted to the university. During these hard times “the former director of ISS Bulgaria helped me the most with support, accommodation, preparing the application documents and guidance”.

After discharging his still obligatory at that time military service, Mincho did not give up the dream to study and had prepared hard for the admission exams at the university, but for several years he could not pass them. Meanwhile he had changed several jobs, because the employers did not observe the terms of the contracts. In Veliko Tarnovo he had the chance to live for a year in the Protected Home, established by the CLIP. This was a big help while he was trying to achieve an independent life and “at that time I didn’t have any money and was just starting to look for a job.” In 2007 he started to work in a company and says he is extremely satisfied with the attitude of his employer and his fellow colleagues. He preferred not to share his past and insisted that the employer “treats him the same way as the others, not to make any difference, not to have any standing off.”



“I am very grateful for their help. The point was once we settle down, not to seek help from them again”

I started fresh with this job and haven’t seek any help from the CSRI or any other institutions since then”, says Mincho with confidence. “I am very grateful for their help, but the point was once we settle down, not to seek help from them again.” Now Mincho lives with his girlfriend, who graduated from the Veliko Tarnovo University. He does not rule out the possibility to try again to go to the university even if as a correspondence student, since he has to work.

GENO: "The most important thing is to know how to establish contacts."



Geno is fighting for his life from the very first breathing. After losing his parents, he almost suffocated for several seconds after his birth which caused achondroplasia. He has spent all his life in specialised institutions – first in a rehabilitation home in Lukovit and then in the Home for Children Deprived of Parental Care in Lovech. After leaving Lovech, he went in Sofia to join his girlfriend. The first year he stayed jobless, because he did not have “ties” in Sofia. Together with a friend, they started a bookstore, so he worked there for three years until its closing.

He was actively seeking and establishing contacts with people of the business and after the bookstore was closed, he started to work in the municipality – first as junior inspector and now as a senior inspector already. According to him “in order to find a job, the most important thing is to know how to establish contacts. “

Geno has pleasant memories from his training. He was most impressed by the trips and orientation competitions. He has learned how to find his path in unknown places and later this has helped him “to find his place” in general. Geno was vice-president of the National Organisation “Small Bulgarian People” and was working hard to inspire confidence and resilient spirit to people like him, because he does not think they need pity. He is fighting for every centimetre of freedom in the world of the big people, although he is much bigger than his height. He has even adapted his car to facilitate his circulation in the busy streets of Sofia. His advice to young people, leaving the institutions, is “don’t think that the State has some obligations to them. The sooner they understand this, the better“.

“Don’t to think that the State has some obligations to you”.

TODOR: "It's nice to have projects like CLIP, it makes us feel less isolated".



Communicative and initiative, Todor likes challenges and precision. He graduated from the professional high school in Lovech in 2005 and, after leaving the Home, lived in a Protected Home for about a year. He found them wonderful, with all the facilities that even an ordinary family might be lacking. "You go there and feel a normal person", he says. With the assistance of the social worker from the CSRI, Kalina, he has quickly found a job. It even turned out that he was the only specialist amongst his colleagues, but still he was one of the

people who got fired during reduction of the personnel.

His life in the Home was marked by the support of one of the workers there. Todor was often invited by him and he learnt what was like to be at home environment and how to maintain a house. He says that respect is one of the most important values he acquired. "The trainings and visits made us a team", while before that everyone was for himself.

Through acquaintances and thanks to his motivation to work, he was hired to work in a car workshop in Lovech, where he was doing more than well. He succeeded to attract great number of new clients, but the promised rise of the salary has never come. He then decided to go to Varna with his girlfriend and they stay there for several years. He did not have to look for a job for too long. He boldly introduced himself in a car wash and asked if they need a worker. From there he moved to the same company's tyre garage. Back in Lovech, he has easily found a job in only few months. He likes working with cars and dreams of his own business. He has gained a lot of experience and clients who respect him and he does not lack boldness. This fall he will start to study in the Technical College in Lovech, majoring in Automobile Engineering, to improve his qualification.

"The trainings and visits made us a team".

He states that he does not want to search for his parents, because he does not think they might have anything in common. It is beyond him how a parent can abandon his child and never try to find out what happened to her/him. "Nothing justifies the parents to abandon their child. Not money, nothing!"

"It's nice to have projects like CLIP, because that makes us feel less isolated", Todor says. What is important for Todor is be communicative, prudent and have competences at work in order to achieve good results. "When it happens to be at an impasse, the decision for me is in talks", he emphasises.

GENCHO is dreaming to work as a cook: “The people in Bulgaria are not tolerant”.

As many of the other young people Gencho has also spent his life in specialised institutions. From the Home for rehabilitation in Lukovit he was sent to the Home for Children Deprived of Parental Care in Lovech. After graduating from school in 2003 as a cook and left the Home in Lovech, Gencho went to Sofia to look for a job. He believed that the capital was offering more opportunities than Lovech. He was looking for a job as cook for six months without result and says that it is difficult for people to understand and accept him.

Thanks to the willingness and contacts of the people in Sofia, who were working for the CLIP, in the period 2003-2004 he started to work in a car wash and garage. He is still working there even today and for his work he receives a shelter. “The people from CLIP gave us the initial impetus to life”, he says. He is in very good terms with his employer and calls him “father” as well as with his family. He is very grateful for their sympathy and they have plans this year to go together at the seaside.



“The people from CLIP gave us the initial impetus to life”.

He still has the dream to work as a cook, but he is refused everywhere with the argument that he is missing the necessary experience, although he thinks they just cannot accept him. He has passed through some very hard situations he neither wants to remember nor tell about. “The people in Bulgaria are not tolerant and the institutions do not operate the way they have to”.

In the end of our meeting, he affirms that he is very pleased we met, because this is some change in his everyday life. He has lots of friends, but does not have time and money to travel and meet them. He remembers with a smile about the trainings and trips, organised by CLIP and hopes that some day he will meet again his friends.

DOBRI: “in the real life ... you have to cope on your own.”



Dobri was placed in the specialised institution in the village of Balvan when he was in the first school class and then in 2003 was moved to the HCDPC in Veliko Tarnovo. There, in 2007 he graduated from the Vocational High School in Tourism. His stay in the Protected Living Space¹ in the SI established within the framework of CLIP when he was in the 12th class, gave him the chance to gain some important household habits. After leaving the Home, Dobri spent one year in a programme’s apartment called “Protected Home”.

He has found a job within two weeks after leaving the Home, so he never has to register in the Employment Bureau. “The Centre for Social Rehabilitation and Integration in Veliko Tarnovo assisted me with guidance on how to prepare the appropriate application”, he says. Dobromir has worked at this position for one year and then started to work in a hotel. The conditions there, however, turned out to be not that beneficial. It happened to work for 36 hours without rest. The employer once stroke at him finding Dobri asleep from overfatigue. “Instead of showing some understanding that after the sleepless night I need a rest, he started hitting me and yelling.” Not willing to tolerate such attitude, Dobri left and worked for the next one year as supervisor on different construction sites. With the help of a friend, he found a job giving assistance in stables where he received free courses. He then started to participate in competitions and to win tournaments in the amateur group, because he had no funds to pay for the courses, needed to get a professional jockey license.

“The CSRI in Veliko Tarnovo assisted me with guidance on how to prepare the appropriate application.”

“The training under the programme have taught me to be like chameleon, to adapt to different situation, people and customs”, says Dobri. For several months he is working in a hotel in Vitosha Mountain helping to “revive” the hotel. He gets well along his employer. “I learned how to communicate with people during the trainings and during my stay in the Protected Home, because, in the HCDPC we were mostly watching TV”, he explains.

During the short periods when he had no job, Dobri was chopping woods. “An old man taught me how to earn money by gathering nails on the construction sites and giving them for scraps. This was an honest way to have money and ensure the hygiene of the construction site.” He mentions that his life in the Protected Home was not easy. His mates were more unruly and were not working and the neighbours always came to complaint to him in case of problems. He even once had to pay some damages his mates had caused. He says he has learned to manage his budget with the support of the social workers form the CSRI and to value money as well. “Half of my salary was spent to pay the dwelling”, explains Dobromir and adds: “We have to pay something, too, of course. It is not possible to only get things. While you are in the HCDPC, they give you everything, but when you are out in the real life ... you have to cope on your own.”

¹In the Protected Living Spaces young people are placed to live during their last year in the specialized institutions in order to have some practical experience and skills to live independent life.

VALERI is looking for his way

After leaving the specialised Institution for Children Deprived of Parental Care (HCDPC) in Lovech, Valeri has encountered great difficulties in finding his way. His professional training in tanning was not of big help to find a job, because there were only few enterprises in this industry in Lovech.

In the beginning with the help of the social workers from the CSRI, he found a job in the company Balkan and he liked it a lot. However, in 2007 when there were dismissals, he was left jobless. Since then he could not find a permanent position. People from the CSRI and from the Employment Bureau are offering him some other jobs, but Valeri looks for an appropriate job for him. “I want to work as a safeguard, but there are no such openings and there is no job in Lovech”, he regrets.

Meanwhile he is working part time at private construction sites. He managed to cope with the finances, including with the support of a group from Sweden for some years. Honest and responsive, but maybe also somehow naïve, Valeri is now in a very difficult situation. A week before our meeting, he knew that he has to leave the municipal dwelling he has been living since 2004. He has found another dwelling to rent and everything looked in order to the day of our meeting. Some days later I knew he was again without shelter, financial means or job. The financial support from the Swedish group was also suspended. “Very rarely somebody will give you a hand and I do not want to disturb people all the time. The crisis and the unemployment make hard times for everybody”.

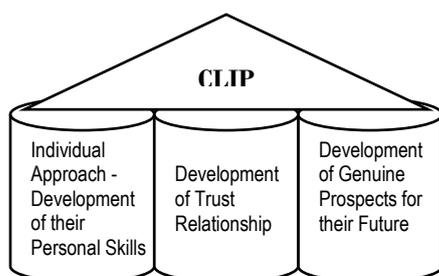


“Very rarely somebody will give you a hand and I do not want to disturb people.”

Valeri has left the institution years ago, but the social worker of the Community Support Centre in Lovech does not refuse to voluntarily assist him, even though this is not officially within their duties. “I have nobody, neither brothers, nor sisters”, he regrets.

In life “we should be good, take care of our own family and not be part of those people who make children and leave them.” His dream is to have a stable and well paid job, his own “at home” and a family.

The model developed by the project is based on three pillars ensuring the progressive autonomisation of the care-leavers: individual approach and development of their personal skills and competences and an aptitude to confront life with their own resources, development of trust relationship and of genuine prospects for their future. Young people need perspective and a



professional orientation. His/her independence is achieved when they have a place to live, a job, a financial basis and dispose of a social net.

The Concept

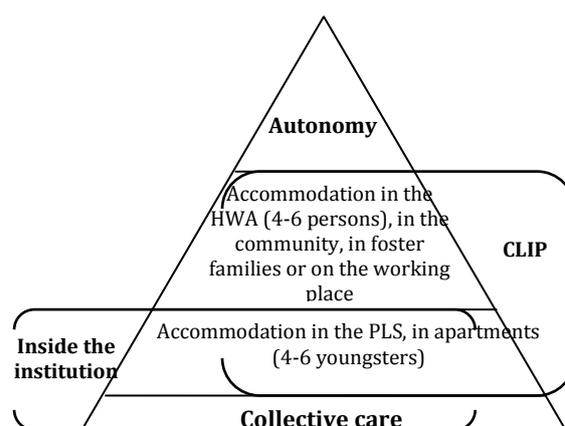
- ⇒ The young person is at the centre of attention of all the professionals involved;
- ⇒ The preparation for independent life for young people begins at least two years before leaving the institution. The appropriate arrangements such as practical trainings have been established;
- ⇒ After leaving the institution, the young person is supported and accompanied on the road to independence by professionals: an external system for professional support should be build (outside the SI);
- ⇒ The young person is supported after leaving the institution in the development of their own social and professional network with their own resources.

The Achievements

Different services have been created within the framework of CLIP, on the way to autonomy of every young person raised in residential care and about to leave them.

The Protected Living Space (PLS) (in the SI) and the Half-Way Apartments (HWA)

(outside the SI) are accommodations designed to gradually lead them towards autonomy. The Centres for Social Rehabilitation and Integration (CSRI) are multidisciplinary teams providing individual support to all the children in residential care during their transition period, through trainings for the formation of individual, social and professional skills, through visits to places beyond the “boundaries” of the “Home” and through meetings with professional in the public administrations.



At the end of the programme, the Bulgarian municipalities took over the activities implemented by CLIP and the model induced by CLIP became a national standard. New methodologies were adopted at national level to regalement these new social services. The PLS are currently known as Transitional Homes, the HWA - as Supervised Homes, and the CSRI are supplemented by the Community Support Centres.

In the period 2006-2009, CLIP was duplicated in three new municipalities in Bulgaria as CLIP 2: Smolyan, Vratza, Stara Zagora.

The dynamics of the programme also engaged other municipalities to ensure a better start in the life of the care-leavers. Considering the undeniable merits of CLIP I and the similar life conditions in other post-soviet countries and particularly the lack of support for young care-leavers, ISS decided to adapt CLIP to the Ukrainian realities and in 2010 started its implementation in the region of Kiev for a period of three years.

During the hard years of transition, many parents have abandoned their children in specialised institutions, mostly because of the unfavourable social situation of the family, because of poverty and illiteracy. The first visits of “the Homes” for children in Bulgaria appealed to the team of the ISS the need of change, because these children were not obtaining emotional support to help them to know themselves and to be more self-confident, nor were they receiving the proper preparation for leaving the institution. The young people were almost ignorant about the world outside the “Home” they grew up and therefore are apt to easy fall under the influence of organisations, involved in criminal activities. They do not know their rights and obligations and many of them have also problems in school, so their chances for professional career are very small.

The methods of work, inherited from the past, were ignoring the individual needs and emotions of every child. The CLIP introduces the individual approach and assessment of the individual needs of every child and their preparation for the life “outside the Home”.

In this study, we have questioned us whether the young people have been prepared for the life outside the Home and how has their life been in this period of more than five years after starting to live an independent life. The conversations with thirty-two young men and women show that most of them have succeeded in their social and professional integration, they have a dwelling, job and social environment and most of all – they rely on themselves.

Recommendations

In terms of approach and follow-up:

- ∞ To sustain the resource and solution-oriented approach, developed in the programme, towards the young people;
- ∞ To start the preparation for independent life more than two years before leaving the institution, to avoid accumulating too much indispensable information in a short period making it difficult to digest;
- ∞ To be attentive to the accompaniment of girls and young women as exposed to a higher risk of trafficking;
- ∞ To ensure a continuous accompaniment through all stages and reinforce the individual follow-up of every young person in difficulty;
- ∞ To keep a long-term contacts and help young people to create a social and professional network outside the SI;

The system of social services:

- ∞ To be flexible in order to ensure that the needs of the most deprived people are met;
- ∞ To adapt the social structures to the current needs of the young people and not vice versa;
- ∞ To develop individualised and sustainable approach for young people willing to continue their studies including the preparation for admission exams and free housing during the first year of studies;
- ∞ To adapt the structures established within CLIP to the new social realities so that they continue to serve the most deprived groups of the Bulgarian society;

To enhance the application of the Quality for Children Standards (Annexe 2)

LINKS

Quality4Children Standards for out-of-home child care in Europe:

http://www.quality4children.info/content/cms,id,89,nodeid,31,_country,at,_language,en.html

The CLIP Manual for professionals, 2006: http://www.iss-bg.org/en/documents/uploads/Publications/CLIP_Manual_en.pdf

The CLIP Workbook for care leavers, 2006: http://www.iss-bg.org/en/documents/uploads/Publications/CLIP%20Workbook_en.pdf

International Social Service - Bulgaria: <http://www.iss-bg.org/en/default.aspx>

The Swiss Foundation of the ISS: www.ssiss.ch/en/

Monitoring report on the implementation of the Action Plan for the National Strategy “Vision for deinstitutionalisation of children in Bulgaria”: <http://sacp.government.bg>

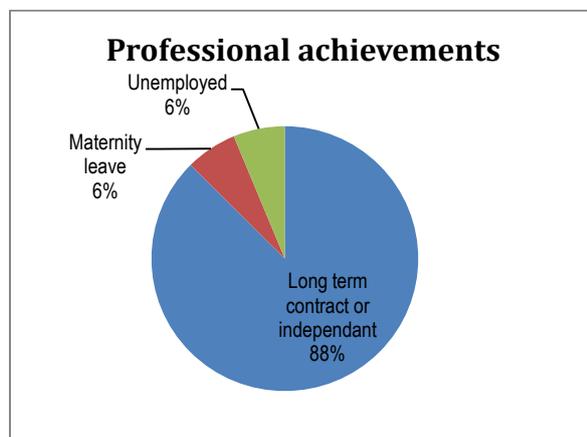
Year report for 2011 by UNICEF Bulgaria, August 2012: <http://www.unicef.bg/public/files/press/56.pdf>

ANNEXE 1: GENERAL PICTURE OF THE INTERVIEWS

Around 140 young boys and girls from the Home for Children Deprived of Parental Care (HCDPC) have participated in the CLIP in the period 2003-2007. Now they are 24 to 29 year old.

The principle objective of the study is to follow up the development of the young men and women after they have left the HCDPC as to their employment, residential settlement and social integration, as well as about the difficulties they have encountered after they started to live outside of the specialised institution, about specific skills and abilities that are necessary to be able to overcome such difficulties and to whom they address in such needy situations.

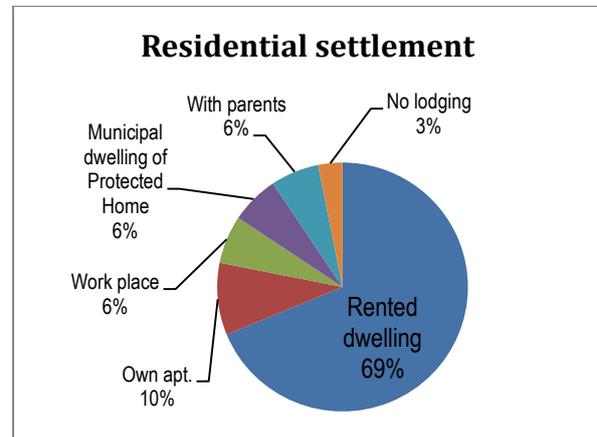
Twenty-six face-to-face meetings were held and six conversations on the telephone. According to data from the young people, the tutors and directors of the HCDPC and from social workers (former and operative), it was found out that at least 24 people are outside the country. The fact that after more than five years only three of thirty-two people contacted had no clear memories about the components of the programme shows that it has played an important role in their life.



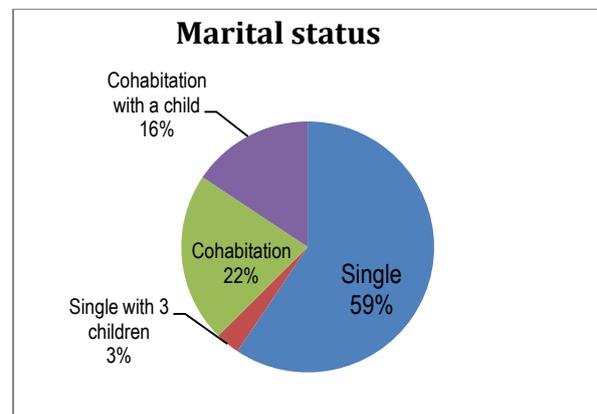
Currently, 88% of the interviewed have permanent employment and a significant part of them have kept their job for more than five years. Two of them have succeeded to leading positions and one is self-employed. They have a variety of professions: teachers, designers, operators in industry, in constructions, in hotels and restaurants.

From the thirty-two interviewed, five have declared their will to continue their education in

higher school establishments. Three of them have successfully graduated, two did not succeed to pass the admittance examinations. Two of the young people, who had no such intentions before, have shared plans to continue their education. One of them will be in the first year during this academic year.



The majority or 22 people are living in a rented dwelling and pay monthly rent. They are unanimous that this is not a stable situation and would like to buy their own home. One young man has difficulties to find a permanent dwelling by the moment of the study. This situation is recent and expected to be resolved soon.



There are no people among the interviewed to have concluded civil matrimony. They consider it as unnecessary formality. Five of them have a child, but have not concluded matrimony and 19 of them are not engaged. One of the participants in the study is a “solitary” mother taking care of her three children since the separation with their father, who was abusing of her. She does not want her children to have her destiny, to be raised in an institution and is doing her best for them to

live in good environment and to have the education she does not have herself.

Difficulties encountered in the years after leaving the specialised institution

Great number of the young people has encountered difficulties in their professional career. They say that in Bulgaria it is almost impossible to find a job without “ties”. Some of the participants in the study have faced problems with the prejudices of the society as to people, who grew up in a specialised institution as well as to disabled people. The latter was an obstacle to take positions although in these particular cases it was referring to diseases that were irrelevant for the duties of the respective working places.

Some of the young people of Roma origin were having difficulties to rent a dwelling although they were regularly paying the rent. Two other young men have no sufficient incomes to pay a rent. One young man is living where he works, because the place is too far away from the nearest agglomerations.

How do they overcome difficulties?

„If you do not find an exit, look for another entrance”, Angel says wisely.

According to the young people, the most important thing is to be resilient and to have self-confidence. They recommend people of their destiny not to rely on the State, but on their own efforts, to be serious, organised and to have good habits of working. It is important to know how to stand for their opinion, to respect other people, but also not to allow to be treated in an intolerable way. There is a clear need of better knowledge of the rights, resulting from their social status.

Whom they are addressing in case of need?

Today the young people demonstrate remarkable self-confidence as to the difficult situations they

are facing in the “real life”. Most of them say that in the last years it was in very rare occasions they have had to address anyone in case of need. About 80% manage to overcome the problems on their own or to maybe ask friends and relatives for support. Two people rely on the cooperation of the social workers in the Protected homes and the Centre for Community Support and there is one, who does not know were to address for help.

The interviewed share the opinion that the support they have obtained in their last years in the Home was very valuable for them. They say there are young people, who did not succeed in coping after leaving the institutions. They think this is because such people are lacking the will to live a more independent life, because they are used “everything to be given to them ready“. According to one of the young girl, the trainings are starting too late, especially for those, who have never knew the "normal" family environment, so in this last year there is too much to learn and too much to change in their upbringing. There are also some opinions that many of the young women are already tied with a child in this last year.

Over 60% of the interviewed do not maintain contacts with the tutors from the Home and the collaborators under the CLIP, considering they do not need help. One of the young men explains that it was the goal in fact – not to seek their assistance after being settled. About 10% maintain friendly relations and meet them when they have a chance.

Many of the young people mention that the trainings, the visits in other cities and in general the attitude of the people working or volunteering for the CLIP has helped them to better know themselves and their classmates and has united them. More than 70% of the young people maintain contacts with each other more than five years after leaving the specialised institution and all declare their desire to meet again.

ANNEXE 2: QUALITY STANDARDS FOR « OUT-OF-HOME » CHILD CARE IN EUROPE

In cooperation with the FICE, the IFCO and SOS-Kinderdorf International, the ISS Switzerland has drafted quality standards for “out-of-home” child care in Europe, in a report fully available, in several languages, on the “Quality 4 Children” website: <http://www.quality4children.info>

Decision-making and admission process

Standard 1: THE CHILD AND HIS/HER FAMILY OF ORIGIN RECEIVE SUPPORT DURING THE DECISION-MAKING-PROCESS

⇒ The child and his/her family of origin have the right to an intervention if they express the wish to change their living situation or when the situation demands it. The child’s safety and best interests are the highest priority. The child and his/her family of origin are always listened to and respected.

Standard 2: THE CHILD IS EMPOWERED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

⇒ All persons involved listen to and respect the child. The child is adequately informed about his/her situation, encouraged to express his/her views and to participate in this process according to his/her level of understanding.

Standard 3: A PROFESSIONAL DECISION-MAKING PROCESS ENSURES THE BEST POSSIBLE CARE FOR THE CHILD

⇒ During the out-of-home care process, siblings are cared for together. Separate placement is only indicated if it serves the well-being of the siblings. In this case, it is ensured that they maintain contact.

Standard 4: SIBLINGS ARE CARED FOR TOGETHER

⇒ During the out-of-home care process, siblings are cared for together. Separate placement is only indicated if it serves the well-being of the siblings. In this case, it is ensured that they maintain contact.

Standard 5: THE TRANSITION TO THE NEW HOME IS WELL PREPARED AND SENSITIVELY IMPLEMENTED

⇒ After the agreement on the care-form has been made, the future care organisation prepares the child's admission thoroughly. The welcome must be gradual and cause as little disruption as possible. Transition to the new placement is arranged as a process whose main purpose is to ensure the child's best interests and the well-being of all relevant persons involved.

Standard 6: THE OUT-OF-HOME CARE PROCESS IS GUIDED BY AN INDIVIDUAL CARE PLAN

⇒ An individual care plan is created during the decision-making process and further developed and implemented during the entire out-of-home care process. This plan is intended to guide the overall development of the child. Generally, the care plan defines the developmental status of the child, sets objectives and measures and clarifies the resources needed to support the overall development of the child.

Care-taking process

Standard 7: THE CHILD’S PLACEMENT MATCHES HIS/HER NEEDS, LIFE SITUATION AND ORIGINAL SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

⇒ The child is given the opportunity to grow up in an inclusive, supportive, protective and caring environment. He/she has the chance to maintain contact with his/her original social environment. Family-based care options are a priority.

Standard 8: THE CHILD MAINTAINS CONTACT WITH HIS/HER FAMILY OF ORIGIN

⇒ The child’s relationship with his/her family of origin is encouraged, maintained and supported if it is in the best interests of the child.

Standard 9: CAREGIVERS ARE QUALIFIED AND HAVE ADEQUATE WORKING CONDITIONS

⇒ Caregivers are thoroughly assessed, selected and trained before taking on the responsibility of caring for a child. They receive continuous training and professional support to ensure the overall development of the child.

Standard 10: THE CAREGIVER'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHILD IS BASED ON UNDERSTANDING AND RESPECT

⇒ The caregiver pays individual attention to the child and makes a conscious effort to build up trust and to understand him/her. The caregiver always communicates openly, honestly and respectfully with the child.

Standard 11: THE CHILD IS EMPOWERED TO ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE IN MAKING DECISIONS THAT DIRECTLY AFFECTS HIS/HER LIFE

⇒ The child is recognised as the expert of his/her own life. The child is informed, listened to, taken seriously and his/her resilience is recognised as a strong potential. The child is encouraged to express his/her feelings and experiences.

Standard 12: THE CHILD IS CARED FOR IN APPROPRIATE LIVING CONDITIONS

⇒ The living standards and infrastructure of the care organisation satisfy the child's needs in respect to comfort, security, healthy living conditions as well as uninhibited access to education and to the community.

Standard 13: CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS RECEIVE APPROPRIATE CARE

⇒ Caregivers are continuously and specifically trained and supported to meet the special needs of the children in their care.

Standard 14: THE CHILD/YOUNG ADULT IS CONTINUOUSLY PREPARED FOR AN INDEPENDENT LIVING

⇒ The child/young adult is supported in shaping his/her future towards becoming a self-reliant, self-responsible and participating member of society. He/she has access to education and is given the opportunity to acquire life skills and adopt values. The child/young adult is supported in developing self-esteem. This allows him/her to feel strong and secure and to cope with difficulties.

Leaving-care process

Standard 15: THE LEAVING-CARE PROCESS IS THOROUGHLY PLANNED AND IMPLEMENTED

⇒ The leaving-care process is a crucial stage in out-of-home childcare and is thoroughly planned and implemented. It is primarily based on the child's/young adult's individual care plan. The child/young adult is recognised as an expert regarding the quality of his/her care. His/her feedback is essential for further developing the quality of the care system and of the respective care model.

Standard 16: THE COMMUNICATION IN THE LEAVING-CARE PROCESS IS CONDUCTED IN A USEFUL AND APPROPRIATE MANNER

⇒ The child and his/her family of origin have the right to an intervention if they express the wish to change their living situation or when the situation demands it. The child's safety and best interests are the highest priority. The child and his/her family of origin are always listened to and respected.

Standard 17: THE CHILD/YOUNG ADULT IS EMPOWERED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE LEAVING-CARE PROCESS

⇒ The leaving-care process is based on the individual care plan. The child/young adult is empowered to express opinions and preferences about his/her current situation and future life. The child/young adult participates in the planning and implementation of the leaving-care process.

Standard 18: FOLLOW-UP, CONTINUOUS SUPPORT AND CONTACT POSSIBILITIES ARE ENSURED

⇒ After the child/young adult has left out-of-home care, he/she has the opportunity to receive assistance and support. The care organisation strives to ensure that he/she does not perceive the leaving-care process as a new strong disruption. If the young adult is of age, the care organisation should continue offering support and contact possibilities.

Support system can only be efficient if roles and functions of all actors are well defined and if a good coordination between them is ensured.



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