

# The future begins in the family



Newsletter of the Project "Protecting children of Moldova from family separation, violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation", implemented by EveryChild in partnership with the Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family and the Ministry of Education



## The legislation on child protection will be modified

The legislation on child protection will be modified according to the international standards in this field

The modifications will be operated based on the conclusions of a specialists group inside the central public authorities, civil society and academic representatives, and legal experts. The draft of the project on modifying a range of legal acts will be soon proposed to be consulted by the civil society, and furthermore towards obtaining official reviews from the central public authorities.

According to the statements of the Head of the Directorate of Child's Rights and Family Protection of the Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family, Mrs. Viorică Dumbrăveanu, „The Modification and completion of a few legislations will allow the activity's intensification in the context of identification, assessment, assisting, referring and monitoring of the families and children in difficulty”.

The new project will allow the adjustment of the protection policies and activities for the children without parental care at the standards provided by the UN Guidelines on alternative care of children, a document legitimated by the UN General Assembly at the 20th Anniversary of the Children's Rights Convention. The Republic of Moldova is one of the first countries in the region that aims to ally at this international document's provisions.

Specialists from the Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Justice, as well as civil society's and academic representatives and legal experts formed the specialists group in charge for the modification of the child care legislation.

## Regulations on family support service and reintegration will be elaborated

The Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family will develop new regulations on the establishment and functioning of the family support service.

The Head of the Directorate of Child's Rights and Family Protection of the Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family, Mrs. Virorica Dumbrăveanu states that: „Family support is a complex service and it is necessary to be developed republic-wide. This type of services offer psycho-social support to families and children in difficulty (documents' preparation, support in finding a job, etc.), but also provides information and counseling to parents to raise their awareness on the risks and the consequences of the child institutionalization”.

The regulations that will further be developed by the competent ministry will be a regulative act for the local public authorities in order to establish and develop this service at the national level.

The family support and reintegration service represents a form of protection that ensures the child's growth and development within his/her family, through the prevention of the child's abandonment and facilitating the child's return back home, from the institution to his/her biological or extended family.

The goal of this service is to keep the child in the family, the prevention of child's abandonment and placement in a residential institution, the child's reintegration with his/her family and the provision of the support to the family.

## **The Director „EveryChild” Moldova, Mrs. Stela GRIGORAS:**

# „The reform of the residential institutions is made by the NGOs and local authorities based on the funds of the foreign donors”

- *“Partnerships for children” is the slogan of the “EveryChild” organisation. To what extent you manage to transpose this desideratum in the organization’s daily activity?*

- „EveryChild” is here in Moldova since 1995, and after all this time, we believe that on their own no one can change a child’s life to better. This is possible only within an efficient partnership between the state structures, local public authorities, international and non-governmental organizations, and not least, the children and their families. Our activity has been always based on a reliable partnership between all these actors.

The collaboration with local public authorities allowed us to develop different programmes focused on children’ separation prevention and institutionalization, social rehabilitation and family reintegration of the children from residential care. In collaboration with the Government of the Republic of Moldova we implement a technical assistance programme in reforming child and family social protection policies. The final goal of all our projects is to contribute to the reduction of the number of the children cared for in residential institutions in the Republic of Moldova.

- *In how many communities have you promoted the “EveryChild’s” “reforms?”*

- In the framework of the residential care institutions reform, “EveryChild” works in 5 raions - - Falești, Ungheni, Călărași, Cahul and Telenești. In all these regions EveryChild implements a complex process of transforming of some boarding schools and also some auxiliary schools for children with mental disabilities. Another project, through which we managed to cover the majority of the republic’s raions, is related to the development of the foster care service. In Chișinău and Orhei



we work at the moment in order to develop a foster care model that would offer short brake foster care placement for children with disabilities living in families. We think that this service is an efficient way to prevent the abandonment of children with severe health problems. We know cases where a lot of parents that take care of their disabled children – bedridden or in a wheelchair, when they reach rock bottom decide to place the children in residential care. The service that we try to establish will offer the parents a respite period, while they can solve the problems they are facing with, to recharge their batteries, and further again to take care of their children.

- *You said before that „EveryChild” supports the process of reforming the residential institutions. How many children came back to their families and communities due to the support of your NGO?*

-The number is tens and hundreds. Thanks to our interventions during the last two years, 117 children from two residential institutions in Ungheni were rein-

tegrated in their families. At the boarding school from Ungheni now there are just 20 children for which in the nearest future will be find an appropriate solution. Albinetul Vechi and Socii Noi are other two auxiliary schools that were reformed with our organization’s support. Both institutions were closed, where 103 pupils used to study, the children were supported to go back home or to be placed in different alternative family based services. In the current year we managed to close the auxiliary school from Călărași, where there were placed 72 children. Although the local authorities hasn’t yet closed the institution, no child is longer there; all of the children are with their families or in alternative family based care services. We are also involved in the reformation of the residential institution from Căzânești, Telenești. Our next objective is to work with the institution for children with tuberculosis, from Ungheni. Our experts at the moment work at assessing the children and their families.

- *Which are the most frequent causes for children to be placed in these institutions, far from their families and the rest of the world?*

- If everywhere around the world children are places in residential institutions as a consequence of family abuse, in our country the most frequent cause for institutionalization is the poverty and parent’s irresponsibility. The biggest injustice was made in report with healthy children that were placed in institutions for children with mental disabilities. These children were separated from their parents and dragged into these institutions, just because they struggled at school. At that particular time, these children’s problems could have been exceeded with the involvement of the school teachers. Unfortunately, it has been chosen another “ solution” – the most un-

fortunate and unfavorable for a child – the residential institution.

*- The current stage of the residential system's reform launched in 2007 will end next year. Which are the weaknesses of this reform in your opinion? Which aspects the authorities should focus on in the future?*

- I believe that we will reach the main objective of this reform, that aims to reduce by 50% the number of the children living in residential institutions. Besides, this reform wasn't implemented at the national level. The Government didn't support financially these transformations, at least until now. The reform was made possible by the ONGs, in partnership with the local public authorities with the foreign donors money.

The merit of the central authorities is that they imposed strict rules for a child to enter the residential institutions. We firmly believe that the gate-keeping commissions are efficient filters that stop children's institutionalization, the local authorities having to identify alternative solutions for crisis cases, first of all offering better support to the families. We have to admit that the activity of these commissions managed to considerably reduce the number of pupils within the residential care system.

It is essential that the in the nearest period, in early 2012, the national authorities undertake an evaluation off all the work that has been done during this strategic period. We have to be completely sure that these transformations have brought real benefits for the child and his/her family, but also to learn the necessary lessons in order to implement efficient and effective programs in other parts of the country.

We need a more serious involvement of the Government in order to accomplish the reform, that should be accompanied by own contributions for the implementation of this reform at national level. This reform requires financial support and well-trained human resources. In this respect, the state's intervention could be a decisive one. The local authorities also need the insurance that the services they develop for the children will be financially and legislatively covered. I think that we should give a bigger autonomy for the local authorities, so that every locality could plan the social services that the children and families need, but this autonomy also to be accompanied by a more forceful monitoring of the social services and the evaluation of the outcomes achieved in children's lives.

*- How many years we need in order to make the residential institutions history and to ensure that every child in this country lives in a family or in an environment as close as possible to the family one?*

- I believe that anyway there will exist a limited number of residential institutions like small placement centers, just that they will offer services to a small number of children and for a limited period of time, and that these services are of a higher quality than those offered by the current residential institutions. In order that the situation that you describe to become a reality, it is necessary that the family support service to be accepted and implemented in all the raions. We also should have social workers specialized in child's protection, that can help the family to overcome the crisis,

supporting the family to become strong and independent. The foster care service is another service that should be present in every single raion. As long as the world exists, there will also exist children that will not be able to live in their biological or extended families. The best solution for these children is a foster care family that is ready to offer to the child appropriate care, support and warmth.

I think that we need 4-5 years to reach this desired situation when not even a single child will live outside the family or alternative family environment, with the condition that we manage to develop all the services listed above and will carry out a well-targeted social policy.

*- Thank you very much for the interview.*



A year ago Ana was the best pupil at the auxiliary school from Albinețu-Vechi, Făleşti. With the grades 8s and 9s at almost all the school disciplines, she participated at all the sports and artistic competitions arranged for children from the special schools. "She is the pride of our school and I will not allow her to leave the school", the affirmation made by the director of the school every time the girl's mother tried to talk about the girl's transfer at the school from their village.

## After years of separation, Ana came back home



The girl's mother says that "The school director came and took her (girl) to the school. She was examined by the medical-psycho-pedagogical commission only after a month, and was diagnosed with an easy form of mental retardation, although Ana was a smart and clever child and didn't struggle with the community school programme". This woman states that the teachers from the Albinețu-Vechi school used this method in order to determine the girl's older brother, that had been in that institution for a couple of years already, not to escape from there anymore.

This error was rectified last year, when another commission decided to cancel the mental retardation diagnosis, that was attributed to the girl in an abusive way.

After the reorganization of the auxiliary school where Ana used to study, she came home, to be together with her mother and her older brother, graduate of the Albinețu-Vechi school. The family struggles to survive, the only stable source of income being the social support from the government. They sum at those a couple of hundreds of lei the occasionally gains of the older brother, that works some days at wealthier villagers households. With the certificate that he received after graduating the auxiliary school, this young man was not allowed to study at any vocational school.

Although at the auxiliary school they had for sure at least 3 meals a day, and it was acceptably warm and clean, Ana states that she would never change her parental home for the so-called comfort from the auxiliary school, even if at home they have difficulties to warm the house, and with food; the better food they enjoy just on holidays.

The mother also states that she would never again give her child away from the family home. The mother of the children says that "I did not know that the Albinețu Vechi school is one for the children with

mental disabilities, I believed that the teachers from there would help her to study better. I was shocked to find out that my boy would receive a certificate instead of a diploma for his school graduation".

Even if Ana was, in a way, the favourite of the teachers and the school's director thanked her for the excellent results she had at studying, she does not remember with too much enthusiasm the period when she used to live there.

Ana says that "We were ashamed to go out in the village; people said that we study at a school for stupid people, and the other children from the village used to point at us. But the teachers used to encourage us and to say not to pay attention to the other children, especially that our performances were the best at all the concerts organized in the village..."

At the school Ana studies now, Ana is

far to be the best pupil in the group, because the serious areas at some disciplines that her colleagues have been studying already for a couple of years, while she started to study them only a year ago. Even if it is hard for her, Ana strives to keep up with all her group, being supported by her teachers and colleagues, but the most by the school's teachers that help her to do her homework, but also at school extracurricular work. Ana has an individual programme at the community school and this should help her to fill in the educational gaps. In the little free time she has got left after doing her homework, Ana loves to read, to help her mother with the household's matters, and especially to cook something tasty. Her future profession is also related with the kitchen. Ana's dream is to become a cook and more often to have on her table holiday dishes.