

Bridges for New Beginnings – Annual Report

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Hope and Homes for Children

Bridges for New Beginnings continued to transform the lives of children with special needs living in care across Europe and Africa, in countries where Hope and Homes for Children operates.

In partnership with Hope and Homes for Children Romania and the UK, Bridges for New Beginnings helped pioneer a new approach to supporting children and young people with special needs, providing training and mentoring to professionals, volunteers, parents and government authorities.

Romania

After the release of the IMPACT training curricula to the Romanian authorities in July 2012 and the initial training held in Baia Mare we conducted a series of seminars and workshops at the regional level.

The approach proposed by the curricula, developed with Bridges for New Beginnings leadership and know-how, triggered significant interest from the local professionals and child protection managers across all 47 counties in Romania.

In 2014, our work focused on consolidating the skills of the Romanian professionals involved in supporting children with special needs, and their parents, as well as the skills of the professionals working with children with special needs in care.

Outcomes:

- We trained 40 foster care specialists who are now accredited to care for children with special needs
- We provided IMPACT training to 35 direct care staff and service managers in 4 new SGHs developed as a result of two institution closures in 2 counties
- We provided IMPACT training to 235 service managers in child protection services across 9 counties
- We instructed over 240 child protection and care professionals in the principles of IMPACT across all 8 regions of Romania

Continued results delivered through IMPACT training helped us to secure the commitment of the highest Romanian authorities to eradicate institutional care in the country. The political decision taken this year after our increased advocacy efforts resulted in a new strategy for the reform of the child protection system, including the closure of the remaining 184 institutions for children and the transition of over 9,000 children into families and communities. As a result, over 5,000 children with special needs will benefit from improved support and community living by 2022.

In addition to the commitment to children, the Romanian authorities expressed their resolve to stop the use of institutional care for adults with special needs and engage in a similar process which will support their transition to community living.

Bulgaria

After introducing IMPACT to high-level child protection decision-makers in Bulgaria in October 2013, we were invited to assist the Bulgarian Government to build the capacity of their direct care staff and specialists to work with children and young people with special needs.

In June 2014, we delivered the first training for a group of 20 professionals selected to become IMPACT trainers in Bulgaria. The initial training was structured in 5 modules and covered all key concepts of IMPACT. Through interactive sessions, case studies, discussions, and group work, the trainees gained a very good understanding of the curricula and its tools.

All participants rated the training highly, both in terms of its content and delivery, and they made a commitment to continue their professional development in order to serve the best interest of children with special needs.

At the end of the week-long training, all trainees returned to their counties and services and shared what they learned with their staff and colleagues involved in the care of children with disabilities. Since then, they have received ongoing support via emails, shared materials, and regular conference calls. After only three months of applying the IMPACT principles in practice, one of the lead professionals, a child psychologist, confessed: "The training is life-changing for the children we support but it is also having a tremendously positive impact on our lives and our own children."

Rwanda

In 2014, we continued to use IMPACT to develop the capacity of the first 38 professionals recruited in Rwanda to form a national child protection workforce. In a specially designed module we delivered additional training on all issues relevant to children with disabilities.

The IMPACT principles and approach helped tackle some serious prejudices against the population with disabilities and will, in time, help establish the first specialist task force in an African country.

In 2014 we also delivered additional training to professionals in the Hope and Homes for Children team in Rwanda, helping them to provide supervision and support to government professionals and volunteers working with children with special needs.

We are currently recruiting the first 35 foster caregivers who will be trained to become specialist foster caregivers for children with special needs, and we are preparing the development of new services for a group of 20 adults with special needs currently trapped in one of the institutions we are in the process of closing.

We remain grateful for the specialist support we receive from Bridges for New Beginnings, and for Veronica's leadership and extraordinary dedication. We look forward to our continued collaboration in the years to come.

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