

PREPARATION FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING



SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES
INTERNATIONAL

Briefing Paper

A young woman with long dark hair, wearing a grey sweater, stands with her arms crossed, looking upwards towards a bright blue sky filled with white clouds. A green speech bubble is positioned above her head, containing the text 'I MATTER'.

I MATTER

Issue 1. September 2009

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IMPRINT

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EDITORIAL



The journey from being a child to being an independent adult is an adventure – we all remember how excited we were to move out, or to receive our first salary. Certain aspects of an independent life such as house hunting, finding a job, engaging in relationships and starting a family might be challenging. The help of the family in this important transition phase is crucial. The family might give advice, offer a place to stay if there is a need to or give financial support throughout the studies.

But what if a young person does not have a supportive family network? What if this young person could not grow up with her or his family for various reasons, and grew up in alternative care?

Young people leaving alternative care are often left without the support they need to go through this transition. Too often, they have to leave care at a too early age – 18 years, even 14 years, and in an abrupt way. Without anybody to guide them, listen to them or support them financially, many young care leavers struggle to finish their education with a degree, find a job, or secure a flat. Research shows that many care leavers are at a higher risk of being homeless, unemployed or under-employed, under-educated or dependent on social security.

According to its mission statement, SOS Children's Villages helps children to shape their own future and build their resilience. SOS Children's Villages continues to support the young people in its care financially and morally in all areas of their life: by providing educational programmes such as vocational training, by supporting a young person throughout his/her university studies, by providing counselling services or by preparing youth with semi-independent living arrangements.

To ensure that such services are made available to all young people in the care system, SOS Children's Villages launched a three-year campaign to improve the services in Europe and Central Asia. All young people should be adequately prepared for independent life and should receive the support they need after leaving care.

**IN THE END, EVERY YOUNG PERSON
SHOULD BE ABLE TO SAY: I MATTER!**

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Helmut Kutin'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

HELMUT KUTIN
PRESIDENT

I MATTER: AN INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN BY SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES ON LEAVING CARE

Leaving home and starting life as an independent adult can be one of the most challenging steps in any young person's life; becoming independent after leaving care can be especially daunting. In many cases, young people leaving care are expected to become independent at a very early age, considerably younger than peers who grow up in their families of origin. Often young people in care face challenges without the usual safety nets on which to fall back. For young persons leaving highly structured institutional settings, becoming an independent and socially integrated adult is especially challenging. In January 2009, SOS Children's Villages launched a campaign for the social inclusion of young people ageing out of care. The campaign involves young people with care experience, academics and professionals in 15 countries across Europe and Central Asia. A research coordinated by Mike Stein (see p. 8) shows that the transition to adulthood in former communist countries can be abrupt, and is very often experienced as a second abandonment.

WHAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE WITH THIS CAMPAIGN

Our goal is that young people in alternative care in Europe and Central Asia will be provided with appropriate preparation for leaving care and are able to access continued after care support according to their individual needs.

Over the next three years, SOS Children's Villages will involve young people in decision-making, document the problems that young people ageing out of care face (when it comes to employment, housing, education or emotional stability), and collect and share good practices in supporting their transition and their resilience; and will, when necessary, lobby for changes in policy and practice.

WHERE THE CAMPAIGN TAKES PLACE

15 countries across Europe and Central Asia are participating in the campaign: Albania, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria,

WHAT WE UNDERSTAND AS LEAVING CARE

In this campaign, the term leaving care means the preparation of young people for successful transition from the care system to independent living, as well as after care services. Our campaign encompasses all forms of alternative care: from foster care to institutional care. The campaign is about creating a level playing field for young people ageing out of the care system.

Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Georgia, Germany, Kyrgyzstan, Poland, Russian Federation, and Uzbekistan.

WHY WE ARE ENGAGED IN IMPROVING LEAVING CARE

SOS Children's Villages, with years of experience preparing young people for an independent life and providing after care services, can play an important role in advocating for better conditions and standards of leaving care in partnership with like-minded organisations.





SOME FACTS AND FIGURES ABOUT CARE LEAVERS IN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

- In Albania, the age for children to leave care is legally defined as 14.
- The Czech Republic lacks a clearly defined system of leaving care services: five ministries share responsibility for the care system.
- In Estonia, there are vast regional disparities in the quality of after-care services.

THE CAMPAIGN HAS THREE OBJECTIVES:

1) SHARE KNOWLEDGE AND RAISE AWARENESS

Why we want to raise awareness & share knowledge

Young people ageing out of care face many challenges but there is a lack of research on their outcomes and wellbeing. There is a need for more official data on young people in the process of leaving care in order to better support them.

How we do it

• Collecting more data on leaving care

In 11 countries, SOS Children's Villages conducted situation analyses on young people ageing out of care, and will prepare an international situation analysis based on the findings of those national analyses.

• Organising conferences and roundtables

SOS Children's Villages, together with partners, will organise a series of conferences and roundtables to enable stakeholders to exchange on issues related to leaving care. One of the first conferences took place in Prague, Czech Republic, in June 2009. It brought young people with care experience, academics, senior officials from the relevant ministries and representatives from local authorities, care providers and non-governmental organisations together.

In October 2009, SOS Children's Villages, together with the Council of Baltic Sea States, the Lithuanian government and the Council of Europe, will organise an international conference "Keeping the door open: support to young people leaving care" in Vilnius, Lithuania.

• Knowledge-sharing

A series of briefing papers (of which this is the first) will be published in the next three years; they will offer a platform for exchanges of good practices, updates on legislation and practice and interviews with stakeholders.

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2) YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND INCREASE EMPOWERMENT

Why we want young people to be the main actors of the campaign

Young people with care experience are the main experts and actors of the care system. They have the right to be consulted in all processes impacting on their lives.

How we ensure that young people become the main agents of change

- Young people are members of the international and national steering groups of the project;
- national networks of young people with care experience are supported and strengthened (see box on the creation of a youth network in Azerbaijan);
- the participation of young people with care experience is facilitated and supported in meetings and conferences where decisions are made regarding alternative care and social services.

CREATION OF A YOUTH IN CARE NETWORK IN AZERBAIJAN

In Azerbaijan, four young people are members of the team planning and implementing the national campaign on leaving care. A gender balance has been ensured and some are from institutional care and some from the care of an SOS Children's Village family. Each team member is responsible for a different issue. In February 2009, the young people took the initiative to create the first youth in care network in Azerbaijan, the "Youth Reliance Bridge".

The "Youth Reliance Bridge" network. Within the network, young people who have left care or who are ageing out of care discuss the challenges they face. The goals of the network are also to ensure the participation of young people in decision-making, exchange ideas and create solutions to problems. Some of the most common problems are: integration in society, health problems, employment, education, and housing.

Currently 80 young people are members of the "Youth Reliance Bridge"

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3) IMPROVE POLICY AND PRACTICE

Why we want to improve policy and practice on leaving care

- No proper leaving care support can be provided without an adequate legal framework. As the example from Norway shows (see p. 14) when legislation does not include clear guidance regarding leaving care, the issue gets neglected.
- For children in alternative care, the state is the child's guardian, and has the duty to protect them and to ensure decisions are made in the best interests of the child. It is therefore important to strengthen the role of the state in all care issues.

How we support the improvement of policy and practice

- by promoting quality care standards (such as Quality4Children standards and the "Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children" by the United Nations);
- by monitoring the implementation of legislative measures;
- by taking part in working groups aiming at drafting new laws; and,
- by sharing good practices with decision-makers and professionals.

EXISTING INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS ON LEAVING CARE: QUALITY4CHILDREN STANDARDS

Advocating for better leaving care conditions goes hand in hand with advocating for quality care standards. We promote the standards for quality care in Europe which were developed by FICE (Fédération Internationale des Communautés Éducatives), IFCO (International Foster Care Organisation) and SOS Children's Villages in the framework of the project Quality4Children. Four standards focus on leaving care:

Standard 15:

The leaving care process is thoroughly planned and implemented

Standard 16:

Communication in the leaving care process is conducted in a useful and appropriate manner

Standard 17:

The child/young adult is empowered to participate in the leaving care process

Standard 18:

Follow-up, continuous support and contact possibilities are ensured

Learn more about the Quality4Children standards at: www.quality4children.info

Véronique Lerch is the project manager of "I matter", an international project on leaving care in Europe and Central Asia. She works for the Programme Development Unit of SOS Children's Villages International.

PROMOTING THE RESILIENCE OF YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVING CARE: MESSAGES FROM RESEARCH

Mike Stein



WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

Resilience can be defined as the quality that enables some young people to find fulfilment in their lives despite their disadvantaged backgrounds, the problems or adversity they may have undergone, or the pressures they may experience. Resilience is about overcoming the odds, coping and recovery. But it is only relative to different risk experiences - relative resistance as distinct from invulnerability - as well as age and cultural contexts, and is likely to develop over time. What are the main messages from research for promoting the resilience of young people leaving care?

STABILITY

Young people who experience stable placements that provide good quality care are more likely to have positive outcomes than those who have experienced further movement and disruption during their time in care. Stability has the potential to promote resilience in two respects. First, by providing the young person with a warm and redeeming relationship with a carer - or a compensatory secure attachment which may in itself reduce the likelihood of placement breakdown, and contribute to wellbeing. Second, and not necessarily dependent on the first, stability may provide continuity of care in young people's lives, which may give them security and contribute to positive educational and career outcomes.

A POSITIVE SENSE OF IDENTITY

Helping care leavers develop a positive identity is linked to: first, the quality of care and attachments experienced by looked-after young people - a significant resilience promoting factor discussed above; second, to their knowledge and understanding of their background and personal history; third, to their experience of how other people perceive and respond to them; and finally, how they see themselves and the opportunities they have to influence and shape their own biography.

EDUCATION AND TURNING POINTS

Research studies on young people leaving care consistently show lower levels of educational attainment and participation beyond the minimum school leaving age, in comparison to other young people. Good

educational outcomes are associated with placement stability, gender (young women do better than young men), a carer highly committed to helping the young person with his or her education, and a supportive and encouraging environment for study. This may also include the foster families' own children providing help and acting as role models. There is also evidence that young people who have had several placements can achieve educational success if they remain in the same school, maintaining positive friendships and contacts with helpful teachers. School or care itself may also provide turning points - open the door to participation in a range of leisure or extra curricular activities that may lead to new friends and opportunities, including the learning of competencies and the development of emotional maturity - and thus promote their resilience.

PREPARATION FOR LEAVING

Preparation for leaving care may also provide young people with opportunities for planning, problem solving and the learning of new competencies - all resilience promoting factors. This may include the development of self-care skills - personal hygiene, diet and health, including sexual health; practical skills - budgeting, shopping, cooking and cleaning; and inter-personal skills - managing a range of formal and informal relationships. Preparation should be holistic in its approach, attaching equal importance to practical, emotional and interpersonal skills.



YOUNG PEOPLE'S TRANSITIONS FROM CARE

In comparison to their peers in the general population, most young people leaving care have to cope with the challenges and responsibilities of major changes in their lives, in leaving foster care or residential care and setting-up home, in leaving school and entering the world of work, or post-16 education or training, or being parents, at a far younger age. In short, many have compressed and accelerated transitions to adulthood. This represents a barrier to promoting their resilience in that they are denied the psychological opportunity and space to focus - to deal with issues over time which is how most young people cope with the challenges of transition. Promoting resilience during transition will be assisted by: giving young people the opportunity for more gradual transitions from care; providing them with the emotional and practical support they will need into their early twenties; and giving them the psychological space to cope with changes over time.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S LIVES AFTER CARE

International research has shown that care leavers as a group are likely to be among the most socially excluded young people in society. However, the application of a resilience framework also suggests that there are differences in outcome groups between those successfully 'moving on', those 'surviving', or just getting by, and those who are 'struggling'. In general terms, the evidence shows that these different pathways are associated with the quality of care they experienced, their transitions from care and the support they receive during and after they leave care. What can make a difference to their lives, or promote their resilience, is the personal and professional support young people receive after leaving care. Specialist leaving care workers can greatly assist these young people by supporting them and helping them in accessing accommodation and financial assistance, education and careers, and health and wellbeing services. Also, mentoring, including mentoring by young people who have already left care, may assist young people during their journey to adulthood, and offer them a different type of relationship from professional support or troubled family relationships.



CONCLUSION

Promoting the resilience of young people leaving care will require more comprehensive responses across their life course: by ensuring high quality care to compensate them for their damaging pre-care experiences through stability and continuity; by helping them develop a positive sense of identity, as well as assistance to overcome educational deficits; by specialist help for those young people with mental health problems and complex needs; by providing young people with opportunities for more gradual transitions from care, more akin to normative transitions; and by providing ongoing, longer term support into adulthood.



PROFESSOR MIKE STEIN

Mike Stein is a research professor in the Social Policy Research Unit at the University of York.

Over the last 25 years he has been researching the problems and challenges faced by young people leaving care. He has also researched the experiences of young people who run away from home, as well as care, and mentoring for care leavers. He directed the first study of young people leaving care in England and Scotland.

He has been involved in the preparation of best practice and training materials, and has also been consulted on the development of leaving care services internationally and leaving care legislation in the UK. Mike Stein has published extensively in the field (see www.york.ac.uk/spru).

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH NETWORK ON TRANSITIONS TO ADULTHOOD FROM CARE

Together with Professor Harriet Ward and Emily Munro, Mike Stein is also a co-ordinator of the International Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood from Care (INTRAC), and co-editor of the book “Young People’s Transitions from Care to Adulthood, International Research and Practice” (Stein and Munro (Eds) which is based on research from 16 countries and was published by Jessica

Kingsley last year. The network currently has 25 members from 17 countries around the world.

INTRAC has three objectives:

- to share research findings on the problems, challenges and outcomes for young people making the journey from care to adulthood;
- to explore the social, political and legal structures that support or inhibit transitions to adulthood; to develop joint research initiatives with the purpose of producing findings that can shape policy development in this area;
- to explore how research findings can be used to shape policy development on a national and international basis.

If you want to know more about INTRAC, have a look at their website: <http://info.lut.ac.uk/research/ccfr/INTRAC/website1/about.html>

CARE LEAVERS: HOW THE UN COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD PROTECTS THEIR RIGHTS

Maria Herczog



In recent years, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has paid increasing attention to the situation of children and young people without parental care and has promoted the development of standards to guide the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) for those children. Therefore, the convention can really be seen as providing a framework to implement a holistic model for leaving care, even if it is not explicitly stated in the convention. It is important to note that the UN Committee understands the term „leaving care” in a broader sense thus including: children leaving the care system to go back to their biological families, or when being adopted, etc. The UNCRC is mostly relevant for the preparation for leaving care as it offers protection until the age of 18. Other human rights instruments can then be used to protect and promote the rights of care leavers as young adults.

WHY IS THE UN COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD PAYING INCREASING ATTENTION TO THE SITUATION OF CARE LEAVERS?

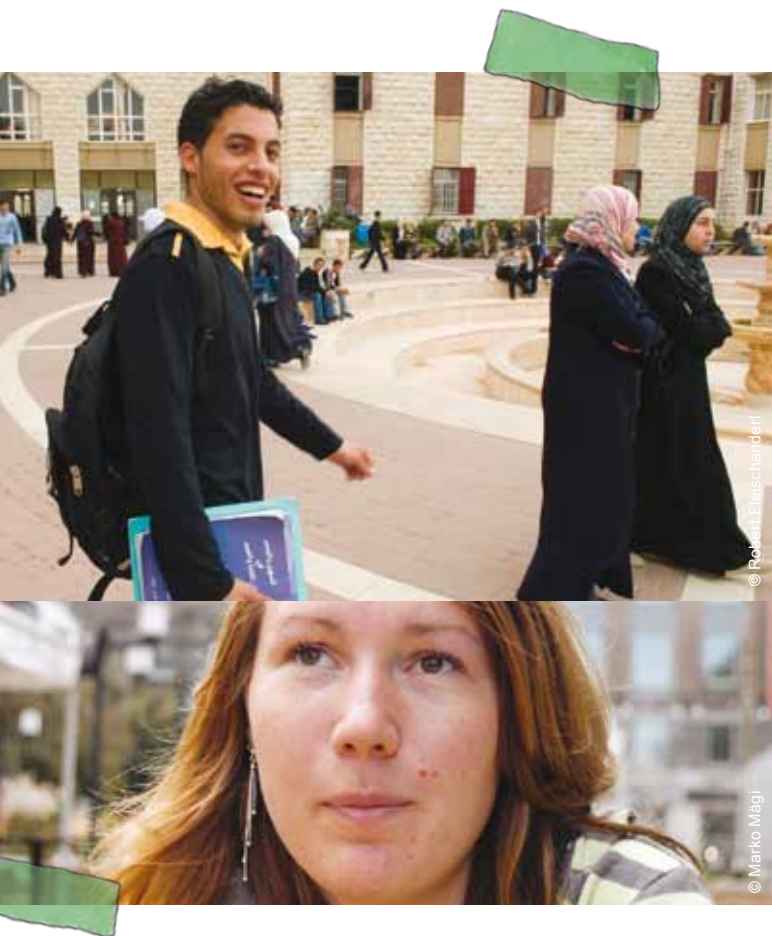
- Many young people leave the care system before they reach the age of 18, sometimes as early as 14 (like in Albania). In the United Kingdom, almost half of the young people leave their care placement before their 18th birthday.
- Research indicates that young people leaving care are at high risk of social exclusion. There are noticeable differences between groups of care leavers (see Mike Stein's

article). Some young people are very successful and resilient, as a result of many factors. Although not enough is yet known about those factors, in most cases it appears that childhood history, the first years of life, the nature of problems leading to alternative care, and the time spent in care, strongly influence the outcomes. All those factors (e.g. stable placement, contact with biological families) are matters of concern for the Committee when it receives states' reports.

- Quality preparation for leaving care is no less important in social work than issues of family preservation, the prevention of separation, etc and is a key component of quality care provision. If, as a whole, the quality and professionalism of the care system is not well designed and managed, how could young people be well prepared to leave care?
- On many occasions, committee members have also recommended the use of the UN Human Rights and Social Work Manual to ensure that professionals are aware of the needs of those in the care system, including the planning for and preparation of care leavers.

ONE DAY DEDICATED TO CHILDREN IN ALTERNATIVE CARE

The Committee on the Rights of the Child decided to devote its 2005 day of general discussion to “Children without parental care” in order to improve the implementation of the Convention regarding the rights of children in alternative care and to identify the most important issues related to it: legal frameworks, fam-



ily support and alternative care policies, and ways to increase the participation of children.

One of the outcomes of that day was the recommendation of the Committee to establish an expert meeting to prepare a set of standards on alternative care. A project by UNICEF and International Social Services (ISS) had previously made the same recommendation and the draft was discussed by the Committee together with the members of the expert group. The government of Brazil took an important role in supporting the preparation of relevant guidelines. In June 2009, the Human Rights Council recommended that the Guidelines should be approved by the United Nations General Assembly.

A NEW TOOL SOON AVAILABLE: THE GUIDELINES FOR THE ALTERNATIVE CARE OF CHILDREN

These Guidelines, once adopted, will outline special protection for children and young people in care. They were developed to ensure that the decision to put a child into care is necessary and that the care provided is right for that child. Part of quality care is of course preparation for leaving care and the Guide-

lines paint a useful picture of what that should look like in the paragraphs 130-135.

For instance, the Guidelines recommend a clear and well-timed plan that is tailored to the specific needs, abilities and aspirations of any young person leaving care. This plan, prepared in full consultation with the young person, should be targeted at encouraging him or her towards self-reliance and full integration into community life as a young adult. After leaving care young people should also be supported in gaining access to suitable accommodation, employment opportunities, further vocational and educational opportunities, and other relevant after care services.

The Guidelines intend to set the fundamental professional, ethical and procedural principles based on the UNCRC addressing all the relevant issues concerning children without parental care. For the Committee members, the preparation of the Guidelines and the debates around these issues are extremely helpful in raising awareness and ensuring adequate attention be paid during the discussion with the state parties, NGOs, experts, professionals and children. The Guidelines should also serve to broaden the scope of reports submitted to the Committee.

Maria Herczog is a sociologist whose main areas of research are child welfare and protection. She is the author of several books and chapters on these issues and the Chief Editor of the Hungarian professional journal "Family, Child, Youth", since 1992, and chair of the association of the same name. She holds the position of senior university lecturer at the Eszterhazy Karoly Teacher's College, Department of Social Pedagogy. Additionally to her academic work, Maria Herczog is a World Health Organisation (WHO) national focal point on the prevention of violence and has been a board member of Eurochild since 2008, as well as a member of the EU Economic and Social Committee since 2004. Since February 2007, she is a member of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

¹www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/traininglen.pdf

²Implementation Handbook for the CRC, UNICEF, Geneva, 2008, pp.278

³www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/discussion/recommendations2005.doc

SUCCESSFUL ADVOCACY FROM A YOUTH IN CARE NETWORK

Renathe Arevoll

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PUTTING LEAVING CARE SERVICES BACK ON THE NORWEGIAN CHILD WELFARE AGENDA

The first Norwegian child welfare act, from 1953, included regulations on after care up to the age of 23. These were dropped when, following public opinion that held that the child welfare system intervened too often and too soon, new legislation was introduced in 1992 reducing the authority of the child welfare system. Young people could now choose to leave care completely at the age of 18, losing the possibility to reverse their decision not to make further use of services after they had left.

In the years to come, the legislation did not point out any duty for local authorities to help young people after they had reached the age of 18. However, authorities had the possibility, to offer services up to the young person's twentieth birthday, but only when this was decided before he or she turned 18. This led to passivity in child welfare and the term 'after care' disappeared from the Norwegian child welfare vocabulary.

A STRONG YOUTH VOICE IN THE DEBATE

After some years, several workers and organisations began to discuss the problems relating to young people leaving care without preparation and support. As a result, in 1997, the youth network Lfb (Landsforeningen for barnevernsbarn) was established to serve

the interests of young people in care. Its first goal was to contribute to bringing back leaving care services in the Norwegian child welfare system.

In 1998, the parliament adopted a new law. That when the child approves, measures implemented before the child turned 18 may be maintained or replaced by other measures - including social work support, financial support, help in finding accommodation, education and work, therapy and 'support-contact' (befriending) - until the age of 23. In addition, local authorities have a duty to conduct a needs assessment at a stage when there still is time to prepare the young person for life after care. However, this new law says nothing specific about preparation: workers therefore have to decide without formal guidance what good practice is regarding the preparation for leaving.

Despite evidence that young people fare better when they make use of after care services, some young people still decline further care services once they reach the age of 18. Reasons for this include being tired of the system or wanting to stand on their own feet straight away. In cooperation with the Department for Children and Family Matters, Lfb has drafted a proposal to reestablish the right for young people to ask for assistance, even if they previously rejected it, which will be sent to Parliament.

TOWARDS A CULTURAL CHANGE IN CHILD WELFARE WORK

Without formal guidance among Norwegian social workers almost disappeared in the years in which the legislation did not specify a duty to undertake such work. Now that the legislation focuses on young people's needs when they are leaving care, child welfare workers should rediscover and develop good practice in preparation for and support of this transition. Today around 80 % of young people in Norway remain in care when they turn 18.

Renathe Arevoll is the chairman of Landsforeningen for barnevernsbarn in Norway. She is 26 years old and was herself raised in foster care.

For more information, contact the Lfb directly at: lfb@powertech.no, www.barnevernsbarna.no

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE AND CAREGIVERS SAY ABOUT LEAVING CARE

YOUNG PEOPLE ARE REALLY SCARED BECAUSE THEY MUST LEAVE WHEN THEY TURN 18. I HAVE HEARD THAT SOME OF THEM EVEN SKIP CLASS TO STAY IN THE HOME ONE MORE YEAR.

DALIBORKA FROM CROATIA

IT IS A GREAT FEELING WHEN SOMEONE ASKS YOU "WHAT DO YOU WANT? WHAT IS BETTER? WHAT DO YOU THINK IS BEST FOR YOU? WE WILL DO IT TOGETHER, JUST TELL US."

DALIBORKA FROM CROATIA

AFTER SHE LEFT THE HOME, SHE WAS SURPRISED HOW HARD IT WAS. FROM TIME TO TIME SHE GETS SOME HELP FROM HER FATHER OR SOMEBODY ELSE, BUT MOST OF THE TIME SHE HAS TO COPE BY HERSELF.

INTERVIEWER OF N., A CZECH GIRL WHO GREW UP IN A CHILDREN'S HOME

WE DON'T FORGET THEM WHEN THEY LEAVE. IN SOME CASES THE OPTION TO RETURN FOR EVEN A SHORT PERIOD OF TIME CAN GIVE THE STABILITY THEY NEED.

CAREGIVER FROM PORTUGAL

YOUNG PEOPLE NEED LOTS OF SUPPORT FROM THE COMMUNITY, SUCH AS SOCIAL SERVICES, AND THEY ALSO NEED A JOB TO SURVIVE OUTSIDE.

YOUNG PERSON FROM ALBANIA

A LOT OF FORMER FOSTERED CHILDREN GET IN TOUCH AFTER THE END OF THE PLACEMENT AND SOMETIMES WANT TO VISIT OR JUST GET SOME GOOD ADVICE OVER THE PHONE.

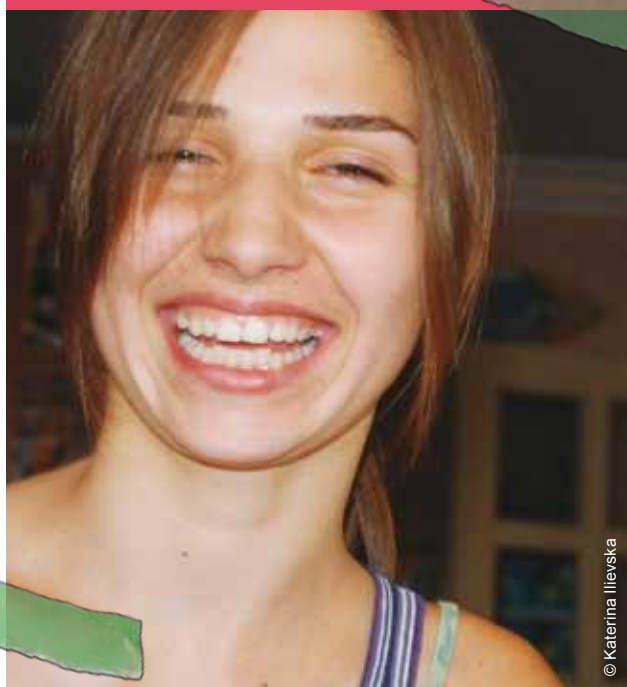
FOSTER FATHER FROM SWEDEN

I MATTER



SEMI-INDEPENDENT LIVING: A SUCCESSFUL AFTER CARE MODEL IN CEE/CIS/BALTICS

Sandra Kukic



For any child in need of alternative care and placed in the care of SOS Children's Villages by the relevant authorities, the leaving care process already starts within the SOS Children's Village family. It is there that the foundations for future independence and self-sufficiency are laid. The next step is the transition from the SOS Children's Village family to a youth community that aims to provide the young person with a clearer preparatory framework for independence. On moving on from the youth community, various after care services, in particular the semi-independent living programme, are available to support young people in the transition to independent living as self-sufficient adults.

WHAT IS THE SEMI-INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAMME?

The semi-independent living programme is the main after care service provided by the SOS Children's Village associations in the CEE/CIS/Baltics region. It aims at facilitating a smooth transition to an independent life, and at building the young person's abilities and skills to take full responsibility for her/his future. Usually, this phase has a maximum duration of 3 years, after which the young person should be able to lead an independent life without the continued support of SOS Children's Villages.

THE MAIN OBJECTIVES OF THE SEMI-INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAMME ARE TO ENSURE THAT:

- the young person has regular employment and receives regular income;
- the young person has appropriate housing;
- the young person is adequately prepared to overtake full control of, and responsibility for, her/his life.

WHO BENEFITS FROM THE SEMI-INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAMME?

The majority of young people in the care of SOS Children's Villages benefit from the semi-independent living programme. However, there are a few exceptional circumstances in which the semi-independent living programme is not appropriate, for example if the young person is married, living with a partner or is a single parent; or if the young person is doing mandatory military service.

For these young people, individualised support measures for the duration of one year are defined before the young person leaves his/her youth community. The main care person continues to provide support as the reference person, responsible for after care support. Together with the young person, this main care person defines and delivers the required forms of ongoing after care support. It should also be noted that these young people may still apply for participation in the semi-independent living programme at any time within their first year of leaving the care of SOS Children's Villages.

High school and university students are a special category in SOS Children's Villages' semi-independent living programme. In these cases, the duration of the support services depends on the length of their studies. Therefore, students at higher educational institutions can benefit from the semi-independent living programme for periods longer than 3 years.

WHAT IS THE ORGANISATIONAL FRAMEWORK IN SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES?

SOS Children's Villages' overall continental framework for leaving care in the CEE/CIS/Baltics region promotes and defines progressive and empowering guidance towards independence of children and young people leaving care. Semi-independent living was officially endorsed as the main after care model for the organisation in CEE/CIS Baltics in June 2006.

Within this continental framework, each SOS Children's Village association in the CEE/CIS/Baltics region is tasked with developing after care concepts in general and for semi-independent living in particular. These developments should, of course, be in accordance with the national legislation, cultural requirements and the socio-economic situation. These national concepts define the criteria for moving into semi-independent living arrangements, prioritise issues related to accommodation and financial support, forms of support and guidance, and identify rights and responsibilities of the young person during their stay in the semi-independent living programme in more detail.

Finally, monitoring and evaluation measures are also defined at the national level. Best practices are collected to adjust this programme further so that it

meets the individual needs of the young people as much as possible.

Sandra Kukic is a Youth Care Development Advisor for SOS Children's Villages for the region CEE/CIS/Baltics. She graduated as a psychologist and as a systemic family therapist. She has been working for SOS Children's Villages since 2001. Before that, she worked on the treatment of trauma and community based recovery.



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WHAT DOES SEMI-INDEPENDENT LIVING REALLY LOOK LIKE FOR A YOUNG PERSON?

Mariela from Bulgaria moved from her SOS Children's Village family to a youth community when she was 14. She had lived with her SOS Children's Village family for 11 years and has remained in regular contact with her SOS mother, whom she sees during her holidays. In the youth community, there were two youth co-workers and 15 young people. She had her own room in the youth facility and received pocket money every week after they cleaned the flat together.

At the end of August of this year, she left the youth community to move into her own flat in town. She will soon start studying and wants to graduate in computer sciences. She is also considering taking a part-time job.

GOOD PRACTICE OF SEMI-INDEPENDENT LIVING IN FRANCE

Maison Claire Morandat

Maison Claire Morandat (MCM) was set up by SOS Children's Villages in 1986 in the heart of the old mining area in the North of France, in a socio-economic context that had deteriorated considerably. With four SOS Children's Villages, the association is now well established¹ in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region. In the youth center², 37 boys and girls ranging from 16 to 21 years of age are provided with educational and social support in modern accommodation. Each young person lives in his/her own flat, with eight studio flats grouped within a single building for the youngest, and 29 flats that are integrated into the social fabric of the neighbourhood for the older young people. The support services are based on an individual educational contract that specifically involves experimentation with semi-independent living by the young people.

Channelled through the child protection services or judicial system, two-thirds of the youngsters have come from a placement location (foster family, SOS Children's Village families, or residential care). A growing number of young people have been excluded from the school system and any kind of employment project when they arrive. Many have complex sets of problems: learning difficulties, relationship disorders, a history of physical abuse, and in some cases they are foreign unaccompanied minors. So in 2007, the MCM created a structure with eight studio flats which offer direct supervision of the actions of daily life to better prepare the young people for a semi-independent life.

The young people benefit from a secure and structured environment which will help them to succeed in their personal plan and support them in a gradual move towards independence and social integration. Accom-

modated initially within the studio building or in "joint occupancy", the young people then go into housing that they can keep until they leave, thanks to the system of transferable leases. The organisation signs an agreement with the landlord, making the young person a "subtenant" until the lease passes into his/her name when the support comes to an end. While this demands a significant amount of networking, transferable leases are proving to be a flexible response, appropriate for the problems in accessing housing, particularly affecting young people. But for all that, in a context marked by restricted access to employment for young people³, the risks of getting into debt and hence being evicted are still significant. The Green Paper on young people published by the office of the High Commissioner for Youth in July 2009 talks of France's poor performance in relation to youth employment and an employment level relative to the general population that is among the worst in the OECD. Several contributing factors are cited, notably: poorly developed vocational courses coupled with a mismatch of educational provision and the needs of the economy; lack of jobs for young people and a long transition between the first job and permanent employment; and finally a lack of support for young people without a job or education. In France, entry into employment is far later than in many European countries. Only 46% of young French people between the ages of 20 and 24 are in employment, compared to 63% of young people in all OECD countries. Young people leaving the protection of childhood at 18, or 21 at the latest, too often pay the high price of poor coordination between social, family and youth policies.

¹ Maison Claire Morandat has the status of

"Maison d'Enfants à Caractère Social" (MECS)

RESOURCES ON LEAVING CARE





NEW PROJECT ON YOUNG PEOPLE WITH CARE EXPERIENCE AND EDUCATION

In 2008, a project called YIPPEE (Young people from a public care background: Pathways to education in Europe) was set up with the aim of increasing knowledge of the post-compulsory education of young people with care experience.

The research looks at the current situation of these young people to get an understanding of the social, political, economic and personal factors that help or restrict participation in further or higher education for this highly disadvantaged and socially excluded group of young men and women.

This research brings together five EU countries: Denmark, Hungary, Spain, Sweden and the UK.

<http://tcru.ioe.ac.uk/yippee>

KEEPING THE DOOR OPEN: REPORT ON LEAVING CARE FROM THE COUNCIL OF BALTIC SEA STATES

The Working Group for Cooperation on Children at Risk of the Council of Baltic Sea States published a report in 2008 on the available assistance to children leaving alternative care in all countries in the Baltic Sea region.

The report calls authorities to do more in a systematic and comprehensive way to support children that have spent part of or all of their childhood in alternative care. It also shows the need to address the unequal ac-

cess to support and the inadequate provision of services according to the individual life situation.

www.childcentre.info

RESEARCH BY SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES FRANCE ON YOUNG PEOPLE AGEING OUT OF CARE

SOS Children's Villages France published the results of a research study done on the life paths of almost all the people who lived in SOS Children's Village families in Marseille as children over the past 40 years. The study looks at aspects of their lives after care: their professional life, their social life (social networks, integration) and their personal life (their marital status and their parental role). One chapter also looks at the transition phase.

www.sosve.org/50-Actualites/PDF/ill_80_cahierssos3.pdf

CONNECTING NOW FOR THE FUTURE: REPORT FROM A CONFERENCE ON LEAVING CARE

The "Connecting Now for the Future" conference took place on June 4th and 5th in Montreal, Quebec. The conference's goal was to bring together a broad range of professionals to exchange ideas and to reflect on issues and practices in relation to the transition to independent living of youth at risk. More than 600 people from over 15 countries participated.

You can find some of the presentations at the below link: www.colloquejeunes2009.enap.ca/site/en/youth-conference-presentation.aspx?sortcode=2.1.2.2

For more information on SOS Children's Villages' leaving care campaign (see pp. 5-6), you can **SUBSCRIBE TO OUR NEWSLETTER** (published three times per year) by sending an e-mail to: lao@sos-kd.org.

USEFUL TERMS ON LEAVING CARE

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AFTER CARE

Professional support young people receive after they leave care.

ALTERNATIVE CARE (ALSO REFERRED TO AS OUT-OF-HOME CARE)

A formal or informal arrangement whereby a child is looked after, at least overnight, outside the parental home, whether by decision of a judicial or administrative authority or a duly accredited body, an initiative of the child, his/her parents or primary caregivers, or spontaneously by a care provider in the absence of the parents.

Main forms of alternative care:

residential care and foster care, other forms of family-based or family-like care such as a placement in an SOS Children's Village family

CARE LEAVER (ALSO REFERRED TO AS YOUNG PERSON AGEING OUT OF CARE)

A young person who leaves care upon coming of age, who is no longer entitled to care and protection under the child welfare system.

LEAVING CARE

Preparation of young people in care for their transition from the care system to independent living. Leaving care includes after care services, which is the professional support young people receive after they left care.

LOOKED-AFTER CHILDREN (ALSO REFERRED TO AS CHILDREN IN ALTER- NATIVE CARE, CHILDREN WITHOUT PARENTAL CARE OR CHILDREN DEPRIVED OF PARENTAL CARE)

Children in care subject to a court order and those accommodated by a local authority. This term is used mostly in the United Kingdom.

RESILIENCE

The quality that enables some young people to find fulfilment in their lives despite a disadvantaged background, problems or adversity they may have faced, or the pressure they may experience.

SEMI-INDEPENDENT LIVING (SIL)

Form of care where young people are supported to become independent in the context of their own homes, a group home, a hostel, or another form of accommodation.

A LOVING HOME FOR EVERY CHILD



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