

Vulnerable Youth in Transition to Adulthood

**Projects and programmes to support young people
leaving care and (potential) early school-leavers**



The European Social Network (ESN) brings together people who are key to the design and delivery of local public social services across Europe to learn from each other and contribute their experience and expertise to building effective social policy and practice. Together with our Members we are determined to provide quality public social services to all and especially to help improve the lives of the most vulnerable in our societies.

Introduction

This booklet provides an insight into multi-agency work between youth services working with young people leaving care and projects aimed to prevent early school leaving. It looks at projects and programmes across Europe that aim to assist young people in their transition into adulthood. Common characteristics include community-based services, inter-sectoral cooperation and a holistic approach to each young person. ESN is committed to supporting European policies for vulnerable young people, notably in their transition to adulthood and to the implementation of the Commission's Recommendation on early school leaving.

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Part I. Young People Leaving Care

European Social Network (ESN) has recently explored in the seminar “*Vulnerable Youth in Transition*” the situation of young people in Europe and the role of social services to help them in their transition to adulthood. The seminar focused on two vulnerable groups – those leaving care (be it residential or foster care) and early school leavers.

The poor outcomes of young people who have been in public care have been a particular concern over many years. Children in care (or ‘looked-after children’) are who may (sometimes temporarily) be unable to live with their parents due to the risk of neglect or abuse.

Care can be transformational for some children and young people, giving them a new chance in life, but others will continue to exhibit behaviour which is a consequence of their chaotic upbringing (e.g. truancy, petty crime, drug abuse), and may themselves have children as teenagers and be unable to look after them. Forms of care include: care in a children’s home, fostering and adoption.

One of the problems children themselves mention is the lack of stability – some move between different forms of care (e.g. from an institution to a foster family then back to a natural parent) often with several placements over many years. There are also in some countries large numbers of children and young people in institutions (‘orphanages’, ‘special schools’ or homes for disabled children) who are cut off from the rest of society and whose life chances are severely restricted.

Young people looked after by the State are likely to have a different pattern of transition to adulthood than other adolescents. International research on young people making the transition from care to adulthood has revealed their poor outcomes, in comparison to children who have not been in care, especially in education, health, unemployment, criminality, mental health and social exclusion in general.¹

ESN has asked its Members for practice examples from various European countries that can help prepare young people for an independent life or the support they receive after leaving care.

¹ Stein M (2004) *What Works for Young People Leaving Care?* Barking: Barnardo's.

FEPA, Spanish federation of organisations working with young people leaving care, Spain

Website: www.fepa18.org

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FEPA is the Spanish federation of organisations working with young people leaving care. It was created in 1999 and it has now 45 members in eight Spanish regions. The organisations have 128 residential homes with a total of 610 places. FEPA is funded by the Spanish Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality, the Catalan Regional Ministry of Welfare and Family (ESN Member) and the *Fundació La Caixa*.

Its main objectives are: to create a network of organisations offering support to the everyday work of professionals and to develop services that complement those provided by its member organisations.

These objectives are realized through the following activities:

- **A Youth Space/Meeting Point** offers information and guidance for young people who have left care and complements the work undertaken by educators in each organisation. They help young people with their studies, in finding a job, housing, free time activities, guidance in regards to legal and health issues. 635 young people have been using the service in 8 cities from 5 different regions. The service is implemented in cooperation with official services such as **EspaiCabestany** (see below).
- **Adulthood pathways** offers technical and education support for young people in care and those who have left care between the ages of 16 and 21 years. This programme aims to reinforce the support offered by the regional governments of Aragón and Catalonia to help young people in their individual pathways into adulthood. 132 young people have benefited from the programme.
- **Economic support for academic pathways** offers economic and education support for young people leaving care. They participate in vocational training, pre-university and university studies. 72 young people have benefited from this programme in two years.
- **Professional training** for staff working in the meeting points and the education pathways initiative to help them adopt the “skills grid”, improve body language and make them aware of burn-out.

EspaiCabestany, Directorate General for Child Care (DGAIA), Regional Ministry of Social Welfare and Family, Generalitat of Catalonia, Spain

Website: www.gencat.cat/benestarsocialifamilia

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EspaiCabestany is a programme that provides support for young people under and over 18 who are either in care or have left care in various areas: housing, training, financial support, legal, labour and social inclusion. The aim is that they build their autonomy and move towards emancipation into adulthood.

Here there is a short description of some of the resources available within the programme:

- **Housing:** eight fully equipped apartments and 13 residential places are offered to over-18s. They receive guidance in regards to education pathways and the support of a social educator throughout their personal project.
- **“Via Laboral”:** this programme aims to improve the employability of young people leaving care and provide them with access to the labour market. It is linked to a professional project and provides young people with counselling and guidance. 436 young people have participated.
- **Economic Support Programme:** this aims to give young adults in care the necessary income to develop their autonomy. The grants are linked to an Individual Work Plan and have a professional tracking reference. During 2011 there was an average of 452 grants per month.
- **The Legal Accompaniment and Mediation Programme** aims to provide guidance, counselling and follow-up on issues raised by young people, professionals or associates. It supports young people in the process of autonomy, with direct support and personal assistance. In the same time, it also offers them full ownership of the process of becoming independent. In 2011, 585 young people took part in the programme.

From isolation to integration, De-institutionalisation and Child Protection Department, Azerbaijan

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In cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, international organizations and local NGOs, the De-institutionalization and Child Protection Department in Azerbaijan implements training on business promotion and independent living skills to help develop the employment skills of young people deprived of parental care.

The Ministry of Education in collaboration with Baku Employment and Labour Centre organize vocational courses for young people leaving State child care institutions. Upon completion of the courses, specific measures are taken to help them find a job.

The Ministry has a network of boarding schools for children deprived of parental care which provide pupils with general secondary education whilst in vocational schools young people are provided with accommodation and maintenance and live in State care until the age of 16.

Having realized that these young people need further support once they reach the age of 16, the Ministry of Education jointly with SOS Children's Villages Association have established Youth Homes aimed to reintegrate young people leaving State care centres into society.

The main aim of these homes is to ensure the successful transition of 16 year-old adolescents to an independent life, to improve their social and life skills and provide them with the necessary skills to help them adopt a profession. The duration of stay in these homes is four years. The next stage is semi-independent life which continues until the age of 23.

The Children's Parliament, FICE-Hungary

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FICE-Hungary's purpose is to promote more effective education in family-like residential homes for the successful social reintegration of young people leaving children's homes.

The Children's Parliament is a very innovative way of hearing the voice of children and young adults in public care. The Children's Parliament was founded in 2001 by FICE-Hungary. Members are 14-22 years old children and young adults in care (50-70 members).

The main aims of the project are:

- to give children and young adults in care opportunities to express their views about the child protection system and their problems.
- to ensure publicity for children in care (press coverage too) and guarantee interest representation for children and young adults in residential homes and in foster care. Sessions of the Parliament are connected to different child protection programs (e.g. children's day).

Main themes of the Children's Parliament are:

- Ensuring common placement for siblings
- Expressing opinions about support and everyday life in institutional care.
- Use of pocket money
- Expressing opinion about special needs children's care
- Violation of personality rights
- Accepting homosexuals and other minorities in care
- Problems with housing support
- Problems with self-sufficient life and social integration

Collaboration framework between youth care and social services, Public Services of Wallonia

Website: www.socialsante.wallonie.be

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The number of young people under 18 in care or in contact with social services rose in 2010 to 20 964 persons (2.2% of youth under 18 in the French-speaking area including French-speaking youth in Brussels). Therefore, it is absolutely necessary that social services (for those under 18) and adult social services (including young adults) use the same language and organize exchanges of information in order to avoid any gap in helping young adults in their transition into adulthood. They need to have a clear operational framework.

With this in mind, the Government of Wallonia (competent for general social services) and the Government of the Federation Wallonia–Brussels (competent for care of young people under 18) decided to establish a common cooperation framework which would be a useful and safe instrument for local care and youth services to provide better support for young people under or around 18.

The framework has two levels:

1. Cooperation principles:

- youth and the family must always be the focus of interventions
- transparency and all decisions are taken with the participation of those concerned
- reciprocity (contacts will be held between services but always respecting professional secret)
- continuity of the social file process taking account of each service's work
- local dialogue between services operating at first level with the aim of using the resources as well as possible
- permanent evaluation of the protocol

2. Procedure

The aim is to procure a secure framework for processing the files for professionals. Each service will design a framework to exchange information and make easier the exchanges concerning personal files between social workers.

MundutikMundura, Emancipation Programme for Young Immigrants Leaving Care, Bizkaia County Council, Spain

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This programme is addressed to young immigrants (usually from non-EU countries) at risk of social exclusion and with no family support who have been cared for by local social services until the age of 18. The programme aims to prevent the social deterioration into which the target population would be liable to fall if they had to face life on their own before completing the process of growing up, obtaining an education, finding a job and a meaningful place in society.

Specifically, the aims are:

1. To develop skills and abilities that they need to live an independent life.
2. To develop the skills that they need to make their own decisions.
3. To develop healthy living habits.
4. To structure and organise their time suitably.
5. To extend their network of relationships and social bonds.

The programme provides a comprehensive intervention consisting of residential support with social assistance, covering:

- Relationships and social bonds
- Acquisition of social skills and abilities
- Education/training
- Preparation to find a job
- Regularisation of documents

The project started in 2005 with 75 places available in various centres run by four not-for-profit organisations, but the figure has now increased to 102. The work done is based on individual care plans tailored to the assessed needs of each user. Interventions start based on referrals from Child Protection Services and usually finish once users have achieved the objectives set after a maximum of 18 months. The objectives are met when the user can live an independent life which is assessed through various criteria, such as:

- Minimum education requirements
- Availability of financial resources to live independently
- Having residence and work permits
- Holding an employment contract
- Ability to live independently (social, personal and labour-related skills)

KidS, Community services for young people 16-21, City of Cologne, Germany

Website: www.stadt-koeln.de/2/kind-jugend/kids

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Since most young people leaving care do not have a supportive social network or a person of reference, this project aims to put a young person in touch with a long-term key worker. After staying in foster or institutional care for years, young people need counselling and assistance in obtaining educational achievement, in developing an individual future plan, in coping with difficulties like substance abuse or debts, and practical aspects of life like doing the laundry, cooking and cleaning. KidS provides professional support tailored to the individual needs of the person.

The Municipal Social Service assesses the support for young adolescents, if necessary in cooperation with other youth services and professionals and decides the most appropriate type of service for each young person depending on various criteria, such as their level of autonomy, education or apprenticeship, social network and the ability to cope with everyday-life.

KidS provide 3 main services:

- **Mobi** in which young people live in their own flat; targeted at young people from age 17
- **INSPE**, in which young people live in various settings (flat, hotel, with friends); targeted at young people from age 16 in critical life situations
- **SeIMa**, for girls aged 16 or over to live in an apartment with support until they are capable of living independently.

The successful completion of the programme is measured by their ability to be independent, run a household and a budget, build up personal relationships and be integrated in society.

Bruggenna(ar) 18 – Pathways into adulthood, VVOS – OCMW Ghent, Belgium

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There has been a shared concern about the gap between child care and adult care amongst professionals. Caretakers working with minors in care get frustrated because much of the invested care gets lost when young people reach 18. In the city of Ghent, four local organisations from different settings decided to initiate a pilot project with partners from child care, care for people with disabilities, general health care and social services (local municipality) in order to facilitate the transition to adult care.

They aimed for better knowledge of each other's work and settings in order to undertake better cooperation which would help in the transition of young people leaving care into adulthood.

Main actions were:

- meetings between professionals so that they could know each other (face to face)
- the creation of a common information folder by and for the involved partners
- sharing of good practices
- a workshop on transferral for professionals.

Amongst others, main challenges faced were finding indicators or a definition for “the best help or the help needed”, and ensuring participation of users.

- Evaluation of the project demonstrates that:
- the information folder is widely appreciated
- knowledge and trust have grown between professionals involved
- sharing of good practices is so interesting that it is being continued
- young people now have an accompanied personal transferral to social services even before the age of 18.

With this project, professionals from the above organisations in Ghent aimed to ensure that young people leaving care in Ghent at least know where to turn to when help is needed

Part II. Early School Leavers

More than six million young people in the EU leave education and training with lower secondary level qualifications at best². Although the situation varies in the EU countries, early school leaving follows certain patterns. Early school leavers are more likely to have a lower socio-economic status or belong to vulnerable social groups. Low levels of education not only have severe consequences for the young people concerned, but also high social and economic costs for society as a whole.

In June 2010, the European heads of state and government decided that reducing the share of early school leavers to less than 10% (from 14.4% currently) by 2020 would be one of the headline targets of the Europe 2020 strategy. In 2011, a Council Recommendation³ to reduce early school leaving acknowledged that “Early school leaving needs to be addressed across a range of social, youth, family, health, local community, employment, as well as education policies”. ESN’s position paper welcomed the Recommendation and highlighted the need to provide holistic solutions by involving various actors (different public and community/civil society groups) and supporting the whole individual and the family around them.

ESN has recently looked at strategies to fight early school leaving in the seminar “*Vulnerable Youth in Transition*” and asked its Members for practice examples in fighting early school leaving among young people for a successful labour market and social integration as young adults.

² Further information available at: http://ec.europa.eu/education/school-education/leaving_en.htm

³ Council Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/education/school-education/doc/earlyrec_en.pdf

The Education Plan – Strong and Further, Municipality of Hamm, Germany

Website: www.hamm.de/familie/eltern/plan-bildung.html

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The **Education Plan** takes a holistic approach; its services are available to children 0-18 and their parents. Partners in the Plan are the education, health, children's and welfare departments of the municipality and the local Job Centre. There are various projects: '**Strong**' is targeted at pre-school children. '**Further**' concerns children's transition from primary to secondary school, and '**Fit for work, fit for life**' concerns the transition from school to work.

In the **Strong** project, particular importance is attached to every child's ability to speak the German language. Activities include:

- Training parents in helping children learn at home
- Language training for parents and children from a minority ethnic background
- Discussion of parents' needs with support workers in nurseries and pre-schools

In the **Further** project, children who are lagging behind their peers in late primary school get additional classes to help them catch up. Parents are supported through one-to-one and group mentoring, e.g. in matters of parenting, home-learning or choice of school. This also helps to develop peer support networks among parents.

In the **Fit for work, fit for life** project, the aim is a sustainable transition from school to work. Three schools are working with municipality to:

- Identify support needs of young people, parents and teachers
- Offer individual advice and support to pupils
- Develop thematic cooperation between school, youth welfare department and local business

Impacts so far have been:

- Education/social services are in touch with parents who were not known before
- Reduction of risk to children in the early years of life.
- There is also greater cooperation between social services and schools.

Idfaszgyongy Alapítvány és Alapfokú Művészetoktatási Intézmény (Pearl Foundation and Basic School for Arts), Hungary

Website: igazgyongy-alapitvany.hu/

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The “Real Pearl” Foundation (Igazgyöngy Alapítvány) is a not-for-profit organisation in Berettyóújfalu (East Hungary), which aims to foster and develop artistic talent and provides basic arts training as well as social support for underprivileged and Roma children.

Its main aim is to support the personal and artistic development of these children ‘outside the walls of the school building’ in order to improve their chances of integrating into society when they grow up. By presenting the children’s artwork to the public, the project also aims to change the stereotypical image of socially disadvantaged and Roma groups in the hope that this will help their integration into the society later on in life. As such the Foundation allows for access to the best tools and materials and the most interesting techniques for pupils who are eager to learn. It focuses on creating equal chances and builds on education, social work and cooperation between different institutions.

Besides running a basic art education institute, the Foundation’s activities have broadened in recent years to include the provision of social services primarily for the families of the pupils who take part in the arts programme. These activities range from distributing aid (clothes, food, firewood, building materials, transportation) to giving advice about how to deal with crises (e.g. collapsed roofs, illness or court cases) or understanding how to deal with authorities and official procedures.

The Foundation has been active for over 12 years and today 670 children take part in their art training programme. The majority (around 70%) of participating children are socially disadvantaged and 250 live in severe poverty. The Foundation is funded partly through government subsidies and partly by donations from individuals as well as private organisations under the framework of corporate social responsibility.

In 2010 the Foundation was awarded the title of “Best Civil Organisation of the Year” by its local authority.

National Educational Welfare Board, Ireland

Website: www.newb.ie

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The National Educational Welfare Board is an independent statutory agency, established under the Educational (Welfare) Act 2000, with responsibility for ensuring that every child either attends school, or otherwise receives 'a minimum education'. In particular, the Board has a key role to respond to children who are not attending school regularly, or where there is concern about the child's educational welfare.

In Ireland a new action plan for educational inclusion, the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) was launched in 2005 by the Department of Education and Skills. The DEIS action plan was grounded in the belief that every child and young person deserves an equal chance to access, participate in and benefit from education. At its core was a standardised system for identifying and regularly reviewing levels of disadvantage, and an integrated *School Support Programme* (SSP) that would bring together and build upon existing interventions for schools including the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) and the School Completion Programme (SCP).

In 2009, both these initiatives transferred to the National Educational Welfare Board and the Board was charged with developing "a single, strategic approach reflecting equally the nature and strengths of each of the services, including the National Educational Welfare Service to address school attendance, participation and retention".

The rationale is that the complex problems faced by children with poor attendance, participation or retention arise from a combination of factors that negatively influence a child's functioning.

The nature of these difficulties means that each support service working in isolation stands little chance of making lasting, meaningful change. To make a real difference, a co-ordinated, structured integrated approach is necessary involving all those who are likely to be able to contribute to a resolution of the problem.

Inter-service cooperation to fight early school leaving, Mosfellsbær, Iceland

Contact: Elín Gunnarsdóttir and Berglind Ósk Filippíudóttir, Social Workers in Child Protection Services, Mosfellsbær

Child protection services (CPS) work under the Child Protection Act intervening in the lives of young people at the age 16-18, who for some reasons, i.e. drugs, criminal offense or mental health problems, cannot handle daily life. This is accompanied by instability and poor attendance at secondary school.

To meet the needs of these young people and enhance their social status CPS implemented job training in the year 2008 and cooperated with other institutions in Mosfellsbær such as pre-schools and the local sports centre.

The job training is 9 hours per week and the salary is paid by the CPS. Thanks to this cooperation, young participants become socially active, gain daily routine, and enjoy their job training in supportive and healthy surroundings.

The CPS social workers follow these individuals with monthly interviews. Most of them continue their secondary education. This cooperation has been reported successful by the social workers in CPS and by participating services. The young people report they find the strength to face the challenges of daily life again.

The CPS and Mosfellsbær social services are active co-workers with Fjölsmiðjan, a non-profit practical training and education centre for young people who have dropped out of school. It was founded in 2002 by the Icelandic Ministry of Welfare, Directorate of Labor, municipalities in the capital region and the Red Cross. The primary goal is to develop opportunities for young people (16-24 years) in various areas: woodwork, education and counseling, cookery, computer skills, printing and packaging, automobile servicing and electrics.

Support for High School Roma Students in Romania, Foundation Resource Centre for Roma Communities and Roma Education Fund

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“Support for High School Roma students in Romania” is a four-year project implemented by the Foundation Resource Center for Roma Communities (RCRC) in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Research (MER) and other NGOs in Romania.

The project was initiated and financed by the Roma Education Fund (REF) Budapest, starting from the experience of a similar pilot project financed in Macedonia. The project aimed to contribute to the emergence of new Roma elite by providing 9250 monthly (925 annual) scholarships and school-based mentorship to a total number of 275 Roma students in secondary schools, for a period of 4 years (2007-2011).

The total amount allocated for grants within the programme was 462500 EUR (9250 scholarships of 50 EUR each).

The main objectives of the programme were:

- to improve 275 Roma students' high school performance by 0.5 points (GPA) by providing them with financial support in upper secondary education.
- to provide educational support in the form of individualized mentoring
- to increase the number of Roma students who complete high school and go beyond compulsory education.

The main components of the programme were the financial support conditioned upon school achievement and participation in mentorship activities.

The individual and group mentorship activities consisted of:

- Professional counseling and orientation
- Personal counseling
- Learning methods for the subjects at which the student faces problems;
- Support to elaborate an individual study plan
- Cultural activities (for example, the International Day of Roma)

M@ZL: Address medical absenteeism in secondary school, Regional Public Health Service West Brabant, The Netherlands

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The M@ZL intervention aims to limit early school leaving in secondary school by providing guidance to students who have frequent or prolonged absences for medical reasons.

Schools are provided with clear information about:

- when and how to contact students and parents
- when and how to refer to the youth health physician or school attendance officer.

Schools actively trace students with frequent or prolonged absence and can choose between two different routes:

- The first has fixed criteria for referring to the youth health care physician: four times reported ill in three months or more than six days continuous.
- In the second route the school decides if and when to confront the student and parents in case of sickness absence. This conversation may lead to a consultation with a youth health physician, who can refer to a medical specialist or a psychosocial support network.

In both cases, the consultation is compulsory. In case the appointment is missed, the medical absence is reported to the school attendance officer, who will take further action.

Paying attention to sickness absence together gives the opportunity to contact and support vulnerable students in an early stage. Underlying problems can be identified by answering questions, for example: why have you been reported ill so frequently or what causes your imbalance? Students, parents and schools can be given advice in order to maximize participation in school activities and help them graduate, eventually reducing health inequalities.

Stay on Track, Vienna Board of Education, Austria

Website: www.antwerpen.be/onderwijs/international/comenius

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Comenius Stay On Track is a partnership between the cities of Antwerp (Belgium) and Vienna (Austria). The overall purpose of this partnership is to develop better cross-sectorial (Education, Economy, Social Services) policy and tools to reduce and manage truancy, prevent drop-out and improve quality of student guidance and follow-up in part-time vocational secondary education (Antwerp) and dual vocational education (Vienna).

Both partner regions want to counter truant behaviour in school and on the job, prevent early school leaving and improve the quality of pupil guidance at school and on the job. The most important result is a toolbox with a collection of measures, practical approaches, checklist, manuals and good practices (available on the website).

Increasing the number of “on-the-job-learning” apprenticeships and the quality of mentorship in the companies is one of the most important aims. The project should have an innovative impact on policy makers, school head-teachers, student guidance, pathway counsellors, teachers, social workers and job trainers. The project aims to have a big impact through job shadowing opportunities, case studies, dissemination and implementation of the toolbox and a wide dissemination of the project work in the cities, at national level and in EU institutions.



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