



Equilibrium 2015 highlights

A year of growth

It's great to find a theme for reporting on a year's activities to avoid producing a simple list of "things we did last year."

The theme for 2015 is very definitely the expansion of EQ's influence in the development of services for children and families.

It was a period in which we took over management of new child protection services and successfully completed a high-profile project. The English-language Facebook page launched during the year carries the banner Equilibrium-GOING FORWARD. The expression was chosen in acknowledgement of our expansion and progress.

So, if EQ is, indeed, going forward, what significant steps were taken in 2015 and where are we positioned at the start of 2016?

New services

Having provided a team to support the transfer of children and young adults from large, residential institutions to three small-group homes in Ruse, EQ took over the management of the two facilities where young adults are cared for. These youngsters have significant special needs and we draw on our long experience of caring for a group of children at the Pink House and also make ample use of the support services at the Ruse complex and working relationships to provide the youngsters with social, recreational and educational opportunities.

Providing care for over thirty young people with significant disabilities provides the ongoing challenge of mobilizing resources to cater for the personal development of each individual. We need to be flexible, think expansively and plan rigorously in order to fulfill care plans that are genuinely *personalized*.

Increased focus on early childhood development

In a variety of ways, EQ's work during 2015 revealed an expanding focus on early childhood. An action undertaken independently by EQ in two Roma communities (funded by TSA-Bulgaria) is followed naturally by EQ's partnering the municipal authority (Bulgarian Swiss Cooperation Programme). Although approaches and target groups are somewhat different, both undertakings allow EQ to increase its expertise in promoting quality care for mother and child before, during and after childbirth and supporting Roma parents in catering for the health, education and development of their infants.

EQ also provided input into a project undertaken by the National Network for Children and provided a research team that sought feedback from Roma families in the context of a project that focused on the importance of social services that promote healthy early childhood development.

A project piloted in two of the city's kindergartens is not unrelated to the work done in the Roma communities as it helps parents and kindergarten teachers to understand the impact of their attitudes and actions on healthy child development and promotes a kindergarten regime that is supportive of positive parenting that focuses on gentle, loving guidance as opposed to punishment and negative judgement.

Both undertakings will develop and expand during 2016 and this action is accompanied by the publication of an EQ booklet ([линк](#)) и плакат ([линк](#)) that lays out the central tenets of positive parenting.

During 2015, EQ experts delivered training to professionals in a number of locations that focused on early intervention and follow-up support for families with children with disabilities or developmental problems. We have a highly-trained, mobile team in Ruse that continues to accumulate practical experience. Обученията като под-изпълнител на Карин Дим и Надежда и домове за децата.

Our strong and multifaceted relationship with foster parents and adoptive parents continues to help ensure the quality of our work with or on behalf of young children. They represent a cohesive and mutually supportive group that views the Ruse complex as an informal meeting place (eg mixed ability playgroup, scheduled coffee mornings) and can be relied upon to support EQ fundraising ventures. The importance of this social dimension of our relation with existing and past clients cannot be over-emphasized. The scale and variety of support for 2015 events, campaigns and fundraising actions reveals that the social services complex is a genuine community hub. Similarly, the EQ team has become something of a regular attraction at Mall Rousse. Purposefully imbedding our work in the community in this way helps ensure relevance and contributes to our awareness of our social impact. The public knows what we do and how we can be reached.

Completion of project

On 30th March, David Bisset and expert in reflective learning, Professor Tony Ghaye gave presentations to an audience gathered in the headquarters of the British Council in Sofia. They were happy to be supported by Albena Prokopieva and Krasimira Rusinova representing the services in Veliko Tarnevo and Panagyurishte that were participants in the project actions.

The audience comprised a variety of stakeholders with a shared interest in the monitoring and evaluation of social services including representatives of both the State Agency for Child Protection and the Agency of Social Assistance. The event – facilitated by the eminent psychologist, Dr. Vesselina Bossilkova – was the culmination of the project entitled – “ External / Self - evaluation in Childcare & Family-Support Services as a Means of Capacity-building” and it coincided with the publication of “Evaluation of Childcare & Family Support Services focusing on the Impact on Beneficiaries: Inherent Difficulties, Ethics, Key Principles, Suggested Approaches and a Selection of Related Tools” in both English and Bulgarian. The Bulgarian version depended on significant input from Dr. Bossilkova and Galina Bisset.

The introduction to the booklet ([линк](#)) explains that it is “an abbreviated version of a far larger manuscript”. The full manuscript is in the hands of a publishing company in the USA and it has been distributed to several universities for feedback and advice. The subject is relevant to all those concerned with the impact-based evaluation of the myriad services provided within monolithic social

welfare systems. In these systems, there is a significant emphasis on procedural efficiency. The book explains that efficiency is not the same as effectiveness measured in terms of positive impact on the wellbeing of service users. However, in complex operating systems, the measurement of impact by inspectors or external evaluators is fraught with difficulty. The book explains how service providers can work within an improvement culture and amply demonstrate the impact of their own actions.





