

## **Respite placement for children with disabilities**

**Seven foster parents from Chisinau municipality currently provide respite care within the foster care service. This type of placement allows the parents who are raising children with disabilities to have a respite, during which they can solve certain family or health problems they face. The respite placement is a new service in our country, piloted and implemented with the support of Partnerships for Every Child NGO.**

This type of placement is currently provided to 13 children from the municipality, and their number is to increase in the future, says Olga Zaharia, foster care manager at the Municipal Department for the Protection of the Rights of Children.

The respite placement may last from one day to 45 days per year. This type of placement is provided to children aged 0-18, with any type of disability.

"The placement itself is preceded by matching of the child, his family, and the foster care-giver, so that the latter finds out all details about the child and his needs. An important condition is that the relation between the child and the biological family is preserved during the entire placement. The child is also informed about the goal, duration, essence of the respite placement, and about when he will come back home", said Olga Zaharia.

According to the information available to Chisinau Municipal Department for the Protection of the Rights of Children, there are 2000 families with children with disabilities in present. Over half of such parents have no possibility to find employment, because they have to stay permanently with the child.

The Foster Care service is regulated at the national level and provides a variety of placements, including respite care.



However, it has not yet been fully piloted in Moldova.

The first beneficiaries of the respite placement were selected in response to the applications submitted by families with disabled children and the evaluations made by social assistants. The fos-

ter parents received special training, so that they can work efficiently with the children who have disabilities or various health problems.

Currently there are 23 foster parents in Chisinau who have given respite care to 79 children.



## The draft law on special protection of children at risk and children separated from parents, approved by the Government

**The Government approved on the 6th of February's meeting the draft law on special protection of children at risk and children separated from parents**

According to the Minister of Labour, Social Protection and Family, Mrs. Valentina Buliga, Moldova hasn't had a document like this before, while the existing normative acts are far insufficient to provide effective regulation in the area. Thus, the new law provides procedures for the identification, evaluation, assistance, reference, monitoring and evidence of children at risk and of children separated from their parents, as well as identifies the authorities and structures responsible for the application of these procedures.

The document defines a set of new notions in the child protection system that have been previously used with different meanings. The draft law revises the activity of guardianship authorities. Thus, it proposes to withdraw the decision-making function from the guardianship authorities of Level 1 local public authorities and the executive function of Level 2 local public authorities, as their activity is inefficient and often presents bureaucra-

tic barriers in decision-making regarding children.

The draft law also provides the self-notice and book-keeping procedure in the case of children at risk, and a clear definition of risk situation. If applied, these legal stipulations will standardize the procedures of assessment and registration of children at risk. The document clearly determines the situations and conditions when the children can be attributed the status of "temporarily left without parental care" and "left without parental care", and specifies the terms, identifies the specialists and the decision-making authorities in-charge with the assessment of the child's situation, attribution of status, and placement of children separated from their parents.

Besides, the draft law stipulates compulsory cooperation in matters of child protection, between local and territorial guardianship authorities from various local public administration structures,

institutions, and services under their subordination, working in the area of social assistance, education, health-care, law-enforcement, etc.

The document also regulates emergency and planned placements of children, as well as types of social services where the children can be placed.

The draft law was produced in a participative process, with the consultation of the civil society representatives, central and local public authorities (at the Congress of Local Authorities of Moldova). Consultations were held during the entire process – starting with the determination of the law concept and structure, and working on its contents.

We remind that the public association Partnerships for Every Child played the role of mediator in relation with the civil society and local partners, and ensured the expertise and opinion consultation of all partners.



## Inter-sector cooperation for the assistance and monitoring of children who are victims of abuse

**I**n February, family doctors, school headmasters, community social assistants, and members of multidisciplinary teams from Falesti raion participated in a series of trainings for the piloting of the Instruction of inter-sector cooperation in the assistance and monitoring of children who are victims or potential victims of abuse, neglect, exploitation, and traffic. The seminars were held within a project implemented by Partnerships for Every Child and the Moldovan branch of Swiss-based NGO Terre des Hommes.



Emilia Ciobanu, Chief Specialist in child's rights protection, talked about the objectives of the raion Child and Family Protection Strategy, adopted by Falesti Raion Council on the 31st of May 2012.

The goal of the strategy is to strengthen inter-sector cooperation in the protection of children against violence, abuse, and neglect, through awareness raising, early intervention, development of child and family social protection policy, reduction

of risks in child development and risks of severe problems that may require colossal efforts to be solved. The strategy contains a clear mechanism that distributes tasks among specialists from a number of areas, setting a common implementation scheme.

"This, in fact, is a system of efforts and activities to be implemented at various levels and in various forms, in order to identify the problem at an early stage and solve it, rather than wait till this problem will become a severe one", said Emilia Ciobanu.

According to a research performed by Partnerships for Every Child, many specialists faced difficulties while estimating the dimension of violence against children. Thus, the most of them tended to reduce the scope of the problem. In most cases, when talking about abuse and violence against children, doctors, teachers, and other specialists refer only to physical abuse, not knowing that there are many other forms of abuse.

"The research results showed that domestic abuse is caused both by external factors, such as socio-economical situation, and internal, such as family

collapse, low level of education, lack of parental skills, family relations, and other. Methods of control and discipline of children pass from one generation to another. Thus, if a child is exposed to violence, he is likely to have the same behaviour in relation to own children when he grows up", mentioned Emilia Ciobanu.

Very often parents aren't even aware that they are abusing or neglecting their children, for example, when they don't feed them enough or don't buy clothes for them, or don't call the doctor when their child goes sick. One of the most frequent causes of neglect is lack of living and education conditions. Many children have to live in cold, in settings that lack elementary living conditions.

According to the seminar participants, a more efficient solution of the children's problems is possible only in the conditions of efficient collaboration at raion level, between all structures in-charge with child protection. These institutions include the raion child protection council, gate-keeping commission, multi-disciplinary commission, anti-human trafficking commission.

## **Family-type homes – evaluated by Advisory Boards for Children**

**“Family-Type Homes (FTH) is a very good service for children who are orphans or left without parental care. FTH gives them an opportunity to be together with their brothers and sisters, and feel as in a true family”.**





These are only some of the conclusions made by the ABC members, after they finished the evaluation of family-type homes in Calarasi, Ungheni, and Falesti raions.

The ABCs submitted the conclusions and recommendations that followed the monitoring to the child protection decision-makers.

The evaluators mentioned that the children placed in FTH don't lack anything, they have toys, school supplies, participate in numerous events, attend interest groups and activities at school. All the children who participated in the research mentioned that the most important persons in their lives are those who take care of them, that is, their parent-educators. Thank to these conditions, the children can develop, they have opportunities to participate in various school and extra-school activities, to be appreciated and feel loved and protected.

At the same time, the most of the evaluated children expressed regret for not having possibility to maintain relations with their biological families. Most of them see their parents, brothers, sisters, other relatives, very seldom, or don't see them at all.

Among others, the authors of the study recommended that depending on the child's age, he should be announced about his placement into family-type home. The ABC members consider that in cases when this is possible, the child should know the cause of the placement the term of stay in the fostering family. According to the authors of the report, this information will help the children gain more confidence in their own future.

In addition, the authors of the study consider that it's of major importance that prior to the placement into FTH, the child and the parent-educators should undergo a matching procedure. It should be noted that only three out of all the children participating in the study met their parent-educator prior to placement, while in all other cases they met the family in the day of their placement.

The authors of the study also mentioned that it is necessary to encourage contacts between the children in placement and their biological or extended families, which also fits the Family-Type Homes Regulation and the individual care plan of the child, developed by ter-



ritorial social assistance authorities.

Natalia Semeniuc, Consultant in social services development and child participation at Partnerships for Every Child, said that the monitoring and evaluation of family-type homes included several stages. A number of workshops were held initially with the children, discussing the principles of the service organization and functioning. The workshops included detailed discussions about the questionnaires to be used with the children in placement. The young evaluators had a series of meetings with the social assistance and family protection department, in-charge with this ser-

vice, discussing with them all details of the service functioning.

The ABC members visited then tens of children placed into family-type homes.

This is not the first experience for ABC in the evaluation of a social service for children. They already performed evaluation of over 80 children placed into foster care in three raions of the country.

The ABC members work currently on the evaluation of placement centers for children in Falesti, Ungheni, and Calarasi raions.

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## Another chance

**V**alentina Cozma became a foster parent two years ago. She has been taking care of a boy since then. The foster parent has strongly attached to this child, who has become a real full-rights member of their family.

“Since Nicolae appeared in our family, the sun rose in our house”, said the woman. If in the beginning they thought the boy would stay only one year in their family, now the placement has been extended for undetermined term. This is so because the boy’s biological family’s situation hasn’t improved, and his mother continues to be in severe condition. The child visits his mother every weekend, to come back on Mondays to his new family, where he is equally loved.

Several months ago Valentina Cozma started to provide a new type of placement – respite care. This placement is designed for families that raise children with disabilities. Up to the present, her family has given respite care to two girls with special needs.

“I think this type of placement is extremely useful for families that raise children with disabilities. Both girls who were placed into our family come

from one-parent families, their fathers decided to leave. In these conditions, the mothers who were left to fight alone have basically no time to take care of their own health or do other important things”, says the foster carer.

Anisoara, one of the girls who was placed into Cozma family, is 8 years old. Although she has many disabilities, she managed to become one of the best pupils of their class. “Initially, the biggest challenge for me was to comb Anisoara’s very long and dense hair every morning. But I got used to this shortly”, says Mrs. Cozma smiling.

The foster parent says that she learned very many things from this child. First of all, how to mobilize in the fight with difficulties. Thus, although the girl has a severe disability with her both hands, she manages to have perfect hand-right.

During Anisoara’s placement in Cozma family, her mother had time she

needed so much to have a surgery. Now Anisoara is with her mother, but she is ready to come again to Cozma family, where warmly welcomed.

Respite placement is a new type of foster care, implemented in the Republic of Moldova by Partnerships for Every Child.

The project implementation was preceded by a nation-wide research that had the purpose to evaluate the real situation and the problems that families raising children with disabilities face. It was identified that these families are much more vulnerable socially and economically, because one of the spouses cannot work, as he (she) needs to stay with the child. Consequently, the entire financial burden falls on the other parent. The other children of these parents don’t receive the attention they need, because their parents spend most time with their disabled brother (sister).

A mother raising children with disabilities works 24 hours out of 24, without vacations and holidays. These women often have no time even for a doctor’s consultation. This all happens because they don’t have anyone to leave their child with.