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METHODOLOGY

FOR TRAINING PROFESSIONALS TO SUPPORT THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING IN RESIDENCE SERVICES AND UNACCOMPANIED MIGRANTS AND MIGRANT YOUNG PEOPLE WITH THE CREATION OF A PERSONAL LIFE PROJECT AFTER LEAVING STATE CARE

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Introduction

The project in brief

“**Making the /im/possible dreams come true**” is a project aimed at building the capacity of professionals working in the field of child protection and providing state care to children without parental care and unaccompanied migrant children through: 1) sustainable methodological tools of work with children and youths which are to help the young person create their “Personal Life Project (PLP) after the state care” and 2) the creation of an institutional coordination model and mechanism in the form of a 3-element support network for children and adolescents leaving the institutions in three areas which are important for the young person – education, employment and supporting social services.

The project approach and methods are based on Lundy model applied in various European countries and developed by Prof. Laura Lundy at the Queen’s University Belfast, consisting of four key concepts in relation to the application of Art. 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) concerning children’s participation – **SPACE, VOICE, AUDIENCE, INFLUENCE**

This model is shared in the four project sub-targets:

Sub-target 1: Creation of pre-requisites for **SPACE**: preparation of two methodologies and training professionals working for and with children, in relation to the rights of the child and child



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protection in state care: 1) Methodology of the training of professionals concerning the support to youth in the process of creating Personal Life Project once they leave state care and the practical implantation of the project; 2) Methodology of training professionals concerning the implementation of methods for tackling hostile or risk environment for young people leaving state care;

Sub-target 2: Providing conditions for **VOICE**: supporting and preparing children leaving state care by directly providing for the relevant basic services (advice) to create and put into practice their Personal Life Projects and the implementation of the methods for tackling hostile or risk environment – all of this involving direct children’s participation;

Sub-target 3: Preparing the ground for **AUDIENCE**: involving the relevant stakeholders (incl. public authorities supporting the project such as associated partners, the State Agency for Child Protection, the Employment Agency, the State Agency for Refugees to the Council of Ministers, Plovdiv Municipality, Stara Zagora Municipality) so that they work together and create a three-component support network for young people leaving state care which includes: (1) a network providing the basic services needed for the young people leaving state care; (2) a network providing access to higher education and professional training and (3) a network providing access to the labour market;

Sub-target 4: Spreading and reproducing the **INFLUENCE**: spreading the methodologies at national and international (cross-border) level through the organization of (1) webinars open to professionals working for and with children, concerning the rights of the child and child protection in state care; (2) e-conference with the stakeholders; (3) information working meetings between representatives of Bulgarian and Romanian institutions providing state care to children without parental care and between Bulgarian and Greek institutions providing state care to unaccompanied migrant children and (4) awareness-raising campaign at national level.

Objective of the methodology

The objective of this methodology is to provide professionals with a model for support of youth leaving cares and unaccompanied migrant children and persons as to how to create their Personal Life Project after the state cares. For the youth to be effectively supported, it is necessary to know them and understand their needs and specific characteristics very well, help them explore their own



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abilities and strengths and give them timely and expert support so that they can become independent and useful to themselves and to society.

A large part of the children who have grown up in institutions or in countries outside the European Union do not know their own rights. Specialized support is based on their fundamental rights. The concept of human rights means and entails that people engaged in all interpersonal relationships should be visible and their human dignity and importance should be respected. People interact in a variety of ways and everyone is entitled to be themselves in such interactions, to be as they are and express their own personality (self) in way that does not harm others.

Structure and Purpose of the Methodology

The methodology is structured in such a way as to provide the knowledge, information and tools needed to professions working with young people benefiting from residences services and with unaccompanied children and persons and its contents is as follows:

Section I: Methodology for professionals' work with children and young people in residence services and unaccompanied migrant children and migrant young people in the process of creating their personal life projects after leaving state care;

Section II: A programme designed for training professionals involved in the application of the methodology;

Section III: Additional materials for young people which the professional may give to the young people: necessary information for every young person starting an independent life;

Section IV: Additional materials for trainers and professional which provide further information on the specific characteristic of the work with the groups of young people, guidelines on the organization of the training sessions and up-to-date information on the legislation in the Republic of Bulgaria concerning the target groups of young people covered by the project.



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Section I: Methodology for professionals' work with children and young people in residence services and unaccompanied migrant children and migrant young people in the process of creating their personal life projects after leaving state care

1. Characteristics of the young people benefiting from residence services and unaccompanied migrant children and young people

The period from adolescence to adulthood

The period from adolescence to adulthood entails multiple significant changes for the young person which concern, on the one hand, the development of self-identity and, on the other hand, the development of autonomy and taking responsibilities for your own life.

Development of identity

To develop an identity means that a person should have a realistic idea of self – who am I, what can I do, how do others perceive them. Identity is experienced as a sense of well-being: you feel comfortable with your own self, your own body; you know where you are heading and you have a personal conviction that you will have the recognition from the people that matter to you. That is how persons with strong identity recognize their relatedness to others. They are not afraid of relating to others, they do not feel “lost” in the other. The psychoanalyst Erik Erikson considers that human personality develops in a series of stages. At each stage the individual has to find a solution to a major task, to resolve one psychological crisis. The outcome of every “crisis” of this kind determines the next stages in life. In other words, how an individual is brought up and raised paves the way for solving such crises or stops, blocks the development with unsolved tasks. The positive outcome of each stage of development leads to healthy psychological functions of individual and how the individual fits in the environment. The negative outcome of a given stage of development leads to difficulties at the next stage, to inadequate idea of one's own self and the world, to difficulties with the relationships with other people.



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During adolescence (12-18) male and female adolescent grow into adulthood. This period is characterized by physical and psychological changes. The adolescents from their *identity*: personal, social, sexual, professional. They learn to establish various relationships with other people (friendship, working relationships, intimacy, sexual relationships, etc.), to separate from others, to keep in touch with others, to interact with their peers, to take responsibility for their own life, to communicate with adults in a different way, to choose a profession, hobby, continued education, political and religious ideology. Such choices are accompanied by many experiments enabling male and female adolescents to test their limits and abilities. The successful outcome of this period is a stable sense of self-identity and an idea for the future.

The body (physical, hormone) changes give rise to discomfort and anxiety. Finding “your own place” is accompanied by a lot of rebellion and confusion. That is why male and female adolescents often have hostile or inconsistent behaviour. This is their **identity crisis**. Adolescents try to construct an image of their own self as individual personalities with all the complexity of every personal aspect: professional, sexual, social, etc. This is the reason why they do not want to seem like others, instead, they want to be different from others, however, they still find it difficult to define this difference. Such difficulties are expressed as contradictory behaviour. Good parents see this difficulty and give an example to their child, without imposing their will and at the same time allowing their child to make his/ her own choice and have personal life. They help the child form his/ her own views, gain experience and draw lessons from what happens with him/ her, build up a realistic idea of self and make plans for the future.

Children without parents do not have a permanent relationship with an adult to whom they can turn to with their anxieties, concerns and needs. As with many children who do not find the support of their parents in the period of adolescents, they try to find answers to the question of “Who am I?” in the **negative identity**. The negative identity is the identity that is in contrast with anything: child crime, abuse with drugs and alcohol, school dropout, sexual promiscuity (the practice of indiscriminate contacts). Some adolescents may even show symptoms of psychological diseases when going through such a crisis. Others go through the so-called **identity moratorium** which means that they defer as long as possible making decisions and changes in life because they are afraid, and they feel utterly unprepared for autonomous life. Still others (this is quite frequent with children who have grown up without parent or have lived serious life situations) construct an **identity of early maturity**. Although they seem more mature than they age suggests, seemingly self-confident, such adolescents are deeply insecure, have difficulty establishing satisfactory relationships with others.



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During adolescent and the transition to adulthood, the adolescent has to construct a narrative, a “myth” of their own self: to summarize their past, to determine who they are now and to decide what to do in future. Unless the adolescent has successfully went through the previous stages of development, he/ she will not be able to trust others, to make plans for his/ her future, to be confident in his/ her own abilities, to take the initiative and experiment with various types of behaviour and roles (see Additional materials for trainers and experts).

Development of autonomy

The transition to adulthood and the development of autonomy has special characteristics in the case of adolescents who have grown up in institutional care and unaccompanied children and persons who have been left without parental care at some stage of their life and have experienced losses and serious events of various tykes. These young people have not built up an appropriate support network of people close to them, friends and experts, they do not have enough information on the opportunities of development. They need to develop certain skills for searching support and information. Albeit no longer children, adolescents during the transition to adulthood have a strong need for specialized support and guidance during this critical transition stage. For them, this period is full of anxiety, lack of knowledge and insecurity.

At the time of leaving cares, the young people are more vulnerable. Left without a support network of people close to them and without knowing the opportunities offered by public institutions, they are particularly vulnerable and might be caught up in traffic, shadow economy, criminal networks, abuse and (labour, sexual, etc.) exploitation. Ignoring such vulnerability because of lack of knowledge or lack of adequate services makes it more likely for the adolescents to be involved in situations which threaten seriously their health (sometime even their life) and future.

Difficulties faced by the young people leaving care and the unaccompanied children in Bulgaria

Lack of life experience and skills for autonomous life entail difficulties in evaluation and unrealistic evaluations and life choices for adolescents after their period they have lived in residence services. They are faced with challenges such as making a living, finding a job and accommodation and starting a family.

Quite often, young people find it difficult to maintain their job, even after finding one and being employed, because, on the one hand, they are faced with unfavourable attitudes, low pay and labour



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exploitation, and, on the other hand, they do not have the working habits, patience and perseverance needed to learn and develop. Part of the girls and boys, from an early age, get entangled in prostitution which they perceive as a sufficiently good “key” to future living. Offering sex services gives them money, protection and privileges and is perceived as an alternative to easy living. However, it is often turned, at a later stage, into a serious financial dependence and their only way to make a living.

Children who have grown up in institutional care often find it difficult to establish stable and salutary relationships and friendships for various reasons such as public prejudices, the influence of their previous environment, specific characteristics of their psychological development.

During the period of residence services the adolescents respect the rules and order established within the service, follow a particular schedule and are entitled to advice. They are in a relatively secure and controlled environment. Once they leave the service, there is a drastic change to the environment and the young people are very often unprepared to face the risks and challenges of the new environment. They are often used to receiving assistance and utmost support and feel entitled to this and once they become of age, they find it difficult to cope on their own. One of the reasons for this lack of autonomy is that they have developed the identity of a victim: their destiny was the one of losses they could not have controlled or avoided as children. However, the fact that they continue to identify themselves with victims means that the young people leaving residence service continue to look for the same assistance in the case of their relationships, without making any personal efforts for a change and development. This identification makes it easier to manipulate them and, thus, the young people become victims of traffic, violence and exploitation of different kinds.

Children, especially unaccompanied migrant children, share risk factors of traffic and exploitation identified in relation to adults. A specific factor characterizing the environment (in particular on the Balkans) is the insufficient sensitivity to violence which is to be part of the work of both experts meeting children at the border and of the legislation. For example, a delay in the family reunification procedures in the case of an unaccompanied child lead to an increased risk for the child to be involved in traffic and exploitation. Children often do not understand all the procedures they are subject to and look for other ways to reach their families (UNICEF & REACH, 2017). The only way they see to continue their journey to other parts of Europe is to resort to smugglers and traffickers (Save the Children, 2017). An example of the insensitivity to violence is the practice of “bacha bazi” in the case of Afghan boys and male adolescents which forces them to be involved in



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sexual exploitation and violence. The insensitivity refers to the fact that this practice is considered to be a “cultural tradition” and not a situation in which adolescents are in need of protection.

Other risks at individual level are:

- Previous experience of violence in the country of origin or country of transit;
- Women and children travelling alone;
- No knowledge of rights;
- No knowledge of languages and of the individual countries;
- Indebtedness (to traffickers and other persons who have “helped” them in the course of the travel) (Forin & Di Maio, 2018).

These risks need to be taken into consideration when preparing a Personal Life Project after leaving residence care.

The methodology contains a detail material on traffic and drug smuggling (see Additional materials for young people; it is a good idea to go through this material together with the young people and it might be given to them).

2. Necessary support during the transition into adulthood

The issues below concern the support which has a direct influence on the everyday life of the young people leaving institutional care and correspond to the rights of the children.

- **Psychological support**

The coming of age in the case of children without parental care (regardless of whether they are unaccompanied children and persons or adolescents who have grown up in the homes for children without parental care and residence services) has a critical influence on their well-being and way of life. The goal of the adequate psychological support is to identify and find solutions to their specific fears and concerns about the future. Such support should start at a relatively early stage (at least two years before leaving the care) and should continue after coming of age (at best, until the young person feels confident in his/ her abilities for autonomous life).



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Psychological support is aimed at constructing a stable identity. In other words, the adolescent should have a clear idea of self which corresponds to his/ her actual abilities, qualities and skills. Setting objective (what do I want to become, where do I want to live, what kind of job do I want, what kind of profession do I want to learn, what kind of family do I want, etc.) is an important and integral part of the identity. Psychological support contributes to acquiring the appropriate skills to achieve these objectives.

- **Information**

Children who have grown up in institutions often do not have the necessary and correct information on the essence and consequences of the transition into adulthood. It is necessary to provide information on the consequences of coming of age in a clear and transparent manner, in response to the major concerns of the adolescents, in particular information concerning: 1/ the rights and obligation they are going to have once they come of age; 2/ the change in the way of life once they leave the institutional care; 3/ the opportunities to find an appropriate job, further education; 4/ services and experts supporting the process of finding accommodation and a job; 5/ the risks of leaving the institutional care.

- **Further education**

Various studies and practice show that, once the adolescents leaving the services come of age, education becomes less important. On the one hand, they need to have a stable income so that they can start an autonomous life; on the other hand, the majority of these young people do not professional qualifications and higher education is not a priority for them. It is very often the case that no connection is seen between the qualifications and the actual opportunities for a well-paid and permanent job.

At the same time, both the studies and practice show that further education facilitates to a large extent the transition into adulthood: it is a pre-condition for extending the support and informal network (friends, acquaintances, people who have the similar interests and problems, etc.), it extends the period of time for making definitive decisions as to important aspects of life, it provides an opportunity to find a place to live, scholarship or solutions to other important everyday needs.

In this regard, it is good for the young people leaving the services and the migrants to receive support for their aspirations and efforts to continue their education in any relevant form: university, professional education, courses for professional skills/ qualifications, etc.

- **Access to accommodation**



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One of the major concerns of the young people leaving the services is find an appropriate accommodation at the village, town or city where they would like to live. A large part of the young people has no skills to maintain an apartment or a house on their own, to use domestic appliances, to cook, to consider the bills to pay, to manage their financial resources. Apart from the financial aspects, it is necessary to have skills to find a place to live, negotiate the terms and conditions, conclude a contract, keep it clean, communicate with the neighbours. If they have the proper skill for all this, there will be less suspicion and negative attitudes in the community towards the young people who have a different cultural background and who have grown up in institutions.

- **Employment**

Access to employment is an issue of fundamental importance for the young people leaving the institutions or for the young migrants. The transition from education to employment is also a factor associated with the transition from childhood to adulthood in general. The children leaving various institutions and migrant children find it particularly difficult to find a paid job. This is precisely the reason why these young people need appropriate guidance and various kinds of support to ensure their access to the labour market and to keep the job. It is necessary to have job search skills, job application skills (preparing a CV in different formats, a motivation letter, job interview skills), knowledge and skills to conclude an agreement, skills to remain at the new job position, to communicate with colleagues at different organizational levels, to tackle various types of stress, to learn new things quickly and to adapt to the new environment.

- **Health**

The skills to keep in good health are essential for all people. To be prepared for an autonomous life, young people need to know what good health means, how to identify diseases, how and where to look for medical help. It is vital for the adolescents leaving the institutions and/ or adapting to a new unfamiliar social environment to be provided with information on their healthcare rights, on the possibilities for specialized, possibly free healthcare during this transitional period. They need to acquire the skills for asking the medical professionals for further information and to make decisions on treatment.

Specific areas of support for unaccompanied children and persons:

- *Specific guarantees in the case of the asylum-seeking procedure*



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With the coming of age asylum seekers no longer have a series of specific guarantees which may ensure their rights and opportunities to be granted asylum. Therefore, information and advice on such legal aspects had better be provided to the young asylum seekers.

- ***Family reunification***

Once they come of age, unaccompanied children separated from their families and recognized to be in need of international protection are no longer entitled to family reunification. Therefore, unless the procedure has been completed before coming of age, it may be terminated. Considering the importance of family reunification in terms of making the transition into adulthood easier and considering the resources it involves for the host country, the process needs to be completed even after coming of age. The family reunification process needs to be made faster and simpler.

Guidelines to trainers:

The experts participating in the training have long experience with working with the young people benefiting from the services and with unaccompanied children and persons. Encourage the systemization of this experience. Divide the people to be trained into several small groups of 3. Put a different question to each small group concerning: the specifics of communication with these two groups of young people (depending on the experience of the trainees): how past experience influences their behaviour and personality; the specifics of these groups when it comes to making decisions and the specifics when it comes to realizing the consequences of the decisions made; specific needs for support and the creation of a support network. Let the groups work for 15 minutes and then let each group present their work by systemizing it in the following areas:

- Specifics resulting from internal factors;
- Specifics resulting from external factors;
- Resources.

Help the trainees reformulate specifics perceived negatively as resources and associate the young people's needs, fears with the personal life experience of the trainees: whether they have also experienced similar emotions and events, what helped them overcome the difficulties in such cases. Use the information available in both methodologies when necessary.

3. Specific characteristics of the work with children who have experienced loss or violence



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It is appropriate to consider the young people who are seeking asylum in Bulgaria and come from other countries from a legal/ administrative and psychological point of view.

In terms of their psychological development, they are adolescents going through the transition into adulthood regardless of their cultural background. On the other hand, they are likely to have experienced serious traumatizing events such as war, (systemic) violence, abuse. Such experiences leave deep and permanent psychological scars and, therefore, it is important not to ignore them.

It is crucial for young people's development, for the successful outcome of their personal life projects to establish a relationship of trust between them and experts. Several factors influence the establishment of trust; one of them is the young person's ability to trust and be trusted and this ability depends on his/ her personal story. Events such as a loss, betrayal of trust, violence make the young person less able to trust and be trusted. That is why it is important to know the young person's personal story and to realize how such painful events impact their existing relationships with other people and how to treat the incidents which are an obstacle to establishing a relationship of trust.

The majority of young people coming as refugees and unaccompanied minors in Bulgaria (and part of the children who have grown up in institutions) have experienced numerous traumatizing events such as being victims and/ or witnesses of violence, loss of close relatives and family, favourite objects, home, country. Some of them have lived through war, systemic violence, negligence, abuse, dehumanization. They have avoided death. They have survived.

As a result of such events the young people often have different time behavioral characteristics. As a means of defence against the pain of past experiences and losses, unaccompanied children and persons may:

- “forget” part of their life and experiences;
- be unable to “overcome” a given experience;
- have sleep problems;
- become isolated or refuse to talk;
- want to commit suicide;
- start taking drugs;
- have suspicious, accusatory and aggressive behaviour;
- have difficulties with learning new things, etc.

Professionals should be prepared and should realize that it will take time to mobilize both internal and external resources to counter the personal multiple vulnerability and the external challenges. /



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Further information on the specific psychological characteristics of these children and young people and the professional assistance they need is available in the additional materials for trainers and professionals/.

Guidelines to professional when working with unaccompanied children and persons:

- 1. Get to know and become familiar with the general issues of the context the young person comes from: what the social precepts for a successful man/ women are at the country of origin, which of them the young person would like to follow and to what extent they are in line with the social precepts in Bulgaria; what the main values of the people living in the countries and cultures of origin are. Check whether the existing conditions and relationships do not further traumatize the refugee because of conditions and communication in contrast with these values.**
- 2. Encourage the young person to tell his/ her personal story. Ask him/ her whether he/ she has experienced very stressful events and what impact they had on him/ her; whether there was an event which drastically changed his/ her life. Give him/ her a chance to tell his/ her story and give vent to what he/ she has lived regardless of the time past. This will help him/ her free mental capacity to think about the future.**
- 3. Evaluate the young person's individual qualities you need to deal with. Learn about the context and put the experience of war, violence in the context of the particular individual. To determine the follow-up activities and to realize the long-term consequences, it is essential to know the age at which the traumatizing event took place. Let the person share his/ her anxieties and difficulties, taking into consideration the peculiarities of the unique situation he/ she has experienced and continues to experience. Do not judge the story, listen.**
- 4. Give more information on the opportunities Bulgaria has to offer to people experiencing such situation. Relate these opportunities to the desires and dreams of the young person.**
- 5. Follow the rhythm/ speed of the young person. It takes a long of mental efforts to adapt to a new situation and part of the young person's mental capacity is likely to be used for "processing" the stressful events he/ she has experienced.**
- 6. Choose where to meet, at a place where the young person feels safe, protected and at his/ her ease. This will contribute to better concentration and will make communication easier.**



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Guidelines to trainers:

Albeit difficult, talking about the past experiences of violence and loss is important and it is also important to draw a parallel between the unaccompanied children and the children who have grown up in institutions, to find out the traumatizing events (at what age they took place, how they happened, what people were involved) and to relate them to stages of development in order to see their impact on the current behaviour¹.

Almost every child in an institution has experienced a traumatizing event of violence and loss, negligence and discrimination. They have an impact on the child's development such as:

- reduce the child's cognitive abilities, e.g. the capacity of the memory, how fast and for how long new information is memorized and retained;
- reduce the child's ability to concentrate because of increased anxiety;
- reduce the child's ability to set objectives;
- pre-condition for difficulties with establishing relationships of trust with other people regardless of their age and sex.

The experience of professions worldwide shows that the following summarized practices are particularly important and they can contribute to working more effectively with children and young people who have experienced traumatizing events:

- get to know the personal story of each young person in order to avoid sensitive issues;
- work with smaller groups in order to have less sources of anxiety;
- patiently repeat new things until they are learnt;
- not to make promises which may not be kept;
- encourage the formulation and expression of personal objectives and dreams and work together to make them become reality;
- help the young person "see the difference" between the relationships of abuse and the salutary relationships in his/ her life.

Exercise of description of case study 1

Preparation: hand out materials for case study 1 to the participants; case study 1 concerns a young person similar to the target group you work with.



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Instructions to the group: “Divide the participants into 3 small sub-groups. Every small group should answer one of the three groups of questions: knowledge, skills and intervention, personal attitudes and experiences.”

The small groups work for 20 minutes and then each group presents its work and the other groups give advice. Encourage a discussion and sharing of personal opinions, stressing the confidentiality in relation of the personal information shared within the group.

Exercise of description of case 2

Preparation: hand out materials for case study 1 to the participants; case study 2 concerns a young person similar to the target group you work with.

Instructions to the group: “Divide the participants into 2 smaller groups. Follow the described model, describe one of your cases.”

Having worked for 20 minutes, every small group presents its work. Encourage the participants to systemize the information in the following two fields:

- chronological sequence of events;
- relating the traumatizing events to the stages of development and how these traumatizing events may be associated with the demonstrated problematic behaviour.

4. PROFESSIONALS’ WORKING APPROACHES

The methodology we have developed is based on three approaches of work with children and young people, i.e.:

- **Prof. Laura Lundy’s model and the approach of child participation;**
- **the approach based on strengths;**
- **the person-centered planning approach.**

The approach of child participation and Prof. Laura Lundy’s model

The major approach in this methodology is the approach of child participation. The methodology is based on the model of child participation developed by Prof. Laura Lundy, Professor of international children’s rights at the School of Education at the Queen's University of Belfast. This model was endorsed by the Irish Department of Children and Youth Affairs in their recent National



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Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making (2015 – 2020). This model provides a way of conceptualising a child's right to participation, as laid down in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child².

The model helps people working with children focus on what is most important to ensure the active participation of children in making decision on their own development.

The model comprises four major elements which chronologically built-up to ensure the child's participation in the decision-making process. The four elements are as follows: Space, Voice, Audience, Influence (Lundy, 2007). The child's right of participation is divided into two major parts:

- the right to express views
- the right for the views expressed to be taken into consideration.

The right for children to express their views has two elements: Space and Voice:

- The element of Space points to the fact that safe, secure space needs to be ensured so that children can form and express their own opinions, views, needs, desires.

For the organizations and the professionals to understand whether they have completed the first element, they need to answer the follow the following questions:

- ✓ **Have children's views been actively sought?**
 - ✓ **Was there a safe and secure space in which children can express themselves freely?**
 - ✓ **Have all the steps been taken to ensure that all children can take part?**
- The element of Voice focuses on the development of skills and the provision of information so as to help children express their views. The adults should not think and speak instead of

² Article 12:

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law. (Convention on the Rights of the Child, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>).



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the children, they do not control and do not judge, instead they make it easier for children to express their opinions, views, needs, desires.

The organizations and professionals need to answer the following questions:

- ✓ **Have children been given the information they need?**
- ✓ **Has this information been presented appropriately so that children can form their own views?**
- ✓ **Do children know that they do not have to take part?**
- ✓ **Have children been given a range of options as to how they might choose to express themselves?**

The other two elements of Audience and Influence ensure the right that the view expressed by children are taken into consideration.

- The element of Audience makes it compulsory for all those involved in the decision-making process to listen to the views expressed by the child. Professionals and organizations working with children need to create the conditions for children's views to reach the relevant audience and to be heard.

The organizations and professionals need to answer the following questions:

- ✓ **Is there a procedure/ process for communicating children's views to the people who need to hear them and who can make decisions as to how to put them into practice?**
- ✓ **Do children know who their views, needs, desires are being communicated to?**
- ✓ **Does this person/ body have the power to take decisions?**

- The element of Influence refers to the fact that the people working with children and the people making decisions need to cooperate to take the necessary steps in relation to the child's views which have been formed, expressed and heard when and how this is necessary.

The organizations and professions need to make sure that the children's opinions are taken seriously and that steps will be taken whenever appropriate. **For the organizations and professionals to verify that this element has been completed, they need to answer the following questions:**

- ✓ **Were the children's views considered by those with the power to effect change?**
- ✓ **Are there procedures in place that ensure that the children's views are taken seriously?**



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✓ **Have the children and young people been provided with feedback explaining the reasons for decisions taken?**

This way of developing a Personal Life Project actively involves and teaches the young person how to participate and make their own decisions concerning their own life and future; how actively to seek for assistance and how to organize the people around them (regardless of whether they are part of the children's close and informal environment or whether they are experts at job which matter to the young person) so that they can become independent and to achieve successfully their plans for the future.

Strengths-based Approach

Young people who have grown up in institutional care and/ or from poor communities often form a negative idea of themselves (Antonova, 2001). This idea is based mainly on learnt negative stereotypes ingrained in society at large or in their community of origin. Others often evaluate the children from the institution or from a background other than Bulgarian in terms of the deficit – what they are not, what they cannot do, what they cannot achieve or in other words what they are like as persons based on a negative evaluation (e.g. lazy, stupid, likely to steal, unreliable, etc.).

All this often discourages the young person from dreaming, achieving certain objectives in terms of learning and communication with people outside the institutions, from integrating and developing in society. As a result, there is challenging behaviour, apathy, unwillingness and subverting all the carers' attempts to make the young person continue their education, find a job, etc.

One way to find a solution to such behaviour is the strengths-based approach. In the course of a professional conversation with aim of making the young person change his/ her idea of themselves, the young person is encouraged to find his/ her positive qualities, to rethink what positive abilities are disguised beneath the seemingly negative qualities and acts, what the young person's desires, dreams and motivation to achieve them are. Respecting the young person's dignity and desires, he/ she might be motivated to find an active and useful role in society. In other words, the young person might be motivated to start to become independent and take the responsibility to care for himself/ herself on their own by further education, professional training, starting and keeping a job, building healthy and satisfactory intimate relationship with a partner, children, colleagues, the community.



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The identification of the strengths and of what works enables the children to see themselves as capable, strong and useful. When they feel appreciated, they do better and their quality of life improves.

Person-centered planning approach

A third approach which is complementary to and builds on Prof. Lundy's model is the person-centered planning approach. This approach changes the paradigm, i.e. the way to work with young people. The change concerns the transition from “making a decision in the best interest of the child” to “supporting the child in decision-making”.

Regardless of age, we all make mistakes. The possible mistake or wrong or simply unreasonable decision should be a reason for limiting the rights of people. There is acceptance of adults' wrong decisions and choices, on the one hand, and very strict criteria as to the decisions made by children under the age of 18.

What is the essence of this approach?

Person-centered planning may be defined as way to identify how a given person want to live their life and what is needed to make this happen. Planning brings to the fore the person and refers to equal treatment, inclusion in the family, the local community, public life and self-determination which requires changes to the mindset and balance of empowerment.

The general objective of the person-centered planning is “good planning leading to positive changes in the life of people and in the services” (source: <http://bapid.com/bapid/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Supported-decision-making-BG.pdf>). The specific objectives of person-centered planning are:

- to create a vision of the person's life as part of the local community
- to describe the necessary steps to make it happen.

This is achieved through:

- finding and effectively fulfilling the different desires, needs and concerns of the young people who are about to leave state care and, along with this, they should be the primary source of information;



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- understanding and tackling the major issues concerning the young people – finding, together with them, their state, the change they want to make in their life and what contributes to make this change happen;
- identifying and finding the opportunities for the young person's choice;
- mobilizing and engaging the entire network of the young person's contacts; the network of contacts is identified together with the young person;
- resources from the system of services in response to the young person's preferences and with the aim of supporting the desires change – the right of choice;
- registering up-to-date information on:
 - what has been learnt about what the young person considers to be important for him/ her and what others consider to be important for him/ her;
 - what balance has been achieved between what the young person considers to be important for him/ her and what others consider to be important for him/ her;
 - what others are expected to know and do to help the young person achieve what is important for him/her;
 - what needs to remain the same and what needs to change; who and how long will work together with the young person for making the changes happen;
 - what remains the same and what changes during the personal life project and whether this really matters to the young person and whether the young person wants this change.

For person-centered planning to be really effective, there is usually the need for cooperation with a wide range of people, services and the wider community network.

To be able to support a child or an adolescent in decision-making means:

- to listen and to teach the child;
- to help the child form, formulate and express appropriately its desires and preferences;
- to try and make him/ her guide its own life;
- to provide him/ her with the opportunity to interact with other people surrounding him/ her and make him/ her give his/ her contribution as an equal.



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5. Personal Life Project after leaving the state care

What is the personal life project?

The young people leaving the cares should have a “roadmap for the future” or a “**personal life project**” (PLP). The essential idea of this personal project is that the starting point for action is the young person’s own dream. The PLP provides guidance and clear steps as to who, how, in which areas and how long the young person will be supported in the transition from the cares to independent life, from childhood to adulthood.

What is the difference between the personal life project and the individual development plan?

The personal life project focuses primarily and only on achieving the objectives concerning the young person’s future. The outcome of the good preparation and fulfillment of the PLP is a smooth transition from life in care services to independent life and integration in the community. The PLP covers both the last years of young person’s life in services and the period of 1 up to 2 years after leaving the services.

The individual development plan within the care services (or the action plan, the individual support plan, etc.) usually concerns the achievement of particular development-related objectives during the period of provision of care services. The individual plan focuses on meeting individual needs and may be part of the PLP and part of the achievement of the objectives in the PLP relating to the independent life once the young person leaves the service.

The responsibility for the decisions taken and the achievement of the objectives of the PLP should gradually pass to the young person until he/she is entirely responsible for it because the PLP is prepared to make his/ her own dream of his/ her life come true and, as with anyone, the young person pursues his/ her dream independently.

Areas covers by the personal life project:

- measures and services ensuring that the young person is adequately “equipped” to take more and more responsibilities for his/ her own independence;
- the nature and level of contact and personal support to be provided;
- the young person’s health needs and how to meet them;
- arrangements to support the young person in further education or employment;



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- arrangements to support the young person in further intimate and family relationships;
- evaluation of the young person's financial needs and capacity and arrangements for financial support for a certain period of time (if possible);
- measures ensuring the young person has adequate living conditions (rooms, areas of a town, village or city, etc.);
- establishing the young person's needs for legal information and establishing contacts with people providing such information and support.

Stages in the preparation and implementation of the Personal Life Project (PLP) after leaving the state care

- Preparatory stage – selection of a personal mentor and creation of supportive and motivating environment within the service;
- First stage – formulating dreams and objectives and finding the strengths, qualities, abilities, interests and a support network;
- Second stage – preparation of PLP;
- Third stage – process of implementation and periodic review of the achievements under the PLP.

What happens during the individual stages?

Preparatory stage:

The aim of this stage is to create appropriate environment within the service which can engage the interest and motivate the young people and the team. The stage includes a talk with the team from the service concerning the project and the activities. It is important for the people working in the service to be able to make an informed choice as to whether they want to become the young persons' personal mentors. The team itself needs to have a clear idea of who and how wants to be involved as a personal mentor before presenting the opportunity for work on their PLP to the young people.

Who can be a personal mentor?



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The person who manages and supports the entire process of personal project preparation may be called a “**personal mentor**”. Personal mentors may also monitor the implementation of the plan through cooperation with the relevant support staff, providers of services and anyone else involved in the process.

Regardless of whether the professional staff working in the service, the parents, family members, friends or supporters act on behalf of the child or his/ her family, it is of utmost importance that the young person’s personal mentor should be suited for the task in terms of his/ her values, abilities, knowledge and skills. He/ She should be trained for the application of the methodology and should be aware of some important aspect of the young person’s life which might have an impact on the process of creating a personal project.

When the young person does not want to work with a particular mentor (for whatever reason), another mentor should be found.

Why the relationship between the young person and the personal mentor is considered to be a motivation and development tool?

Children who have grown up in institutional care or have been caught up in a situation of gratuitous and systemic violence (similar to that of migrants/ refugees) often have not had the opportunity to establish sound relationship with another adult making them feel protected, safe and trusting the world. There is no so-called relationship of secure attachment. With age such children become deeply distrustful of others, depressed, lacking initiative, aggressive, unable to assess risk situations they get involved in, unable to establish sound and satisfactory relationships with others.

A major task for adult carer and/ or professional is to be able to establish such a relationship with the young person: such relations that give the young person the feeling of trust, predictability and durable relations, protection of young person’s secrets, emotions, experiences, dignity. The relationship should give the young person the feeling of security in terms of his/ her emotional investments in the interactions. Children often describe this type of relationship by say “Someone who cares for me”.

It is hard and difficult to predict how to establish such a relationship with children who have had no such experience so far, who have experienced a lot of disappointments, losses and emotional traumas. This process is difficult for both parties – it is difficult to trust and be trusted. Young people often provoke many times the adult just to “test” the relationship or they try to “take advantage of” this relationship for personal benefits, i.e. abuse the relationship. It is good for the adult to express in words and discuss such processes with the young person so that, firstly, the



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young person can realize the process of abuse and, secondly, the young person can see a model how to overcome this and, thirdly, relationships can be established on the basis of clear definition of roles, rights and obligations on both parts.

Establishing this type of relationship which is new to the child or young person is a serious intervention to attain psychological well-being. This process involves the awareness of fears, shame, anger, disappointments, painful experiences. Once such a relationship is established, this acts as a motivating factor for the young person to start to value, rediscover and develop himself/herself; to gradually become independent, to take responsibility for himself/ herself and to establish sound relationships with other people.

That is why the main task for the personal mentor is to establish relationship of trust with the young person.

What does the personal mentor do?

- **Supports the young person to prepare his/ her personal profile;**
- **Supports the young person to create his/ her own support network;**
- **Helps the support network to respect the choices the young person makes and to participate in the implementation of the PLP;**

Guideline to the trainers and professionals who will work with young people:

How to present the project at the service – to the young people and to the team?

A talk at the service to present the project and the opportunities the project offers to those young people aged 14 to 18 or of any other age group who are about to leave the service. At an introductory meeting the manager at the service supported by a member of the project team may present the project to the young people in an appropriate manner, to introduce the team members involved in the project as personal mentors and the area in which they will be able to support the young people who are willing to take part. It is important for the young people to be given some time to make a decision on whether they want to participate in these activities, which staff member they would like to have as a personal mentor, and to think about their dreams and what they want to achieve in life.

How can the young people choose their personal mentor?



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One possible way is to put a list of the names of staff members at a visible place where the young people can express their preference to work with a certain staff member by writing down their own name next to the name of the staff member in the list. Another way is that a team member holds an individual talk with each young person and during the talk the young person can express his/ her preference. A third way is that each staff member willing to be a personal mentor can state the hours when he/ she is available for a meeting so that for the first two weeks the young people know where and when to find the staff member and have a talk with him/ her. It is important to respect the young person's preference and give the young people limited time to make their choice so that this can serve as a topic of discussion: that life offers certain opportunities some of which are limited in time. The young people should know that their preferences will be respected and that the final decision will depend on the availability of the particular staff member.

Possible approaches of young people's participation:

For the group of young people to be prepared for participation, there could be a series of group meetings at which you can start to work on the personal plans and the desires for the future. Game methods and various stimulating materials (e.g. pictures, stories, stories of young people from institutions who have made their way, success stories, etc.).

Here are some examples of games:

Show a film/ media coverage – a real-life story of a young doctor who has grown up without parents

<https://www.btv.bg/video/shows/tazi-nedelia/video-sabota/cenata-na-edna-mechta.html>

Show the film to the young people. Then discuss with the young people the reasons for the success of this young man.

Another way to show a personal example is to organize a meeting with a person who has lived at an institution and has had success in life.

A collage/ picture of My Dreams

In the beginning the young people will find it difficult to express and divide in different areas their dreams and desires, you can start by suggesting to them image which they can divide into 2-3 areas.

Preparation: gather together 10-20 magazines/ newspapers from different areas, e.g. sports, technologies, cars, fashion, interior design, architecture, finances, tourism, cooking, life of artists,



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etc. If you have a group of 9 young people, you can select materials for 3 small groups of 3 people – big sheets of paper, glue, scissors, felt-tipped pens, colour paper, scotch.

Example of instructions to the group: “Now we’ll play an important game. Please, make small groups. Each small group sits down in different corners of the room. Choose a “supplier” within each group. The “suppliers” will come to me and ask for materials and bring those materials to the group. Your task is to make a picture/ collage in response to one question by using the available materials. Each group will give an answer to a different question. I will now go to each group and put the questions to the groups.”

The questions are:

Group 1: Where do you want to live in 5-years’ time? What will your place look like? Whom do you want to live with?

Group 2: What do you want to work in 5-years’ time? What will you look like? Whom will you work with?

Group 3: How do you imagine the perfect family you will have in 10-years’ time? Who will be the members of this family? How many children will you have? How will you spend your time together?

“Go through the magazines and find pictures/ text which correspond to the questions put to your group. Cut them out and make another picture with the cutouts on the big sheets of paper. You have 1 hour to do this.”

When there are 15 minutes left the moderator of the session goes around and help the groups choose a speaker of the group who will present the collage to all the others.

It is important that all the people should be heard and positively evaluated during the presentations. The moderator of the session puts supporting questions aimed at making clear the motivation and the ideas in relation to the questions. The answers should be judged as good or bad.

My Stamp exercise

This is an individual exercise, i.e. every participant prepares their own stamp and then present it to the group. The idea is to see the difference between the different roles the young person will play as an adult.

Necessary materials: A4 sheets of paper, colour felt-tipped pens/ pencils, magazines, glue, scissors.



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Example of instructions: All important people and families had their own stamp. Now important people have business cards. The stamp and the business cards are used to introduce the person in various roles. Now everyone will make their own stamp. You can take a sheet of paper and divide it into 4 parts. You should draw or glue a picture cut from a magazine in each part so that each picture can show you in these different situations. It should show who you are and what your strengths/weaknesses are. Here are the parts of the stamp:

Me – when I am alone with myself

Me – when I am with friends

Me – when I am at school

Me – when I am with relatives/ close friends/
the family

If most children have no family, the fourth part can be replaced by: Me – in 5-years' time as an expert/ profession in the field of...

You have 20 min. to do this. Find a suitable place to work. If you have any questions, raise your hand and I will come.

In 20 min. every young person tells about their own stamp whenever they feel ready. The moderator of the session puts some additional question to make clear the strengths and personal qualities. There should be no judgement on the answers, every dream expressed is taken seriously. If anyone does not want to present their stamp, they should not be forced to do so.

Life Line exercise

The exercise is aimed at systematizing the past experiences and focusing on important events and ideas of life after leaving the service.

Preparation: A larger room is needed. Ask the group to stay in such a way that there is enough space for one long line on which the participants can walk. On one side of the line you should write "Birth", in the middle – "Present", at the end – "Death".

Example of instruction to the participants: "We are going to play a game. Everyone who wants to participate can play the game. It is called "My Life". You can see a line here. It represents you way in life – here is the time of birth, here is the present moment and here is the time when everyone of us dies. I will help everyone of you to walk along the line and tell us about his/ her life. Who would like to start?"



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The moderator of the session helps every young person walk along the line. The moderator walks beside him/ her and guides the story by asking questions such as “Where are we now? How old are you? What is going on? Who takes part? What are you doing? Do you like this? How do you imagine this happening?” It is important to follow speed of the person telling the story without rushing or stopping. If the person telling the story happens to experience strong emotions, the person should not be prevented from telling the story to the end and instead he/ she should be encouraged to express himself/ herself in words and to give explanation.

Having finished the exercise with the trainees, you should draw some important lessons and give guidelines as to what is important to do to complete well the exercise. For example: “We should not judge as good or bad what we the person has told us because otherwise the story will be sincerely told.” or “Keep up with the person telling the story so that he/ she can feel more secure and heard.”

The aim of these exercises is to investigate personal experience. The best way to learn how to do them is for the trainers themselves to do them. Take the time to do them, especially the “Life Line”, because the latter exercise is very loosely structured, and the moderator needs to “listen to” the child’s emotions and story.

First stage

The first stage of the PLP preparation is to **realize what the young person’s dreams and desires and what his/ her actual abilities and capabilities are**. This happens during a series of meetings between the personal mentor and the young person. Other people and experts invited by the young person or recommended by the mentor can also take part in these meetings. The main objective of this stage is to help the young person formulate his/ her dream as to what he/ she wants his/ her future life to be: what job he/ she wants, where he/ she wants to live, whom he/ she want to have relations with, how he/ she imagines his/ her family, job, profession. An accompanying objective is to single out the visions of life which are unrealistic and detrimental and to help the young person make an “inventory” of his/ her own actual resources (e.g. knowledge, abilities, personal qualities, interests, people who can really support the young person once he/ she leaves the cares, material and financial resources, etc.). It is important to review the existing relationships with people in terms of violence, abuse and risk for the young person’s health³ and life.

³ When we discuss health, we mean the young person’s physical and emotional health.



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The basis of this process is the relationship of trust established between the young person and his/her personal mentor.

Children who have grown up in institutions often find it difficult to formulate their long-term objectives and dreams. One of the reasons for this has to do with the development: the time perspective as part of abstract thinking starts to develop during puberty which means that now is the time to start to rethink a realistic time plan. As with any adolescent their desires, ideas of the future and dreams may be unrealistic, and this further complicates their fulfillment. A talk about the abilities, the peculiarities of the character is needed to form an identity and to reconsider how realistic the desires and dreams are.

Another more important reason is that children who have grown up in poverty usually have short-term objectives of meeting their immediate needs. From an early age, they get used to the attitudes other have towards them that they do not have many opportunities for future development and they start to impose limits on themselves in terms of their desires for development, their awareness of their strengths, thus limiting their potential for future jobs and activity. This is very important when it comes to children of minority background. That is exactly the reason why they themselves often refuse to think about their own future, subvert the professionals' attempts to help them with that.

The main tasks at this stage are:

- **Formation of a realistic positive idea of his/ her own abilities and personality, expression of interests and values;**
- **Formulation and expression of dreams about the personal and professional development.**

Guidelines to trainers and professionals:

Self-knowledge and career development programmes, methods and tests

Career development programme



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There are a lot of career development methodologies and guidelines developed in the international and Bulgarian practice, including the ones concerning children who have grown up without parental care. This methodology has taken into consideration many good practices. The team of the Ministry of Education and Science has developed a user-friendly and very well-structured career development programme in line with the child's stages of development: <http://orientirane.mon.bg/programa/>. This programme provides modules developed for children of school age, combines various methods, such as individual and group ones, tests and information ones (e.g. films describing different professions and stimulating self-knowledge). Albeit designed for children who have grown up in institutions, this programme provides a wide variety of tests and materials adapted to children and adolescents and designed to be user-friendly for direct work with youth.

Self-knowledge tests (personality types)

During their teenage years, children are usually curious to know what they are like, how others perceive them. On the one hand, children in the institutions often grow up with a negative, unilateral and unrealistic idea of themselves. One way to change this idea is to use specialized tests which are objective and do not depend on the adults' and peers' subjective judgment. On the other hand, some of these tests are used in real practice to select staff and it is good that personal mentors use them when they discuss with the young person the skills required for a given profession.

An example of such a questionnaire is the Mayers-Briggs questionnaire. It may be used as an amusing method to get to know yourself by identifying with a film character (<http://absolutnite.com/index.php/bg/2015/10/07/iskash-li-da-znaesh-kakav-si-testat-na-majers-brigs/>).

The positive aspect of the test is that it has been adapted and standardized considering the Bulgarian conditions and it has been used in lot of research on various youth groups in Bulgaria (Pencheva & Papazova 2006, Papazova & Pencheva 2007, etc.). The challenging aspect of this instrument is that it takes time to complete and gives an idea mainly of the self-evaluation. Answers to the questions may also be used as the basis of a discussion with the young person. A free online version of the questionnaire is available at <https://mbti.bz/bg>.

Although the latter website is in English, it offers a up-to-date game version of the questionnaire <https://www.16personalities.com/free-personality-test>. And here you can find the Bulgarian version: <https://www.16personalities.com/bg>.



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At this stage the most important skills the future mentors, experts, need to acquire are as follows:

- skills to find out the actual motivation for a choice of dream/ profession (e.g. active listening skills, use of various types of questionnaires, motivation inquiry, etc.);
- skills to support the young person in forming a realistic evaluation (skills to work with test materials, confrontation skills, skills to interpret and put into positive context what has been heard, etc.).

What does a motivation inquiry mean?

Young people often have no idea what they want to become because they do not know the various professions, they are under pressure from adults and because this does not matter to them. Young people usually want to have money, to have a family, to become like ... (someone they look up to). However, there are often different needs behind one and the same dream or desire. For example two people may want to become pimps but the first one wants this because of the power over others while the second one because of the relationships with women. Such differences and deeper needs may be met by other professions and skills. Personal mentors have the task to find out these deeper motives and ideas.

What happens?

After formulating the young person's dreams and desires, the talk with the young person should also cover the following questions:

You want to be ...? You dream about ...(having a lot of money)? How do you imagine this profession/ dream? How will it change your life? So you want ... (e.g. others to respect you)? How can you achieve this in a different way? Who else has already achieved this (e.g. the respect of others), but is not ... (e.g. a pimp)? What does he/ she do to ... (e.g. be respected by others)?

Various studies and practices have shown that the main motivation of boys is the respect of others while that of girls – the opportunity to find a permanent partner in life whom they can rely on for cares and support. Such needs can also be met by acquiring certain skills.

As to the types of questions and other methods concerning the work with the self-image, more systematized information is available in the Methodological materials for youth detention centers



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(YDC) and social and pedagogical centers (SPC) developed by the team of the Know How Center for Alternative Children's Cares at New Bulgarian University and in particular in the Methodology on the evaluation of the individual needs of students with deviational behaviour/ in conflict with the law living in YDC and SPC (<https://www.mon.bg/bg/100381>).

Within the context of this methodology confrontation means to express an opinion different from the young person's opinion to stimulate self-knowledge and formation of realistic self-evaluation. Confrontation should entail relaxed, non-aggressive tone of voice, without insulting and judging the young person's personality. It is good to involve also direct observation and description of the particular behaviour, without judging it as good, bad, inadequate, etc. It should be clear that it is all about the opinion of the personal mentor and it should end by putting a question to the young person.

For example, the young person states that he/ she is sufficiently independent and does not need anyone telling him/ her how to write a CV. An example of a confrontation could be: I have a different opinion. I've seen for a week that you've been constantly asking Ivan how to write it and it seems that you can't do it without him. What do you think, am I right?

The best way to acquire such skills is through role plays.

Each skill should be based on a typical situation with the young persons the participant will work with daily. Select the 3 most typical situation to serve as the basis of the role play. Select two volunteers: one to play the role of the personal mentor and the other – that of the young person. Ask them to play the roles and let them improvise for 5 minutes on how to conduct the talk so that they can practice the skills.

In case of difficulties experienced by the person playing the personal mentor or after the play, ask the participants and observers to share the following:

- How did they feel while playing the roles? What did they find difficult and easy?
- What did they find to be successful and why? What did they find to be unsuccessful and why?
- What provoked the young person's interest and maintained the conversation?

Finally, give some essential advice to the personal mentors which they can use in their work with the young people. For example:



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- It is good to make the young people/ children clarify and rethink their own abilities and realistic desired objectives and dreams in an individual conversation so that they will not be influenced and pressurized by peers or the social factors related to other peers or adults;
- Take your time and ensure relaxed environment in which you can talk without being interrupted;
- It is essential to show the adolescent that you work with and for him/ her and he/ she can trust you;
- Take the words he/ she shares seriously – without negligence and without dramatizing;
- Encourage the young person to talk, without putting pressure on him/ her;
- Listen carefully and patiently. You can repeat what he/ she has said to make sure that you have understood correctly;
- When the expert focuses the conversation on rethinking the personal qualities and desires, the expert may also share their own observations and opinions. It is recommended to do this after asking the young person whether he/ she would like to know your opinion stressing that this is your personal opinion and he/ she may or may not agree with it. This will teach the young person the following important skills:
 - Everyone is entitled to a personal opinion and the other person's different opinion is not necessarily related to an insult, violence, imposition of opinion and submission.
 - Respect for the boundaries of the other person: if the young person is not ready to hear a differing opinion for one reason or another at this point in time, we have respected his/ her emotional insecurity and psychological well-being. In other words, the young person learns the behavior of non-violent respect for the boundaries of others, how to recognize such behavior and how the young person can behave like this in the relations with other people.

Outcome of the first stage:

The expected outcome of the first stage of the creation of a Personal Life Project is:

- Creation of the young person's profile. This profile indicates the starting point for dreams, ideas, desires, interests and skills in the areas of the PLP;
- Having a clear idea of the people whom the young person can trust and who could support him/ her in the process of establishing his/ her independence.

The profile is created by the adolescent supported by the personal mentor. The role of the personal mentor is to guide and stimulate realistic and the broadest possible self-evaluation. It is important



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that the young person himself/ herself draws, formulates and evaluates the conclusions on his/ her own idea of his/ her own skills and abilities; the objectives and dreams he/ she has for the future life; the awareness of the opportunities the Bulgarian context offers for development. The creation of a profile entails consistent talks and arrangement on the actions between the young person, the personal mentor and the people from the support network.

Profile areas

Profile areas are also the main areas of the personal life project. This methodology groups the necessary knowledge and skills in areas describing vital aspects of the independent life the young person prepares for. They are in line with the international child well-being standards and reflect the basic rights of the child:

- House and appropriate living conditions
- Health
- Education
- Employment
- Integration
- Support network

Guidelines to trainers and professionals:

Young people find it difficult to formulate well-structured and detailed dreams, desires, ideas. That is why we can help them by using different methods: preparation of collages letting them choose what they like from a range of visual stimuli; by discussing their present life; by sharing observations with them concerning their interests and abilities. Whatever method we choose, it is important to explore the areas by asking questions.

Each area covers several questions which are of importance for the independent life of each person. The questions are in line with the specific characteristics of the young people in care and of unaccompanied children and persons who are not aware of the Bulgarian context. Each adolescent has their own unique story and situation so the personal mentors may skip and add new questions depending on the particular adolescent they work with on the creation of a profile and a life plan.

The questions in each area have the following rationale:

- Present state;



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- Idea of the future;
- Necessary knowledge, skills and qualities;
- People who can support the young person in this area.

House and appropriate living conditions

In this area, the young person makes an “inventory” of his/ her knowledge and skills for finding a house and living and independent life there. Examples of questions are:

- Where do you live now? With whom? Do you like it? What do you like? What do you not like? What would you change?
- If you had your own house, what would it look like?
 - Where do you want to live? Why there? How would this change your life?
 - How are you going to look for a house? Where will you find information on houses? What do you need to do? How will you choose an appropriate house?
 - How will you contact a landlord and negotiate with him/ her? How will you know about the contract conditions? Who can help you with that?
 - How can you maintain a house in suitable living conditions? Can you use domestic kitchen appliances? Can you keep the house clean?
 - How do you imagine your communication with the neighbours? Can you respect the rules on living together with others? Who can inform you of these rules?
 - Can you go shopping? Can you cook?
 - How do you manage your budget? Can you plan and reconcile income and costs? Can you pay your bills without delays?
 - Can you manage and plan your time?

Health

- Are you healthy now? How do you know this? What do you do when you are ill? How do you know you are ill? Who helps you go to the doctor, buy medicines, taken them as prescribed, helps you get well? Who do you look for first when you feel unwell?
- Knowledge and skills for personal hygiene (hygiene of the body, teeth, hair, clothes, shoes, etc.): what does a young man/ woman need to do to keep good personal hygiene? What does this involve? How often do you need to carry out basic hygiene procedures? Can you keep your clothes clean? How do you choose your clothes?



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Good hygiene has an impact not only on a person's health but also on the possibility to be accepted in society. It is important for young people to see the difference between clean clothes suitable for the occasion and expensive clothes. It is especially important for girls to be able to know what the make-up, cosmetics, clothes, hair styles are suitable for different situations.

- Who has taken care of the young person's health so far? How did the young person take part in this process? Can you tell the signs that show him/ her that he/ she is healthy? How can you tell that you are ill?
- Do you know who, where and when can you look for help when ill, hurt, after an accident, emergency? Can you dress a wound on your own? What medical interventions are you afraid of? Are these fears adequate?
- Sensitive information about health – use of contraceptives and protection from sexually transmitted infections (for further information – the guidelines of the Bulgarian Family Planning Association, BFPA). Use of alcohol and narcotic anesthetic substances – risks related to this use, whom to turn to for help in case of overdose.
- Do you have a GP? Do you know how to contact the GP? Do you know how to change your GP? Do you have a personal dentist? Do you know how to contact the dentist? Do you know how to change the dentist? Do you know your rights as a patient? Do you know what to do for a health insurance after leaving the service?

The personal mentor needs to be trained for the last group of questions. Here is the necessary information which the young person has to know and have it written down (see Additional materials for the young people).

Education

In this area the young person analyzes and evaluates his/ her abilities, interests, skills, desires and dreams about further education and acquisition of a profession.

- Which school subjects are of interest to you? Which ones do you find easier? Which professions are related to these subjects?
- If you had the opportunity to continue your education, what would you like to study? What would prevent you from continuing your education? How can you get over it?



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- What do you think is the highest educational degree you want and can have? Why do you think so? Could you have a different idea? Do you want to have a different idea? What needs to change to make you pursue what you want but consider to be impossible? Is it realistic to achieve this?
- How can you search for information on further education or professional qualifications?
- Is there anyone you can rely on (for support with the studies, for information to guide you, etc.), if you decide to continue with your studies?

Employment

This area concerns the young person's ideas and desires for the future profession and job; the young person's knowledge and skills to search for a job, to prepare and work with documents; to go to job interviews; the young person's idea of business communication. The consultant may include various tests (used for selection of staff, self-knowledge) to make the young person know better himself/herself and to have an adequate self-evaluation and to get an idea of the qualities which employers find valuable and look for.

- What can you do best and with enthusiasm? What others (teachers, friends, other relatives and people he/ she looks up to) think that you do best? Whose opinion is most important for you? Would you like to invite this person at the discussion?
- What do you want to work? Do you want to have a given profession? If so, which one? Why did you choose exactly this profession? How would it change your life? What do you need to work this? Do you think you have the necessary knowledge and skills, abilities and personal qualities to learn and work this? If not, what other profession/ work would correspond to your desires and would change your life in the same way?
- Can you write your own CV? Can you write a motivation letter? Do you know which documents you need to start a job, do you know where and how to find them?
- What is the appropriate behaviour when applying for a job, at a job interview? Can you negotiate a salary?
- What do you know about the different types of contracts?
- How do you imagine the communication with colleagues at different level of the hierarchy?
- Is there anyone who can help you choose a profession/ job; search for a job; apply and keep a job? Who is this person? Would like to invite this person at these discussions?



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Integration

- What do you know about the cultural values, social rules, holidays, etc. in Bulgaria? (this is important not only for migrants but also for children in the institutions who do not Bulgarian ethnic background and who have not had the chance to learn these things so far).
- Do you know who to enact your right to vote? How to vote?
- How to communicate with the institutions? What is the appropriate behaviour at public places? What is the appropriate dress code and attitude at public places: at the theatre, cinema, in the street, at work, in the shops, in public transport, at state institutions?
- Do you know your fundamental right? Can you assert them without being aggressive? Do you know whom to turn to for help when your right is violated? Is there a person you can rely on in this regard? Do you want to involve this person in the discussions?
- Do you have informal relations/ close relatives who can support you after leaving the care? What can you ask them, how can they support you?
- Can you evaluate risk situations? Do you know how avoid becoming a victim of traffic, violence, abuse and exploitation?

Support network

Along with all these talks and discussions with the young person, it is good to hold meetings with the people who are important for the young person. They could be parents, relatives, friends, supporters, a psychologist, a social worker from the service, any other staff from the service, teachers, staff from “children’s pedagogical units” or the municipality, etc. Some of them might support the young person both to create a personal life project and to serve as an important support after leaving the care.

How to identify these people?

The young person with the support of the personal mentor draws up an exhaustive list of the areas of life (e.g. place to live, education, job, health, property, free time) and the people he/ she can trust and those who can help him/ her. Drawing up this list ensures that the person exercises control over its contents and actively participates in its preparation. This will make it possible for him/ her to present what is important for the young person at the first meeting with the possible candidates to support him/ her. When the young person recognizes some of these people as important for achieving his/ her objectives, the young person with the help of the person mentor organizes a



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meeting with them. At this meeting, the young person presents what has been done so far in relation to the personal profile/ project and discusses with them issues concerning the profile and/ or project.

Summary of the information

Talks with the young person should be summarized in such a way as to be easy to understand by the young person and ease to use by the young person and the personal mentor.

Here is a suggestion how to summarize the information in a table:

Name of the young person:			
My biggest dream in life:			
Area: House			
I want to live: <i>(the dream, idea, desire in general terms)</i>			
N e c e s s a r y knowledge/ skills	<i>Level (e.g. of knowledge: has the necessary knowledge; needs to have knowledge for...; skills: can do on his/ her own; needs support for ...;)</i>	Is there anyone who can support him/ her – relative/ family or a professional?	Has this person been invited at a meeting? <i>(yes/no; when and where is the meeting?)</i>



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<p>Looking for and renting a house:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. use of websites 2. arranging a meeting with landlords 3. understanding the contract 			
<p>Maintaining the house:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. hygiene 2. use of appliances 3. cooking 			
<p>Using money:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. budget planning 2. paying the rent and the bills 3. communication with banks 			
<p>Neighbours:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. respect for the rules of the block of flats 2. establishing relations with the neighbours 			

There may be a similar table for each area; the table shows each young person's individual needs and the necessary skills may be identified, to what level they need to be developed and who can be actively involved in this.



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Specially prepared questionnaires may be used to support this activity. The questionnaires for this are may complement the areas already described.

Guidelines to trainers:

During the training the professionals need to prepare such forms to be followed later on. The preparation of forms enables the discussion of the skills needed for each area and the selection of the most important ones for the young people leaving the institutions in terms of their life and professional experience.

Exercise for the preparation of forms

Preparation: print out the example of a table, the questions by areas, the attached questionnaires in 3 copies. Prepare big and small sheets of paper, pens or pencils, scissors and glue or scotch.

Instructions to trainees: “Now we are going to prepare a form to summarize the information from the first step. It will guide us what and how to discuss it with young people. It is important for the form to be easy to work with and easy to understand for you and the young people, to contain the most important skill that each young person should have to start a normal independent life. Please, form 3 groups. Each group will be given materials for each area. However, each group will have to work in detail on one priority area and will only give suggestions for the other areas. The first group will work on housing and integration, the second one on education and employment, the third on health and support network. You have 1 hour for work. Then each group will present its priority areas and the other groups can add something.”

Form role play

Following the preparation of the appropriate forms, it is good to test them before starting to work with the young people.



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Instructions to trainees: “Now we will test if the forms we have prepared work. Each small group will select two people to play the roles of a personal mentor (PM) and a young person. The young person from small group 1 (SG1) goes for advice to the PM of SG 2. the young person from SG 2 goes for advice to the PM of SG 3, the young person from SG 3 goes for advice to the PM of SG 1. Within 10 minutes you will play the roles and go through the areas which are priority areas for the PMs. The observers in the SGs have to see what they would change in the forms. ”

Following the 3 role plays in parallel, you share what has been done and what could be changed. It is important for the trainees to feel confident when using this tool

If the trainees have difficulties starting a talk, they can be given a questionnaire as an example and the following instruction: “Now I will help you complete the questionnaire, we will do it together. It is important to understand how you are doing in your everyday life and whether there is anyone who can help you to make it easier for you. Now we are going to read the questions. Can you/ I write down your answer here (in the relevant field)?”

Summary

At the end of the exercise you make a summary of what could be of help to the personal mentors. You can also add the following pieces of advice:

When completing the questionnaire, the personal mentor:

- may skip or add questions if necessary;
- may change/ reformulate the questions so that the young person can easily understand them;
- could start they questions by saying “Can you...” because this will help understand if the person can see and name his/ her own difficulties, understands his/ her duties and obligations.
- The adolescent making the plans decides “*Who will be invited to participate at the first meeting for supporting his/ her life plan? When? Where?*” It is the young person that decides who is important for him/ her and it is the young person that decides where to meet. The time of the meeting is also important my. The personal mentor should be prepared to hold a meeting even after the working hours or at the weekend. People might be invited in writing or by phone. The invitation should always be on behalf of the young person and if possible the young person should make the invitation.



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Second stage

This is the stage of the **preparation of a personal life project**;

- The realistic ideas of life are expressed in detailed feasible steps;
- The resources and risks involved in their implementation are explored;
- Joint activities are coordinated with the support network.

The project needs to be prepared before the young person leaves the service and requires constant work for at least a year before leaving the service and at least for a year after leaving the service.

Who can be involved in this process?

People who have different relations with the young person are involved in the preparation of the personal life project. They may be divided into a central circle and an outer circle.

- **The central circle** includes the young person leaving the service and the people who most directly involved with the preparation and implementation of the young person's PLP: the personal mentor and the people from the service whom the young person trusts and who are committed to help the young person acquire the necessary knowledge and skills for independent life.
- **The inner circle** includes the people selected by the young person as people whom he/ she trusts and can rely on, e.g. parent, siblings (brothers, sisters), close or distant relatives, neighbours, friends, professionals from this or other services. When exploring these relations of trust, it is important to discuss the young person's previous relations with these people and to sort out and reject the relations which have led the young person to situations of violence and abuse and which have put the young person's life and health at risk.
- **The outer/ administrative circle** is built up during the implementation of the personal life project and includes the people who have certain functions in the services and institutions related to the implementation of the PLP. These are people working in the municipal administration (need to be contacted when finding a house, etc.), the labour office, medical professionals (GP, other relevant professionals, etc.), career consultants or teachers (with the aim of further education), etc.

The term "**support circle or network**" refers to anyone whom the person would like to involve in the preparation of the personal project: family, friends, supporters, professionals, service providers, teachers, groups from the local community, etc. The efforts should focus on the support needed for



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each participant to play their role in the process of preparation and implementation of the personal project. The person mentor and the young person manage these interactions, respecting the rules they have established.

Guidelines to trainers:

Each region has a different system of services, institutions, NGOs and professionals who can be involved in the process of supporting the young people leaving the institutions and the unaccompanied minors. It is important to discuss and draw up a list of these resources so that the efforts of different services in the same region can be coordinated.

Task to the trainees: Divide the group into smaller groups of three people and give the following instructions: “The instructions for the outer/ administrative support circle are common. Have a look at the instructions and add the necessary services, institutions, NGOs and professions in your region to the list. You have 15 minutes to do this.” When the time is up, each group presents its proposals.”

Preparation of a Personal Life Project:

The beginning of this stage may be considered to be the **first meeting of all the participants in the support network** (the invitation is extended to relatives, family, friends and professionals from various services, NGOs and institutions who could help with the implementation of the PLP). The aim of this meeting is to present the project prepared so far by the young person, to hear the opinion of the people selected to provide support and to arrange joint actions. The meeting is facilitated by the personal mentor or any other professional.

Before the meeting takes place, the adolescent and the personal mentor make a summary of the information from the first stage. During the meeting the young person presents to the people invited his/ her idea of the future: where he/ she will live, with whom he/ she wants to live, whether he/ she wants to continue his/ her education and where; where he/ she wants to work, whom he/ she wants to receive help from and with what he/she needs help, etc. It is necessary to give the young person space to express his/her dreams and together with the support network to find new opportunities making it possible for him/ her to fulfill the project.

The first steps for implementing the project should be arranged at the end of the meeting. It is important to agree on the role and area of support that each person invited by the young person at the meeting can offer.

At the end of the meeting the following should be agreed:



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- the time of the next meeting;
- the person(s) responsible for the organization of the next meeting;
- the place of the next meeting.

It is important for the young person and the supporters to know that everyone of them can ask for a meeting.

Follow-up meetings

The personal project “drives” the change of the young person’s life. Not all activities may happen as planned; however, at follow-up meetings they may be optimized and changed. Not all the participants in the support network remain the same, but in regard changes may also be expected. How many areas of life need to be covered in the preparation of the PLP and what is the time for achieving the objectives strictly depends on the individual. Following the organization of the initial 2-3 meetings of the support network, the personal mentor becomes not simply a “moderator” but a “coordinator” of the process and the ensuing progress.

Guidelines to professionals and trainers:

The young person’s dreams, desires and ideas for the future (in general and by areas) are defined at the first step. The actual abilities and resources he/ she has at this stage to fulfil these dreams are also discussed.

It is good for the discussion with the support network to follow the order specified in the following example of a format when presenting a dream, objective, activity:

Personal Life Project

Of:

My dream:



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Area	Desire (dream)	Possibilities	Risks	Who? Why? What?	Resources/ information	Deadline
Education (school subjects; relation with the profession; further education; barriers; education level – is it realistic?; information on education and professional qualification)	1.	1. 2. 3. ...	1. 2. 3. ...	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. ...	1. 2. 3. ...	1. 2. 3. ...
Profession/ Employment (future profession and job – why exactly this?; job search; documents; interview; business communication)	1.	1. 2. 3. ...	1. 2. 3. ...	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. ...	1. 2. 3. ...	1. 2. 3. ...



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House and appropriate living conditions and personal finances (Where? information; maintenance; kitchen appliances; hygiene; living with others; cooking; income/ costs; bills; time planning)	1.	1. 2. 3. ...	1. 2. 3. ...	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. ...	1. 2. 3. ...	1. 2. 3. ...
Health (health insurance; GP/ dentist; keeping in good health; prevention of diseases; assessment of risk situations and reactions)	1.	1. 2. 3. ...	1. 2. 3. ...	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. ...	1. 2. 3. ...	1. 2. 3. ...



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Integration (cultural values; social rules; holidays; voting; communication with institutions; fundamental rights; informal relations/ close relatives; assessment of risk situations and reactions to traffic, violence, abuse and exploitation.	1.	1.	1.	1.	1.	1.
		2.	2.	2.	2.	2.
		3.	3.	3.	3.	3.
		4.
				5.		
				...		

Guidelines to professionals

The individual columns indicate the sequence of the young person's dreams to be discussed. It is important to encourage the discussion without judging the young person's dreams, desires, visions as good or bad and, instead, suggesting what is realistic and what can be achieved. It is important to hear every point of view and to make it clear that it is the young person that takes the decision.

- Possibilities

These are the possibilities related to the fulfillment of a dream. Encourage brainstorming: the participants suggest ideas and proposals without assessing those of the others. Write down all the possible ways to achieve results together and some of the actions to try in order to achieve the results.

Consider what is important for the young person during the brainstorming, what type of a person he/ she is, how he/ she communicates, what his realistic possibilities to fulfil the dream are.

The more possibilities you indicate, the higher the probabilities of success!

Mark each possibility with **1,2,3** or **a, b, c** for future use.



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Gather information and ask for advice from the group and outside the group (whenever necessary).

- Risks

Everyone takes advantage of this opportunity to share their fears and hesitations in relation to each possibility, weighing up the pros and cons and identifying the risk level. You do this so that every member of the support network can have the chance to express their concerns and share their responsibility as to the risk.

It is important to determine whether the risk is manageable or not. How can you minimize it? You need to decide this for every possibility. Write down all the risks and thoughts.

- Who, what and why?

A specific plan to implement the steps needs to be prepared in this respect. You need to decide who will do what at each step. Indicate why a particular person has been chosen (it is important that one person should not do everything) to support the person for achieving the results.

Explain why a particular person has been chosen for a certain part of the result/ decision. Write down the decisions and the reasons for them.

- Resources and information

The people who have undertaken to do a certain task, with the help of the support network, draw up a list of the necessary and available resources (e.g. relatives, knowledge, information, skills, etc.). The major questions are: Will you need additional information and resources? How will they be accessible?

Indicate who will gather the information and from whom.

- Deadlines

The participants, the young person and the personal mentor summarize the decisions taken and the commitments made. They decide on deadlines and how to search for help during the implementation. They sign the decision and agree on the next step to be taken: who, when, with whom to meet, where to go and what to do.

Guidelines to trainers:

It is good for the future personal mentors to do a simulation of the meeting with the support network once. The possible participants in this meeting are selected through brainstorming (a



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procedure to apply this technique is presented). For example: the young person, the personal mentor, older brother, grandfather, representative of the labour office and a social worker from the local “Social Assistance” directorate. Select members to the group to play the roles of these participants. The other trainees will have the task to observe this process:

- What did the moderator of the meeting do successfully?
- Did the moderator manage to encourage the discussion?
- Were the necessary decisions taken?

The participants playing the roles sit down in the center of the room while the other trainees are in the outer circle. The participant playing the role of the moderator can at any time:

- Ask for time for advice with the group;
- A change.

It is important to perform the simulation of the meeting within 30 minutes. The participants playing the roles of the personal mentor and the young person can choose for the simulation a dream, vision, idea of an area of their choice.

At the end of the role play share the experience of playing the roles:

- What did you find difficult?
- What do you think you managed to do well?

Afterwards, encourage the observers to answer the question they have been asked. Finally, make a summary of the best findings of the group as to what is good to do at the meeting so that it can be successful, i.e. to agree on an action plan.

Third stage

The third stage is the monitoring of the implementation of the young person’s personal life project.

There is regular monitoring with the optimum period for holding a meeting with the support network is 6 months. Upon request of the young person, the personal mentor or a member of the support network, meeting with different participants may be held, if necessary.

At the meetings for monitoring the implementation of the personal life project, the following questions will be answered:

- What is the general objective/ dream which is being implemented?



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- What makes us gather together?
- What have we done so far? What are the obstacles right now? What have we done to overcome this obstacle? Who can help us by providing a different point of view, different information, anything to overcome this obstacle? Is it necessary to overcome it or can we do anything else?
- How much time do we need to cope with the obstacle? Who will do what in the following 1-2 weeks (or any other period)?
- When will we meet again and who will bring us together?

When implementing the project, there will be not only obstacles but also achievements. Let us recognize, encourage and celebrate these achievements. Talk with the young person who does he/she want to tell about these achievements, how to present them, how to celebrate them.



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Section II:

An example of a programme for training professional working with children and young people living in residence services and unaccompanied children and young people in relation to the application of the methodology for creating a personal life project after leaving state care

The programme is designed for the trainers and the professionals who are going to work with the young people on the preparation of their personal life projects. The programme follows the contents of the methodology and contributes with interactive exercises making it easier to consider, learn and apply in practice the new knowledge and skills. It is recommended to follow the sequence of the topic-related sessions because they are intended to build up knowledge and skills. Considering the dynamics and specific characteristics of the group, some exercises may be replaced.

The programme is made for a two-day training (depending on the number of hours) and it is recommended that the first two sessions should be held the first day while the sessions from three to six should be held the second day and the other two closing sessions should be held the third day. This is the first out of a series of trainings and supervisions and so its main objective is to teach the participants new knowledge and skills in relation to the methods used and the overall idea of how to prepare a personal life project together with the young person.

Day 1

Session 1: 12.30 – 15.30

Topic: Introduction and deciding on a framework

Opening the training, introducing the project and objectives of the training, introducing the moderators.

Introducing the participants – every participant introduces themselves by saying their name, profession and position in the service where they work and a few words about themselves which, they believe, will surprise the other participants.



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Stating expectations and rules for the groups – the participants divide themselves into three small groups. The first group generates expectations from the training (What do I want to happen? What would be valuable and useful for me from the training?), the second group focuses on the concerns (What do I want not to happen during the training?) and the third group focuses on working rules (How will the communication between us happen so that we can make the most of it?). In 10 minutes, every small group presents its answers to the questions and the other groups add information. At the end the moderator takes the requests of the groups (expectations and concerns) and they all decide on working rules and time frame.

Topic: unification of the concepts and language to be used in the project

Sub-topic 1: Specific characteristics of the age from 14-21 years, the transition from childhood to adulthood

Presentation of Erik Ericsson's theory on the stages of development

Interactive game – the group is divided into small groups of 5 people. Every group discusses the following questions for 15 minutes:

- What do you remember about this, how did they experience the difficult age of puberty?
- What did you want to be?
- Which factors of change and support were valuable to them?
- What were your greatest fears?

Then every group presents their answers to the others. The moderator encourages them to think about:

- their “mistakes” which they want the young people to avoid;
- the young people of today (there could be a brainstorming on the specific characteristics of the “young” of today and in what way they are different from the previous generations)
- what we, as adults, do with the differences between the generations?

Session 2: 16.00 – 18.00

Sub-topic 2: approaches on which the preparation of the personal life project is based



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Presentation – Prof. Lundy’s model

An interactive game: divide the participants into 2 small subgroups (4 groups in the case of more participants). The first group focuses on how the first two elements (safe and secure space and support for the expression of the young person’s opinion) can be ensured at their services. The second group works on the other two elements: which persons can be involved in the work with children (both the young person’s relatives and professionals, people from the institutions, etc.) and what has an impact on the implementation of their personal projects. A brief discussion within the larger group.

Presentation – Strengths-based approach

An interactive game:

1. A brainstorming on the types of young person’s behaviour and characteristics which bother and concern the most the people working with them.
2. In small groups, try and reformulate positively such problematic behaviour and characteristics.

Share in the larger group

Presentation – Personality-centered approach

Feedback and closing the sessions of the working day.

Day 2

Session 3: 9.30 – 11.00

Topic: Personal life project

Presentation – Personal life project: essence and stages

Exercise: in small groups of 5 people the participants think of a way to present the project and the possibility of creating and implementing a PLP to the young people. Having shared this in small groups, the moderator suggests the interactive games described in the methodology.

Playing the Life Line exercise:

- The moderator shows the exercise with a volunteer from the group;



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- Two volunteers from the group – one in the role of the moderator and the other in the role of the person walking along the line – do the exercise.

Share and summarize – what is the best way to do this exercise with the young people?

Session 4: 11.30 – 13.00

Presentation – PLP: first step

Work on a specific case: the exercise for building skills for PLP preparation makes sense if it is based on a real-life specific case from the practice of the participants. Suggest a model for describing the case to the participants:

Description of a case

Young person's history:

Family:

Other important relationships:

Problematic behaviour:

Divide the group into 3 small groups and let each of them describe one case. When presenting the cases, make a comparison of the problematic behaviour with the Erik Ericsson's theory of the stages of development (possibly with the theory of attachment).

Select one case considering that it should be challenging in terms of the participants' professional skills, but it should not concern a "desperate" case, i.e. someone who cannot be influenced by professional intervention.

Session 5: 14.30 – 16.00

Presentation – PLP: first step - continuation

Following the methodology, make a sequence of exercises for the acquisition of skills to support the young person with the formulation of a dream/ objective in life and with the formation of a realistic self-evaluation of the knowledge and skills in one of the PLP areas. The participants should take some time to go through the methodology made by the team of the Ministry of Education and Science and to choose the resources they could use in their work with the young people.



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Session 6: 16.30 – 18.00

Presentation – PLP: second step

Discuss with the participants the proposed form of documenting the young person's personal project. Make the necessary changes so that it can be of help and can structure the process, instead of burdening the participants.

Discuss the role and importance of the support network. In the context of the specific case, who could be invited for a meeting of the support network.

Feedback and closing the sessions of the second working day.

Day 3

Session 7: 9.30 – 11.00

Presentation – PLP: second step – continuation

Following the methodology, do a role play of the first meeting of the support network based on the specific case of the previous day. Give advice to the personal mentors as to what could help them make a success of this first meeting.

Session 8: 11.30 – 13.00

Topic: Feedback and closing the training

Discuss the following feedback points with the participants (you could do this also through interactive games):

- Which expectations and in what percentage were met?
- To what extent the training was useful for the work to be done? What would they take from the training for their work in general?
- What would they change in the training and how? Why? What would they add or do in a different way?
- What different resources would they recommend using in the preparation of the PLP – resources which they have used successfully in their work?



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Together with the group decide on:

- Date of the next training;
- “Homework”: try and apply part of the first or second step of PLP with a young person in the period between this and the next training. Summarize in a brief presentation what worked well; what they changed to make better planning; what the personal mentor and the young person found difficult. These presentations will be examined at the next training.

Closing the training.



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Useful sources:

For professionals:

Bulgarian Association of Persons with Intellectual Difficulties - <http://bapid.com/bapid/>

Bulgarian Family Planning Association - <http://www.safesex.bg/>

Bulgarian Red Cross - <http://www.redcross.bg/>

National Anti-traffic Commission - <http://antitraffic.government.bg/>

NHIF - <https://www.nhif.bg>

Know-How Center for alternative children's care, New Bulgarian University - <http://knowhowcentre.nbu.bg/>



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Ministry of Education and Science, Career Development Programme: <http://orientirane.mon.bg/programa/>

Child Protection Platform ChildHub: <https://childhub.org/bg>

Multi-culti Programme – Bulgarian Programme for the integration of migrants and refugees through the promotion of the countries’ culture and cuisine: <http://multikulti.bg/bg/project/bg-map>

Caritas Bulgaria Foundation - <https://caritas.bg/>

Lale Foundation - <http://www.tulipfoundation.net/>

Canadian Centre for Victims of Tortures: <http://ccvt.org/research-publication/articles/>

Charity Organization “Voices of young people in care” - <http://www.voypic.org/publications/young-peoples-guides>

Loveguide - Bulgarian website containing videos and information on safe sex and questions of sexuality, sexual maturity and relationships: <https://loveguide.bg/>

SOS Children’s villages Bulgaria - <https://sosbg.org/>

For young people:

Website on cooking:

<https://www.24kitchen.bg/videos/24kitchen-kulinaran-kanal>

<http://www.1001recepti.com/recipes/>

Know-How Center for alternative children’s care is an inter-departmental structure at New Bulgarian University, working to put into practice the university’s mission, i.e. “to provide in service of society its academic potential and to react to the social and economic changes by being involved in them with its own projects, academic programmes and research”. The goal of the center’s team is to create culture of partnership and dialogue among all the stakeholders in the child and family policy-making process and practice. <http://knowhowcentre.nbu.bg/>

Radostina Antonova has a master’s degree in psychology from St. Kliment Ohridski Sofia University and is currently a Ph. D. student at St. Kliment Ohridski Sofia University, Department of Sociology. She is a researcher and coordinator of projects at the Know-How Center for alternative children’s care, New Bulgarian University. She has over 16 years of experience in work on the



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ground, the design and development, implementation and assessment of various methods for prevention, intervention and therapeutic work with vulnerable groups, such as the Roma community, female and male prostitutes, the LGBTQIA community and people with intellectual difficulties. She is the author of over 20 scientific articles and papers in Bulgarian and international magazines, including the British Medical Journal.

Iliana Yordanova Malinova has a master's degree in psychology, a master's degree in public administration, she is educated in special pedagogy and has participated in the planning, management and direct provision of services to children and adults with intellectual disabilities since 1993. She worked as a senior expert for *Integrated Education and Special Schools and Homes for Children without Parental Care* at Pazardzhik Regional Inspectorate to the Ministry of Education, Head of the Regional Social Assistance Directorate, Deputy Executive Director of the Social Assistance Agency, Head of a daily center for children and elderly people with intellectual difficulties, researcher with the DI for children with disabilities – the Case of Bulgaria, consultant for early child development at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy for the Social Inclusion Project funded by the World Bank (2011-2014). Project Leader of projects on supported decision-making with the Bulgarian Association of Persons with Intellectual Difficulties. Author of articles and papers on early intervention for children with disabilities, standards for daily and consultant services for children and adults with disabilities, individual planning of the services for children and adults, guide for professions in the field of social assistance concerning the work with the families of children and adolescents. She has been a trainer and supervisor of providers of social services for children and adults with difficulties since 1995.

Petar Tzintsarski is an educator, journalist, has graduated from P. Hilendarski Sofia School of Mathematics and St. Kliment Ohridski Sofia University. He has over 25 years of experience in the NGO sector, in the media, in volunteer work and in the training of young people in the field of prevention of sexually-transmitted infections (STI). He has been a consultant for prevention with key vulnerable communities, incl. refugees and migrants (since 2007) with the Ministry of Healthcare for programmes funded by the Global Fund to fight AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. He has participated in international scientific projects of the EU (targeted prevention; studies of the behaviour of people from groups vulnerable to STI; behavioural and biological supervision of HIV) and articles and papers in this field.