

The future starts in the family



Newsletter of the Project "Protecting children of Moldova from family separation, violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation", implemented by Partnerships for every child in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family and the Ministry of Education



Stela GRIGORAȘ,
*executive director of Partnerships
for Every Child association:*

“Remarkable success
in the development
of social assistance
in the Republic of Moldova”

The community social assistant is the most important actor in social care at local level. He is the person who needs to know the entire community, all beneficiaries and their needs, and come up with prompt evaluation and first aid in a critical situation faced by a child or an adult person.

Creation of the community social assistance service is one of the greatest achievements in the social assistance development in the Republic of Moldova. In

a way, we have unique experience in this area, because there are not very many countries in the region that could boast with a network of social assistants at community level.

Unfortunately, this area, very important for our country, continues to face a great number of problems. Firstly, there is very high turnover among these specialists. Most of them leave the system because of financial reasons. Often, communities remain without a social assistant for a



longer or shorter period, while those applicants who wish to occupy these vacancies, unfortunately, do not have educational background in the area. Consequently, there is need of on-going training in this area, which involves additional expenses. Often neither the local public authorities, nor the branch ministries have sufficient resources to maintain professional training of social assistants at the relevant level.

Each time the organization I represent implements a project in

a raion, it pays special attention to community social assistants. This is because these specialists make up the most important link between beneficiaries and the social assistance system. They play a very important role both in the identification of persons at risk, and in performing desk or complex evaluation of each case. They are the ones who should mobilize the community level multi-disciplinary team that includes doctors, police officers, school teachers, who should collaborate efficiently and solve each problem case of a family or a child.

I personally believe that our country hasn't invested much in this extremely important element. If we managed to consolidate the community social assistance system, about 60-70% of all social problems could be solved at community level. In this case the need of highly specialized services would also decrease – as they are very expensive and not always produce the desired impact in the life of a beneficiary.



Tudor RĂDEANU,
head of social assistance and family protection department,
deputy president of Ungheni raion:

"Social assistance is not a profession, it's a vocation"

There is quite a big team of social assistance specialists working in Ungheni raion – it includes 285 professionals. Basically, all 33 mayoralties of the raion have community social assistants and social workers. Child and family welfare issues are on top of the list of Ungheni authorities concerns. First of all, we have a list of alternative social assistance services for family and child – foster care, family support, family-type homes, Cornesti mother-and-baby center for

the prevention of child abandonment at birth, and other primary services. At raion level we have a child and family protection social services development strategy in place. We are proud that there are no more babies abandoned at birth in Ungheni raion, thank to the services we provide. In fact, all children in crisis situation are included into the social protection scheme, with intervention plans being developed, to meet the problems each of them faces.

I want to mention that Ungheni raion is one of the pioneers of the residential system reform. Two residential institutions that worked in the raion – the boarding school and the auxiliary school of Sculeni – cur-

rently are closed down. About 120 children were reintegrated into their biological or extended families. Where reintegration was not possible, the children were placed into alternative services – foster care, family-type homes, Sculeni social assistance center for children.

The social assistants are the persons who permanently monitor the children reintegrated from former residential institutions. This monitoring has cross-sector and multidiscipline dimension, because, without the contribution of teachers, family doctors, district police officers, the civil society, it is impossible to solve the problems of children.

On the Professional Day of

Social Assistance Specialists, I would like to congratulate all professionals of the Social Assistance and Family Protection Department working in all areas of our raion, and all our colleagues from the country. First of all, I wish them constant professional growth, devotion, and much success in this activity that is far from being easy in our times, when the country is affected by economical difficulties, crisis of the family, problems caused by population migration. We all wish that social assistance will come to be appreciated at its right value.

I always underline that social assistance is not a profession – it's a vocation.

Mariana LUPAȘCU,
service delivery manager at Partnerships for Every Child:

"Social assistants contributed to the reunification of tens of families"

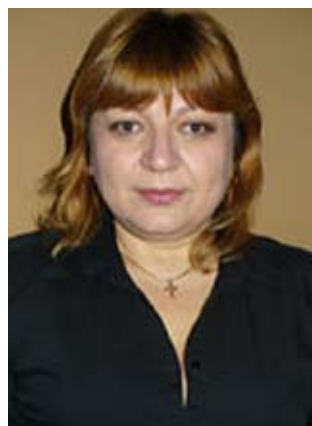
The social assistant is the main link between the beneficiary and the social assistance system. In a community, this specialist covers the needs of all social categories – persons with disabilities, with modest incomes, the elderly, children, etc.

These specialists face numerous problems in present. The first and the biggest is the social assistant's salary – it is so small that it is hardly enough to cover the minimum needs. Transport is another problem – the specialists cannot travel to a neighboring village or raion. In the case of bigger areas, they are compelled to walk several kilometers daily to get to the people who need their help. Political belonging is another factor that affects the social assistant. There are nu-

merous conflict situations that emerge when the mayor and the social assistant are not members of the same party. These factors taken all together cause very high staff turnover in social area. Even if the person is very enthusiastic about the work in the beginning, when they see they can hardly feed their family, they choose to leave the job and go abroad seeking something better.

On the other hand, I would like to mention that social assistants play a very important role in the residential child care system reform. Together with school teachers, family doctors, the mayor, the district police officers, these specialists are in the situation when they have to solve an array of problems that pop up when a child is reinte-

grated into the society, community, school, and family. Most pupils ended up in residential care just because they were not so brilliant at school, or they didn't have what to eat in their families, or because the community didn't have services in place to respond to their needs. Now, although several years have passed since the child left his family, the family problems haven't been solved, but rather, even became harder. Giving away their child from home, the family gets rid of responsibility that some of them see as burden. In these conditions, it is very difficult to convince them that every child's place is together with his family, with his parents. Only a well-prepared social assistant, sticking to a well-determined



methodology of work, is able to ensure a child's successful reintegration. Due to the insistence and professionalism of social assistants, hundreds of children came back home.

It is important now that the social assistant and the entire community become aware that success of each difficult case resides in prevention. I am sure that the social assistants will become part of history of the family, village, system, because they are the persons who contributed to the reunification of tens of families.

Doctor of souls

Emilia CIOBANU,
main specialist in child's rights protection,
depute head of the Social assistance department,
Falesti raion



The social assistant's profession is special, and there are few persons who can practice it. To work in this area, one should be endowed with the highest qualities, such as responsibility, honesty, properness. These qualities determine the specialist to be conscious in performing work duties – to timely identify the persons who need intervention, and promptly react to solve these problems. The social assistant needs much patience and compassion in order to listen to every beneficiary, and, at the same time, to be able

to correctly estimate the level of vulnerability or identify the needs of every person. Unfortunately, there are very many persons in our communities, who need the help of a social assistant – old people, children, families in difficulty, persons with disability. In fact, the social assistant should be close to every person in difficulty.

There is an entire army of social care specialists in Falesti raion: 35 community social assistants, about 90 employees working in community social assistance centers, who provide

services to various categories of beneficiaries – children, mother-and-baby couples in difficulty, old persons, etc. The social sphere also provides employment to parent-educators of 8 family-type families where 32 children in difficulty are placed, and to 5 foster carers.

Each of these specialists contributes in various manners to

the support and help of beneficiaries who need social services. They are our messengers in the territory, and with their help we can support people in difficulty.

I am proud that I have a possibility to work in this area, although it is very difficult and quite underpaid. The joy and satisfaction you get is in the positive change in somebody's life, and it helps overcome all problems. My colleagues and I hope that better days will come, when those who work in this area, and everyone else, will become aware of the need and importance of this profession. Not in vain they say that a social assistant is a doctor of souls.

On this professional day of the social assistant I wish my colleagues much health, endurance, beautiful achievements, and much courage, without which their activity in this area would be impossible.



Elena CHITOROAGĂ,
family protection specialist at Calarasi Social assistance
and family protection department:

"Social assistants essentially contributed to the reintegration of children from residential system"

Over 100 social welfare specialists work in the social assistance system of Calarasi raion – social workers, community social assistants, foster carers, parents-educators in family-type homes.

Difficulties faced by children or families are solved within case management. This means that if a case is not solved at community level (all possibilities have been exhausted), it is referred to the raion level, where it is discussed at the meeting of the commission for the protection

of the rights of children. The commission identifies the exact actions that need to be taken in order to solve the case.

We have a social assistant working in every community of the raion, 3 social assistants in Calarasi raion center, and 2 social assistants in Sipoteni – the largest community in the raion.

In order to build professional capacities of social assistants, the raion department organizes monthly trainings for all social specialists of the raion. These trainings are important for multilateral development of the social assistant, helping him to make prompt and professional intervention for the solution

of social problems in the area where they work.

I want to mention that social assistants also played a very important role in social and family reintegration of deinstitutionalized children. All specialists were open-minded and fully participated in the solution of the emerging problems. Along with the multi-disciplinary commission, the social assistants made necessary social, medical, psychological evaluations, to inform their individual care plans for the reintegration of each child.

A social assistant is important for the monitoring of every child's reintegration. Once in

every three months the individual care plan is revised. On the eve of every new school year, all reintegrated children were examined by the commission for the protection of the child in difficulty, and individual care plans for every child for the year 2012-2013 were produced.

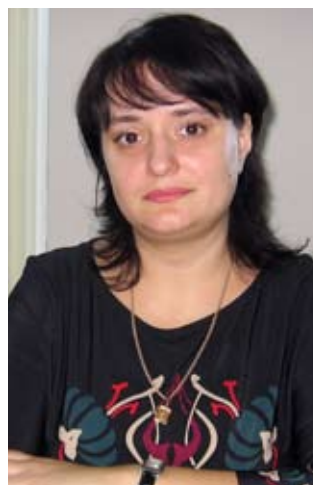
All-in-all, about 100 children studying in Calarasi auxiliary school, Ungheni, Falesti, and Straseni residential schools were reintegrated. Other 31 personal files of children proposed for deinstitutionalization from Straseni, Falesti, and Drochia residential schools are under examination.

A draft law on the child's special protection

The Ministry of Labor, Social Protection, and Family is expected to come up with a new draft law on special protection of the child in the near future. According to Mrs. Viorica Dumbraveanu, head of family protection and child's rights department of the Ministry, the need to adopt this document is high.

"We have very many children in residential institutions, but also in family-type homes and in foster care, who don't have a legally determined status. We regret to state that there are very many children who were forgotten by local authorities, after their placement into the mentioned services. In reality, authorities must monitor, evaluate the children, collaborate with their parents, to see if their situation has changed in time. We have to admit here that there are still many drawbacks in the system", mentioned Viorica Dumbraveanu.

The law of special protection of the child ensures, first of all, uniform use of terminology. Thus, for the first time terms, such as "child at risk", "child separated from parents", situations of neglect" will be provided definitions, and forms



of abuse will be described.

If a child comes into the attention of child care authorities in Chisinau, while he originates, for example, in Edinet raion, very often it is the Child's Rights Protection Municipal Department of Chisinau that has to go to Edinet and evaluate the biological family, or work to achieve deprivation of parental rights – in case if all reintegration efforts are exhausted. Unfortunately, we don't yet have an efficient mechanism of collaboration between authorities. Once the law is adopted, territorial competences of guardianship authorities will be strictly delimited, and we will be able to make authorities collaborate on each case. In fact, the competence will be linked to the child's place of stay. In this sense, the draft law will develop aspects referring to specific responsibilities of local public authorities that have been attributed within the recent years numerous general child protection tasks. In this law, the LPAs will be provided the tools that they will apply in order to avoid situations when a case is referred from one institution to another, and months of time are wasted till a decision is made, as which authority is responsible for the life of a given child", added Mrs. Dumbraveanu.

The new draft law will allow for the adjusting of policies and practices of protection of children left without parental care to the standards of the UN Guidelines for the alternative care of children, adopted by UN General Assembly on its 20th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of Children. The Republic of Moldova is among the first countries in the region adhering to this international document.

This legislation work group includes specialists of the Ministry of Labor, Social Protection and Family, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Health, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Justice, and representatives of the civil society, academic environment, and experts in legislation.

Experts of Partnerships for Every Child consulted the opinion of central and local authorities and social assistance departments, and made suggestions to remove existing drawbacks of the system.



“Children with disabilities should feel that they have full rights at school”

Interview with Valentin CRUDU, head of pre-school, primary, and secondary mainstream education department, Ministry of Education



- Mr. Crudu, what are the perspectives of inclusive education for the nearest future? What were the major activities of the Ministry of Education in the previous school year?

- The Ministry of Education produced Actions plan 2012 – 2016 on the implementation of the inclusive education development program, and in a month we will propose it for the Government approval. The actions plan includes, among other actions, the creation new positions, such as, support teaching staff, municipal and raion psycho-pedagogical assistance services, reorganization of the medico-psycho-pedagogical commission into psycho-pedagogical assistance. The development of the plan lasted more than we initially planned, because in the beginning we didn't have very too many costs to estimate. The state budget for 2013 provides funds to cover the development of this structure in all territorial-administrative units. The main focus is the school psychologist's activity and all issues dealing with psychological consultation both for the pupils, and for the teaching staff, for parents, guardians, etc. Basically, we speak about the creation of certain resource centers, school units where we will have children with special educational needs.

Besides, we continue to pilot the inclusive education program. Over 70 educational units in 12 raions of the country, providing for 900 children with special educational needs, have been involved in this process till present.

This year, the first 39 children with SEN left mainstream school. They are

the children reintegrated from auxiliary schools, who studied based on Individual Education Plan developed by teachers in the schools they attended. The graduation exams evaluation included individual tests for every child, based on the competences they developed. The results are generally satisfying. Within these tests, the children managed to demonstrate the skills they were able to develop during secondary school years. Now the Ministry of education will issue a document certifying the children's competences. The only difference from other school certificates is a field pointing out that the certificate holder was trained within individual educational program. The holder of such a document will be able to pursue education in a vocational or crafts school, so that he can get a profession, and at 18, when he becomes adult, will be able to find employment or go in for further education at college or university.

- In 2013 a new financing formula, “money follows the child” will be applied for primary, secondary schools, and lyceums. What does this formula hold within for children with special educational needs who were reintegrated into school, community, after years of life in special institutions?

- *This formula will be also adapted for children with special educational needs, because these children should come with as much money as possible to school. They will need support teaching staff, a recovery program in a resource center, and other intervention and support. Funds will also be needed for modernization and infrastructure development*

in schools, so that children with special needs are able to move around the school without any difficulties. In this context, the infrastructure of all circumscription schools will be adapted to the needs of children with disabilities. If there are very many children with SEN, we will seek opportunities to help these schools build lifts. It is important that these children have opportunities to move not only on the first floor, but also, if the school has several floors, to have access to all classrooms, to the computer room, canteen, etc. Only this way children will feel like children, living among other children, and fully enjoying their rights.

- To what extent are the teachers across the country ready to meet the requirements of children with special educational needs or those who come back to their schools from auxiliary institutions?

- We train the teaching staff, as we are aware that they should know how to deal with a child with SEN. The Ministry of Education has developed a training module for future teachers, and it is implemented in teacher-training faculties. There is a course of inclusive education in the on-going training framework of the Institute of Educational Science, to ensure that teachers know how to adapt the curriculum for a child with SEN, how such children should be assessed, etc. In addition, teachers are trained to develop Individual Education Plans, so as to fully meet the needs of each child.

Respite placement for families

Respite placement for families that have children with disabilities is currently piloted with the help of Partnerships for Every Child in Chisinau municipality and Orhei raion. Up to present, eight foster care families were trained to provide this type of placement, and starting with this September the first children will be able to receive this service. A respite placement can last from one to 45 days per year. Respite foster care placement can be provided to children under 18 with any type of disability.

Stela GRIGORAȘ,
executive director of Partnerships
for Every Child:

“This services provides for the placement of a child with disabilities into a family that is well-prepared, trained, and specialized in caring of a child with special needs during a short time, while the child’s biological parents can solve certain family or health-related problems.

This service is regulated at the national level under the foster care law that stipulates several types of placement, including respite. However, till present, it was not fully implemented in the Republic of Moldova. I think this project will give a possibility to develop respite placement, re-evaluate it, empowering us to see the strengths and vulnerabilities, after which the service can be replicated at the national level.

We consider this service is very important for children with disabilities and for their families. Not being supported by authorities, these families face major risk of separation from their child and placing him into a residential institution.

Thus, the Ministry of Labor, Social Protection and Family intends to revise the secondary legislation on alternative care of children, in line with the international guide on alternative care of children and with the foster care regulation. The quality standards will also be revised, so that they include models

of positive practices in the new guide – also in the context of the new service we are developing. I hope that the changes in the legislation will support the local public authorities in the service implementation, especially when they will be presented models that have already been tested.

Prior to the project implementation, two researches were performed. One of them, realized at the international level, had the goal to identify and analyze models developed in other countries for the support of families that raise children with disabilities. The second research was intended to evaluate the real situation and the problems faced by these families in our country. Within this research, a number of families in Chisinau and Orhei were interviewed. We found that these families live under permanent stress, because one of the spouses cannot be employed and needs to permanently stay home, and, consequently, the financial burden lays on the other parent. The other children of these parents do not receive the necessary attention, because most of the time is given to the child with disabilities. Often, parents face health problems because of permanent stress. In the view of this reality, we consider that respite would be very good for these families, to empower them solve their immediate problems, such as go to a doctor, receive treatment, etc.”

Prior to the placement, the child and his family are matched with the foster care, helping the latter to learn all details about the child and his needs. The persons in-charge with the project implementation say that one of the conditions of the placement is to maintain the relation between the child and his biological family during placement. At the same time, the child will be informed about the goal, duration, essence of the respite placement, and about his coming back home.

Viorica DUMBRAVEANU,
head of Family Protection
and Child’s Rights Protection
Department of the Ministry
of Labor, Social Protection
and Family:

“The foster care framework regulation and the minimum standards of quality were approved by the Government in 2008. The foster care service develops with encouraging pace. In fact, the current version of the regulation contains provision for the existence of a temporary placement – or, as it is also called, respite foster care placement. In this context, the legal framework exists, but it needs a special approach to this type – respite – placement, if we consider the specifics of this service’s beneficiaries. The foster carers who will provide this type of care need to be additionally trained, and this is why we decided to work in partnership to pilot respite placement.

Respite placement is also cost-efficient. Thus, the cost of supporting a child in a residential institution or in a temporary placement center are higher, because, apart from direct costs for children – such as food, medical care – they include indirect costs, like salaries for the staff, buildings running-costs, etc. Thus, the legislation provides for a 30% higher allocation of funds for the placement of a child with disabilities, compared to all other allocations. This is necessary because of many of these

having children with disabilities

children need diapers, special food, or adapted living conditions. If we speak about a child in wheelchair, for instance, obviously, not all foster carers' homes would be adapted to the care conditions and needs of a child who might require such placement.

First of all, it is necessary that these homes have access to children. We don't mean only technical and material equipment of a dwelling – it is very important, but we speak about the training of foster carers, because they need additional skills to be able to ensure the care of a child with special needs. Another very important issue is constant administration of medicines that cannot be interrupted during the placement term. Besides, a respite placement foster carer needs to be careful about the child's special diet. In addition, there are various emergencies, when the foster carers have to react promptly, even to provide emergency medical aid.

I want to mention that this service is

implemented within a sustainable partnership with the local public authorities who expressed their intention to implement this type of placement, and with Partnerships for Every Child that supports the local public authorities in the development of this placement. In fact, the project supported by Partnerships for Every Child became the foundation of this service in the Republic of Moldova.”

Svetlana CHIFA,
*head of Child's Rights
Protection Department
of Chisinau Municipality:*

“Families raising children with disabilities expect some more sustainable help from the government. From informal researches we know that there are around 2000 families that have children with disabilities. Parents in more than half of them don't have a possibility to find employment, because they permanently need to be with the child.

With the support of Partnerships for Every Child, a set of seminars have been organized for the specialists who will work in this area and for the applicants who accepted to provide this service – respite foster care.

In present, there are 25 paid foster care families in Chisinau municipality. The municipal council became more open to the support and development of these alternative services, and if it is necessary, we will be able to financially cover a bigger number of such families.

At the moment we are selecting the persons who would like to provide this service. At the first stage, the applicants were selected among the families who already have experience in fostering children. Compared to other areas across the country, it is more difficult to select foster carers in Chisinau municipality. In rural area, where there are not very many employment opportunities, the recruitment of foster carers is easier.”



Children set priorities for the national child protection strategy

Members of Advisory Boards for Children from Calarasi, Falesti, and Ungheni raions participated in the development of the priorities of the National Child and Family Protection Strategy. Children shared their visions with representatives of the Government, international organizations, and civil society.

Participating at the meeting were 24 children between 12 and 17 years old – they are children participating in various child rights promotion initiatives, including Roma children, those in various risk situations, and children with special educational needs from Calarasi, Falesti, Leova, Orhei, Ungheni raions, and Chisinau municipality.

The participants discussed the issue of child's rights protection in the raions they represented. The most acute problems that were mentioned included: lack of services, especially in rural areas – for children-victims of abuse, neglect, and

exploitation; mistrust in professionals who work with children and fear to ask for help; parents who are not prepared to support their children emotionally; abuse-elimination legislation is not put in practice; lack of information about the rights of children, who don't know where to ask for help if their rights are violated; lack of information about children-victims of abuse; insufficient funds to support children and families in difficulty.

Based on the described situation, the children proposed that the Government includes the following priorities of child and family protection interventions: to modify legislation in a way that it provides for more

severe punishment applied to persons who abuse and neglect children; to monitor how the budget allocated for children is distributed and used; to develop community services for children-victims of abuse, neglect, and exploitation; to train professionals in providing secure and non-violent environment to children, in organizing informative activities, in the identification, analysis, and referral of abuse and exploitation cases; to create a data base that registers all children, especially those exposed to forms of abuse, neglect, and exploitation; to train parents to provide emotional support to their children, exhibit non-violent behavior to their children, and protect them against abuse and neglect; to inform all children and parents about the rights of children, so that they understand and are able to overcome risk situations.

The process of the new National Child and Family Protection Strategy development started on 17th April 2012, at the initiative of the Government of Moldova.





Five more foster carers start to work in Ungheni

Five foster carers start their activity in Ungheni raion. The future specialists, selected from a much bigger number of applicants, were provided training, where they learned how to communicate efficiently with children, what are the psychological peculiarities of an abandoned child, and what the foster carer can do for him. Representatives of Ungheni Social Assistance and Family Protection Department said that increasing numbers children need this service in present.

Beneficiaries of the service are children temporarily or permanently living outside their family, children whose needs cannot be met by their biological family, children who may become victims of various forms of violence, etc. In present, there are 25 foster carers and 40 children in placement in Ungheni raion.

Tudor Radeanu, depute president of Ungheni raion, and head of Social Assistance and Family Protection Department: *"The foster care service works in Ungheni raion since 2002. In these 10 years of the service activity, hundreds of children were placed in foster care. Applicants to the position of foster carer are approved by the raion Commission for the protection of the child in difficulty. The service provides several types of placement: short-term (not exceeding 12 months); long-term (till the child turns 18); emergency (from 72 hours to one month)"*.

It is for the first time that representatives of children are consulted about the priorities of a Government's strategic document in the area of child and family protection.

The Strategy is a logical continuation of the residential childcare system reform for years 2007-2011, that, according to national and international experts, registered significant process for children. There are twice as fewer children in institutions now, compared to when the reform started. The children were helped to come back to their biological families, or were placed into alternative family-type services: community homes, family-type homes, foster care services.

However, the process was slower in the case of children with disabilities and children under 3. Today, there are about 200 small children living in institutions in Moldova, although their stay here can have dramatic consequences: a common rule says that a child loses 1 month in development for every 3 months he lives in residential care.

Among the goals of the new Child and Family protection Strategy is to ensure equal social protection to all care, eliminate domestic violence an abuse against women and children, eliminate labor and sexual exploitation, create community services, and increase family welfare, promoting and supporting family unity, force, and resistance.

During the Strategy development, parents, children, specialists, and all interested citizens will be consulted. The process will be coordinated by the Ministry of Labor, Social Protection, and Family, under the guidance of the National Child's Rights Protection Council, and supported by the cabinet of the prime-minister.



A summer school for the most active children

Over 50 children, members of Advisory Boards of Children (ABCs) from Falesti, Ungheni, and Calarasi raions, participated between July 2-6 in a summer school organized in a leisure camp in Vadul lui Voda.



from Falesti, Ungheni, and Calarasi

Natalia Semeniuc, child participation consultant at Partnerships for every child, said that the goal of this activity was to build competences of children in monitoring of abuse and neglect cases in their local areas, and in protection of children with disabilities. During 5 days of training, the children learned what disability is, what rights people with disabilities have, and spoke about the problems faced by children with disabilities in their neighborhoods.

One of the summer school sessions was totally dedicated to the “Child’s Helpline” – a new service that has been working for three months already in Falesti and Ungheni raions. This telephone helpline, launched in April, is available both to adults and children who want to report abuse and neglect cases. All calls are processed by specialists, and are further reported to competent authorities.

Natalia Semeniuc mentioned that the summer school is not an isolated event on the child’s advisory boards agenda, and that their members received training in various topics related to child’s rights during their school year.

Created in 2011, the ABCs intend to become a form of association, where children can express their opinions and implement their own projects that meet their needs. ABC members participate in the decisions consultation process and in monitoring social policies in their native communities.

Locally, the councils act as partners of the Social Assistance and Family Protection department, participating in the development, implementation, evaluation, and monitoring of local policies and programs related to children and young people.

The ABCs include children between 12 and 17, with or without experience of residential care or other forms of care (foster care, family-type homes, guard-



ianship), with parents working abroad, children with special needs, children of Roma ethnicity, and children from community schools.

This year ABC members regularly participated in local meetings where child-related decisions were made. Children came up with recommendations

and proposals for the improvement of the child protection system. Young advisors are also involved in the assessment of needs of children in care or at risk of being separated from own families, and in the development and monitoring of local child rights protection policies and programs.

Chance to remain with the family

Nicolae, a boy with blond, curly hair, is the heart of Valentina Cozma's fostering family that lives in Durlesti town. The boy, turning 5 this autumn, shares his love with his two "mothers" – the birth mother who is bed-ridden, and the foster carer.

lae visits his biological mother every week-end, and returns each Monday to his new family, where he is loved as much as back there.

Olga Zaharia, manager of Chisinau municipal foster care service, said that 38 foster carers have

"We had fear of making a mistake in the beginning – it's such a responsibility, and he is my sun", says Mrs. Valentina. Helped by the foster parent, the boy learned several poems, learned to count, and to speak Romanian in one month. What he loves most of all is to make love declarations.

Valentina Cozma has been working as foster carer for over one year, and Nicolae is the first child in placement in their family. "It's important for us that he feels free and secure. We do our best to be real parents for him. We give him what we have the best, and he pays us back with very much love", says Mrs. Cozma.

She found occasionally about her today's profession – in a trolleybus add. The woman remembers the text of the announcement: "I am alone, you can be my family" – a message that touched her soul so much that she thought for a while her heart would stop. She got out at the first station and immediately called Chisinau municipal foster care service, eager to help a child in difficulty.

The other day Valentina went to the municipal Child's Rights Protection Department, where she had initial assessment. Then she followed training, and in a couple of months he had Nicolae placed in her family. The boy's birth mother is bed-ridden, and the grandmother intended to place him into a baby home, because she felt unable to take care of him. The foster care placement followed a one month's period of matching, during which they met and talked daily.

If initially it was planned that the boy will stay in Cozma family for



only one year, now the placement was extended for unlimited term. This is because the situation in the biological family has not changed, and the mother is in critical situation. Nico-

been working during recent 12 months. In present there are 20 fostering families having 21 children in placement.