

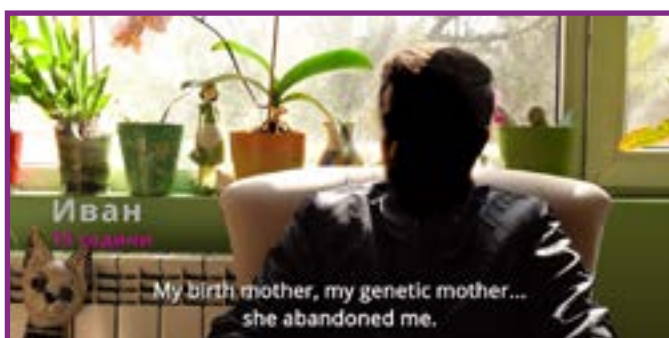
The Project SUPPORTS



The project started in early 2019 with the financial support of the European Commission. It is coordinated by PULSE Foundation, Bulgaria in partnership with CESIS, Portugal and Defence for Children - Italy, which unite in the direction of creating comprehensive care for children leaving residential institutions.

The Results

- More than 250 trained social service professionals in Portugal, Bulgaria and Italy
- Over 90 children from crisis centers and social services participated in trainings and individual activities;



The project had the following goals:

- To enhance the competences and skills of professionals working in residential care settings;
- To create an instrument for training and work based on a child-based and dynamic multidisciplinary approach;
- To promote the participation of children hosted in residential care facilities regarding decisions about their actual and future conditions;
- To promote the exchange of good practices in each country and among European partners.



- Video “Support for children and youth, affected of violence and living in institutions”;
- Videos for young people from institutions;
- “Guide to Happiness” - Handbook for young people leaving social services;
- My Rights - A Handbook for Children in institutions;
- Leaflets;
- Translated and adapted training methodologies for specialists and conducting of workshops with children.

The Manifesto

The Children's Voices

This manifesto is one of the results of the work of the young people involved in the Advisory Board – composed from young people who left the services for alternative care in Matosinhos, Portugal, consulted and supplemented from a youth advisory group towards PULSE Foundation, Bulgaria.

The manifesto contains the most important aspects in the process of leaving care and transition to adulthood and life in society.

It was established in April 2021.



[You can read and print the Manifesto \(in Engl\)](#)

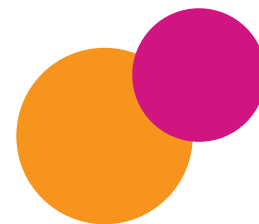


Independent look

Project evaluation

The project team is extremely critical of the quality of the implemented programs and activities. We believe that all of us have given our best in the situation we were in. It was important for us to have external, independent look at the results achieved by SUPPORTS project. This is the reason we contacted the Orion Association and Milena Stateva.

“Future projects and initiatives by this consortium (and probably its expansion) hold a tremendous potential of an awesome power to reach to the heart of problems, challenges and obstacles that hinder



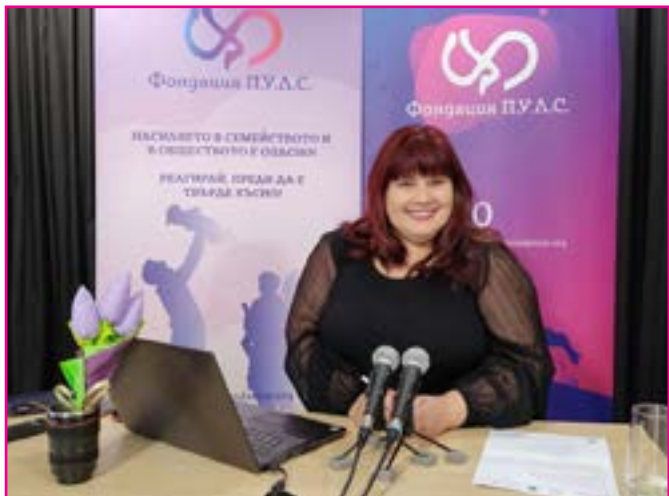
the adequate reform of care institutions not only at the national, but also at the EU and wider levels. ...

I strongly advise the readers of this bulletin to take note of the findings of the project and to watch this space for future knowledge, in sights and understanding.”

[Here you can read the evaluation in brief](#)

More 100 specialists from three countries

The final conference



On April 29, 2021, an international final conference within the project SUPPORTS - "Supporting Children in the Delicate Phase between Adolescence and Adulthood while Leaving Alternative Care Facilities" brought together over 100 specialists from Bulgaria, Italy and Portugal.

More than 100 specialists from three European countries - Bulgaria, Italy, Portugal, live broadcast, translation into 4 languages, panelists from 4 countries. The main focus of the transnational conference was on the rights of children living in institutions, as well as their preparation for leaving the institution and creating a plan for the future (Life project).

During the event, the project partners shared about the objectives, activities and results achieved in the two-year international project, as well as the challenges encountered related to the global pandemic of COVID-19.

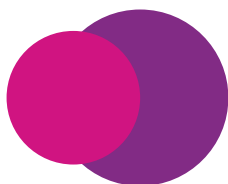
Technical partner of the conference and livestreaming: StreamEvent.bg

The event was opened by the Chairperson of PULSE Foundation, Mrs. **Ekaterina Veleva**, who welcomed the participants and expressed special gratitude

"The SUPPORTS project gave a valuable gift to all of us. A gift of creativity. With the project we supported children in the delicate phase between adolescence and adulthood, who leave the institutions for alternative care. I am grateful to my partners from Portugal, who are at the heart of the project and are the main driving force behind the project. I am grateful to the European Commission for believing and funding the project. I am grateful to everyone who fulfilled the goals of the project. A special gratitude to all the children and young people who opened their hearts to



us, trusted us and participated. These children were the main driving force, experts - sharing with us to make children's lives and the world a much better place. It accomplished the goals as much as possible by giving the children a voice, as well as giving us- adults the opportunity not only to know their rights but also to listen to them".



A key project objective was to increase the capacity of professionals working with children in residential care to apply children's rights-based approach to their work.



“What we tried to achieve with the training in the protection system, the institutions and with regard to the children themselves was the establishment of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, as a key tool for the transition from residential care to independent living. We all agree with the values present in the Convention. Residential care practices are extremely far from the principles, including those of non-discrimination. Although on paper our legislation is very close, the reality is different. Conditions should be created for the future of children. The project provided an opportunity to bring the Convention on the Rights of the Child into concrete action in order to achieve sustainability of measures.”

Pippo Costella

*Director of Defence for Children
International Italy*

Ana Cardoso, Coordinator of CESIS – Portugal, the person who inspired the project and a major supporter of its magic, shared with the conference participants an inspiring quote by Mendes (2009):

“Every young person needs ongoing help to make a smooth transition to adulthood. Every good parent continues to give love and support to their children well after the age of 18, providing them with the best possible start in life. Our requirements for young people in alternative care should not be lower”.



Mrs. Cardoso pointed out that leaving the service is not only a special fragmentary moment, but should be seen as a process starting from the moment the child enters residential care - an important element of the work. She shared the need to create a plan for the future, a life project that aims to help the child leave residential care.

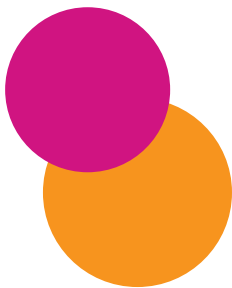
“In order for such a plan to be developed, we must listen to the children and thus develop it with the participation of the children themselves - with their lives, with their history from before entering the residential service.”



Emphasis on the Life Project was also placed by **Joana Cerdeira** from the National Commission for the Promotion of the Rights and Protection of Children and Youth:



“From the moment children are placed in residential care, the aim is to ensure their active participation, including by providing access to information, and to encourage children to be responsible. The children ask how long they will stay here, where they will go. The Life Project helps them move to an independent maturity. Through the Life Project, independent living skills are developed that allow children to feel safe and secure after leaving. It is important to mobilize the local community to organize a network to support children.”



Special guests of the event were Velina Todorova, Deputy Chair of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and Mrs. Marta Kuljon, Policy Officer in the Children’s Rights team (European Commission - DG JUST).

“The topic is one of the broadest and most debated and involves both civil society and government. The children’s opinion is not part of this debate. The project places the rights of children and their participation on a structural level. We believe in diversity as the needs of children are diverse. Children with special needs - for example, migrant children, victims of severe domestic violence, transferred from foster families. These children prefer an environment closest to the family. For us, this alternative must remain, relying on high-quality



care, qualified professionals, participation of children through their active participation and protection of their rights. These children have the right to a good education, health care, justice and active participation.”

Velina Todorova

Deputy Chair of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Mrs. **Marta Kuljon** on her own behalf and on behalf of the European Commission, emphasized the importance of children and young people being actively involved in key decision-making processes for their future - a right strongly set in a comprehensive EU child's rights strategy.

"Children in residential care in many cases use this right in a very fragmented way. They are often deprived of the mechanisms that allow participation - for example, they do not have access to computers, to the Internet. It is also fragmented because sometimes children are formally invited, but their feedback is not taken into



account when making policies. The European Commission has set up a European platform for children's participation at EU level. In order to increase the participation, we have planned to translate documents concerning children into an accessible language. Increasing participation in the school environment. One of the children from Slovenia said the following: "Living in a service means nothing to us - except that we have experience in life." The fact that the child has a certain history simply means that the child has a certain experience."

The right of the child to be heard is regulated in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that every child has the right to express his or her views on all matters affecting him or her.

"The right to vote can give these children to be active agents, instead of being in a sacrificial position where others can make decisions for them. The participation of the child is one of the basic principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that children and young people have the right to express their views freely and that adults have an obligation to listen to children and to facilitate their participation in all matters."

Ekaterina Veleva



Thus, among the most important and emotional moments of the conference was the Voice of young people who are or have been in residential care, expressed and presented in different ways by different partners.

Within the project, children and young people expressed their expert opinion and the steps that all experts and institutions at regional, national and international level should take in order to protect their rights as much as possible and for them to have a dignified life in alternative care, giving them the necessary experience to continue their lives as dignified adults.



Milena Stateva, PhD, The Orion Grid Association, an external project evaluator: *“There is a specific methodology that has two strengths - giving children a voice and the opportunity for what will happen to them after leaving the service. All of these will be tasks of our evaluation so that we can learn of this program and its implementation so that it can be shared and implemented.”*

Combining their skills, experience and expertise, in the last two years the SUPPORTS project partners have managed to take a few small steps to lead to a big leap in solving the problem of helping children in the delicate phase between adolescence and adulthood, while leave alternative care facilities.

Within these two years, social workers working in residential institutions were sensitive. A tool based on a child-centered and multidisciplinary work model was created and dozens of children found support for empowerment, following their individual needs and abilities. These are the main and most important successes of the project - the support of young people from their significant adults.

Within SUPPORTS, the partners from Bulgaria, Italy and Portugal created a number of information and sensitive materials aimed at children and young people living in residential services, as well as guidelines for work and training of specialists working in residential services.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the project team managed to adapt and continue its important work in support of children and young people living in institutions.

“People who work with us need to know us, to know their work well, to help us overcome our difficulties. I really like it when adults listen to us, show that they understand our past, when they explain our rights, when we choose where to live together. We know that they will always consult us. They help us.”
Sidalia Magalhaes, Member of the Youth Advisory Council, Portugal

“Think of children who live in a place they don’t feel like their place, they don’t know where they are, they move around with professionals ... how could they reveal themselves? Who is there for them? For this reason, foster homes or foster families are better because they stay. The educator is leaving and you have to start a new process “, a young man who left alternative care, a participant in a Focus Group in Italy.

The children’s Manifesto reflected in a very emotional way what they think is important to change in order to feel independent. The Manifesto demonstrates very well what is needed for children to move to an independent life and what steps should be taken by all professionals and institutions involved in working with children in this direction.

The project added value

Ana Isabel Guerreiro



The SUPPORTS project is a current project that reminds us of the importance of framing the work for and with children in line with the principles enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The CRC has a vision for children, that each and every child is able to fulfil their human potential. This is a right of all children and it poses obligations upon states to take action to ensure equal opportunities for children to thrive, whoever they are, whatever their story, wherever they live. This work is even more relevant when we are talking of children who have had or are enduring hardships of different nature, such is the case of children living in alternative care.

Importantly, the SUPPORTS project did frame its work on a child-rights based approach. Children's rights informed the training developed, but also guided the work carried out with children and young people.

I would like to highlight in particular, the work done for enhancing children's participation both at an individual level and as a group. Although children have the right to participation, the project demonstrated that its fulfillment is still far from achieved. In this sense, taking into account the past experience of the partners and emerging knowledge from the work with professionals and young people, the partnership prepared a set of documents, including tools to guide professionals in ensuring children's right to participation. Concerning children's individual participation, the partnership produced a document focused on children's life project, which is in line with the

principles of child rights. It is fundamental to remind of the importance of creating the necessary conditions for children to participate in the preparation of their life project, from the moment they enter, until they leave the alternative care homes.

Secondly, the project demonstrated, once more, the value of engaging with children and young people as a group. Children and young people are experts of their own lives and their experiences and individual needs must be given a higher voice. The inputs provided by children, young people and young adults have helped to identify what services and tools are needed and to adapt them in a way that truly responds to the challenges faced by young people when they leave care. And sometimes these needs are quite basic and easy to solve, such as teaching children and young people how to do their laundry or use an ATM service. This is why children must be at the centre of decision-making processes.

I would like to give one more example of the project's added value. In Portugal, the SUPPORTS project was carried out in 3 alternative care homes in Matosinhos, in close partnership with the local municipality. Throughout the project duration, CESIS worked in 4 complementary ways:

1. At local level, CESIS facilitated the setting up of a local network of relevant entities responsible for housing, work, social support and other relevant areas;
2. In the children's alternative care homes, CESIS trained and worked with professionals working for and with children;
3. In the same setting, CESIS worked with children and young people who were living in the homes, but preparing to leave; and finally
4. It worked with young adults who had left care some time ago.

Working on these 4 different levels enabled the Portuguese partner to propose long-term support for young people leaving care and, importantly, which was adapted to the needs and concerns highlighted by both the children

and young people in preparation for leaving care and those who had already left care.

This complementary work and its achievements show that each stakeholder is important in its own way and that they each have a crucial role to play in improving the lives of children and young people living in alternative care and in supporting them in a new, autonomous life.

In this respect, the project has paved the way to:

- Enhance the attitudes, knowledge and skills of professionals working with and for children;
- Give a voice to children, young people and young adults;

- Prepare guidance documents for institutions; and

- Set up evidence-based collaborations at local level to support young people leaving care.

SUPPORTS is coming to an end, but I hope its lessons learned and added-value will stay and will inspire its partners and other organisations and governments to take up this important work and support the lives of many children in need.

Thank you.

Children have the right...

Ana Cardoso

Coordinator of CESIS - Portugal

Children have the right to participation in decision-making processes affecting their lives both individually and as a group. This right is enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Portugal ratified in 1990, as well as, in domestic legislation since 1999. There is greater awareness on the importance of this right at national level, but there is no specific training for professionals working in residential care or otherwise in the child protection system.

The project SUPPORT was an important contribution to enhance training of professionals working with and for children and young people in alternative care, particularly in ensuring the rights of children and young people.

The training developed was supported by the training manual designed in another European project: THEAM Project - Training healthcare multidisciplinary teams on children's rights and on child-friendly justice.

SUPPORTS's training activities were based on a participative methodology and in creating a climate of trust and openness conducive to sharing experiences between different institutions and identifying weaknesses. In Portugal there was the involvement of 41 professionals and among this group some of them are prepared to continue given training.

This training process allowed not only to contribute to the capacity building of professionals but more important it also allowed the design of a new approach for building a life project with children and young people in care. This new approach makes clear the participation of young people in the complicity with the principles established in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This new approach was already presented to the national services for social security in Portugal which is responsible for the child care system in Portugal.

SUPPORTS project in Italy

Martina Finessi



Through the SUPPORTS project, DCI Italy has aimed at developing a training and pedagogical program to reinforce residential care facilities in sustaining the development of children's life projects during their permanence in residential care until they leave care. Leaving care should thus result in a sustainable path in continuity with the previous steps realized while in care. DCI focused its action on unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) as they represent a large portion of children in living in residential care settings. The choice has been made due to DCI's experience on guardianship of unaccompanied foreign children, which represents a privileged observatory to analyse their permanence in residential care.

Partnership of the project in Italy:

- Regional Ombudsman for Children of Liguria Region
- SOS Children's Villages Italia
- SIPROIMi project of the Social District VII, Savona province, region of Liguria (3 reception facilities)
- "Casa Don Bosco" second level reception facility for unaccompanied children run by Salesian congregation in Genoa
- SIPROIMi project of the Municipality of Ancona, in Marche region (6 reception facilities)
- Associazione Agevolando - Care Leavers Network.

Implementing project activities with children was challenging given the pandemic situation, nevertheless DCI Italy managed to carry out activities with children and young people, DCI consulted 25 children in 4 residential care facilities during 6 sessions, organized through

the support of professionals in the facilities and cultural mediators.

For the creation of the advisory group of young people, DCI Italy opted for online consultations and experimented the "Conversation Circle" methodology online with a first group of young informants. During the project lifetime, it could count on the cooperation with Associazione Agevolando - Care Leavers Network and the involvement of three regional Care Leavers Network whose young participants could inform project activities and provide recommendations for actors involved in residential care.

In terms of training of professionals, the training methodology has been based on the CRC as a systemic and multidisciplinary platform to re-consider the centrality of the child, able to orient project drafting, pedagogical action, professional mandates and integration processes among all actors working with and for children inside and outside residential care institutions.

Training processes have been proposed as "Training on the job" stemming from concrete and direct professionals' experience, observation and reflection on practices

The training module has been conceived as:

1. Needs Assessment
2. CRC systemic approach - pedagogy - project planning
3. Relation/contexts - psychosocial aspects - migration cycle
4. Towards an action plan - referral system based on the 4 areas of the CRC and articulated into 4 levels (child, structure, local context, outside and beyond)

A total of 45 professionals have been involved in 3 training cycles both in presence and online.

Additionally, 46 professionals have been involved in 2 Training of Trainers cycles.

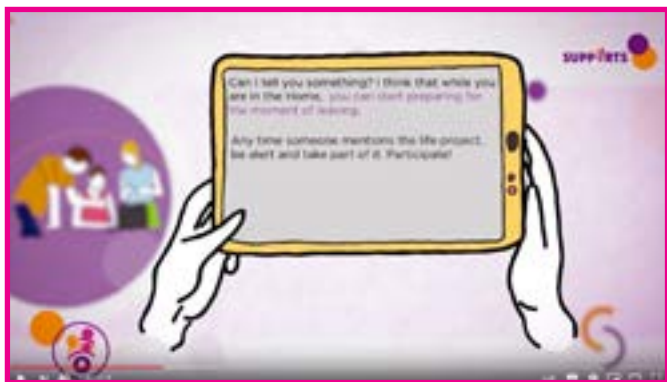
The set of theoretical-practical guidelines developed in the framework of the SUPPORTS experience could be adopted and replicated in the training processes for professionals of other regions and adopted at national level, after project lifetime.

Watch in YouTube!

Entry into the residential care system



Preparing for leaving



Click on the picture!

About the life project

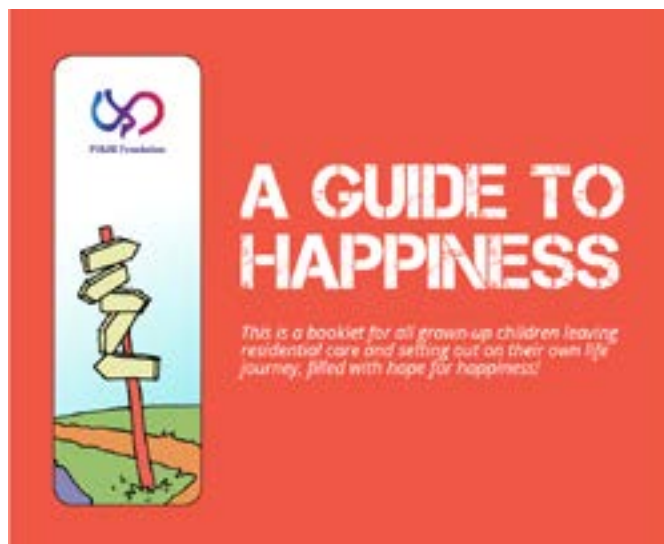


Click on the picture!

Open and read!



Click on the picture!



Click on the picture!

How to prepare for independent living?

Please, call us!



SUPPORTS *SUPPORTS - Supporting children in the delicate phase between adolescence and adulthood while leaving alternative care facilities.*

SUPPORTS is a transnational project involving a partnership of 3 countries from the EU - Bulgaria, Portugal and Italy, which join forces in order to develop comprehensive care for children leaving residential institutions.



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