

Description of Good Practice in Early Childhood Development

An “Equilibrium” practice - „Confident parents for successful children”





Context and relevance to the needs of the target groups

Early childhood development occurs in a 100% of the cases between the ages of 0 and 7, regardless of whether the parents and the pedagogues deal purposefully with it. It is important and scientifically and experimentally proven that these years are key to psyche, emotion, and intelligence for every person's life. Therefore, the conscious occupation with the child in this age unfolds in the best way the potentials set by nature in every person. Early childhood development includes health and nutrition, sensory stimulation, early communication, emotional control, and early learning.

The activities under the proposed practice are related to work in a Roma community in three of the Roma neighborhoods in Ruse - "Selemeta", "Trakia" and "Trite galaba". It is well-known that often the lack of motivation and responsible attitude of parents of Roma origin and other socially vulnerable families towards the education of their children is a prerequisite for the insufficient level of educational knowledge, skills and habits built in the children themselves.

The lack of knowledge and skills of parents of Roma origin or living in a similar situation to meet the needs of children at an early age is mostly due to the level of poverty of families, traditional (cultural) ethnic models for raising a child. This leads to social neglect, ghettoisation (self-isolation), lagging children in their communicative, cognitive, emotional and psycho-motor development. This makes children absolutely unprepared for the education system, ignorance in Bulgarian language, automatic lagging behind and dropping out of the education system at an early stage and, accordingly, social marginalization and repeatability of the models.

The practices of "Equilibrium" for working with Roma communities located in several neighborhoods of Ruse are long-lasting and are based on "learning by experience" or otherwise called "learning by doing and playing".

The team of “Equilibrium” works on the ground - in the community, complex - with parents and children together, in the form of play groups.

Description of the specific addressed needs of the target groups

- Developing the skills, knowledge and experience of Roma parents to meet the needs of early childhood (0-4 years old) by implementing gaming/role models to facilitate communication between parents and their children - proven good practice (talk, learning role play - on the principle of "learning by experiencing situations", keeping a "Personal Mother and Child Diary").
- Formation of sustainable motivation of parents of Roma origin and living in a similar situation to stimulate the cognitive, social and emotional development of children (5-6 years old) in early childhood (preparation for school) by conducting joint activities / clubs - pre-school children and parents in two schools in Rouse (Aleko Konstantinov Primary School and Bratya Miladinovi Primary School). Improved dialogue between Roma families and school staff. Raising education as important in the value system of Roma and others living in a similar to their situation.

Basic activities

The activities under the project "Integrated Approach of the Municipality of Rouse for the Integration of Roma and Other Vulnerable Groups on the Territory of Municipalities of the Rouse District - Program of ZOV" build and develop the long-term work of “Equilibrium” in a Roma community with parents and children on the principle of group sessions, rotated by different families in the community. **The sessions** include parenting and children's activities with toys, books and things made from handy materials that develop different strengths in children - Motor, Social, Emotional, Cognitive, Communicative development, Autonomy and Activity.

Parents, together with their children (0-4 years old), develop stimulating and entertaining toys and handmade books that are also found in the poorest families in the neighborhoods. For example, books and puzzles from a box and cut-out pictures from free catalogs that are distributed by large retail chains; colorful papers for babies, shoes, hangers, dishwashers, old ribbons, etc., a tactile baby blanket from an old towel, pillowcase, buttons and various household items of different shapes, colors and surfaces. It also works individually with families through intensive home visits where the team tracks and builds parents' skills to meet children's basic needs - to recognize different health problems, to respond appropriately to proper nutrition of babies, pregnant and nursing mothers; stimulating breastfeeding and developing understanding of the importance of talking to the baby from the first moment of its appearance (no matter what language), as this has a huge impact on his intellectual development.

The work on this program, developed by “Equilibrium”, builds on the activities related to the direct social work of the Center for Public Support as its activities also cover the age group of children (5-6 years - pre-school age) and their parents. The activities are in renovated study rooms (under the Rouse Municipality project) in schools, which are close to the neighborhoods with concentrated Roma population.

The principles and approaches are the same: "Learning by experience", joint sessions or clubs (three groups in two schools in the city of Rouse) parents and children based on the strengths of

children and parents and the diverse range of intelligence each child has.

Parents make stimulating and entertaining toys and brochures together with the children. They learn and play fairy tales, song and games, depending on the children's potential and the potential of the parents. Through various art techniques (painting, modeling, application, music, dancing, games, etc.), children and parents view different topics (on a pre-program) that are relevant to understanding the need for education and adopting the school as a pleasant place, in which one can learn in a fun and easy way.

We organize and conduct community holidays (including the official ones - Christmas, children's holidays, etc.), dedicated to parents and children, who pass by the great desire and participation of parents and children. They demonstrate with pride what has been learned so far with the help of the team - songs, poems and sayings (in Bulgarian), which parents use in their games with their children; submit the filled-in "Mother and Child's Personal Logs". The progress of all parents and children is remarkable.

Participation

Direct users - 52 children aged 0-4 years who participated together with their parents in gaming sessions (within the community) within 1 year; Indirect beneficiaries covered in the same period are: 126 These are other household members (including other children in families and members of the extended family).

Direct beneficiaries - 45 children aged 5-6 and 46 parents who participated in the clubs for children and parents in "Aleko Konstantinov" Primary School and "Bratya Miladinovi" Primary School, Ruse from the beginning of the school year 2016 - 2017 (until present).

Indirect/distant beneficiaries/stakeholders - school principals; teachers (support for identifying children and parents for inclusion in clubs, teachers are also included in group activities - clubs with children and parents); close friends and relatives of children, incl. brothers and sisters; Ruse Municipality - renovation of rooms in the two schools where the clubs are held;

Most important results achieved

<i>Short-term results</i>	<i>Long-term results</i>	<i>Effects on Roma integration</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improving the interaction between parents and children through games that they understand to be important for the stimulation and development of children; - Perceiving learning as 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Better motor, social, emotional, cognitive, communicative development of children, better developed autonomy and activity; - Improved dialogue between Roma families and school staff; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adequate inclusion of children in the school life, on the street and consequently in society; - Adopting education as an important value in the value system of Roma and others living in a similar situation to

<p>a pleasant, fun and easy process;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adopt the school as an attractive place for Roma children and parents; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reducing the number of Roma children dropped out of the educational system. 	<p>their situation and detention (non-discouragement of children from school) allows for better professional realization, hence more stable and higher income that leads to leaving the ghetto and integrating into society.</p>
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Lessons learned and experience in dealing with risks

In order to achieve a sustainable interest on the part of the target groups (parents and children), the activities must be diverse, creative, tailored to the different potential and the abilities of each child as well as to the parents. Activities should be in a convenient time (agreed with the parents) and a place where they feel comfortable and confident (most often in the community itself or in places close to it).

Necessary prerequisites and success factors

“Equilibrium” built trust on the part of the community (as a result of many years of field work);
 Presence of community mediators - informal Roma leaders with a connection with the organization;
 Intensive interaction and unity of the messages, good/continuous communication between: the team of the organization - parents and teachers

Recommendations for an even better realization by performers

Our practice evolves and builds on a continuous basis formed by the analysis made by the team on an annual basis. The assessment and analysis of what is happening in the community and the interest in the activities are key to improving and developing the practice.
 The other key factor is the good preparation for each meeting - design/script development, materials, a little treat and always - additional games and activities ("plan B"), because improvisation is often required on the ground due to the different number of participants, mood and attitudes to both parents and children.

Applicability of experience in other contexts / municipalities / communities / countries

The practice is absolutely applicable everywhere in the country, due to the low financial resources it is being implemented with (many activities are provided with handy materials, family household items, natural materials).

The practice is based on approaches that are easy to apply in all contexts - games, learning through experience, and creative pursuits. Everything else is a matter of desire, creativity and understanding.

Opportunities to achieve sustainability

These activities are within the competence of the Centers for Public Support and other social services in the community, and financial provision (in the State Financial Standards) of the activity (for fuel, material and remuneration of the team) must be calculated;

Funding activities - financially and in kind are needed both to secure the activity itself and as a means of promoting a program and creating a network of supporters/changing attitudes in the community and the general public.

These funds are also needed to support and assist families to meet the basic needs of children and to deal with crisis situations.

Other important observations and comments

Material support (which can be provided by a social service such as a Center for Community Support or fundraising, including property and food products in kind) for families in certain crisis situations mainly related to children's health and a holistic approach to the whole family, parents to develop confidence and skills to cope with these crisis situations. This has a long-term effect on families - improving not only the purely lifestyle aspects of their lives but also improving their soft skills - understanding children's emotional needs, the importance of a positive parental example, the little things they have to do daily for their children, so that they grow not only healthy, but also more socially inclusive and educated. There are, of course, such parents who find it very difficult to deal with the basic needs of children, it is difficult to develop new skills and to overcome the models they themselves are the product of. They require longer and consistent efforts, intensive support and individual work. However, working with parents of a Roma community who have a desire to develop and overcome the communal tradition that drives self-isolation and archaic patterns of living, leads to a complete change in the community as these Roma parents and their children are the bearers of the new and the necessary support becomes an engine and an example for others

