ANNUAL REPORT
ON PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES AND PRACTICE INSTITUTE
2018 г.

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES AND PRACTICE INSTITUTE – ANNUAL REPORT ON PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

2018

I. INTRODUCTION

The Social Activities and Practice Institute (SAPI) is a non-profit association, registered for public benefit under the Law on Non-Profit Legal Entities in 2001. Each year, we submit a financial and technical report to the Ministry of Justice, and following the amendments to the Law on Non-Profit Legal Entities and amendments to the Law on the Commercial Register and the Non-Profit Legal Entities Register as of 01.01.2018, to the Registry Agency.

We have implemented over 60 international and over 40 national projects, the deliverables of which are available in over 200 publications, manuals, reports, methodologies, group and training programmes, including for children, parents and teachers in kindergartens and schools.

Detailed information on the structure, management, activities and financing of the Social Activities and Practice Institute is available at: https://sapibg.org/en/pages/sa-nas

1.1. Methodology of drafting the report

1.1.1. Purpose of the report: Identification of trends, difficulties and good practices in the implementation of violence prevention in Bulgaria by analysing the activities of the organisation under this priority objective.

Prevention of violence against children is a key priority and a headline goal of all SAPI activities in 2018.

1.1.2. Sources of information

The main sources for the analysis are data from the monthly and annual reports on each social service run by SAPI, prepared for the municipalities which have outsourced the respective service provision to SAPI, and data from the annual information sheets prepared for the Agency for Social Assistance (ASA) and the State Agency for Child Protection (SACP).

The analysis steps on data and evidence from studies carried out throughout the year in the framework of various projects and activities, as well as from piloting and provision of new services for children and families at risk and integrated services for children at high-risk/with high risk behaviour.

Third, it is based on data from specifically conducted qualitative desk research. The first analysis is an analysis of casework documentation of 44 cases of children and 28 – of parents from all social services. The analysis involved the content of the casework information (examining the case, assessment and development of individual support plan). The analysis was based on quality indicators prepared in advance, while the information collected was summarised and quantified by evaluating the repetition of the indicator.

The second qualitative study was done on the completed feedback forms, 250 of parents and 200 of children. Initially, the frequency of words, concepts, phrases was examined, then these phrases were grouped by meaning and the group accumulations analysed. The methodology is described in more detail in the presentation of the results.

1.1.3. The criteria for analysis were guided by the affiliation of the activities to one of the three groups of prevention:
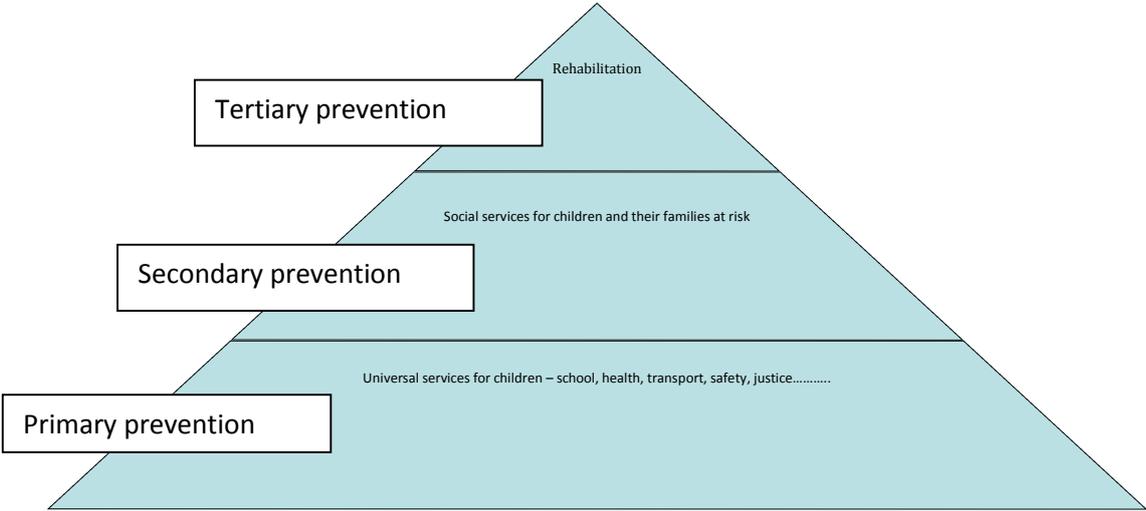

Figure 1 Pyramid of services

Each section of the analysis has its own key criterion and sub-criteria or indicators that serve as a starting point for making conclusions, identifying difficulties and good practices.

1.1.4. Good practices and promising practices

The good practices included in the report are practices that have undergone an external or internal evaluation and there is evidence of their effectiveness.

Promising practices are those that are piloted or have been piloted, but we have no finalised elevations yet.

1.2. Concept and methodology of prevention of violence against children

The organisation's concept of work is based on several basic principles.

The principle of the link between knowledge and practice, or the professionalisation of work, which is mainly achieved by building on research and knowledge of the so called resilience approach, which, as an eclectic approach, opens up space for the use of knowledge from a psychoanalytic perspective, a systematic approach, mentalisation, narrative and other approaches. The aim is that any professional intervention would refer to knowledge.

The principle of safeguarding the rights of the child is also key and justifies the team efforts for the child's living in a family environment, for prevention of separation of the child from the family, for abandonment prevention, etc. At the same time, the efforts are also focused on access to education, healthcare, culture, child-friendly justice and all society and community resources. Important for us is also the child's right to participate as an acting subject, depending on his/her age and individual abilities, so that he/she would grow up as a citizen responsible for him/herself and the society in which he/she lives.

Next, it is important to point out the integrated and interinstitutional approach that we rely on in all activities of the organisation – research, training, provision of social services, etc.

The methodology of work is based on individual and community approaches that allow for a better balance between the individual needs of each person and the community resources, on the one hand, and on the other, on the development and mobilisation of the community itself and its commitment to people at risk.

Moving from a descriptive towards an analytical approach when drafting the periodic reports of our organisation is a relatively new principle of work that we are trying to introduce. It implies development and improvement of the system of data we collect, issuing periodic

analyses and identification of their addressees. In this context, involvement of municipalities is an important priority.

From promising practices to good practices, is also a relatively new trend that involves collecting data to evaluate the quality of any activity through action research and participatory action research methods.

II. GENERAL/PRIMARY PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE

Definition – all activities aimed at the well-being of children and their families, the creation of the best conditions for the development of their potential, their resources and capabilities, as well as their socialisation, autonomy and civic and universal values.

Key criteria for the analysis – Safe environment for children in the family, school and community, with sub-criteria:

- Blending in, belonging to family, school, community;
- Encouraging, supporting and expecting the child's achievements – on behalf of parents, relatives, teachers, pedagogues and other professionals;
- Setting clear boundaries, attitudes to respect and observe social norms, developing the capacity for empathy, for building social relations and relationships in the family, in the school and community;
- Developing tolerance, respect, understanding of others, learning civic values.
- Overcoming the so-called passive neglect of children at risk, i.e. to what extent do universal services prevent or enhance the risk.
- Reaching out to children and families at risk – identification, reporting.

Our work on primary prevention in 2018 was mainly implemented though the projects "Hands up – for Abolition of Corporal Punishment", "Promise 2" and to a much more limited extend than in the previous years through the provision of social services.

The main topics we worked on were meaningful parenting and ending of corporal punishment; the school as a safe place for children and for child participation.

2.1. Trends, difficulties and good practices in supporting meaningful parenting
2.1.1. Preparing for and reflecting on meaningful parenting continues to be a topic with many aspects. On the one hand, we have increasing number of parents who are eager to

learn, discuss, reflect on their attitudes, knowledge and skills. On the other hand, as if there is some sort of increasing "reinstatement" of beating, of violence as a disciplining measure.

It seems that there are two main trends here.

The first trend is the increasingly visible focusing of parents and parents' groups on a more meaningful parenting, acceptance of parenting as a dynamic process of learning and development, of reflection and self-reflection.

We draw this conclusion from a range of programmes for better parenting where parents volunteer to participate. In this group we can also include parents who, having used a social service as a protection measure in family environment, are themselves seeking continued counselling support.

We had 6 *Tea Talks* type meetings with parents where parents were able to share their experiences and concerns with other parents, and assisted by a facilitator to seek solutions. A total of 74 parents took part, 17 fathers and 57 mothers with a total of 107 children between them, as well as 6 expectant parents.

During the meetings, parents shared that according to them the programme was helpful because they could identify changes in their own behaviour and attitudes toward their children. For example, one mother shared that during her involvement in *Tea Talks*, she realised that she was too harsh and often a source of anxiety for her son, and accordingly provoked such a behaviour in him which she considered unacceptable. She shared that she had a sense of "a vicious circle" in which they both felt dissatisfied with each other. A few months after the training, she said she had changed this and was pleased:

"I believe now he is much calmer when he talks to me ... I feel he trusts me more and tells me more ..."

Another participant, a father of twins, said it was very important for him to understand that 7-year-olds still do not perceive time in the same way as adults. He realised how pointless his efforts were to get his children do something for a certain period of time, instead of teaching them to be organised and tidy. The outcome was always tension, shouts, even reprimands, qualifications. Then he always felt sad and that he was not a good father. He said that he had thoroughly changed after the course and now the tension had dropped sharply.

We also had special POWER trainings in positive parenting for parents and in positive discipline for professionals.

In the period June 2017 – July 2018 a total of 8 trainings for parents were organised – 6 in Sofia and 2 in Shumen, for 61 parents of 92 children. In addition, 4 trainings for professionals were conducted in the same period – 3 for teachers and 1 for foster parents.

Because the parenting programme had been implemented primarily with families in which there was a recognised challenge in dealing with unwanted child behaviour, parental feedback was extremely important. In general, parents were pleased with the content of the training. Sharing common problems has reduced parental tension and anxiety. An unexpected impact for parents was the opportunity to share their problems with others or literally: "My problems are not as unique as I thought."

Professionals, on the other hand, were very open to communicate and said they simply didn't know what to do when faced with a challenging situation. The new Education Act implements the concept of positive discipline, most of the old punitive measures have been exhausted and teachers now feel powerless and need new tools to cope with children's behaviour.

The feedbacks from parents showed high satisfaction with the techniques presented to deal with unwanted and unacceptable behaviour.

As the most useful knowledge gained, they most often indicated:

- Communication with the child and the child's views are extremely important;

- Techniques for dealing with challenging behaviour;

- The connection between rules and love;

- For parents, the basic insight was that "the communication with the child and the child's views are extremely important".

Professionals, on the other hand, were very much pleased not only with the presented methods and techniques for working with children, but also with the ideas presented for engaging parents and the opportunities for close cooperation with the social system.

Group programmes for parents – *School for Pregnant Women, Workshop for Parents, Positive Parenting and Adoptive Parents' Self-help Group, group programmes on violence prevention – "No slapping"* for parents of children aged 0-5 years, have been recognised as

good practices. Group programmes support the work of specialists, because they often serve as upgrading the individual work with parents. ***The "Self-Reflexion Group", which is organised in the Community Support Centre in Sofia, is innovative***. It meets out once a month in the context of parenting – professionals use the fairy tale as a basic tool and through the corresponding story conditions are created for self-reflexion. The participants are 18 parents.

A promising practice

The POWER programme and the tea talks were evaluated by an external evaluator. To assess the impact of the training on parents' beliefs and attitudes related to positive parenting and abusive disciplinary practices, SAPI applied the LIFT tool – Interview on parenting practices before and after training. LIFT is adapted from the Discipline Questionnaire of the Oregon Social Learning Centre (OSLC) and can be used for an interview or as a self-assessment questionnaire completed by the primary adult providing the parental care. The questionnaire is being revised to be used with parents of young children.

Average values	*Before*	*After*
1. *Appropriate discipline*	*39,91*	*43,20*
2. *Harsh and inconsistent discipline*	*41*	*32,75*
3. *Positive verbal discipline*	*37,61*	*37,60*
4. *Corporal punishment*	*7,75*	*10,4*
5. *Rewards and incentives*	*38,53*	*39,33*
6. *Clear expectations*	*26,75*	*24,8*

Table 1 Average values of LIFT factors, before and after implementing the trainings for parents in Bulgaria

The interview using the LIFT tool – Parenting Practices Interview, groups the individual parenting disciplinary practices into two main categories: a) appropriate discipline and b) harsh and inconsistent discipline. For example, harsh and inconsistent disciplinary practices include: raising voice to children, threatening children with punishment or discipline that depends on their parents' mood. As appropriate discipline is described the use of practices, such as making children correct their misbehaviour, refused time out or refused privileges when children behave improperly.

As can be seen in the table above, parents in Bulgaria state that they use both appropriate and harsh and inconsistent disciplinary practices – a finding consistent with previous research. However, it seems that after the training Bulgarian parents share that they are more likely to use appropriate disciplinary practices than before the training. It may seem confusing that after the training, Bulgarian parents report that they have been using more corporal punishment. However, this is due to sensitizing towards acknowledging the use of corporal punishment.

2.1.2. In the public space more often, and rather rarely in our work, one may find a trend of trying to legitimise the so-called traditional parenting based on "traditional values", which seems to be a euphemism for defending corporal punishment, the power of parents, and primarily the power of the father.

It should be noted that this trend is difficult to be quantified as it is extremely rare to be manifested in the direct work of the organisation, i.e. training, supervision, research, providing psycho-social support. Moreover, this direct work rather shows that parents who have resorted to physical violence are more likely to express a negative attitude towards such acts that they have performed and in most of the cases explain it with their state of fatigue, stress, anger, etc. Those who identify it as a successful disciplining tool, usually upon establishing a good connection, share their doubts, difficulties, experiences and willingness to change – even the most convinced ones, when meeting their child, who is able to share his/her feelings of fear, humiliation, despair.

Cases of mediation

The father was referred because of the child's report of severe physical violence, a ban to meet his mother after the separation, degrading punishments. During the meetings, the father

defended his approach as a good educational tool and did not see why he should change it. He stated that he attended the counselling sessions only because he was ordered to attend them by the court. Before the court decision expired, the team organised a mediated meeting of the father with the child. It was organised following the methodology for mediation between a child and an adult, in which the team was trained by international trainers https://sapibg.org/en/event/obuchenie-po-vzstanovitelna-mediaciya[1]. At the meeting, when the child managed to say how much he was afraid, how humiliated he felt, how he was longing for his mother, how much he was scared at the moment of the session and how much at the same time he loved his father and wanted to meet him, the father at first emotionally and then consciously reflected on and reassessed his parental behaviour and realised that although he wanted the best for his child, the way he did it led to different results.

2.1.3. The actual reduction and discontinuance of resorting to corporal punishment is a rather lengthy process, which will have to involve parents in a more meaningful way, not only as an object of intervention, but also as a subject of joint action.

One possibility is informing about, familiarising with and discussing research results[2], including medical, neurological, criminological and other with parents, from the position that it is not easy to be a parent, and not from the position of experts, and in no way from the position of assessors and accusers.

Next, it is important for the programmes for parents to be developed and validated together with them, to be focused on reflection, but also on action, empowerment and achieving parental authority, on parents gaining skills for setting boundaries in a way that respects both the parents' and the child's dignity.

Good Practice – "Elimination of Corporal Punishment" Campaign

The "Elimination of Corporal Punishment" Campaign was conducted in August 2018, mainly in Facebook[3], and reached over 30,000 parents. Within that month, messages concerning the damaging effects of corporal punishment and alternative evidence-based decisions were published on the specially-created web page. These messages were distributed to various parents' groups on-line as well as in the traditional media – there were articles, interviews, etc.

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[1] *Restorative Justice for Child Victims* project

[2] https://sapibg.org/bg/book/doklad-sa-telesnoto-nakasanie-nad-deca
https://sapibg.org/bg/book/narchnik-otnosno-telesnoto-nakasanie

[3] *https://www.facebook.com/handsup.bg/*

The campaign was complemented by the #handsupchildren mobile app (may be downloaded on a mobile phone[4]) and a special song[5].

Anyone who had a current discipline related problem with their child was able to ask a question in a specially created online Parents Forum and get advice from a qualified professional[6].

The campaign was covered and supported by a number of media outlets.

"Dnevnik" newspaper[7]

"Jenata dnes" magazine[8]

Dnes.bg[9]

Marginalia[10]

Novite roditeli[11] (New parents)

Purvite 7[12] (First seven)

Maiko mila[13] (Dear mother)

Sofia plays[14]

Bulgarian NGO's Information Portal[15]

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[4] http://www.handsupchildren.org/en/new?id=36)

[5] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J1dq0Tagn6Q&feature=youtu.be

[6] http://handsup.boards.net/board/6/

[7] https://www.dnevnik.bg/detski_dnevnik/2018/08/02/3290333_rucete_gore_ili_sreshtu_telesnoto_nakasanie_nad_deca/

[8] https://www.jenatadnes.com/malkiyat-prints/80-ot-detsata-po-sveta-sa-biti-s-vaspitatelna-tsel/

[9] https://www.dnes.bg/obshtestvo/2018/08/06/rycete-gore-sreshtu-shamarite-tolerantni-li-sme-kym-boia.384238

[10] https://www.marginalia.bg/analisi/analis/malkite-stapki-kam-golyamoto-nasilie-ili-sashto-edin-shamar-ima-snachenie/

[11] https://www.noviteroditeli.bg/da-pogovorim-saedno-novini/vsichki-vsrasti/rcete-gore-sreshchu-telesnoto-nakasanie-nad-deca

[12] http://purvite7.bg/shamart-ne-e-besobiden/

[13] http://www.maikomila.bg/%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B4%D1%8A%D1%82-
%D1%81%D1%80%D0%B5%D1%89%D1%83-
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%D0%B2%D0%BA%D1%8A%D1%89%D0%B8/

[14] http://sofia.plays.bg/courses/view/517

[15] https://www.ngobg.info/bg/news/114527-
%D0%B8%D0%BD%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B8%D1%82%D1%83%D1%82-%D0%B7%D0%B0-
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%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%B9%D0%BD%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B8-%D0%B8-

Dunav most[16]

BNR – Radio Sofia[17]

BNR – Horizont[18]

Zarata – News[19]

2.1.4. The support for prospective adoptive parents shows that selection and training should be followed by post-adoption support, and not monitoring. This would be a principal prevention of major problems and failed adoptions.

Working with adoptive parents represents 20% of the total support for parents in all services. The analysis of the practice shows that these cases come to us due to problematic and symptomatic child behaviour. Parents have no explanation and understanding of their children's behaviour, cannot cope with these situations and cannot handle the age crises. In some cases, they raise the issue of separation with children. When examining the history of the problem, it was found that children have shown signs much earlier than the moment the service got involved, in other words, the support was late.

It has been established as a standard in the services run by SAPI that in case of a referral or request of support for a child to also identify the difficulties and needs of parents, with whom to carry out independent and systematic work.

Another point of view, in support of this conclusion is the feedback from the prospective adopters after the training. To a large extent, they link the usefulness of the training with the

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16 https://www.dunavmost.com/novini/sapochva-kampaniyata-ratsete-gore
17 http://bnr.bg/sofia/post/101007075/shamar
18 http://bnr.bg/horisont/post/101004161/sapochva-kampaniata-racete-gore-sreshtu-telesnoto-nakasanie-nad-deca
19 https://www.zarata.info/%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%BF%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%8F-
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professionalism and sensitivity of the trainers and the need to be in touch with them after adoption and to keep receiving support.

2.2. Trends, difficulties, good practices for greater involvement of universal services and "good enough" training and education in kindergartens and schools.

2.2.1. One of the serious difficulties in the modern school is the field of relationships between teachers and children, teachers and parents, and between the children. These difficulties affect the outcomes at the mainstream level of education, the motivation of children to learn and develop. The school has not yet addressed the difficulties to itself, to the need for professional pedagogical efforts to provide each child with a safe environment and conditions for inclusion in their community.

The first step to solving the problems is to accurately address them, and for each party to take on their relevant commitments and responsibilities. This understanding replaces the pattern of solving problems by transferring responsibilities to the other actors, for example parents to teachers and vice versa, parents and teachers to children and vice versa, etc.

The leading actor in the process of reconsidering the nature of problems in a particular school and assuming responsibilities is the school itself. We believe that the Bulgarian school has resources it can activate, and can develop its capacity to use additional resources by involving the community where it is operates.

The main resource we suggest to be further developed is in the field of skills and competencies that we expect to bring a change in the actions and behaviour of the main stakeholders.

A promising practice "A model of improved practice for a sustainable and secure environment in a school free of violence and aggression based on the development of children's strengths and resources".

A SAPI expert team developed a proposal to create a model of improved practice for a sustainable and secure environment in a school free of violence and aggression based on the

development of children's strengths and resources. This goal may be specified for each individual school and will be appropriate to do so. The model is aimed at:

- *Raising the capacity of professionals and parents to provide a safe and secure family, school and social environment.*

- *Raising the capacity of teachers, parents, and the capacity for good treatment at school and prevention of violence against children.*

- *Supporting the active participation of students in providing an active and safe environment.*

It is particularly important that this model is implemented as a *participatory action research*, i.e. activities to be agreed and planned with the school, based on the specific needs, which are also jointly identified. Next, each activity is validated via its participants, its target group, the experts who implement it, representatives of the community where it is implemented.

A practice with challenges – negotiating the implementation of the model and preparing a specific school project.

We held a series of meetings with representatives of the management of the educational system - the Regional Department of Education and the Ministry of Education and Science and some schools in Sofia. The aim was to change the practice of "an NGO implementing a project" and real negotiation. Experience has proven that there are serious difficulties to arrange meetings, as in five out of the six meetings agreed it turned out that "there was an urgent call from the Ministry of Education and Science" or from a different authority, and the meeting did not take place or was attended by a different representative of the management.

Another difficulty is the insufficient communication within the school, and as a result the decisions made at the meeting were not implemented because the others were not aware of them.

It is extremely difficult to reach parents through the school. This is a topic that needs further investigation on the undelaying causes.

This model presumes the organisation and management to be taken over by the school, that we have not yet achieved at this stage. It is possible that in the process of its piloting it is likely that the active role will be the one of the NGO.

A promising practice

Elements of this model are being implemented at a school in Shumen, where our partnership has a long history – since 2009.

SAPI and Secondary School "Sava Dobroplodni" in Shumen signed an agreement, joining their efforts to organise and carry out joint activities in connection with the implementation of "Strengthening the Child's Strengths for Violence Prevention" project – a model of improved practice for sustainable and safe environment in a school free of violence and aggression based on the development of children's strengths and resources. Prevention programs in grades 5 to 7 will be piloted for 3 years.

As a result of the long-standing partnership, the school – pedagogical councillors, teachers and the director – recognise SAPI and the Complexes for Social Services for Children and Families (CSSCF) – Shumen as an organisation with expertise and experience in prevention of violence and aggression. Work on prevention of violence, aggression and bullying in the school community requires implementation of a holistic approach that unites the integrated efforts of specialists and teachers. A school-level program, in the context of the overall school approach, involves several levels of implementation:

- *Developed and adopted Child Protection Policy, containing standards for the child protection and their implementation to ensure the safety of children at school. The adoption of a Policy, which is shared and implemented by all participants in the educational process, regulates in the long term the goals and objectives of violence prevention, as well as sets specific roles, responsibilities and procedures for action in cases of violence and abuse. – (Policy adopted)*

- *Enhancing the capacity of teaching staff with new methods of teaching and working with children – (1 training delivered). The training was based on innovative effective methods and practices aimed at improving interaction and designing the learning environment in a new way in order to develop personal and social skills of children.*

- *Forming professional groups that allow teachers to share common experiences and solve problems or cases from their practice.*

- *Involvement of students from the school Children's Council and a workshop with children from grades 5-8 to apply the "Peer-to-peer Learning" method in the student community. The activities are aimed at developing skills and empowering students to*

cope with problems and crisis situations in a healthy way without hurting themselves or others.

- *Parents participation, which involves analysing their needs as parents – how they interact with children, what difficulties they encounter, how they support and motivate them, how they stimulate and set boundaries.*

Promising Practice – Campaign "THE SCHOOL AS A SAFE PLACE FOR CHILDREN"

It targets both parents and teachers as responsible adults, whose mission is to provide safe environment for children to learn and develop as confident and capable people.

The campaign reached over 1,000,000 viewers and was broadcasted by bTV, in all metro sections in Sofia, in the National Palace of Culture and the Internet.

"Careful Parents" campaign on prevention of online violence against children. The campaign's messages focus on the problem of solicitation of children on the Internet. The campaign was promoted in the media, social networks and TV. There were over 20 publications and 7,000 broadcasts of the video with more than 100,000 viewers.

2.2.2. Introduction of intervision and supervision practices in schools may contribute to more appropriate pedagogical approaches to all children and children at risk.

The piloting of a supervision group is based on a developed methodology. The meetings we have conducted allow us to say that teachers need to share, to reflect, to seek answers to their questions, and supervision is a highly appropriate place for that.

A promising practice

Supervision groups are held at a school in Shumen. Teachers are active, discuss child cases and ask questions. With the help of the group and in an interactive way, the context around the problem is expanded and hypotheses formulated, new understandings and ideas for approach and work with children are introduced.

2.2.3. Child participation

Child participation is an integral part of the work of SAPI. The organisation has for years been known for its efforts to create an appropriate environment for child hearing in court

proceedings. Hearing child views on issues affecting their lives is done also in different administrative procedures through advocacy at casework level. At case level, each child participates in negotiating the intervention, gives feedback on its implementation, completes a questionnaire after the end of the intervention and provides feedback. SAPI recognises the need to improve the integration of child participation in its casework.

In addition to the individual participation, SAPI encourages and provides space for the development of the so-called "collective participation" [20] – by collecting children's views and presenting them in studies, in prevention programmes at school – various workshops, Consumer Council.

A promising practice

CSC "Slaveykov" and CSC "Nadezhda" invite former and current service users at regular meetings known as the Users' Council. The purpose of the meetings is to get feedback that would improve the efficiency of provided services.

The meetings are adapted to the level of development of children taking part. They get the opportunity to remember how they felt when coming to the centres for the first time, what path they have completed, and what else they would like to happen to them. There are always some tears, a lot of laughter and, of course, a treat!

A promising practice

Child rights club was organised in Shumen, which was joined by 14 school children and launched a new form of child participation. Through the active involvement of children and the implementation of their project concepts, we believe that we provide them with the opportunity to be heard, their opinions to be respected and appreciated. At the end of June, a final open training session for the Child rights club was held during which children received messages and certificates from Ivan Kapralov – Shumen Ombudsman. On the occasion of 1st of June – the International Children's Day specialists from the Community Support Centre – Sofia, organised a "Children's Workshop on Child Rights". Two workshops were held with children from grades 5 and 6 of 16th Primary School in Nadezhda quarter. A total of 40 children participated in the event.

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[20] UNCRC General Comment 12/2009

III.SECONDARY PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN OR RISK PREVENTION

3.1.   General characteristic

Definition – Activities aimed at preventing abandonment of babies, separation from parents, parental alienation, dropping out of school, social exclusion and marginalisation.

Key criteria – guaranteeing children's rights to life in a family environment, access to universal resources such as education, healthcare, culture, justice, sports and other.

- Involved parents and enhanced capacity for good parenting;
- The child has contacts with both parents;
- Improved attachment, family relationships, clear roles of children and parents;
- Having good relationship with a teacher, educator, "good adult", etc.;
- Community support, extended social network of the child and his/her family;
- Improved access to education and improved school achievement;
- Improved access to psychotherapeutic and other health care;
- Access to child-friendly justice.

The analysis of our work on prevention of violence against children at risk is based primarily on data from the provision of social services for children at risk and their families[21] at the Complexes for Social Services for Children and Families (CSSCF) in Vidin and Shumen, the two Community Support Centres (CSC) in Sofia and the CSSCF in Stara Zagora, which until September was run by SAPI, where cumulatively the needs of a total of 2,344 children and parents were met.

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[21] SAPI has been a licensed service provider of social services for children and families at risk since 2003. The organisation established the first in the country Family Support Centre in Gabrovo in 2004, and the first Youth Probation Centres – 2005-2007. Since 2006 it has been providing delegated social services under contracts with the municipalities of Shumen, Pazardzgik, Sofia, Vidin, Stara Zagora.
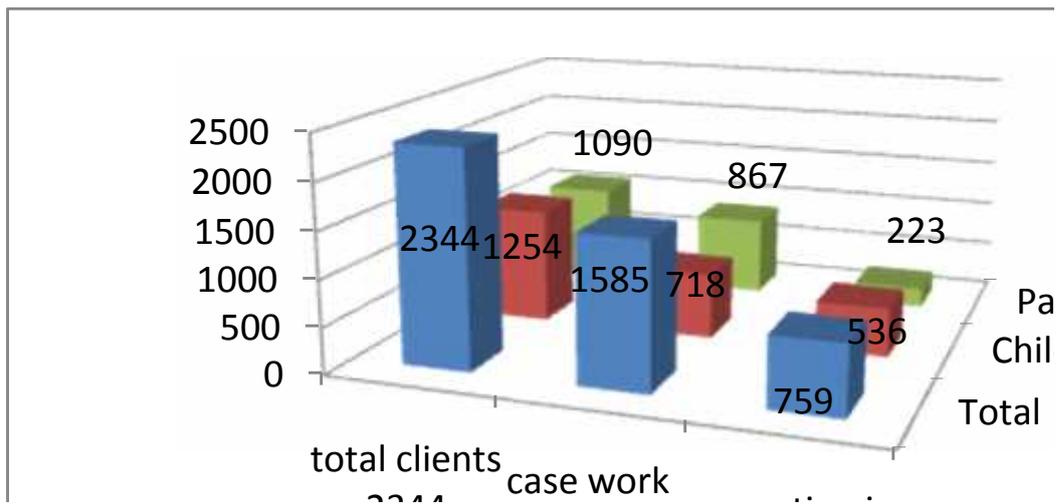
Figure 2: Breakdown of users of social services provided by SAPI in 2018, Source: Annual reports of the services for the municipalities that have contracted them out.

3.1.1. There is a clear trend of increasing secondary and tertiary prevention activities for the account of decreasing primary prevention activities, which, compared to 2017, have covered almost 1000 people less.

The relative share of casework is significant. The reasons may be found in several directions:

– increase of the real time for casework, based on the increase of the share of individual clients;

– increase in the duration of support in individual cases. The data show that out of all closed cases in Shumen, Sofia and Vidin in 2018 – 733, the cases of children were 365, of parents – 368, 32% used 3-month services, and 68% – long-term support, of which 35% were for a duration of over one year.

3.1.2. Out of all closed cases, about 87% were closed for achieving the objectives in the individual plans, and for CSC Sofia and CSSCF Shumen their share was 91%.

This information has been monitored since 2007 and shows a steady level of around 11-12% of cases that were closed for reasons other than meeting the objectives.
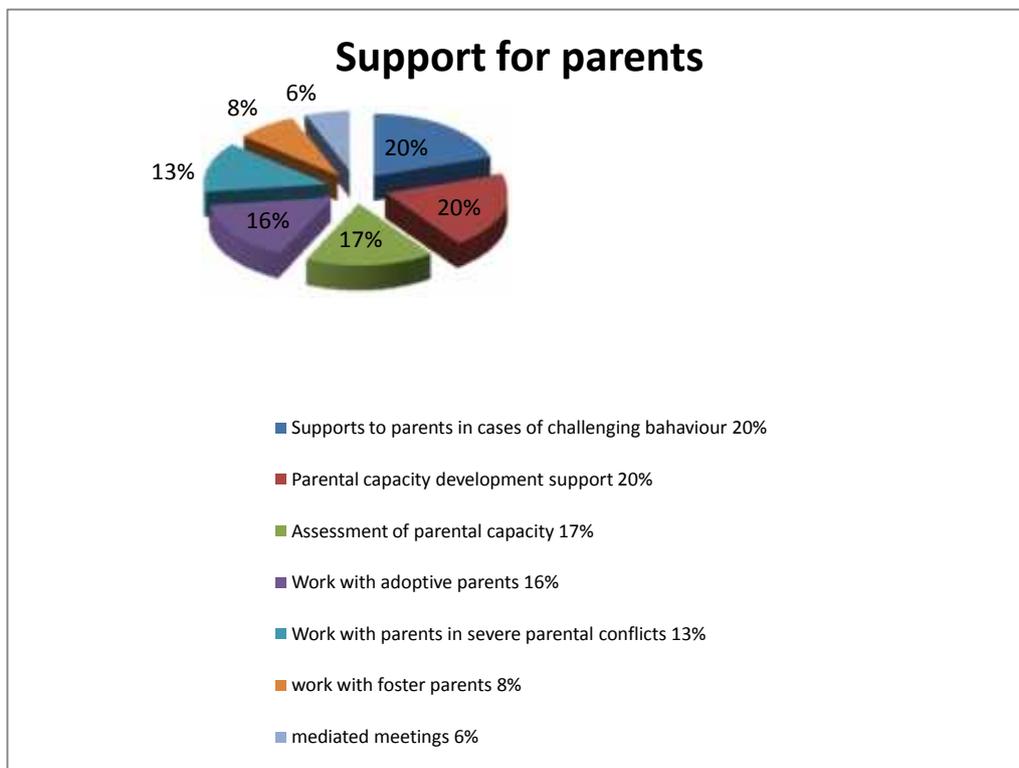
The other cases are of people who were not found at the addresses provided, who submitted written refusal to use services, who moved elsewhere while using the support, and other. It is notable that some of the people not found, were referred by court pursuant to the Protection against Domestic Violence Act. This requires further analysis of the causes and of the interaction with the referring authority.

19

3.2.   **Trends, difficulties, promising practices for supporting parents of children at risk.**

3.2.1. Data for 2018 show that the relative share of involving with parents in the casework has increased by about 17%, which implies the understanding that more and more, precisely the support for parents is the true support for children, as well as that we have succeeded to involve more parents.

Since, this year the work on individual cases as a relative share of the total number of service users, has increased significantly compared to previous years, this conclusion is completely correct. While in 2017 this was the type of work for about 50% of the total number of service users, in 2018 it was over 67% (1,585 out of 2,344).

3.2.2. It can certainly be said that support for parents was meant to achieve a more meaningful and good parenting, and it was sought because of problems in their child's behaviour, in cases of parents' separation, in cases of reintegration of children in their birth families.

Support for parents

- ■ Supports to parents in cases of challenging bahaviour 20%
- ■ Parental capacity development support 20%
- ■ Assessment of parental capacity 17%
- ■ Work with adoptive parents 16%
- ■ Work with parents in severe parental conflicts 13%
- ■ work with foster parents 8%
- ■ mediated meetings 6%

Figure 3: Distribution of parents, users of social services provided by SAPI in 2018, source: Annual reports of the services for the municipalities that have contracted them out.

The diagram in Figure 3 shows that there is a steady increase in the share of parents who cannot cope with age-related crises in children and cannot recognize the causes of child's behaviour. It is most often a "clash" and failure of the punitive model of disciplining to achieve its goals when a child enters puberty and adolescence. It is then that a significant proportion of parents are willing to reconsider their approaches and to look for other parenting behaviours and approaches.

There is now a similar number (takes more than 50% of the work in all cases) of cases for working with parents, in cases of problematic behaviour and for enhancing parental capacity, which is always accompanied by a preliminary, professional assessment of parental capacity and risks.

Case study

The D. family visited the CSC with a desire to consult a specialist about a problem they were experiencing with their daughter. At the first individual meeting with Mrs. D., a contract was concluded and began gathering information for the assessment. The counselling process provided space for the mother to express thoughts, feelings, and emotions regarding the relationship, communication and upbringing style, and her attitudes toward her daughter. Space was provided for the mother to talk just about herself as a woman, wife, sister and daughter. She was able to analyse, process and accept her personal story and work on the connection with her own mother. The mother was counselled on the causes for child behaviour during adolescence. She had the opportunity to seek new strategies for coping and changing her personal upbringing model, trying to move from a strictly controlling and authoritative style of communication with her daughter to interaction based on conversation, negotiation and acceptance. Her feedback was that she was feeling more relaxed, and seeing the same in her daughter. She shared that the girl allowed her to get closer and was seeking to reconnect on her own initiative. The client decided to reduce the control over her loved ones and to show a "healthy selfishness", i.e. she started thinking about herself, sharing responsibility with her partner, allowing D. to get on her own and work on her independence. Here is also part of her feedback: "… I was sceptical and undisciplined with respect to this

social service…" At the end of the work, she said: "I've changed my attitude. I created a personal trusting relationship; I felt an attitude of understanding and of being heard."

3.2.3. The parenting support programs that are being implemented meet the criteria drawn from the analysis of good practice studies.[22] These programs seek to empower parents, not to judge and stigmatise them. The results of the meta-analysis indicate that the most effective programs in this area are those that are used to develop an action centred approach or to empower parents[23]. A very important message of the currently used programmes is that violence generates violence, and they are aimed at supporting parents to act, to exercise their parental authority, but without violence.

Another important message is about the importance of setting boundaries, the safety of children and the development of skills how to do this with respect for the child without resorting to violence.

A promising practice

The operation of the Street Children Centre is organised also as a process that actively supports parents. The process of parenting support and its meaning is negotiated in the very beginning when parents share their difficulties in the process of organising and caring for their children. This support enables parents to become more confident and complete in the care they organise for their children.

*Traditional for the operation of the Shumen Centre is the organised group process with parents – **Parents' Cafes**. The main objective is to encourage parental involvement in sharing the care for children who use the social service. Through various interactive techniques, we talk about parenting – the joy and challenges faced by the parents of children, who use the service. At these meetings we present to parents the organised activities, children's involvement, their progress and difficulties. Their feedback is one of the criteria that form the basis for planning the activities.*

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[22] For more details see: https://sapibg.org/bg/book/narchnik-otnosno-telesnoto-nakasanie

[23] Brown, Ivan, et Sue Sullivan. 2004. "Promotion du bien-être familial et prévention des mauvais traitements: quels programmes sont efficaces?". Feuillet du *CEPB* # 17F tiré d'un article scientifique révisé par des pairs: MacLeod, Jennifer, Geoffrey Nelson et Sonia Desmarais (2000). « Programs For The Promotion Of Family Wellness And The Prevention OfChild Maltreatment: A Meta-Analytic Review ». *Child Abuse and Neglect,* vol. 24, nO 9, p. 1127-1149.
<http://www.cecw~~pb.ca!sites/defaLJlt/files/RLJblications/fr/MetaAnalysi~11EJ2M>,page consultée le 16 novembre 2009.

3.2.4. Our practice leads to the conclusion that there is a shortage of legislation and framework in these conflicts, there is an over-expectation with respect to the counselling services, which are more often used as an evidence tool in custody cases than as a tool for real help.

Severe family conflicts raise the problems of emotional child abuse, which is much harder to recognise and identify. Even the child protection system, while responding to these conflicts by referring both children and their parents to social services, rarely identifies the problem as abuse or a risk of abuse.

There is a definite need for coordinated activities between the child protection system, the social services and the custody cases. It is probably a good idea to consider options for suspending custody cases while using services.

Promising practice

Family mediation

The mediation of the decision-making process in relation to children in the framework of the counselling process shows that it would be good to develop this practice, while respecting the principles and methodology of mediation.

In the majority of parental conflict cases, there are elements of deterioration of the child's relationship with one of the parents, also as a result of deliberate actions by the other parent. Often, they are referred to as Parental Alienation Syndrome and sometimes the court requires an expert opinion of the presence of this syndrome in certain cases, although there is no such formal diagnosis. In such cases, children have been subjected to emotional and mental abuse, which is also shown in the data on the types of child abuse.

There is a growing number of cases where we need to do some urgent work on preventing emotional abuse of children. This is the substance of the work when dealing with parental conflicts, divorces and separation. It is notable that the share of referrals for work on severe family conflicts, together with psychological counselling and mediated meetings, also mainly applicable to family conflicts, reaches around 25% of the work with parents. 25% are working with foster parents and adoptive parents.

In cases where parents are separated, professionals are especially careful and sensitive to the presence of attitudes of alienation and/or of developing a conflict of loyalty in the child towards the parents. Most often, these symptoms are hidden behind the desire of parents to be seen as the ideal parents, those who are always following or ready to hear and respond to the child's wishes. For example, they explain the violations of the visitation regime by presenting this as in fact child's willingness/unwillingness to communicate, meet, and spend time with the other parent. A more detailed examination would identify difficulties not so much in the child's behaviour but in the specifics of the parent's behaviour caused by the current relationship with the other parent. In almost all cases, parents are consciously aware that it is not in the interest of their children to be involved in the conflicts, but in reality, they find it very difficult to act on this awareness and keep their children at a distance.

Promising practice

Meetings supervised by a professional, which for 2018 have already been specified in Court judgments, seem to be recognised as such. The practice is to use the resources of the specialised "Blue Room", as well as other appropriate spaces in the premises.

Promising practice

In 2018 in the cases referred for parental counselling in the context of a marital/partner separation, we begun to move our work more and more towards seeking opportunities for joint/mediated meetings between parents. The reason for resorting to this method of work was the analyses of the outcome of our work on such cases. We have found that the service cannot always achieve the required efficiency in case it is provided in an individual format only, because this creates significant preconditions for conscious search and establishing a sort of coalition between the client and the professional. It also does not contribute to the conflict resolution, since clients are intentionally seeking to maintain their position, namely, "I'm the good one, the other is bad." We believe that only if the right conditions and counselling context are created, this model may change and make the assumption that behind the symptomatic child behaviour there are other reasons, different than those shared and accepted by parents in the individual format as the only ones existing. Mediated meetings provide precisely this counselling context in which with the help of a professional – mediator the process of change is possible. We also consider and register as a significant contribution of these meetings the fact that the responsibility for the child and his/her psycho-emotional

well-being goes back to the parents. Awareness of this responsibility is a significant step towards a process that can lead to the desired change: improved communication after a family separation.

3.2.5. There is a trend and risk in the practice, for the child protection system to be "used" in the battle between parents; the services for the child to be used at the request of one parent and no clear practice for seeking the consent of the other parent, for sharing with him/her the child risk and needs assessment, which has its projection in the social services as well.

The problem is serious and puts the child protection system and social services for children and families, at risk of contributing to the alienation of one of the parents. Even in cases of violence, of domestic violence, it is important that each parent be involved in the work with the child. Often, it is this attitude towards the abusive parent that is "the opening" to working with him/her for changing his/her parental approaches.

Promising practice – Informing and engaging both parents at all stages of the case work on cases of children.

The practice involves examining the legal status of the child, of his/her representatives, and when one parent's parental rights are not revoked, even though the right to exercise custody is conferred on the other, the social service takes steps to involve both parents.

3.3. Trends, difficulties, promising practices in supporting children at risk

3.3.1. The child protection system is increasingly focusing on genuine protection rather than prevention of the risk for children. Children at risk, i.e. children who haven't yet experienced violence, abuse, abandonment, etc., account for about one-third or 33% of all cases of children with whom SAPI professionals have worked.

These were most often cases where the risks identified were risks of: dropping out of school, neglect, disrupting the contact with one of the parents in cases of separation.
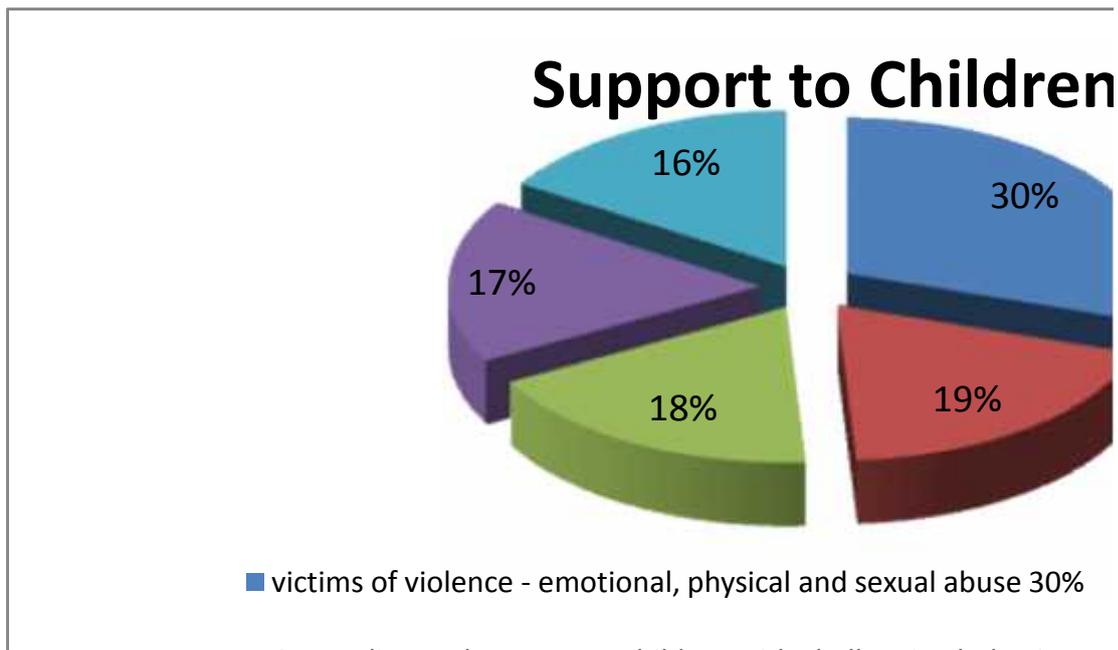
Support to Children

- 16%
- 30%
- 17%
- 18%
- 19%

■ victims of violence - emotional, physical and sexual abuse 30%

Figure 4 Breakdown of child service users in 2018 Source: Statistics of social services run by SAPI.

3.3.2. The support for children at risk of neglect and marginalisation, as well as for those with difficulties at school, implies temporary sharing of some elements of parental or teacher care and upbringing with the main aim of "returning" children back to parental care and upbringing and to the education system. The key here is the meaning of the word 'sharing', i.e. the child support functions are carried out jointly, in partnership and with the support of parents and the educational institution, rather than as their substitution or competing with them.

It is anchored in building a constructive relationship through individual psychological and social support by the key professional, as well as through involving children in specialised group programmes. The work was mainly oriented towards understanding, comprehending, accepting personal history, finding meaning, projection in the future.
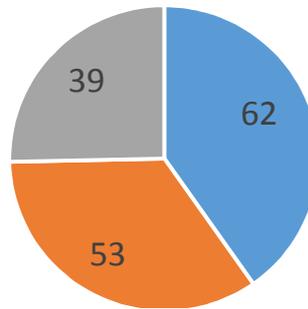
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Children with difficulties at scho

Figure 5 Support for children with difficulties at school. Source: Statistics of social services run by SAPI.

A total of 113 is the number of children who were identified with difficulties at school, due to cognitive difficulties, communication difficulties and difficulties with the social skills; 62 of them were referred for needs assessment by CSC Sofia team, 39 were children, receiving intensive support by the services of the Street Children Centre (SCC), another 53 were covered by specialised support in therapeutic workshops, school support – 17%.

Support of children in alternative care

In foster care 132 ← Psycho-social support / Preparation for adoption

In residential care 26 ← Needs assessment / Psycho-social support / Preparation for adopt
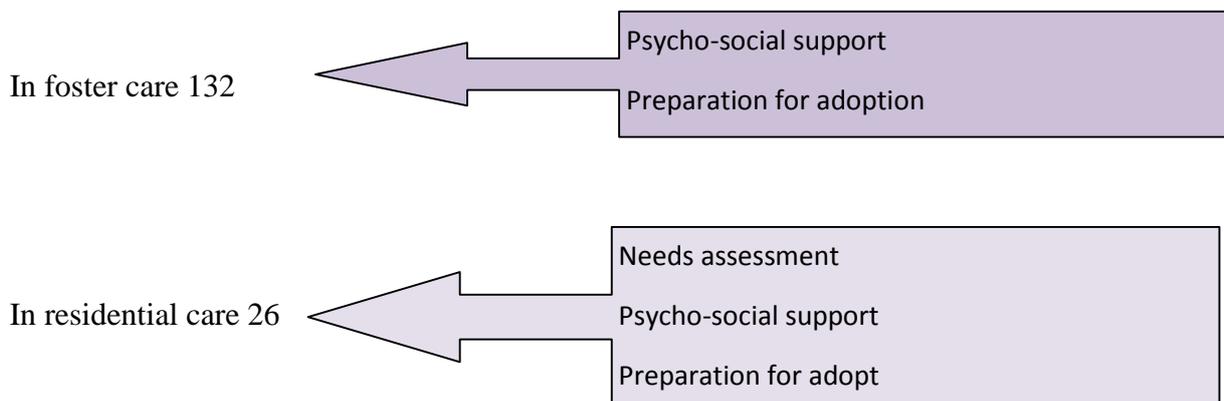
Figure 6: Support for children in alternative care Source: Statistics of social services run by SAPI.

A total of 132 children in foster care and 26 in residential services (18%) were supported individually with drafting personal characteristics, preparation for adoption; 116 cases of children for support and counselling in cases of divorce and severe conflicts (16%).

It is difficult to identify from this type of classification of the groups of children what is the proportion children in a situation of severe family conflicts who have already been victims of violence, at least emotional, and the same is valid for children in alternative care.

3.3.3. The school and the community are not yet committed to the support needed to integrate children at risk. It is still a leading practice for schools to move children from one school to another. Community work in our country remains unclear and there is no effort to engage with the inclusion of children at risk. This statement is particularly true of children in alternative care.

Sharing the education and upbringing of children at risk with educational institutions may contribute to the inclusion of these children in school and in the community.

A promising practice

Intensive support for children with difficulties and problems at school

Integrated support aimed at the children in SCC has proven to be essential in managing the risk factors that are being identified as early as the moment of admitting the children to the Centre.

Children referred to the service and their families have complex psycho-social and psycho-pedagogical issues, usually developed over time, before they have even become aware of their need for support or before they may be referred for it. Therefore, immediate and intensive support is required to deal with such an acute situation.

The intensity of the services provided also determines the need to expand the diversity of experts in various fields such as:

- *Health – GP/neurologist/psychiatrist/clinical specialists;*

- *Psychosocial – social workers from the CPD / CSSCF / SCC; psychologists and clinical psychologists;*

- *Educational – class teacher, pedagogical councillor, school psychologist, speech therapist.*

Taking the acute situations of the child under control is done by organising a competent team around him/her and his/her family, and this allows for an immediate setting up of a safe and secure environment for the child. The key case worker pools the efforts of the experts,

mediates and facilitates by accompanying, providing various methods of monitoring and support, both during the child's stay at the SCC and in the family and at school. At this stage, the experts' work is related to supporting the conditions under which the child's personality functions.

In the process of support, in parallel, a protective and stimulating the development of the child environment is organised, by placing different resilient supports around him/her. The specialised service staff develops programmes tailored to the individual child abilities and interests. The development of children's knowledge and skills is achieved by using a wide range of different approaches – play, discussion, audio-visual, demonstration, design and others. ("Educational Support", "Basic Life and Social Skills", "Art Workshop", "Workshop for Fantasy and Incredibility", etc.).

Children's Council – an organised process of feedback and planning of activities in the SCC by the children as direct users of the service. It is held monthly. The main goal of the Children's Council is to respect their opinions, interests and desires for development in their chosen activities and workshops.

IV. PREVENTION OF VICTIMISATION AND BEHAVIOUR IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW IN CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Definition – prevention of recurrence of the problem, trauma, behaviour, etc. This domain encompasses activities aimed at child victims of violence and their families, children in alternative care, as well as children with behaviour in conflict with the law.

Key criteria for this prevention – prevention of victimisation and criminal behaviour, integrated provision of support, centred on individual needs, such as:

- Involved parents, increased capacity for good parenting for couples where domestic violence was identified;
- Access to child-friendly justice;
- Access to psycho-therapeutic and other health care;
- Access to intensive psychosocial support for children as well as adolescents and young people;
- Access to educational support and support for independent living.

The analysis of the work with children with high risk behaviour or at high risk is based on the statistics of social services, as well as on the study and analysis of the content of the case work in child cases selected by two criteria – the child to be a victim of violence, and all social workers and psychologists working with children, to submit their assessments and plans. The same requirement was placed to professionals working with parents of child victims of violence. The analysis of the content of 44 individual assessments and 38 individual service plans for children allowed outlining some essential characteristics of the group of child victims of violence. The analysis is based on the following indicators:

- Age, gender of the child;
- Service request – by whom and for what;
- What is the current care for the child – family, alternative (foster, resident) care;
- Presence of traumatic events in early childhood 0-7 years, such as violence, neglect, abandonment, separation;
- Current difficulties and destructive behaviours – difficult relationships, difficult behaviours, suicide, addictions, etc.
- Support activities – psychological counselling, accompanying, advocacy, provision of information and other.

4.1. The share of the so-called severe cases which the child protection and social services systems engage with is growing. These are, in practice, cases of children who display symptoms, behaviours that may be considered a consequence of experiencing abandonment, abuse, various forms of violence.

The total number of child victims of violence we have worked with in 2018 was 357, of whom 219 in social services for children and families at risk in the CSSCF Vidin and Shumen and in the CSC in Sofia, and 138 in the specialised services for child victims of violence *Protection Zone (Zona ZaKrila)* in Montana and Shumen.

The total number of children with high risk behaviour and in conflict with the law is 409, representing over 75% of the cases. As criteria for children at high risk, we use indicators such as the severity of the problem, the reason for referral to services, i.e. it is clear that when the child has experienced violence, or has acted in conflict with the law, it is about a risk that has already occurred and a situation of high risk of victimisation or recurrence of the problem. The other criterion is the presence of a range of problems – besides the main reason, there is

often isolation, difficulties at school, alcohol, substance use and other. It is also necessary to take into account that this division is somewhat relative, since within groups it is not always clear whether they are at risk or at high risk.
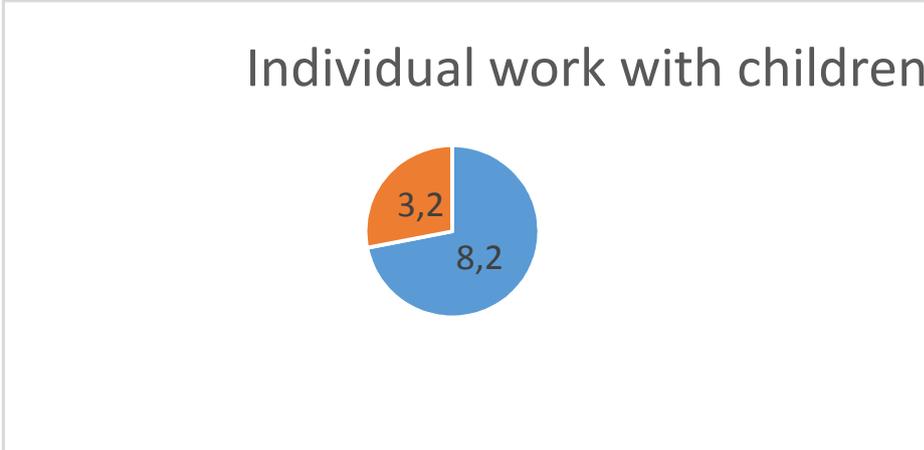

Figure 7 Ratio between the share of children at risk and children at high risk/with high risk behaviour in 2018 Source: Monthly and annual reports of social services run by SAPI.

For the social services, 219 child victims of violence equal to a relative share of 30% of all cases of supported children.

4.1.1. In social services and the specialised service for children in conflict with the law there is a clear trend of increase in the relative share of adolescents referred to CSC, Crisis Centre (CC), SCC, Child Rights Centre (CRC).

In the specialised services *Protection Zone (Zona ZaKrila)* we have a more even distribution by age. Regarding gender, there is a clear difference between the CRC, which works with children in conflict with the law, where boys prevail and other services, where the share of boys and girls is approximately equal.

This data is not surprising; rather, it indicates the gender differentiation of the type of problems caused by traumas, more often in boys.

The analysis covered the casework on cases of 24 girls and 20 boys, and what is notable is the relative proportion of adolescents in this group, which is understandable as it is precisely at this age that the effects of poor care and abuse emerge.
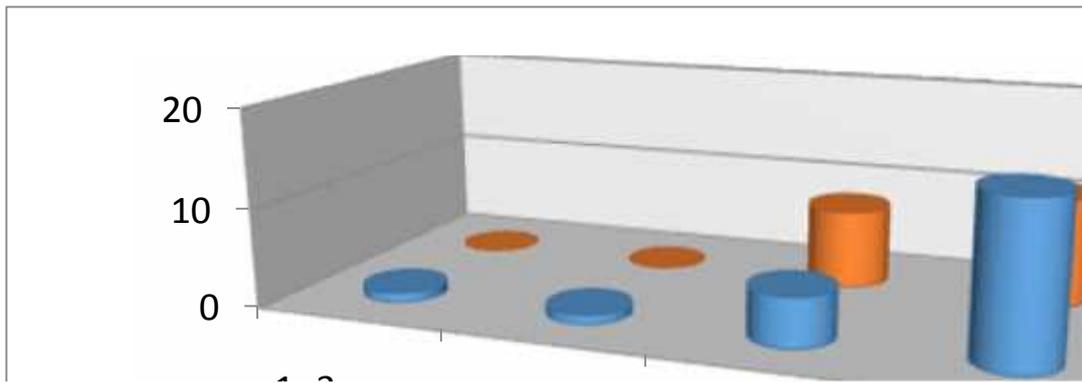
Figure 8: Gender and age distribution of children, clients of social services in 2018

Source: Content analysis of casework documentation.

In the specialised services for child victims of violence *Protection Zone,* the gender ratio is almost the same as in the social services, but the age distribution has its own specificity.
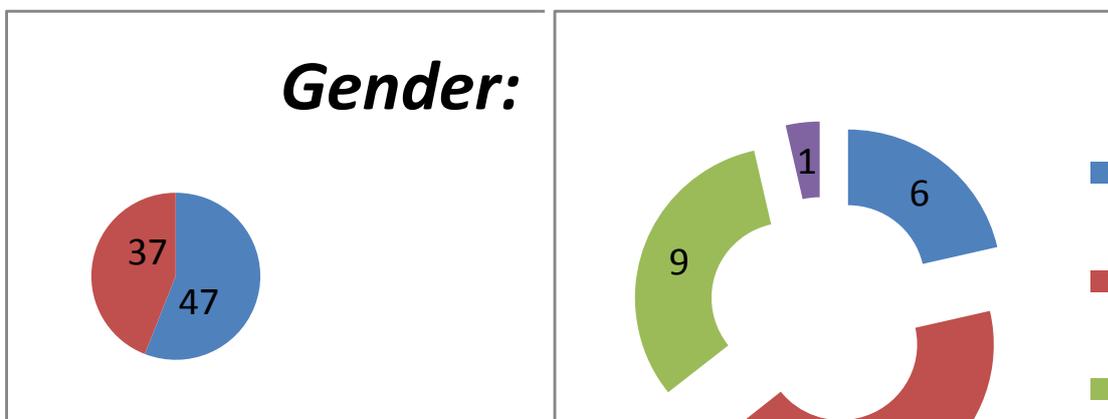

Figure 9: Distribution of children with whom the specialised services Zona ZaKrila have worked.

These data also indicate that for many children, support comes too late.

4.1.2. There is a general upward trend in the number of sexual abuse cases referred to the different types of services run by SAPI. The highest relative share of such cases we find in *Zona ZaKrila*, see Figure 9 and they rank among the first in the social services CSC, CC, SCC, MBU. A visible trend for an increase in psychological abuse cases is seen in the CSC cases, which are mainly cases of children involved in severe parental conflicts and child victims of school bullying.

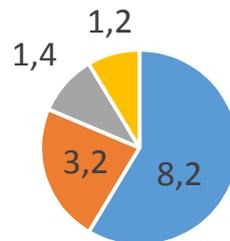Children victims of violence in so...

219

1,2
1,4
3,2   8,2

Figure 10 Ratio by type of violence in child victims of violence in 2018

Source: Monthly and annual reports of the social services run by SAPI.

Neg
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Tra
Dor
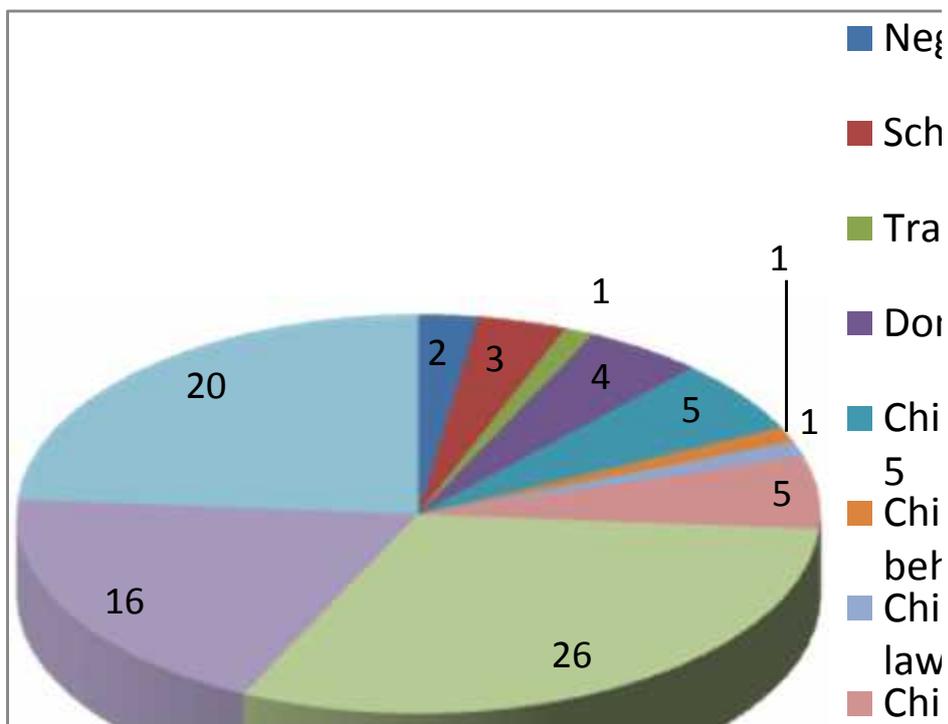Chi
Chi
beh
Chi
law
Chi

1
1
2   3   4
5
1
20
5
16
26

Figure 11 Distribution of children, clients of the specialised services Zona ZaKrila, by type of violence

Statistics from specialised services also show that almost all cases of violence are committed by people with whom the children are in a trusting relationship or somebody they knew – family members, mainly fathers and mother's partners, neighbours and relatives. In most cases, violence is committed in the home of the child, which introduces the hypothesis of resorting to violence to resolve family conflicts and using violence as a means of disciplining children. A big proportion of children are moved out of their families because of violence. This explains the fact that in both centres the share of children being raised in foster families, FTPCs and CCs is the highest.

4.1.3. In children at high risk in conflict with the law, there are some differences in the distribution by age and gender, which is related to both the definition of a child in conflict with the law and to the specifics of the symptoms of the experienced violence.
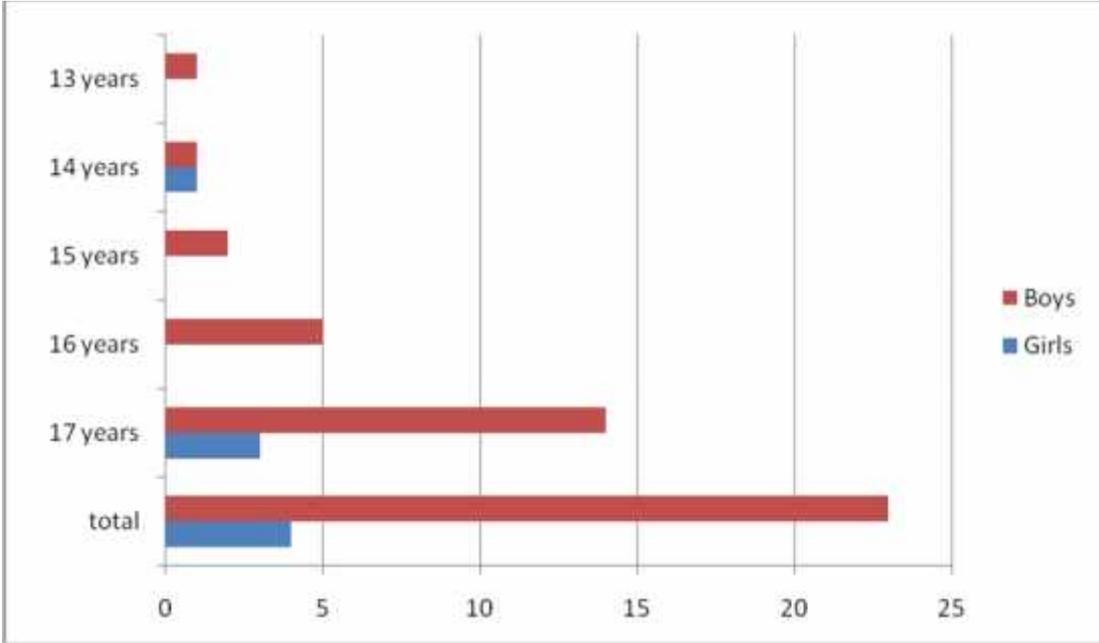
	13 years	14 years	15 years	16 years	17 years	total
girls		1		3		4
boys	1	1	2	5	14	23

Figure 12 Distribution by gender and age of children in conflict with the law that CRC has worked with in 2018

Source: Report of CRC pilot service.

1ˢᵗ stage

16-18 years
14-15 years

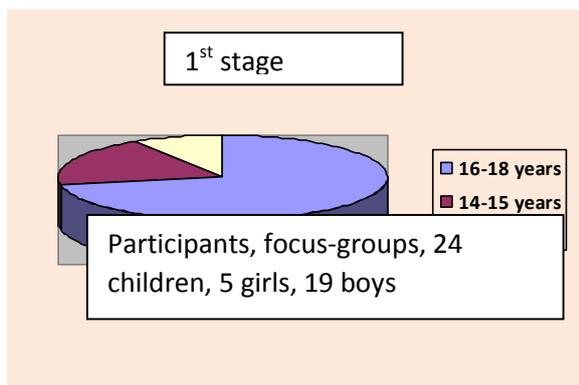Participants, focus-groups, 24 children, 5 girls, 19 boys

Figure 13 Gender distribution of participants in the study "The right of minors to information, translation and interpretation in criminal proceedings: Development of child-friendly tools". EC Justice Programme.

In the first phase of the study took part all children sentenced to imprisonment, as well as about 29% of the children placed in Correctional Boarding Schools (CBS), one CBS being for girls. In the second phase of the study, were covered a total of 36 minors from the regions with the highest number of minors sentenced to probation, of whom 35 were boys and one was a girl. According to CRC data, among the offences for which they were sentenced most were robberies, which suggests aggression and next were thefts.

Robbery	12
Theft	8
Assault and aggression	4
Drug use	3
Hooliganism	2
Drugs distribution	2
Escapes and Prostitution	2
Fornication	1

Figure 14 Offences perpetrated by children with whom work has been done in the CRC. Source: CRC report

4.2. In 2018, according to annual reports, 89% of the individual cases handled by social services were referred by the CPD.

4.2.1. According to the content analysis data on cases of violence, it seems that in almost 90% of the cases, the work started was at the request of a parent to the CPD or by the CPD at the request of the parent. Work only at the request of a parent, followed by the involvement of the CPD, is observed in more than half of the cases (Fig. 15).

Reference from:

Figure 15 Requests for working with children addressed to social services for children and families at risk. Source: Content analysis of casework documentation.

An analysis of the contents of the case files shows that most often the reason for the request was experienced violence, which is understandable insofar as it is one of the criteria for selecting cases. It is notable that in the largest number of cases – 15, there was a range of reasons which provided grounds for the request. This was also confirmed by the analysis of the assessment of the problems of children.

Grounds for referring to social services

Difficult behaviours, difficulties at school	6
Difficult behaviours and psychiatric problems, psychoactive substances addiction, alcohol	3
Experienced violence, suicide, prostitution, and escapes, Difficult behaviours	5
Experienced violence, suicide	1
Adoption	1
Adoption breakdown	1
Updating the plan of a child placed in a service	2
Victim of violence – 13 (sexual abuse, witness of violence, abandonment, neglect, etc.)	13
Post-divorce anxiety, loss	6
By the court – parental alienation	1

Figure 17 Grounds for referring to social services. Source: Content analysis of casework documentation of the social services run by SAPI in 2018

The situation in specialised services at first glance is somewhat different, which is due, on the one hand, to the way information is collected, but, as far as their cases are included in the

qualitative analysis, we may assume for these cases also, that in the vast majority of requests coming from the CPDs, the participation of parents is of similar nature.
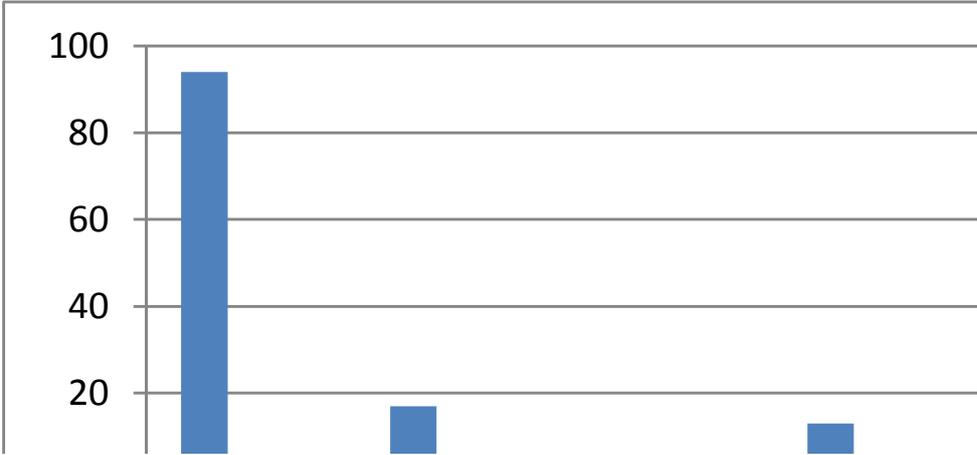

Figure 18 Referral of cases to Protection Zone (Zona ZaKrila) in 2018. Source: Statistics from services.
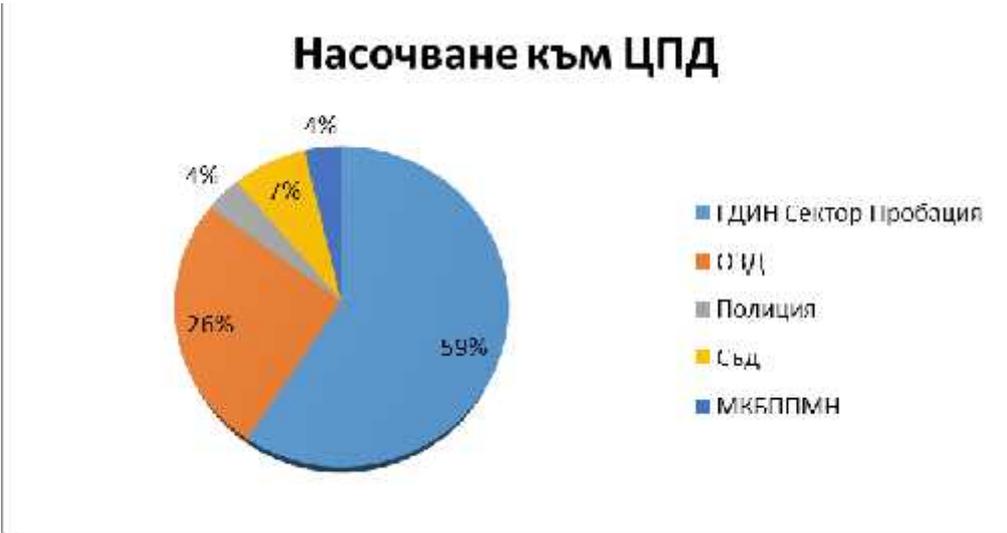

Figure 19 Referral of cases to the CRC in 2018. Source: Statistics from services.

4.2.2. The majority of children at high risk come from a family environment, which is valid for both social services for children at risk and specialised services for children at high risk. It seems that community based social services work more and more for the people in the community.
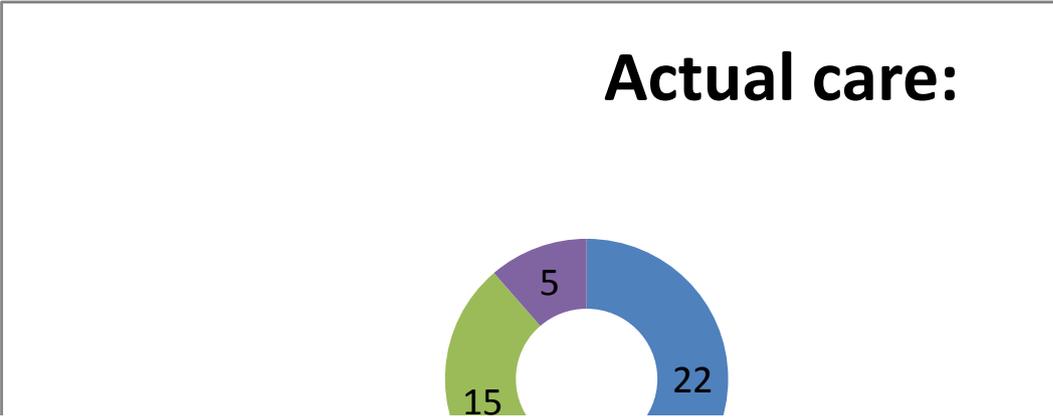
Actual care:

Figure 20 The type of care that children referred to social services for children and families at risk, come from. Source: Content analysis of casework documentation.

4.3 The data show that most children, in practice with the exception of two of the analysed cases, who use services for prevention of repeated trauma, violence and problems, have had history of poor care and abuse in their childhood.

In practice, social services interfere reactively, trying to compensate for the lack of prevention.

4.3.1. This applies to 100% of adolescents, who account for more than two-thirds of all children the services have worked with. The majority have more than one traumatic childhood experience.
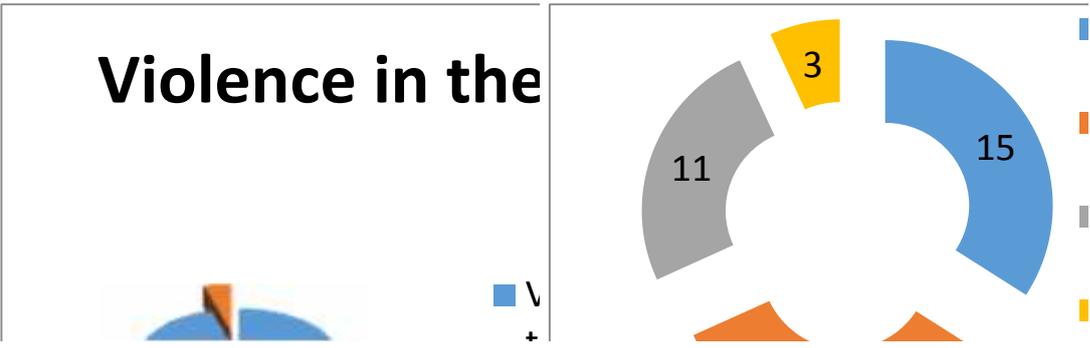

Figure 21 Distribution by range of traumatic events in early childhood. Source: Content analysis of casework documentation.

Content analysis of individual cases shows that children at high risk have had a severe history of abuse, separations, losses, abandonments. In one third of them more than three traumatic events have been identified, most often abandonment at birth or extreme neglect, physical and emotional abuse, and in no small part of cases, also sexual abuse.

4.3.2. The information available on the children in conflict with the law shows that 65% of them live in single parent families – they are raised by their mother, relatives or friends or have stayed in residential services (small group homes, crises center).

When analysing the living environment, numerous common and prevalent characteristics of the family became apparent, that directly affect the quality of the relationships and ties within the family, as well of the care. Almost every child's family has experienced many difficulties and social problems; some parents have criminal records. All of them have an early history of trauma, which has led to a high risk of crossing the line from socially acceptable to destructive and unlawful conduct. History related to traumatic events – victims of physical violence, possible sexual abuse, death of a parent, separation with one parent at an early age, systematic abuse, involvement in fornication.

Due to the high level of neglect on the part of the family, adolescents are very likely to identify with another type of adverse environment, a community of friends and peers, which, in addition to being criminogenic, is also highly coercive and pressures young people to engage in antisocial behaviour. Under pressure and possibly because of unmet needs, again related to the quality of family ties, young people commit robberies, get involved in hooliganism, and may be found in possession and use of drugs.

Their lifestyles, traumas and neglect lead to early school leaving, being out of school for a long period of time, poor performance at school, inability to cope with educational challenges. Problems at school are also related to the lack of basic social skills, incl. motivation and learning skills.

Our hypothesis is that the lack of coping strategies due to their low age and inadequate or absent parental care have made them extremely vulnerable to engaging in criminal and high-risk behaviour.

4.3.3. The effects of poor care and abuse in childhood are most often manifested in the form of destructive behaviours that may be directed to others and also self-directed, and in a large part of cases it is in both directions at the same time.

The analysis of the assessments showed that in over one third of the cases of children above the age of 11, they have more than two types of destructive behaviours or conditions. These are the children who were identified as the difficult cases of the child protection system and their number is increasing.

number of children dis
by the current pro
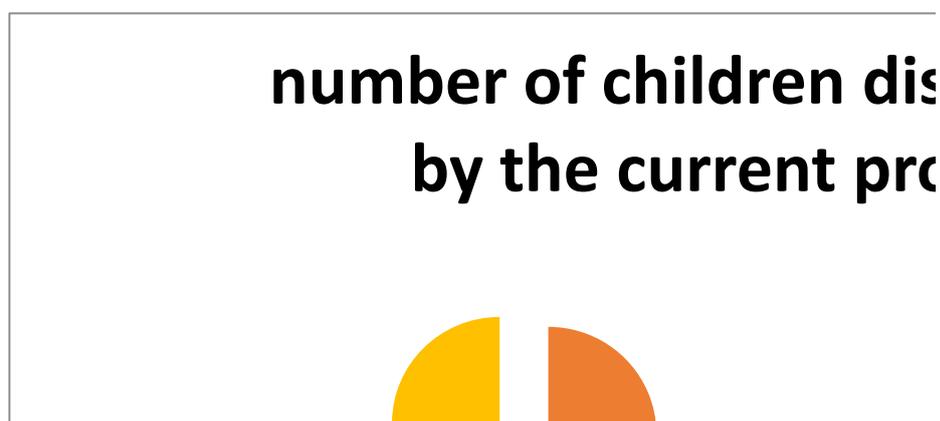
Figure 22 Identified problems of adolescent children as part of the case assessment. Source: Content analysis of casework documentation.

It may be said that the child protection system seems to identify children with behavioural difficulties as children at risk, as opposed to social assistance and social protection structures at national level.

4.4. There is a need for defining the 'children at high risk' group, such as adolescents most often than not, and for developing integrated support and services. The integrated approach to children at high risk/with high risk behaviour presupposes child-friendly justice, protection and restoration.

4.4.1. Support guaranteeing child-friendly justice continues to be rather sporadic. As few as 47 out of 219 children were supported by a professional in the process of their preparation for and interviewing as child victims of violence, 32 children being heard in specialised rooms – 20 children in Vidin and 12 in Sofia.

numner of children victims ... in social services- 21...

- 47 interrogated in a "blue room"
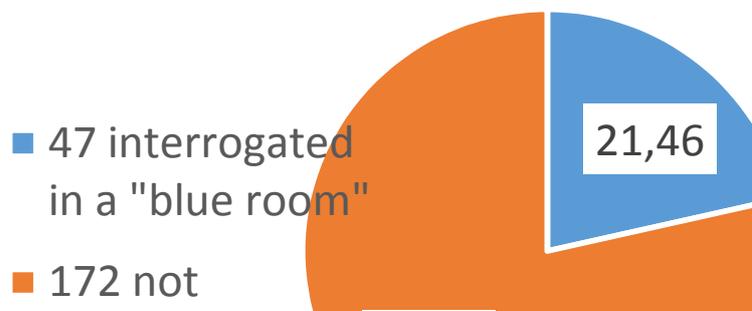- 172 not

21,46

Figure 23. Relative share of participants in child-friendly legal proceedings. Source – statistics from the social services run by SAPI.

The situation is no different with specialised services – out of a total of 138 cases, as few as 20 children have participated in child-friendly proceedings involving an interview in a specialised facility conducted by a professional specially trained in forensic interviewing.

БРОЙ ДЕЦА, ЖЕРТВИ НА НАСИЛ... ЗАКРИЛА- 138

- 20 children, interrogated in "blue rooms"

14%

Figure 24. Child participants in legal proceedings at Protection Zone (Zona ZaKrila) in 2018

Source: Protection Zone Progress Reports

Children interrogated in "blue r...
phase ond type of proceec...

Pol...
Co...
Civ...

Figure 25. Child participants in legal proceedings at Protection Zone (Zona ZaKrila) in 2018

Source: Protection Zone Progress Reports

The reasons behind this can be sought along the following lines:

- The 'recommendatory' legislative framework allowing judgment on the part of investigating authorities without clear criteria for this judgment, as well as the exclusion of police inspections from the scope of the EU directives;

- The underlying understanding that it is 'in the best interest of work' first to figure out if it makes sense to go for pre-trial proceedings, which often leads to change in the child's testimony as a result of delay and respective intimidation or manipulation;

- The underlying expectation that the child, more often than not, is lying, which leads to a 'play it safe' situation and, at the end of the day, to not opting for pre-trial proceedings.

- Insufficient capacity to understand the child, the consequences of the violence against them and the manifestations of these consequences in the child's behaviour. Lack of clear standards for a child interviewing methodology. The understanding that once you are Inspector "Child Pedagogical Room" you can interview a child or act as a psychologist/pedagogue pursuant to the Criminal Procedure Code only contributes to the problem.

The trainings delivered are not linked to any clear competency standards, while for reasons remaining unclear, no multidisciplinary trainings are held at the National Institute of Justice.

These data, coupled with data fed by the CRC and the data from the survey on the awareness of convicted minors, show that the realms of advocacy and information provision need serious reconsideration and prioritisation. One can say that advocacy and informing about the rights of the child are not yet a priority, even within the SAPI services.

4.4.2. Support to children is aimed at preventing the most frequent consequences of poor care and violence, such as victimisation and coming in conflict with the law. In response to children's needs, the support appears to take the form of counselling primarily, which takes care of the consequences of the lack of sufficiently accessible psychotherapeutic assistance.
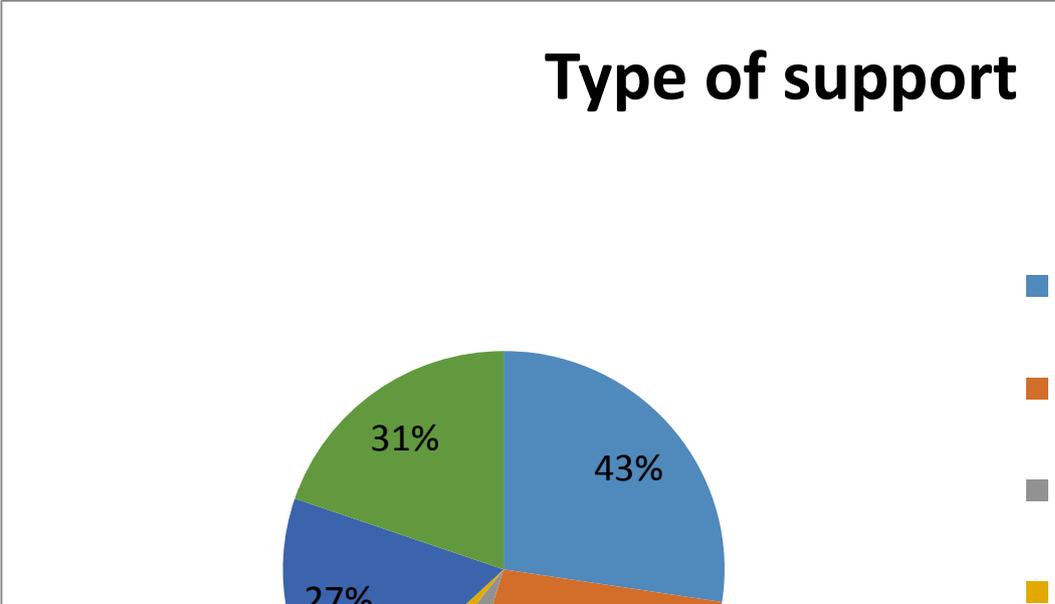
Type of support

31% 43%

27%

Figure 26. Types of support for children in social services

Source – Content analysis of cases of violence in the social services run SAPI.

As shown, 86% of the support is in the form of counselling, which poses serious questions around the essence of social work and the forms it may be provided in, such as information provision, advocacy, accompanying. A need has been emerging for enhancing the capacity of social workers to take up these roles.

4.4.3. The provision of psychotherapeutic support to children with high risk behaviour is the most significant difference distinguishing the services for children and families at risk from the specialist integrated services for children at high risk. It is provided a 100% to all children within the services at *Protection Zone (Zona ZaKrila).*

Psycho-social and therapeutical support in Zona ZaKrila

:

- Social accompanying and advocacy -69
- Psychological support -138
- Therapeutic support -47
- Crisis interventions - 29

Crisis interventions - 29 — 21%
Therapeutic support -47 — 35%
Psychological support -138 — 100%
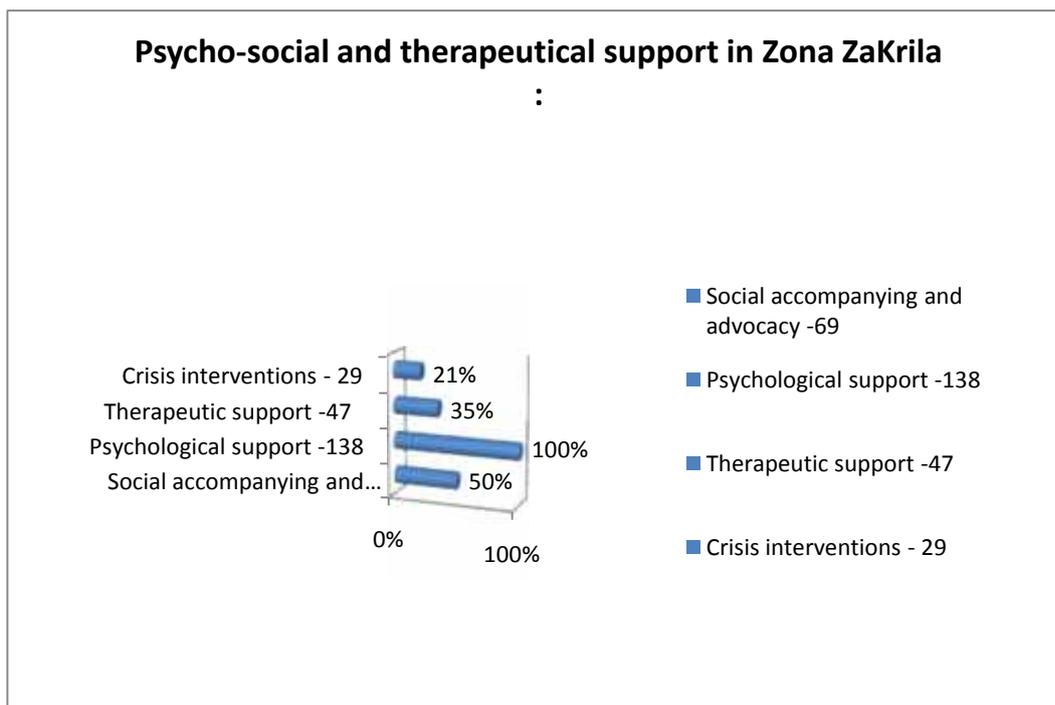Social accompanying and… — 50%

0%   100%

Figure 27. Types of support for children at Protection Zone (Zona Zakrila) for 2018.

Source: Protection Zone Progress Reports

Meanwhile, as one can see, the share of advocacy work is high, which is mainly attributable to the availability of legal support by lawyers and to the specialist trainings and support from Protection Zone and CRC teams.

Case Study, Protection Zone (Zona ZaKrila)

The case is about A., a girl who came to the Centre immediately after being beaten by her father. The parents are separated; following the incident, the girl is in the care of her mother.

A working meeting of the Multidisciplinary Team was held under the Coordination Mechanism for interaction in cases of child victims or at risk of violence, which included a representative from Protection Zone (Zona ZaKrila) too. A decision was taken for the Child Protection Department (CPD) to issue referrals to the child and mother to use social services at the Centre.

A crisis intervention by a psychologist took place at Protection Zone (Zona ZaKrila) to stabilise the state of the child.

The mother was provided with legal advice, and the child and mother were provided with procedural representation. As a result, the mother, in her capacity as the child's legal

representative, filed an application for issuing protection measures against the father. A forensic medical examination certificate was issued. A court case was initiated under the Protection against Domestic Violence Act. A court order was issued requesting the minor's individual assessment, preparation and interviewing. A restraining order was issued against the father. The child was interviewed by a Protection Zone expert in the specialised facility "Blue Room", for court proceedings purposes. Following a district court decision, the father was obliged to attend counselling sessions at Protection Zone Child Advocacy and Support Centre.

Counselling work was undertaken with the child by a psychotherapist focused on processing her negative experience after the violence, which proved systematic.

A professional from the Centre provided psycho-social support to the mother so that she can understand and support better the girl's recovery.

Another specialist was assigned to work with the father towards the latter's recognition of his own aggressiveness and the impact of the upbringing methods he uses on the psycho-emotional state of the child and the child-parent relationship. Alternative, non-aggressive behavioural models were introduced for him to use in relation to the girl.

The case development and the interventions undertaken illustrate an integrated approach for advocacy for the rights of the child and child-friendly participation in legal proceedings, as well as therapeutic support for recovery from the trauma of violence experienced by the girl.

This case saw good interinstitutional interaction in the form of synchronised, timely action on the part of all involved institutions, based on shared professional beliefs.

Last but not least, the systematic approach of the psycho-social and therapeutic work should be highlighted. All players were involved – the girl victim, the non-abusive mother and the abusive father.

4.4.4. Advocacy for children in conflict with the law through information provision, legal advice, development of individual assessments and expert opinions for the court, the Local Commission for Combating Antisocial Behaviour of Minors (LC), the Prosecutor's Office (PO), are leading in the range of interventions according to the CRC reports.

The key activities undertaken in relation to young people in conflict with the law are as follows:

- Information provision – 27 cases (100 %);
- Counselling, including psycho-social: identity, ties and roles within the family, personal story and reflecting on it, social skills and inclusion, working on trauma and mourning, assuming responsibility, life project, referral to institutions and respective social services – 27 cases (100 %);
- Accompanying – to find employment, return to school or continue one's education, participate in proceedings, liaise with institutions for issuing of documentation or in reference to health issues, etc. – 19 cases (70 %);
- Advocacy to ensure the rights of the child or young person are respected as regards representation, detention and interviewing, informing the child and parents, development of a personal profile (assessment), counselling by a lawyer, issuing a protection measure by the CPD – 17 cases (62 %);
- Provision of psycho-social support and therapeutic interventions jointly with the Community Support Centre (CSC).

4.5. Professionals working with children at risk have serious needs for reflection on their work and the latter's clear reference to a system of ideas, for changing the approaches to support, care and upbringing.

This conclusion is based primarily on the observed practice of support to foster parents and of employees in the Family-Type Placement Centres (FTPCs), as well as on providing services such as Mother and Baby Unit and Crisis Centre. The competencies of the employees in these services need to be specially studied, followed by planning of their development.

The professionalisation of these teams continues to be a very serious issue – lack of education requirements, consider teaching competencies the same as socio-pedagogical competencies, no link between knowledge and choice of approaches and actions by professionals.

It transpired at an international workshop on professionalisation in social and educational work with children in conflict with the law, organised by SAPI and Sofia University *St. Kliment Ohridski,* that we are indeed in a different gear compared to countries like France and Switzerland. In our country there still seems to be a need to introduce minimal standards for

the professions, such as level of education and major, since, as one may see in Figure 25, in none of the fields involving work with children there are such standards.
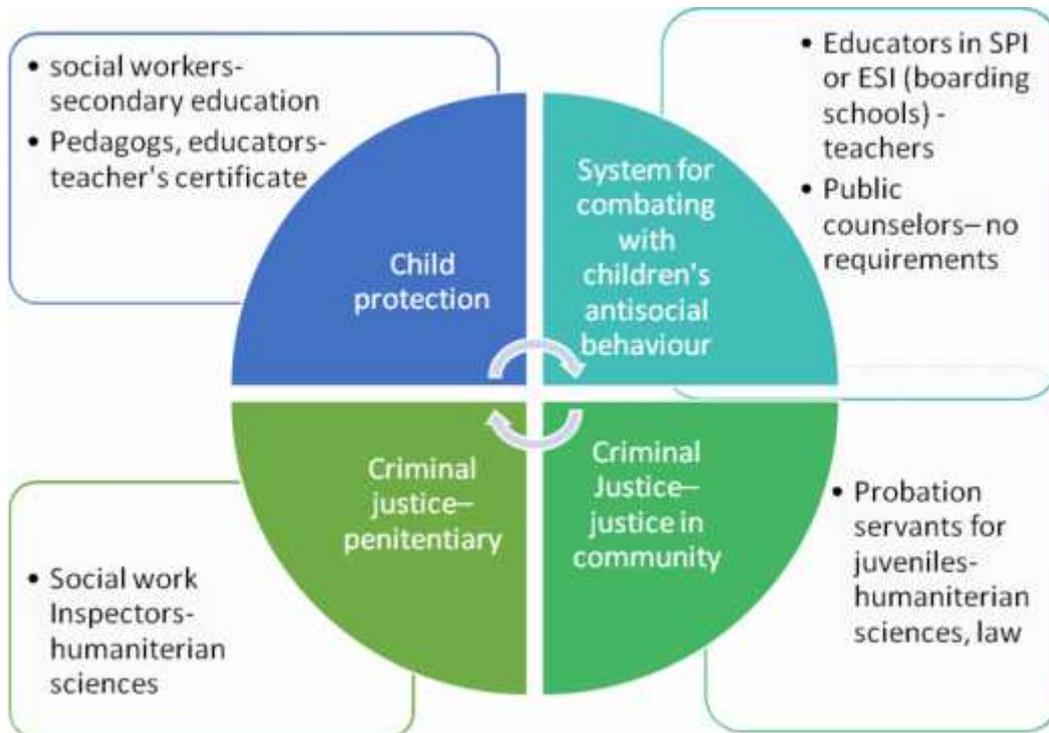

Figure 28. Qualifications requirements for professionals working in the main fields related to children at risk
Source: Professionalisation in social and educational work with children at risk, SAPI and Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, 24th October 2018

The professionalisation-related topics our colleagues from Paris Nanterre University and Geneva School of Social Work are interested in relate to the clear reference of the methodologies and services to supporting the practice of validating pilot ideas through inclusion of the academia resource.

Good practice

Foster Parents Supervision

Mrs. A has been a foster parent for 5 years now specialising in the care of young children. She has taken care of four babies who have been adopted. Currently she takes care of the 2-month old baby boy B. During the supervision she initially shared that there were no difficulties which she wanted to discuss. With the help of the supervisor she changed her mind and wished to express the feelings she experienced in times of discharging the children from maternity hospital, welcoming them in her home and during their separation from her to

move into adoption. At the end of the supervision session she defined this conversation as very important to her because for the first time she managed to feel at ease and talk freely about her experiences – something she had not allowed herself to do up until then to prevent from being accused of non-professionalism.

Good practice – Professional Workshop

The Professional Workshop (organisational and methodological support and supervision) is an integrative, interactive and flexible form of support for helping professionals that includes the following elements: defining the most prominent current need of the team, clarifying the aims and objectives, proposing and implementing a set of specific activities, based on the aims and objectives, such as facilitation of reflection and understanding challenges, increased knowledge in this field, identification and test out of possible solutions and linking them to their work.

This method of work enables participants to:

- *reflect on their work, stepping on knowledge and key concepts of child development, care and upbringing, develop attitudes and skills to use them in their daily work;*
- *enhance their competencies to recognise and understand the individual needs of clients of the service and manage positively the way they are being met;*
- *develop their competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes) to cope with challenging and crisis situations;*
- *improve their skills to organise the daily routines within the residential service, including setting rules and boundaries and living up to them; apply individual and group work approaches on specific topics related to violence and good treatment;*
- *develop their competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes) to work in a team;*
- *be advised on the more effective organisation of the daily work of staff and the allocation of roles, depending on the job position and the type of shift.*

The Professional Workshop (organisational and methodological support and supervision) rests on the understanding that the team is the driver of its own change which they need to want to go for; they need to believe they can do it and develop skills to do it.

The Professional Workshop model (organisational and methodological support and supervision) is fully compliant with the teams' needs and the individual professional needs of their members.

The Professional Workshop (organisational and methodological support and supervision) provides opportunities, in line with the team's needs, for joint discussion and sharing of professional difficulties and challenges, and looking for professional solutions, based on knowledge and experience, in the best interests of users. The Professional Workshop is facilitated by an expert SAPI supervisor and provides support for professionals and the remaining staff working in social services.

V. THE EXPERTISE OF SAPI STAFF – A GUARANTOR OF THE QUALITY OF WORK

As part of SAPI's policy on internal monitoring, supervision and evaluation of the work within the services, a Quality Development System and Programme has been developed. This is an effective mechanism for following-up the results achieved and the progress towards the objectives set. It is also an instrument to monitor and improve the quality of the offered services via effective feedback. The purpose of monitoring is to follow-up and measure the achievement of objectives and the efficiency in the course of work. The monitoring system has a supportive, corrective and forecasting function. As a result of the monitoring implemented, timely adjustments can be made to the way the service is managed and delivered.

The indicators are organised into three areas:

- Organising and managing the service;

- Organising and managing the team;

- Service users.

Monitoring against the indicators is effected via accessible and feasible sources of information and objectives:

- Improved welfare and enhanced social inclusion opportunities for children in Sofia Municipality by safeguarding their rights and best interests, deinstitutionalisation and individualisation of the care they receive.

- Expanded access of children and families to social services corresponding with their needs for support.

- Achieved high quality of service organisation and delivery at CSCs and constantly enhancing the professional competencies of the team.

5.1. The professionalisation of the work of SAPI's teams is a top priority of the organisation whereby we try to meet the international social work standards.

5.1. 1. Staff selection at SAPI respects the specialist qualifications at a university degree level. All social workers have "social activities" or "social pedagogy" qualifications or a Master's degree in social work. We take psychologists with completed Bachelor's degree in psychology, a Master's degree in psychology attracting additional bonuses.

All staff are selected following a clear procedure, which, in addition to entry requirements, includes an interview and practical problems to solve. Each new employee is accompanied by a mentor during induction and is included in suitable training events. During their first year, depending on their experience, they are developing their social casework competence. With psychologists the requirements are aimed at learning and putting into practice a set of professional tools for psychological diagnostics and psychological counselling. After the second year each professional, depending on their experience and interests, and on the practical needs, shall pursue certain specialisation.

5.1.2. The SAPI team gets systematic, targeted and needs-based support for developing their professional competencies

A total of *66 professionals have been trained in basic competencies by SAPI trainers* in 2018 in the following topics:

Working with trauma, counselling methods and techniques, the resilience approach in needs assessment and support planning, the systematic approach.

The training events have a workshop element, a new type of training, doing things together with the team, depending on the expertise of team members.

Professionals from the services have participated in trainings delivered by external trainers, including international, for developing specialised competencies, on topics such as: art therapy, introduction to restorative approaches by an international expert, good practice in

restorative justice for children in conflict or in contact with the law, social work with children and young people with disabilities, positive discipline, restorative victim-offender mediation

5.1.3. Each helping professional employed by SAPI receives support in the form of individual and group supervision, the standard of a minimum number of four supervisions being observed.

Cases which get most frequently supervised, as per the problem involved, are cases of child victims of violence, children with behavioural problems, children with severe symptoms as a result of violence, children in foster case with whom preparation work for adoption needs to be undertaken; children with parental alienation syndrome, severe parental conflict cases.

5.1.4. Conceptualising help continues to be a key priority in supporting the team. Referencing to a clear theoretical framework, when providing rationales for hypotheses and interventions, is a key support objective.

Methodological School Year turned into a workshop for enhancing the professional competencies of specialists, for exchange and generation of new professional ideas, based on knowledge about the improving the quality of the psycho-social practice involving children and families. In 2018 for the first time the Methodological School Year had a new, significantly higher intensity – 4 hours a week.

Priority topics in 2018 were: "Review of casework through a conceptual framework with a focus on the resilience approach, as well as on the systematic and psychoanalytical approaches". The work undertaken within the Methodological School Year sought to enhance the knowledge and skills of professionals to ensure the quality of the services provided to children and families by increased use of reflection and application of theoretic approaches to casework involving children at risk and their families. Observing in their work principles such as the system perspective, consistency, participation, negotiation, integrity and responsibility, good intentions and respect to each team member, the organisation's methodologists support experts in the services through supervisions, while the experts support the team methodologically. The results achieved include a more intensive framework introduced – in each service a particular day of the week dedicated to conducting the Methodological School Year, systematised and enriched resources, methodological materials and set of work tools/ techniques in each service, provided opportunity and conditions for participation of each member of the team. As added value for the professional development of the team one can list improved understanding and interpretation of theoretical supports, improved understanding,

analysis and hypothesising on the various cases relating them to various theoretical supports, assessments that go deeper and enhancing the methods and skills in direct work with clients, focus on the strengths of the people on whom professionals rely in the course of assessment, planning and interviewing for personal development and change, improved skills needed in the counselling process, improved professional self-reflection skills.

Promising Practice

Intensive Methodological School Year

"The Methodological School Year is seen as useful because of the opportunity it provides for people in a familiar and protected environment to share their professional ideas and participate in accordance with their capabilities and professional interests, to fill in their gaps and reorganise their knowledge, be "infected with" their colleagues' enthusiasm, see meaning in what they do and the impact of their work. The structured environment sets requirements; however, on the other hand, the team does it for their own sake i.e. every member makes use of what they specifically need in order to improve their professional development".

The Methodological School Year contributed to improving the basic competencies and developing specialised competencies of the professionals in the social services.

5.2. The SAPI team contributes to improving the capacity of other social services providers and of various groups of professionals working with children and families.

The institutional identity of the organisation is associated mostly with conducting research, developing methodological materials, providing training and supervision.

5.2.1. Publications and research

- Resilience and the Right of the Child to be Heard in Schools

    Training Package for Preparation of Children and Young People to Apply the Peer-to-Peer Training Approach,

    Young Trainers Programme

- Manual on Corporal Punishment (in Bulgarian and in English)[24]

- The Road Ahead – How to Eliminate Corporal Punishment – Recommendations for Bulgaria (in Bulgarian and in English)[25]

- Needs Assessment of Children in Conflict with the Law in Bulgaria: Report on the Right of Children to Information, Translation and Interpretation in Criminal Proceedings (in Bulgarian and in English)[26]

- Barnahus Centre Quality Standards. Manual for Multi-Disciplinary and Inter-Institutional Casework Involving Child Victims and Witnesses of Violence. Summary (translation, editing and publication in Bulgarian)[27]

- Handbook on Applying Restorative Justice to Children (translation, editing and publication in Bulgarian)[28]

- *Careful Parents* Brochure. How to be a Careful Parent and Take Care of your Child's Online Safety[29]

Research:

- **How do We Talk to Our Children about the Risk of Sexual Abuse**, a nationally representative survey among parents and guardians of children aged 5 to 11 years[30].

- The programmes for children in conflict with the law provide theoretical and methodological supports for individual and group work and cover the topics: work with child offenders, work with child and young people at high risk and in conflict

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[24] https://sapibg.org/bg/book/narchnik-otnosno-telesnoto-nakazanie

[25] https://sapibg.org/bg/book/ptyat-napred-kak-da-eliminirame-telesnoto-nakazanie-preporki-za-blgariya

[26] https://sapibg.org/bg/book/ocenka-na-potrebnostite-na-decata-v-konflikt-ss-zakona-v-blgariya

[27] https://sapibg.org/bg/book/standarti-za-kachestvo-na-centr-barnahus

[28] https://sapibg.org/bg/book/prilagane-na-vzstanovitelno-pravosdie-pri-deca

[29] https://sapibg.org/bg/campaign/bditelni-roditeli

[30] https://sapibg.org/bg/book/kak-i-koga-da-govorim-s-deteto-za-riska-ot-seksualno-nasilie-sravnitelno-izsledvane-2018

with the law, set of integrated services for working with children at high risk, the resilience approach

- The prevention-of-corporal-punishment report may serve for justification during training; as well for the *Hands Up!* campaign [31]

- The study of the awareness of child suspects of crime, of their rights highlights again some problems already pointed out in the analysis of the access of children to child-friendly justice.[32]

5.2.2. The delivery of training to external users extended its scope both as type of specialists and as range of topics; however, the actual benefits from it can be manifested when the standards for professionals in the field of social work are changed.

SAPI trainers have conducted training for external users on the following topics[33] – work with child offenders; work with children and young people at high risk and in conflict with the law; a set of integrated services; teamwork, inter-sectoral cooperation in case management; methods and techniques for casework; casework; assessment and planning; interventions, work with involuntary clients; work organisation at CSCs; the basics of social work; casework at CSCs; social work with families; preparation, interviewing and hearing of child victims or witnesses of crime for their participation in proceedings; information provision, advocacy, accompanying and mediation in the process; organisation of the daily life at the FTPC; intensive psycho-social work with children and young people.

Training conducted by SAPI for pedagogical professionals under programmes registered in the Register for Enhancing the Qualifications of the Pedagogical Specialists at the Ministry of Education and Science was delivered to 169 pedagogues on topics such as:

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[31] https://www.facebook.com/pg/handsup.bg/photos/?tab=album&album_id=2151092535172076
[32] https://sapibg.org/bg/book/ocenka-na-potrebnostite-na-decata-v-konflikt-ss-zakona-v-blgariya
[33] https://sapibg.org/bg/highlights/obuchitelni-temi-za-2018-2019-uchebna-godina

Adaptation and re-adaptation of the child; aggressive behaviour as a symptom of a child's problem; bullying and curbing it; the "non-judgmental" approach for group work in cases of bullying, managing the environment for more effective prevention of violence and bullying against children and pupils; the school – a modern and open community for child and parent participation; support of child victims of violence; violence prevention.

In the trainings SAPI has delivered to foster care teams under the *Accept Me 2015* Project, a total of 69 professionals were trained in the following topics: working with child victims of violence; behavioural problems in children placed in foster families; group work with foster families – support, intervision and supervision; positive discipline, teamwork; contacts with biological parents.

5.2.3. Over the year the sustainable tendency of SAPI experts providing supervision to external social service providers has been preserved

On-going supervisions are provided to the professionals of:

The Early Childhood Development Centre, Dupnitsa

CSCs and FTPCs in different regions

The social services in the Municipality of Venets

The social services in the Municipality of Isperih

The foster families and the professionals from the Regional Foster Care Teams in the regions of Vidin, Montana, Shumen, Stara Zagora and Sofia City.

5.2.4. The laboratories contribute for stimulating professionals' reflection and self-reflection, creativity and conceptualisation of helping, upbringing and care. They help overcome resistances and develop a minimum set of shared professional values and principles.

The laboratory for prevention of violence in Montana continued to work, getting together, on a monthly basis, professionals from the CPDs, the social services in the region, representatives of the Regional Foster Care Team, pedagogical councillors and psychologists from education establishments, etc.

In addition, for the first time an intervision group in school was launched[34] – in Bulgaria, as well as in Serbia, Slovenia, Romania, Albania, Moldova. This experience will be evaluated and described as a practice in 2019. It is based on a specially designed methodology.

5.3. The main quality criteria are the level of user satisfaction and the actual change for the better achieved thanks to the support received and efforts the users have made.

In the process of drafting the report, the content of 250 feedbacks from parents and 200 feedbacks from children was analysed. The practice of work in the services includes at the end of the support process to offer to the users, during the last meeting, to provide a written feedback by completing a certain form. The analysis initially took the form of studying *the frequency of occurrence* of particular words and phrases. This explains it why the number of analysed feedbacks is different, smaller than the total number of reviewed feedbacks – not everyone answered the questions surveyed; some answered only one of the questions; some feedbacks contain response to both questions. We looked for an answer to two main questions seeking to find out what was most important and most useful in our work from the point of view of the client, as well as of the change that took place in their life.

5.3.1. What was evaluated as most useful by parents of children at risk who have used the services was the attitude of empathy, meaning well, acceptance, understanding and not judging. Next come the guidance from professionals, the knowledge received from them about their own children, about the specifics of their age, about parenting approaches, etc.

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[34] https://sapibg.org/bg/event/intervizionna-sreshcha-s-uchiteli-v-grad-shumen
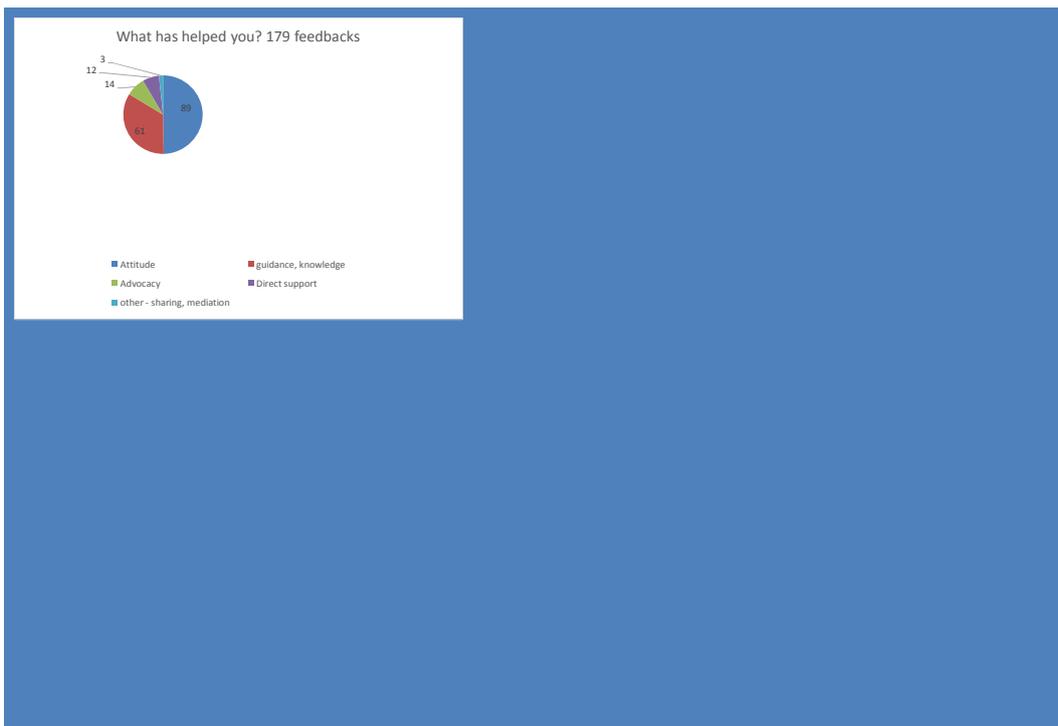
Figure 29. Analysis of the content of feedbacks from parents on the topic of what they saw as most useful in the work of the services. Sources: Files of users from all services run by SAPI.

5.3.2. The change towards good enough parenting, according to parents who have received services from SAPI, is linked with reflection on parenthood, gaining new knowledge and understanding, as well as support to develop new skills and to be ready to act in a different way.
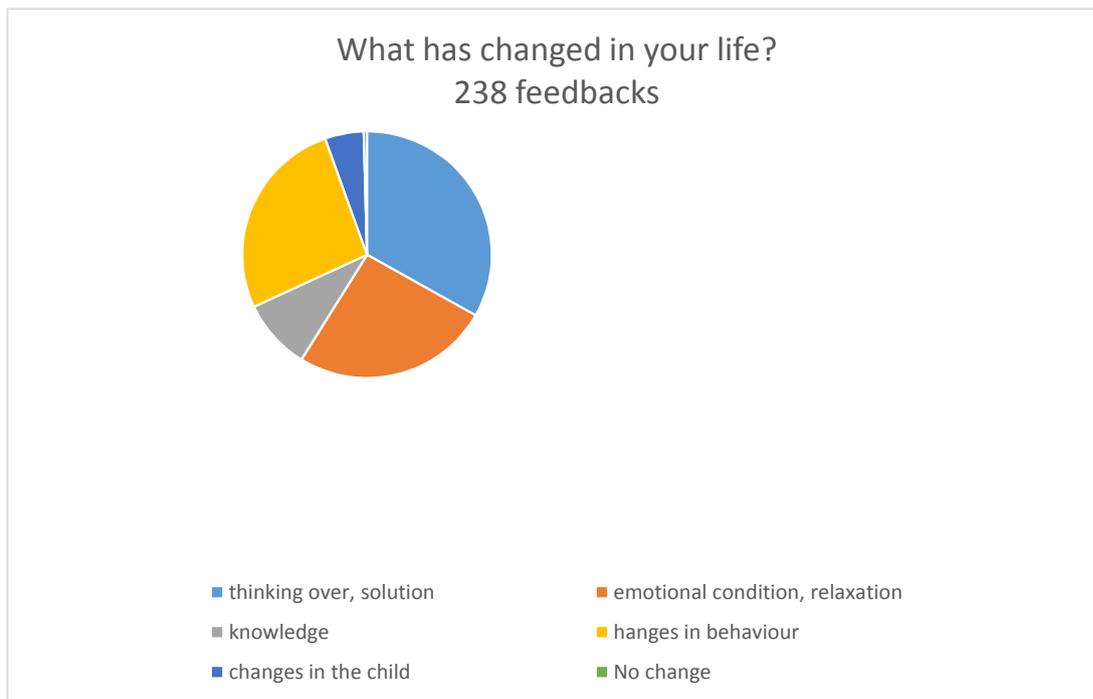
What has changed in your life?
238 feedbacks

- thinking over, solution
- emotional condition, relaxation
- knowledge
- hanges in behaviour
- changes in the child
- No change

Figure 30. Analysis of the content of feedbacks from parents on the topic of what was most useful in the work done

From parents' feedback:

"I learned to understand her behaviour better."

"I got guidance on how to set rules and boundaries to my daughter."

"I believe there is a positive change with my daughter, this service is doing her good."

"I learned how to communicate better with my daughter and understand her teenage behaviour."

"Keeping my problem confidential."

"The fact that she understands me and listens to me, provides good advice, helps me reflect on issues I find difficult."

"The fact that I felt understood."

"I am satisfied with you and the service but there are things that depend neither on you nor on me and cannot be influenced."

"The fact that I received the support I needed to get my child back."

"I found myself; I hope to start the job I so much wanted to and to have more time to be next to or behind my child." "I learned how to talk without nagging. I was helped to find answers to questions about my child, to support him too." "I got help for admitting my child in kindergarten."

"I feel more relaxed and confident."

"Our family is more united now." – "My decisions are based not on emotions but on reason."

"No change" – in 1 out of 4 reviewed feedbacks

"The social worker helped me look at myself from a different perspective; enabled me to exhibit other behaviours too – she provided adequate feedback so that I can work on my destructive emotions. My decisions are based not on emotions but on reason."

"The meetings were conducted in calm, cosy places. The social worker gives me the "You are safe" feeling and I feel more self-confident."

"Talks and support and the fact that I now know that I can cope with taking care of the baby/ child."

"The fact that I had the chance to share my problem with a person who is non-judgmental about the social situation of my ex-partner."

"I am now informed about my rights as a victim of domestic violence."

"I received free-of-charge legal advice."

"I was accompanied by the professional in my visits to all institutions."

"The method of work is a new one and they easily touched my inner world. The many associations made during the session, triggered by the plot of the tale, provided me with new/ different perspectives about my relations with my own children and the other parent."

"To avoid hasty reactions."

"I learned about some stereotypes misleading me to believe I cannot be helped; I was sceptical but I now believe change is in the picture; I figured it out that the relationship with my mother has an impact on the type of parent I am."

"How my teenage problems remind me of the current problems of my son and this helps me understand him.", "I feel the emotional climate in the family is changing towards increasingly calmer and more satisfying… I notice positive changes in my daughter's behaviour which I believe are a result of the changes in my behaviour in relation to her… I think we are all more relaxed at home now… something got unleashed in this child, I can feel she would like to share things with me; I feel that the time together makes us feel good!"

"I reflected on my parental behaviour towards my child", "I became more relaxed and confident in my judgment and in the way I behave with my daughter."

"guidance provided by the professional", "the meetings with professionals and the fact they explain everything", "the approach and attitude of the professionals", "the professionals always understood our difficulties", "I got huge support and understanding", "the sharing and the professionals' guidance", "accepted by a social worker", "heard and supported on difficult issues", "moral and professional support", "We got listened to, supported and encouraged", "My opinion was always respected while I was never accused", "They always asked my opinion"

"My child is more relaxed now"

"more relaxed, understood and supported in a difficult moment of my life"

"the child stopped self-hurting, started to share, became more sociable with his/her peers"

"I learned to have good chats with my son", "more self-confident and above all respecting my son's opinion and listening to him", "I realised my son moved away from me because of my behaviour."

5.3.3. With children too, the attitude of respect, acceptance, understanding, absence of criticism and patronising, meaning well were seen as most useful and this was shared in over 70% of the feedbacks received.
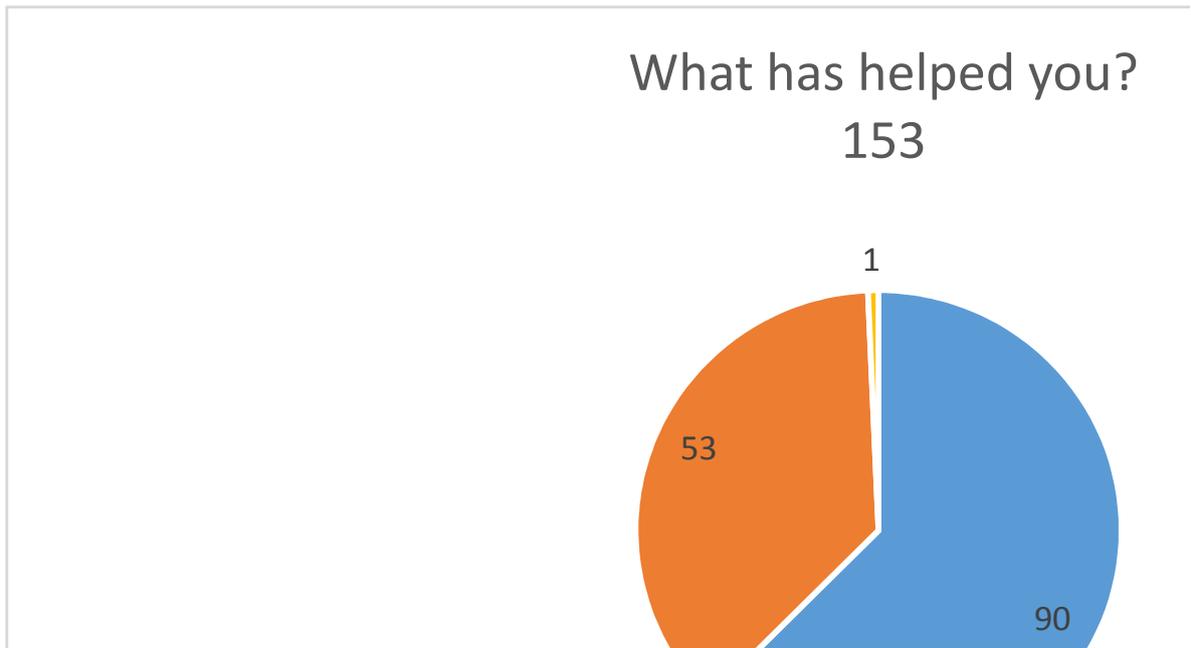
What has helped you?
153

1

53

90

Figure 31. Analysis of the content of feedbacks from children on the topic of what they saw as most useful in the work of the services. Sources: Files of users from all services run by SAPI.

5.3.4. The change with children, in their own opinion, was above all in understanding themselves and others, as well as in their emotional state. Bearing in mind the relatively high proportion of children with emotional problems, anxiety, aggression, etc., such evaluation goes to show adequacy of efforts.

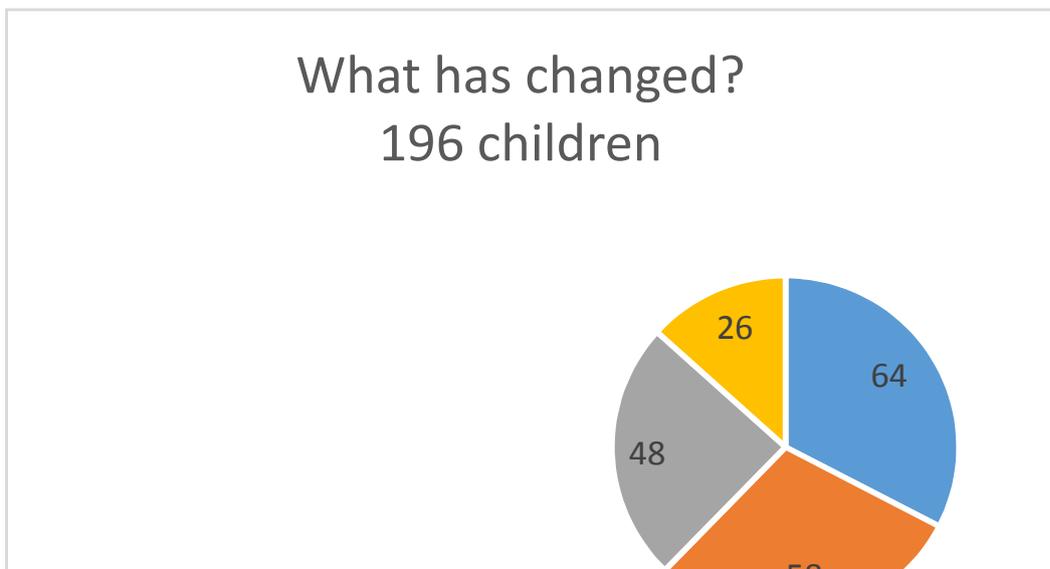## What has changed?
196 children

26

64

48

58

Figure 32. Analysis of the content of feedbacks from children on the topic of what they saw as most useful in the work of the services. Sources: Files of users from all services run by SAPI.

5.3.5. The feedback from partners puts an emphasis on the professionalism of the specialists, their readiness for teamwork and expectation to work for the benefit of the child.

Concerning the usefulness to the partner:

"The opportunity to have competent professionals work with the child" – an investigator at the Regional Investigation Department of the Regional Prosecutor's Office

"Learning about the different approach to interviewing" – an investigator

"The support provided to the child by an appropriate professional" – social worker, CPD

"the way the interviewing takes place and the questions asked" – police inspector

"Child-friendly hearing of the child in a 'blue room'" – social worker

"The child hearing process and the assessment produced" – prosecutor

"The work by a professional with the child and the parents" – Head of CPD

"The overall work. Thanks for it!" – judge from District Court

"Child interviewing in the 'blue room' and the contacts with the social workers" – investigating police officer

"The reports" [what is meant is assessments] – lawyer

"A secured protection of the interest of the child" – judge

"My work with *Protection Zone* Child Advocacy and Support Centre (*ZaKrila*), including on other cases, has always been characterised by excellent cooperation, good preparation and professionalism in each individual case" – judge

Concerning the usefulness to the clients:

"Direct contact with a smaller number of individuals the child does not know" – investigator

"The additional stress caused by the unusual setting and the presence of many people the child does not know is avoided" – investigator

"The work of staff from *Protection Zone* (*ZaKrila*) with the child and their family" – CPD

"Cosy and warm setting, specialists well qualified to work with child victims of violence" – social worker, CPD

"Additional care and special attention to them" – police inspector

"Psychological support on the part of professionals" – CPD

"Calm setting" – prosecutor

5.3.6. As part of SAPI's policy on internal monitoring, supervision and evaluation of the work in the services, a Quality Development System and Programme has been developed. This is an effective mechanism for following-up the results achieved and the progress towards the objectives set. It is also an instrument to monitor and improve the quality of the offered services via effective feedback. The purpose of monitoring is to follow-up and measure the achievement of objectives and the efficiency in the course of work. The monitoring system has a supporting, adjusting and projective role. As a result of the monitoring, timely changes can be made to the way the service is managed and delivered.

5.3.6. It would be useful to extend the scope of feedback from clients to cover the whole process of support, not just the end of it. It seems the other characteristics of working with children are more difficult to define and it would be good to improve the methodology for seeking feedback from children.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Developing the evidence-based approach, involving internal monitoring and analysis, enables us to register important tendencies, difficulties and to draw out and disseminate good practice, which has its specific reflection on the planning and implementation of activities aimed at improving the quality of work.

In this sense most serious emphasis needs to be placed on studying the level of user satisfaction and the actual benefits for users' lives. It is also important to put efforts into gathering comparable data, as well as data that allows going deeper into the problem, such as the data from qualitative surveys – interviews, focus groups, analysis of text or document content, etc.

This approach justifies advocacy, which is very important when we are trying to influence policies and practices at the local and national levels. It is particularly important here to improve the collection and analysis of data from interviews and hearings of children, providing information about the rights, accompanying during legal proceedings, and mediation.

It is necessary to develop a system for in-house and external evaluation of practices we believe are good, and specify measures for their application. It is also important to have a clear mechanism for dissemination of these practices inside and outside the organisation.

It is necessary to insist, advocate for an evaluation of good practices by the State and the introduction of a clear approach of linking up the evaluation and the opening, financing of new activities/services.

It is necessary to support the municipalities where we work to develop their own system of data that will enable them to develop their own specific policies.

The practice of linking the projects implemented by SAPI and the delivery of services to children and families at risk is at the heart of the high level of professionalism in social work, as highlighted by both partners and service users.

Thanks to our projects we manage to secure training for the teams of the services at a level corresponding to the good European practices. On the other hand, implementing project activities up to a high standard cannot possibly happen without the participation and expertise of the colleagues employed in the services.

Setting up temporary, partnering, mixed task forces, involving colleagues from project management and from social services, is a good management practice and should be further developed, since it contributes to achieving specific expertise, in line with the particular activities and tasks, while developing a sense of belonging to the organisation's professional community.

The introduction of professionalisation of the helping professions should be a serious priority both in advocacy and expert activities, above all professionalisation of social workers and psychologists. The actual change in the lives of clients is the result of a lot of effort on the part of different institutions, and if these are not professionally referenced and based on theory, then our aspiration for professionalisation is insufficient.

The change to the job requirements for social workers, not only in the sense of a university degree but also in terms of majors, is particularly delayed. It is important to define the profession clearly and link it up with the other helping professions.

As regards the employment and competence of psychologists, there is a serious problem – on the one hand, as psychologists should not be appointed holders of Master's degree after a bachelor's in another discipline; on the other hand, both Bachelor's- and Master's-degree holders have insufficient knowledge, lack practical skills and need to be trained or encouraged to continue their training. Given the tendency of having increasingly serious cases in social services, the work of the psychologists is becoming ever more crucial.

There is a need for professionalisation of the other professions in social work too – social assistant, foster parent and assistant educator. This is particularly important for round-the-clock services.

Social Activities and Practice Institute (SAPI)

2018