

**Association for support of children growing in out-of-family care »FICE SRBIJA«
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REPORT

From 3rd PROFESSIONALS MEETING OF „FICE SRBIJA“
(Zlatibor, 6-8 December 2006)

Third professional meeting of „FICE Serbia“, was dealing with issues proposed by its members and in consultation with Deputy of Minister of labour and social policy:

- Transformation of child care and children without parental care institutions
- Application of Special protocol for protection of children from neglect and abuse in social care institutions
- Instructions and directions of Ministry to remove irregularities in practice and application of Family law
- A special segment was dedicated to development of organization „FICE Serbia“, to a presentation of project „Reform of fostering in Serbia“ and possibilities of enhancing practice in work with children and youth growing in out of family care.
- At meeting was also introduced a Republic and Regional level of Institute of social care, from perspective of transformation and development of new services and programmes in institutionalized children and youth care

Immediately after the 3rd professionals meeting, a 3rd regular Assembly of organization was held.

At meeting total 43 representatives were present, which included representatives of Child care institutions, Social work centres from all over Serbia as well as representatives of Ministry of labour, employment and social policy of Republic of Serbia, regional Institute of social care as well as representatives of Non-governmental sector.

I

In segment of programme that was considering TRANSFORMATION of institutions, present representatives of institutions expressed their activities, new forms of work and new forms of managements implemented or planned with support of local community, or in forms of projects which are submitted to Social Innovations Fund.

Basic concepts which Institutions for children without parental care try to develop are:

- Various forms of Shelters and shelter stations for children;
- „Half Way houses“, Intermediate housing (sometimes regarding youth in final stages of care, sometimes regarding postinstitutional support) ;
- Daily care centres for children in risk of abuse and neglect or for children with special needs;
- Open multimedia culture centres, clubs for youth inclusion;
- Social Enterprises programmes (bussines and care programmes);
- Concelling and educational centres for support of family in risk;

Institutions are aware of principle of decentranlizaton included in Social Care Reform Strategy papers and their growing focus towards local community, but all participants of the meeting estitame that local community is neither aware enough nor ready to regain function of social care for its citizens.

Also, representatives of institutions recognoize that lobbying in such situation is not their strenght, as well as that they feel lonely in this task.

Centralitized funding (financing) of Social work centres and their bit slower transformation leave homes in great deal left on their own.

At same time, unclarity which forms of care will remain at regional or at national level, as well as when this will be defined, are slowing down homes in thiking which clearly defined forms of child treatment, as part of general category of children without parental care, they could develop.

Off course that every try to define a treatment includes the questions of number and profiles of employed experts (norming) and that is where the story ends. In general climate of tranzition, anxiety of employed over possibility of losing job, might partialy have impact in sense of activating person to find a solution to ovecome the danger, but simultaneously can be a obstacle to rational and constructive thinking.

Institutions are fidning themselves in challinging position that with great deal of capacities still full, they should introduce inner changes and yet provide quality services. At one hand, most of services are financed from „cost of institutionalized care“, which requires full capacity. New services often use same professionals already engaged in day to day activities of institution.

New services, supported by local community, can even further extend palette of children needs that need to be answered, and which is even without it very wide and blurred by general definition of „children without parental care“. Generally not structured enough general setting, not well differentiated from individual needs of children or groups of children, with introduction of new services raises a question of programmes (in)compatibility.

II

Considering application of a Special protocol for protection of children from abuse and neglect in social care institutions, representatives of institutions, members of „FICE Serbia“ at this professional meeting, have presented activities so far realized.

Considering presented, all institutions formed Internal teams, have introduced General and Special protocols to all employed and partially to beneficiaries. However, an impression is that in this area exists a number of unclearly defined situations relating to the Protocol itself, as well as inability to deal effectively in its complete application, especially regarding preventive programmes and actions. Institutions need more support in dealing with childrens mutual clashes and same age abuse, which is not a subject of Special Protocol. Separating victim and abuser, when both are children in care, is a problem. Stressing permanent, 24hrs a day, phone accessibility of members of Internal team might collide with other professional and ethical principles, but can be overcome. None of institutions have clarified position who are members of local Center for social work are their external team to work with, and an impression exists that Centres are not aware of their obligations given. Some solutions from general procedure by Protocol are not consistent, neither clear enough to be practiced.

Strongest impression from discussing application of Special protocol in practice was that institutions are greatly stopped in activities which are proposed by Protocol by a letter of Ministry, which was included with General and special protocol, that promises organized education for application of Protocols.

This might be of less importance by itself, but in situation when institutions are expected to have significant initiative and management of its own transformation as well as decentralization of system, such ambivalent impression of what can and should be done independently, and what needs waiting for an impulse from Ministry, might be serious.

This impression is enhanced by inadequate transparency of change of status of Home for children without parental care in Vranje.

A meeting idea to learn lessons valuable for all institutions in context of application of Protocol, with such decision of Ministry to close the home and end intake of new children, failed.

III

Representatives of Ministry introduced present representatives of professional meeting with Instructions and directions of Ministry to remove irregularities in practice and application of Family law in system of social care, which are instructions and directions given by Minister.

Very direct speech and readiness of presenters to answer all questions of present professionals, could not change the impression that „guilt“ (blame) is put on Institutions that children live in them, like the institutions stole them from parents or custodians and wont let them return to less restrictive services, for which children have growing need.

It is specially interesting that these instructions and the current explanation of Family law completely exclude possibility of voluntarily placement in institution by parents, as a form of family support to overcome the ongoing crisis.

Although family Law notes the obligation of parents to keep contact with children placed in institutionalized care and to make reasonable efforts to take child to a family as soon as conditions allow to, which implicates that not all children are in procedure to loose or limit parental rights (which furthers on implies voluntarily temporary placement of children as anywhere in the world), current expositions eliminates this possibility.

CONCLUSIONS

At this professional meeting a great joy was expressed by all members for being part of „FICE Serbia“. An overall impression was made that all present representatives of institutions, for very first time, were prepared to completely, without any restrains, talk and exchange experiences as well as dilemmas regarding actual situation, status and perspective of development of institutions for children and youth in Serbia.

A expectation that „FICE Serbia“ will in future contribute to enhancement of practice in institutions, Homes for children is strongly present.

This expectation are directed to mainly a possibility that new members can be:

- Informed of actual changes and possibilities related to development of services and their complementarity to legal solutions,
- Possibilities to raise competencies of work with children and youth – via organized educations,
- Provision of professional literature (presentation of contemporary methods in work with children and youth),
- Exchange of professional experiences using interactive models of work that will include both professionals in child care institutions, as well as beneficiaries.

These needs of Associations members are integrated in Plan of work for forthcoming period.

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PLAN AND PROGRAMME OF WORK OF "FICE SERBIA" ASSOCIATION FOR YEAR 2007.

I NETWORKING

National level

1. A need to network services and new forms of organization of institutions dealing with child care, and which will arise in process of decentralization of system as well as in process of transformation of institutions, will be actual during 2007. Activities of FICE Serbia will be directed to promoting organizations goals as well as offering cooperation to all institutions and organizations dealing with children and care of children growing in out of family care.

Regional level

1. A setting of higher level of cooperation is planned by making an Contract of cooperation with FICE organizations in region. Since 2006. FICE Serbia will become a headquarters of regional organization of FICE of South East Europe, as well as it might in coming mandate periods (2 to 6 years).
2. Networking institutions included in regional pilot project of continious education.

International level

1. Realization of joint projects of FICE Serbia with FICE organizations from Europe or other members.

II SUPPORT TO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF MEMBERS

1. Realization of PRIDE Programme.
2. Presentation of programmes proposed by Agreement on intentions with Holland organization FICE Netherlands.
3. Providing professional texts for internal use of members.
4. Implementation of regional pilot project of continuous education.
5. Annual meeting of professional exchange for members of FICE Serbia.

III Development of organization

1. Activities on promoting mission and results of work of organization to both professional and general audience.
2. Extending membership.
3. Help in overcoming collectively stressfull situations in organizations, collective members of FICE Serbia.
4. Adjusting functioning of FICE Serbia to articles of new Law on non governmental organizations, whose adoption is expected in 2007.
5. Continuation of activities on creating needed conditions to open office of FICE Serbia.
6. Support to individual members of FICE Serbia.
7. Participation on professional meetings on national, regional and international level.

Report is submitted by:

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