



## A brief history of Ruse's Complex of Social Services for children and families

In 2004, the deteriorating husk of Ruse's 'Hristo Smirnenski' school was given a substantial facelift so as to accommodate both the new Complex of Social Services (the Social Support Centre and the Centre for Street Children) and the offices of the region's Child Protection Department (CPD). The planners were acknowledging the synergy that binds the two services - while some clients of the centre are self-referred the vast majority derives from the CPD.

The third arm of the Complex - Mother and Baby Unit - was located in a purpose built facility in 'Neofit Rilski' Street. In 2008 the Municipal Council supported a decision to change the building to serve as a small group home which remains within the Complex.

The new complex was officially opened on 3rd October, 2005 and started to operate under the management of CARE-BG supervised and supported technically by Georgy Simeonov - project manager, as one of ten similar facilities situated in Bulgaria's major cities.

The undertaking represented the culmination of a World Bank project and it was from this source that the operations of the centre were funded during its first year. The operating budget is now provided by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, with the local municipal authority acting as financial monitors.

The local authority made a decision to tender out the management of the social services and it was on the basis of such a tender that the 'consortium' of Equilibrium and Ruse's Open Society Club submitted the technical proposal that won them the right to manage the complex from 1st July, 2009 onwards.

As managers, our main tasks are as follows -

- Supporting vulnerable families and keeping children out of the institutional care system





- Maximizing the potential of seven children in our care who, through accident of birth, don't have the faculties that most of us have. They are 'disabled'.

The main building represents the headquarters for a social support team comprising social workers, psychologists, educators, speech and art therapists, 24-hour carers and medical support staff. Most work in the community. The complex contains an emergency placement unit and a number of facilities (including a gymnasium and indoor climbing wall) that enable us to host a variety of clubs and provide a programme of youth activity.

On August 27th, 2009 we formally opened a new facility - a play and therapy room especially designed for disabled youngsters where we can work in cooperation with other organizations that cater for some of the city's least fortunate youngsters drawn from the surrounding community.

In October 2008, seven children were transferred from the old-style institution for the disabled in Mogilino village to the small group home known to locals as the Pink House. Equilibrium now manages this facility as part of the complex assisted by an international network of experts.

"We are enormously grateful for the gestures of support we've received from a variety of sources throughout Europe. Feeling part of a fraternity provides us with the confidence to push boundaries."

-- David Bisset, EQ CEO, electronic newsletter

The Pink House is home for seven youngsters and we provide for their physical rehabilitation, healthcare, education and recreation. It is only now that we are coming to differentiate between genuine disability and the effects of profound and prolonged deprivation. We don't know whether we'll ever fully eradicate the effects of their early childhood experience but at least it can be said that they have a home, a future and loving guardians. On 2nd September, 2009 we opened a new sensory garden that was designed for the Pink House by a creative and enthusiastic team from the complex.

