



Equilibrium in 2019

Two main themes emerge from a review of Equilibrium's activities in 2019 –

1. Landmarks in the development of social services
2. Heightening of our focus on early years' care and education

Social services



During November, we hosted an event celebrating a decade of providing care for children who came to the Pink House after being released from the notorious Mogilino institution.

The event was attended by Dr. Eleanora Lilova, chairman of the State Agency for Child Protection who was among a group that watched the team leader from the Pink House, Nadia Petrova chart the lives and astonishing development of all the children who have grown into young adults in our care.

The specialist, 24-hour care that we provide to young people with significant special needs was prominent during 2019 as the year marked the fifth anniversary of the launch of the three small-group homes, Faith, Hope and Love, the first being managed by the organisation Child and Space.

We co-hosted an event at the regional history museum to celebrate the anniversary and also to publicly confirm our continuing commitment to community-based care for those with intellectual disabilities. We believe in celebrating neurodiversity.

- People with neurological differences are not broken or incomplete versions of normal people.
- Disability, no matter how profound, does not diminish personhood. People with atypical brains are fully human, with inalienable human rights, just like everyone else.
- People with disabilities can live rich, meaningful lives.
- Neurological variations are a vital part of humanity, as much as variations in physical size, body shape, skin colour and personality. None of us has the right (or the wisdom) to try and improve upon our species by deciding which characteristics to keep and which to discard. Every person is valuable.
- Disability is a complicated thing. Often, it's defined more by society's expectations than by individual conditions. Not always, but often.

(The list is provided by Aiyana Bailin, an autism care professional and disability rights advocate)

Neurodiversity awareness was a key theme of our project: "Tactile workshop for equal opportunities in the community". We filmed our activities in the regional history museum during which we worked with adults and children using techniques seen in Italy as used in work with the visually impaired. Our ambition was to draw attention to sensory deprivation as a barrier to involvement in the arts and cultural life of the community. It needn't be.

During 2019, Equilibrium won two awards –

1. The "Child's Saviour" award from the National Foster Care Association in recognition of our work in developing foster care (training and supporting foster families) as part of our contribution to the national deinstitutionalisation programme.
2. We received an award from the National Alliance of Social Responsibility in recognition of our contribution to the development of social work in Bulgaria.

Early Years



During the spring of 2019, as the project that gave rise to the Ruse family centre approached its culmination, Dr. Vessela Banova assessed the impact of our work with young children and their parents.

She identified the centre as having crucial significance in the context of the emerging national focus on the crucial importance of support for early childhood development, effective support for families with young children and early intervention in response to signs that healthy development is in jeopardy.

Throughout the year, Equilibrium was highly active as a member of the newly formed Early Years Alliance and, indeed, we hosted an event in Ruse at which those working in early years care and education discussed the current professional and social climate and its significance for the development of tools for tracking the development of infants.

The family centre is actively accumulating online resources for parents and those working with young children. These can be found on the Equilibrium website by using the link <http://eq-bg.org/en/category/early-childhood/>

The production of material continues in 2020 with the release of a new film and work on a new online publication.

Our work with the Danish VIA University College continues. The overall objective of the project is to contribute to the improvement of care, pedagogy and education in early childhood institutions – primarily kindergartens - in the four involved countries (Poland, Bulgaria, Slovakia and Hungary). We support the work in Bulgaria but we look forward to forming working relationships with the other countries.

The six themes drawn from the Danish early childhood curriculum should not be thought of as six independent subjects, but rather as aspects of child development.

The six themes are:

Comprehensive personal development

Social competencies

Communication and language

Body, sense and motor development

Nature and outdoor life

Culture, aesthetics and traditions

Two highly important aspects of the project are

1. Extensive engagement with parents

2. Changing the indoor layout of the Sofia kindergarten “Brothers Grimm” and extensive re-landscaping work outdoors.

The Ruse kindergarten “Snow White” is also being supported to review its pedagogical approach and think about improving the physical learning environment.