

Helping children with disabilities by early intervention services provided in their family environment

Equilibrium – the provider of social services in the Ruse complex for children and families at risk, has won 4,000 leva in a competition of projects organized by the "Bulgarian Charities Aid Foundation" – BCAF. The proposals should have been targeted at supporting parental organizations of disabled children. The money for the competition had been donated mainly by UniCredit Bulbank staff and supplemented by the BCAF social causes donations fund. The EQ project will be implemented from December 2011 to June 2012 in partnership with Ruse's Open Society Club and Karin Dom Foundation – Varna. The project team will work with 10 children with disabilities and their parents. The early intervention service should be promoted, developed and formally included as one of the range of social services with a state-delegated budget for at least 30 children and their families.

"Early intervention is extremely important because at a very early stage it gives us the opportunity to discover that a child has a deficiency in his or her development. And early identification of each problem and timely intervention help to prevent its deepening" – explains Ms Milena Vlahova – the Director of the Ruse Complex for Social Services (CSS) and the manager of the project. "All the early intervention services are based on the perception that children begin learning from infancy, not when they enter school", says also Ms Vlahova.

A team of four specialists from the Ruse CSS will attend a training course in Karin Dom called "The Early intervention for children with developmental retardation – a community-based approach." At the same time the new service will be provided in the town of Ruse. The family-oriented practices for early intervention are the essential part of an innovative approach. Specialists work together with the parents in their home – the place where the whole family is extremely comfortable and the team sees children in their natural environment. The home visits will be done by a physiotherapist, a pedagogue, a speech-therapist and a psychologist. Depending on what the child special needs are, one of them will be the key specialists for the family. The team will offer a programme of activities relevant to the child age and stage of development that can be easily implemented as a part of the daily routine – feeding, sleeping, play time, interaction with siblings. These family-oriented practices engage the strengths of parents together with any current resources available at home.

Children and their parents will have access to the play room in the Ruse CSS, as well as to the toy-library. There will be groups for joint play. Thus children will learn to cooperate, share and find friends. And the parents will be able to better understand their children's emotions and behaviour, will observe the development of other children of the same age and with similar deficits, will see other parent-child relationship models.

The project aims at building parental networks for assistance that will help the families in need to contact other parents, upbringing children with similar problems, who are willing and capable of offering information, advice, support, assistance. Among them there's that special group of parents who had realized that they have a special child as early as in the maternity ward. The Ruse CSS will give parents the opportunity to take part in a variety of activities – yoga, dance or art classes – where they will have time for themselves and their personal development, to meet new friends and interact socially.

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