National report

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Abeona
AN EFFECTIVE RESPONSE TO CARE LEAVERS’ PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION

Erasmus+

POLAND

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PART 1: NATIONAL CONTEXT AND INFORMATION
1 CHAPTER 1 : FOSTER CARE SYSTEM IN POLAND

1.1 What is foster care in Poland?

Foster care in Poland entails care for a minor whose parents do not fulfil their protective and educational roles. In these circumstances, care for a child become the responsibility of specialised institutions, aiming to satisfy the child’s existential, social and emotional needs.

For many years in Poland, the system isolated children from parents who did not provide adequate care. There was no attempt to work with the whole family and this emotional bond was neglected. At the end of the 90s, foster care system reform was introduced. This established comprehensive family assistance which would allow the child to function within the family. Re-integration of families became the priority, while putting a child in foster care became only one of many available options. Different types of foster care were introduced and the capacity of care providing institutions was reduced; currently they only cater for older children.

As of January 1st 2012, the rules and types of foster care and help for its adult recipients are defined by the Family Support and Foster Care System Act (here referred to as the Act). Supporting a family is aimed at reinforcing parental protective and educational abilities, limiting the necessity of removal of children and overseeing children’s safe return to their families. Removing a child from the family is only the last resort, enforced when a child’s health, safety or life is endangered as a result of environmental failure. Common causes for removal of a child from family include: parental substance abuse – 36,97% of all cases, inability to provide protective and educational care – 25,15%, loss of a parent – 8,51% and loss of both parents – 4,46%\(^1\).

According to the Act the objectives of foster care are:

1. Work with the family to allow the return of the child, or if that is impossible – adoption, or if this also proves impossible – to provide care and upbringing in a foster environment.
2. Preparation of a child for:
   - A decent, independent and responsible life
   - Ability to deal with life challenges ethically and in an appropriate manner
   - Establishment and nurture of close, personal and socially accepted relationships with family and peers, including relief of the effects of loss and separation and acquisition of social skills
3. Satisfaction of children’s emotional needs with emphasis on nutritional, health, education, cultural and recreational needs\(^2\).

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\(^1\) Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, 2012

\(^2\) Family Support and Foster Care Act.
1.2 Placing a child in foster care.

A child is placed in foster care following a court order, parental request or with the parents’ consent. A court rules when a child is orphaned or parental custody is limited or revoked; also, when a child’s wellbeing is endangered. Furthermore, it is possible to place a child in foster care based on an agreement between the foster family or the head of a foster home and the local authority (starosta). An attempt is always made to place a child in family foster care first - only if there is no such possibility are they placed in institutional foster care.

1.3 Foster Care Structure.

Foster care structure reflects the hierarchy of Polish local government. The figure below depicts how competences are divided between echelons.

Assisting wards of foster care who come of age while gaining independence is solely assigned to local government and government authorities. The organizational units responsible for family support and the foster care system are branches of local government such as the County Centre for Family Support (CCFS) or, in cities with the legal status of a county, the Municipal Centres for Family Support (MCFS). These institutions organize the foster care system and run both family and institutional care facilities. Adoption centres, regional care facilities and pre-adoptive intervention centres are managed by county authorities.

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3 Family and Guardianship Code. Article 109, paragraph 2, point 5
4 Family and Guardianship Code, Article 112, paragraph 1

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According to the Act the main tasks of the authority are:

- creating and implementing 3-year plans for counties on how to develop foster care, which includes the yearly limit for professional foster families
- providing children with foster care
- supporting individuals who are in the process of leaving foster care and becoming independent
- creating conditions for new foster families, foster homes and assistant families to emerge and function
- running care and education centres
- organizing and funding workshops for those who will be working with children and youth from foster care
- organizing support for family foster care, for example specialist counselling
- financing benefits for foster care, the process of becoming independent and workshops for those who will be working in foster care

Besides CCFS, Social Assistance Centres (SAC) can provide help to wards of foster care. SACs are institutions established according to national social policy, which is aimed at helping people in difficult life situations (financial hardship, poverty, unemployment, alcohol addiction, violence, failure as a caregiver).

1.4 Foster care structure in Poland.

Foster care is elaborately distributed and can be manifest as institutional or family type care (Figure 2).

![Figure 2. Foster care in Poland (own research)](image-url)

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1.5 Description of the figure and individual forms of foster care.

1.5.1 Family foster care

Forms of family foster care are:
1. Foster family
2. Foster home

- **FOSTER FAMILY** – provides care and education for children — fully or partially deprived of parental care.

Types of foster families are as follows:
- **kinship foster family** – formed by the relatives and siblings of a child; it is entitled to child support benefits;
- **non-professional foster family** – formed by individuals who are not related; it is entitled to benefits for each child in its custody; no more than 3 children are placed with them at a time (more only in the case of more numerous siblings);
- **professional foster family** – besides receiving benefits for each child in its custody, also entitled to financial remuneration for foster family duties; no more than 3 children are placed with them at a time (more only in case of more numerous siblings).

A professional foster family can undertake the roles of:
- **Family intervention** – take in a child following a court ruling; if a child is brought in by the Police or Border Agency; upon request of a parent or other persons; in the case of immediate life- or health-threatening domestic violence;
- **Specialized professional foster family** – for children who need special supervision or care, for example those with certified disabilities or exhibiting anti-social behaviour.

- **FOSTER HOUSE (FH)** – is created by a married couple or an unmarried individual. No more than 8 children can be placed there at a time (other than in the case of more numerous siblings).
1.5.2 **Institutional care** is provided in the following forms:

1. Care and education centres
2. Regional care and therapy centres
3. Pre-adoptive intervention centres

**CARE AND EDUCATION CENTRES** – meet basic needs and provide round-the-clock continuous or periodic care and education for children fully or partially deprived of parental custody.

Types of care and education centres:

- **Socialization centres** – implement the *child help plan* developed together with the family assistant; enable contact between a child and their parents and other relatives; take action to enable a child to return to their family; provide education relevant to a child’s age and developmental capabilities; provide therapy; provide the health care benefits a child is entitled to;
- **Intervention centres** – provide emergency care in case of a crisis, especially if a child requires immediate help;
- **Family centres** – care for children of different ages, including multiple siblings; no more than 8 children can be placed there at a time, with the exception of numerous siblings.

**REGIONAL CARE AND THERAPY CENTRES** – for children whose health requires specialized care and rehabilitation; no more than 30 children can be accommodated at a time.

**PRE-ADOPTIVE INTERVENTION CENTRES** – for children who are aged less than 1 year old and who require special care and cannot be placed in family foster care while waiting for adoption; no more than 20 children can be accommodated at a time.

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1.6 **Process of gaining independence.**

The Act regulates transition to independence while receiving foster care. This occurs between from the age of 18 to 26 and equips former wards to enter independent adulthood, integrated into their environment. According to the law, one year prior to coming of age, the person entering this stage is required to choose an *Independence Assistant*.

An independence assistant can be anyone they choose, deemed acceptable by the head of CCFS. No less than a month before coming of age, the ward together with the assistant and family foster care coordinator drafts a document called the *Individual Independence Program (IIP)*.

This should cover all aspects of attaining independence important to the future of the minor.
It outlines each step and the scope of cooperation between them and their assistant, including the following:

- The means of receiving an education or professional qualifications;
- Gaining employment;
- Obtaining adequate housing;
- Obtaining adequate benefits (means to gain independence, homemaking, continue education) and establishing a timeframe for their realisation.

The program is approved by the head of CCFS and becomes the basis for application for appropriate benefits. Failure of the ward to follow the program can result in refusal or suspension of benefits. After formally completing the program, wards are entitled to assistance, counselling and social work (up to 3 years after attaining the age of majority, according to the Act).

1.7 Housing

A minor is entitled to foster care until the age of majority. A ward leaves the facility on turning 18. However, a ward may stay at the facility until they are 25 provided that they continue their education and the foster family, foster home or the head of the facility agrees.

After leaving foster care, a ward can be housed in a council apartment, public housing or a halfway house on preferential conditions or move into their family home.

1.8 Changes stemming from the implementation of the Family Support and Foster Care System Act.

The Family Support and Foster Care System Act was derived from existing legislation within the Social Security Act. As mentioned in the introduction, the objective was to prevent premature and hasty isolation of a child from their family, as well as to support the entire biological family.

The following important changes should also be mentioned: the introduction of the position of family assistant; elimination of the income criteria necessary for receiving financial support and the option of remaining in a facility until the age of 25 in individual cases. Moreover, as of July 25th 2014, numerous revisions have been made to the Act to improve the existing law, for example – the earlier appointment of the independence assistant; access to legal and psychological counselling for those in the independence process and clarification of the responsibilities of the head of a CCFS.
1.9 Commentary from the authors of the report

Not all the points in the Act have been fully implemented and many are controversial. It is difficult to meet the emotional needs of a child if separation from the main custodians is hasty and not preceded by adequate individual consideration of the young person’s situation. It is difficult to meet security needs if a child placed in foster care is barely a toddler who requires a stable relationship with the caregiver. Establishing supportive relationships with a ward is complicated by the high turnover of both wards and wardens.

Employees of foster care, often for reasons beyond their control, focus more on their organizational and administrative duties rather than on educational matters. Also, they have too many wards in their custody. The heads of the facilities dedicate themselves more to the bureaucracy, than to establishing a close ward – warden relationship. It is important to provide for a child’s nourishment and health care needs, but it has come to our attention that not enough work is being done to strengthen self-esteem, support the trust-building process and nurture self-belief in their role leading towards autonomy. In the authors’ experience with youth during the phase of transition to autonomy/independence, the most effective work is based on partnership, respect and the personal strengths of wards.

From practical experience, it is clear that prolonged stays in foster care with a high number of wards (considering the housing conditions) are not conducive to developing a sense of self-efficacy and autonomy. Furthermore, they do not constitute building blocks for the construction of a decent and independent life. A sheltered existence is counterproductive to the development of a sense of agency. A lack of engagement in daily chores like cooking, laundry or shopping does not support resourcefulness in functioning independently (M. Ibisz, A. Skalec, M. Szeniawska, 2007; A. Sołtys, B. Kulig, 2012).

It is assumed that the Independence Assistant supports transition to independence. Unfortunately, the Act does not regulate their duties, qualifications or competences. The role is a social function and is not subject to any evaluation or remuneration. According to research, the person chosen to be an assistant is, more often than not, unprepared for the role (M. Abramowicz, A. Strzałkowska, 2014). It happens that the assistant has little chance of supporting their ward obtaining what they need to become independent. For example, if a facility warden acts as an independence assistant it is difficult for them to find enough time to spend with the person they are responsible for. Young people say that the independence assistant’s role is often limited to helping with formalities (such as applying for an ID card or opening a bank account). For wards in institutional care it has not been established who should provide assistance and monitor the process of becoming independent. In family foster care settings, the role is exercised by the family foster care coordinator, who supports the independence assistant and their ward. The possibility of counselling, provided by specialists working in the facility for 3 years after leaving, which existed in the Social Security Act, has not been extended. It would have been the natural progression for support.

According to the 2014 Supreme Audit Office (Najwyższa Izba Kontroli) report, the waiting time for approval of the IIP is reprehensible. In a few CCFS units, it has been established that it required more than 10 months. Furthermore, the majority of wards did not succeed with most of the points included in their IIP. The document has become a means of acquiring financial support and not a tool to build independence.
CHAPTER 2: STATISTICS

Over the past few years the number of children placed in foster in Poland has remained high. There has been little change. Since 2004, the number of foster families has risen by 8 thousand, a significant increase. The number of children in care and education centres has dropped by only 1 thousand.\(^5\)

![Bar chart showing wards of institutional and family foster care 2005–2014 (GUS, 2014)](image)

*Figure 3. Wards of institutional and family foster care 2005–2014 (GUS, 2014)*

As presented in Figure 3, there were 19229 wards in institutional care and 57422 in family foster care in 2014. Almost 10% (1705 in 2014) of those in institutional care and 15% (8421 in 2014) of those in family foster care were adult wards continuing their education.

There were 9063 girls (47.2%) and 10166 boys (52.8%) placed in institutional care; in family foster care the numbers were 20405 (35.5%) and 37017 (64.5%) respectively.

Despite that it can be seen that in some years fewer children were placed in foster care, when compared to the total number of minors, the number is increasing (figure 4).

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It is worrisome that despite all reforms, the number of children in foster care is constantly rising even though the total number of children is falling.

Next, data on unemployed and NEET youth is presented (Not in Education, Employment or Training).
The unemployment rate for youth was 22% in the last quarter of 2014, which was 2.5 times higher than the 8.3% rate for general population of productive age. In the last quarter of 2014 there was a rapid 5.3% decrease in youth unemployment compared to the corresponding period in 2013. The youth unemployment rate is the highest of all age groups. It should be mentioned that this situation in Poland follows that in other countries – the youth unemployment rate is always significantly higher. High youth unemployment rates are observed in nearly all EU countries.⁶

According to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy:

*Very low professional activity (only 33.1% professionally active) and low employment rate are typical for young people. Only one in four, aged between 15 and 24, is in work (25.9%), whereas 78.4% of people between the age of 25 and 34 and as many as 82.2% of people aged 35-44 are professionally active.*⁷

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⁷ Department of Labour Market MLSP.
2.1 NEET people finishing education prematurely and youth unemployed.

The table below shows fluctuations in the NEET population between 2008 and 2014, those finishing education prematurely and youth unemployed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NEET youth percentage (% of population aged 15–24)</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People finishing education or training prematurely (% of population aged 18–24 with 1st degree secondary education at most and not continuing education or training)</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate (% of workforce aged 15–24)</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Labour market rates (source: GUS and Eurostat).

In 2014 the NEET rate, the percentage of people who are unemployed, not continuing their education and not in training, was 12%. According to Eurostat, in 2013 the percentage of the young NEET population (aged 15 – 24) was 16.2%\(^8\). In 2014, people who finished their education or training prematurely were 5.4% of the population aged 18 – 24. For a few years this rate has remained steady.

2.2 Percentage of learners and employed among wards of foster care.

There are no figures available for the number of learners and employed wards of foster care, which would cover the whole population; data from available research is presented.

Research (M. Abramowicz, A. Strzałkowska, 2014) conducted in 2012 by the Laboratory of Social Research at the University of Gdansk, on 402 wards (care and educational centres) who gained independence, showed that 50% were in education.

The majority were in high schools (32%) and post-secondary schools (28%); 28% were in higher education. 32% were employed, 22% had occasional work and 46% were unemployed. The research also showed that 40% percent were both in education and occasional work or unemployment; 29% were neither in education nor employed or only found occasional work.

**COMMENTARY FROM THE AUTHORS OF THE REPORT.**

In the research mentioned in the report there is no data on the average time of stay in foster care, average age of the wards or the percentage of immigrants accommodated.

Incomplete data is due to the limited means of gathering information about those leaving foster care. In Poland the Central Statistical Office (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, GUS) gathers widely available data. Unfortunately, the data collected by GUS contains mostly the number of facilities, wards and their age. Difficulty in reaching people who leave foster care is another obstacle. There is no practice for gathering contact information from those placed in foster care. Also, there are no programs intended for monitoring wards.

The *Family Support and Foster Care System Act* anticipated more efficient support for families which would result in fewer children being placed in foster care. As seen in the figures, the number of children placed outside their family has been steady for 3 years and the number of wards at age of majority who remain in foster care has risen.

The harmonized youth unemployment rate remains very high, almost 3 times higher than the general unemployment rate. The level of youth unemployment (21.4%) is also higher than average for the EU. As shown, young people entering adulthood are very rarely engaged in professional activity.
Help available for foster care wards on the labour market is complex. Young people can benefit from assistance provided either, as part of the process for gaining independence or from the activity of labour market institutions as well as projects realized by NGOs (Figure 6).

### 3.1 Assistance provided by the Employment Promotion and the Labour Market Institutions Acts.

Issues concerning employment are regulated by the April 2004, Act, which specifies the role of the state in promoting employment, professional activation and relief of the effects of unemployment. There are numerous labour market institutions, but the following play the most significant roles in helping wards of foster care:

- **Public employment services** (county and voievodeship employment agencies)
- **Voluntary Labour Corps** (*Ochotnicze Hufce Pracy*).

VLCs offer employment assistance, addressed to youth, learners, graduates of secondary schools and students, who obtain temporary jobs (often seasonal work) through VLCs during school breaks.
By registering with an Employment Agency, an unemployed person can expect the following forms of assistance:

- Benefits
- Offers to improve professional qualifications
- Financial support for a start-up (starting a business)
- Financial support for post-graduate studies
- Loans for funding workshops
- Free health care under the National Health Fund (Narodowy Fundusz Zdrowia)
- Employment counselling
- Employment services

Internship programs are also available for people seeking employment. In order to be eligible for financial benefits an unemployed person must fulfil certain requirements such as: registering with an Employment Agency, no other offers of help from the Agency, documented 365 days of work within the last 18 months. The amount, paid monthly, depends on work experience (up to 5 years – 664.90PLN [about 150EUR], after more than 20 years – 997.40PLN [about 230EUR]).

As part of the assistance scheme laid out in the Act, a County Employment Agency can prepare an individual plan for a person who is unemployed or seeking employment to facilitate a suitable job opening.

Of 177.3 thousand young people, 35.1% of all the unemployed took advantage of job creation programs in 2014. Compared to 2013, there was an increase by 21.7 thousand people, i.e., 13.9%, with a 6.1% increase in the total unemployment rate. Generally, young people used those forms of support to allow them to obtain professional qualifications or experience such as: training, internships, financial support for post-graduate studies or exams. 40.7% under the age of 25 who sought help with Employment Agencies in 2014 found a job.

Despite a wide array of available assistance programs, Employment Agencies are inefficient in activating unemployed young people. The group is characterized by very low professional activity (only 33.1%) and an equally low rate of those working on an employment contract. Only one in four, aged between 15 and 24 (25.9%) is in work, compared with 78.4% in the group aged 25-34.

3.2 Assistance provided in the Family Support and Foster Care System Act.

According to the Family Support and Foster Care System Act a person in the process of gaining independence is entitled to assistance in finding employment.

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10 Statistics provided by Department of Labour Market, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, 24.02.2015
Aid provided by the state to a young person leaving foster care can be either financial or non-financial. In practice, it is most often, expedient, minimal financial aid. There are two types of financial support:

- **One-off payment** – about 1500PLN (ca. 345EUR) in tangible assets and, depending on the period spent in foster care, from 1650PLN (ca. 380EUR) to 6600PLN (ca. 1510EUR) towards becoming independent.

The Act does not specify how it should be spent. Most commonly wards use it for renovation, home appliances, furniture and houseware, school materials or equipment for work.

- **Monthly** – 500PLN (about 115EUR) for continuing education

Both types of financial support can be paid until a ward reaches the age of 26; independence benefits can be in instalments; those for tangible assets are paid only once, in full. The heading ‘continuing education’ should be understood not only in the sense of attending school or university but also as participation in teacher training or workshops geared towards improving and developing professional skills, as well as internships in the workplace as part of on-the-job training.

Non-financial help includes assistance in obtaining adequate housing and household equipment and securing a job.

As shown in a 2014 report by the SAO, the CCFS assisted job seekers in gaining employment by offering them support when contacting County Employment Agencies; they also encouraged young people leaving the foster care system to take part in the Human Resources Development Operational Programme, which provides: raising professional qualifications, career consulting, psychological and legal counselling, personal development workshops (active job search, competence training), funding education and internships. Other research (M. Abramowicz, A. Strzałkowska, 2014) shows that most wards declared that they did not obtain any help from their caregivers, therapists or teachers in choosing a profession.

### 3.3 Organizations supporting the professional activation of foster care wards.

Below, some of the NGOs are listed, which include assistance for wards leaving foster care in their stated roles and objectives.

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11 **Assistance in gaining independence for adult wards of foster care, SAO, 2014.**
3.3.1 Gdansk Social Innovations Foundation.

The foundation implements programs aimed at children in difficult financial and social situations. Also, the foundation focuses on improving professional competences of foster care wards. To date, the foundation has carried out the following projects: Workwards (Q pracy), A Bridge to the Labor Market (POMOST na Rynek Pracy), Launch Aid (Wsparcie na Starcie).

3.3.2 Psycho-prevention Society.

The Society organizes training on methodology for work to assist young people gaining independence. Also, the society developed the work model for Independence Assistants. During their training, they draw attention to good practices in supporting a ward on the job market.

3.3.3 EU projects executed by state agencies.

So far, under the Human Resources Development Operational Programme the following projects have been implemented: Activity: a chance for employment and independence (Aktywność szansą na zatrudnienie i usamodzielnienie), Integration for independence (Integracja dla samodzielności), Action: a chance for the future (Działanie szansą na przyszłość), Human: an investment in society (Człowiek inwestycją w społeczeństwo), A BRIDGE to the Labor Market (POMOST na rynek pracy), Workwards (Q pracy).

The above projects were introduced by CCFSs in various cities before 2015. Their aim was to support wards of foster care in building their independence and finding employment. The majority of the projects were carried out by local subcontractors - training companies or NGOs. CCFS employees did not become involved in their execution. Projects were reported following HRDOP requirements, but were discontinued after financial support ended.

COMMENTARY FROM THE AUTHORS OF THE REPORT

The analysis of support for employment integration shows that the extremely hard situation which prevails during the transition to independence for young adults coming from foster care. There are no solutions aimed at systematically helping those seeking employment. Young people do not receive relevant preparation at facilities. There is no training, workshop or work with the individual intended to strengthen a ward’s job seeking competences.

Dropping financial criteria to qualify for benefits for continuing education would be a good idea. Young people can now earn as much money as they are able with no fear of losing their
state benefits, however, young adults in kinship care are the only group for whom the legal issues still present an obstacle. They are obliged to stay with their foster family for 3 years, while for those in other forms of foster care the period is one year.
4 CHAPTER 4 : RESULTS OF SUPPORT ON LABOR MARKET PROVIDED TO FOSTER CARE WARDS.

4.1 Conclusions based on SAO 2014 report.

In 2014 SAO audited institutions providing independence assistance to adult foster care wards. Below, the most important findings, directly or indirectly related to the labour market are itemized.

1. The main difficulty for foster care recipients of independence assistance was in finding employment, especially in the face of the high unemployment in Poland.

CCFS actions are limited to facilitating contact between a ward and the County Job Agency or presenting them with options to join a HRDOP project. Usually, young people were offered a paid internship as a part of various projects. However, offers presented to foster care wards were unappealing both in terms of the position itself and the proposed salary. Very often the payment offered was barely above that of state benefits\(^\text{12}\).

2. A major disadvantage to foster care wards in finding employment was lack of professional qualifications.

This group is characterized by relatively poor education and little or no job experience. Prolonged reliance on social security benefits was the consequence of wards’ troubles in finding suitable employment. State assistance mainly focuses on expedient financial help, insufficient to be of real assistance; it does not create conditions for development at the critical and difficult time of emerging independence. Despite the fact that the Foster Care Act sets financial aid for continuing education at no less than 500PLN (about 115EUR), no area controlled had adjusted the amount to suit a ward’s individual situation – each was awarded the minimum, 500PLN, and no more.

3. The audit showed wards’ basic needs were not adequately satisfied to justify classing the system as successful.

Although the basic needs were met, the transition is marred by feelings of anxiety, rejection and isolation. That is why it is necessary to create a comprehensive system, which would also provide emotional and social assistance.

\(^{12}\) Assistance in gaining independence by foster care wards. SAO, 2014
4. The requirement of preparing the IIP (Individual Independence Plan) no later than a month before becoming formally independent is misguided.

This preparation period is too short. Foster care employees recommend that the process should be started before leaving middle school, at 15-16, when a ward is still in foster care. It would prevent random choice of vocational schools and would make it possible to provide suitable housing. Furthermore:

(...) in most cases the programs did not specify the modus operandi in the case of those forms of aid which are hardest to deliver – assistance, in attaining suitable housing and employment.

5. The insufficient number of halfway houses for adult wards awaiting their own private accommodation is a problem.

The report mentioned, lists cities which did not provide halfway houses. Besides the low number of such places, authorities do not offer much council or public housing. The absence of assistance in securing suitable housing very often leads wards back to the damaging environment they were rescued from.

COMMENTARY FROM THE AUTHORS OF THE REPORT

At this point we would like to present our conclusions from the research on the psychosocial situation of independent wards of care and educational centres. As presented by M. Abramowicz and A. Strzałkowska, 2014, pursuing one’s own interests plays an important role in the professional context. It has been shown that people who could pursue their personal interests chose a related occupation and were more content about their choice than those who did not have this opportunity. Therefore, while working with a young person, it is important to develop their interests and consider their needs, skills and predispositions.

The report indicates that the majority of young people do not feel prepared to enter the labour market. Wards declared that they did not know how to dress, act, write a CV or look for a job. Moreover, they only had a vague impression about their future occupation or what it entailed.

The research outlined the key points in a ward’s life, which are important in preparing them for the labour market. The following were also mentioned:

- The moment of choosing occupation/school
- Receiving professional psychological help
- The moment of leaving the facility
- Gaining independence outside their family home
- Choosing their independence assistant
5 CONCLUSION

Just as in other European countries, a high unemployment rate among young people in Poland was observed. A substantial proportion of wards of foster care belonged to this group. Lack of family support, low social and professional competences disfavoured finding a place on the labour market. 46% of those becoming independent in 2012 remained unemployed. These young adults, despite insufficient help and their difficult situation, managed to survive with financial aid for continuing education and social benefits. Sometimes they resorted to illegal solutions such as black market jobs. There are few programs and tools serving to support professional activation of young people; they only extend locally and are discontinued when their finance ends. There is no research on the efficiency of the support that was granted. Changes in the work model with young adults are necessary as well as the implementation of diagnostic tools and programs to assist and work with those leaving the foster care system. Outsourcing to NGOs is included by EU projects, however, this is aspect is irregular and not systematic. There is clearly much which can be done to improve the future prospects of wards of social care, even within the bounds of the system as it now stands, although discontinuity seems a worrying feature. Care-giving should be prioritised over paperwork and liaison with other players in the wider system should underpin the strong financial and practical support demanded by those for whom normal social networks fail. Improved measures and follow-up where possible would provide invaluable for future, evidence based system changes. Follow-up is frequently neglected as an important part of studies. Many elsewhere might argue that it allows real insight which may well be missing from a main study.
6 REFERENCES


PART 2: YOUTH WORKER EXCHANGE – FEEDBACK AND ANALYSIS
7  INTRODUCTION – THE CHOICE OF PRACTICES

Our colleagues from abroad visited Poland in order to examine the good practices in including foster care youth into the labor market.

We have chosen three different paths employed during the process of gaining independence to serve as examples:

1. An NGO taking part in an EU project and its social enterprises
2. An NGO focused on education
3. A local government organization implementing a new approach to youth workers

Methods used in Poland are highly innovative, but there are no nationwide system solutions. Governmental institutions are underfunded – the financial means are inadequate and a single social worker has too many responsibilities. Current political solutions aim to increase benefits for all families, rather than supporting entrepreneurship in the marginalized groups.

NGOs offer invaluable initiatives, but are not seen by the public sector as a suitable partner capable of replacing governmental agencies. The same applies to businesses.

Nonetheless there are instances of NGOs or local governments undertaking local initiatives. Often, businesses which follow CSR policy are important partners.

The institutions we have chosen all share a common holistic approach to the process of gaining independence. In order to successfully enter the labor market several steps need to be undertaken early on - suitable preparation and supervision of a young person’s development followed by creating the right opportunities.
CHAPTER 1: GDANSK SOCIAL INNOVATIONS FOUNDATION (GFIS)

8.1 General description of the institution.

The first chapter is devoted to GFIS because it represents the most comprehensive and holistic model of good practices. Since its establishment in 2007 the foundation has been engaged in supporting the growth of local initiatives and the development and implementation of effective solutions for children and youth in difficult socio-economical circumstances. It works locally in Gdansk in close collaboration with the city’s authorities.

Following an EU directive, the foundation modernized institutional foster homes limiting the number of children to 14 in each. It runs six small Homes for Children in Gdansk with their own educational system and a highly qualified team supported by a supervisory network. GFIS also runs a community center (Neighborhood Home) in Orunia (a district in Gdansk) and a social portal MojaOrunia.pl.

GFIS employs social economy solutions by running social enterprises. The “Kuźnia” coffee shop and “So Stay” hotel help children from foster care to prepare and enter the open labor market.

8.2 Good practice number 1 – social enterprises.

**KUZNIA COFFEE SHOP**

Kuźnia operates as a social enterprise whose profits are invested in its development. The coffee shop employs four young people from various GFIS centers – two as permanent senior staff and two as temporary interns. Kuźnia provides opportunities to gain business experience in customer service and develop barista skills. Moreover, it serves as a tool allowing the supervisors from Homes for Children to demonstrate in a safe environment the challenges of work to those children entering adulthood. Internships don’t have a fixed duration – it depends on the needs and abilities of each individual child. In the first years Kuźnia was subsidized, now it is entirely self-sufficient.

**SO STAY HOTEL**

So Stay Hotel – the first Socially Responsible hotel in the Tricity has been opened on 18 Kartuska St. in Gdansk. This is a unique place which combines a market-oriented business with social responsibility providing job training for youth entering adulthood.
Setting up the hotel was an innovative undertaking on a nationwide scale. This 3-star hotel was built partially thanks to contributions from companies who now use the hotel for conferences, which requires a certain standard to be maintained. The management style puts a premium on high quality service. The hotel was established to accommodate business people and tourists coming to Gdansk. Supervised and mentored by professionals, young people gain qualifications and experience, both highly valued on the open labor market. Foster care youth constitutes 30% of the staff, while recruits from the hotel service sector of the labor market make up the rest.

Internships are available for foster care youth while traineeships have been set up for those in need of support in gaining independence. The idea is based on the success of Danish vocational schools. Young people can hone their skills as receptionists, wait staff, bar staff and room service. The hotel is run as a social enterprise and its profits are reinvested in youth education. The hotel restaurant, So Eat is open to the public.

8.3 Good practice number 2: the support model as a process – the mentor’s role.

**INDEPENDENCEWARDS! (Q SAMODZIELNOSC!)**

An innovative educational program was developed in Homes for Children basing on the experiences of working in the Homes in the Tricity and recommendations from “Workwards” research. It is a compendium of knowledge for entities launching or running small care and educational centers. A new approach to education, which changes the way of thinking about preparing wards for independence, is the main innovation:

- The process of gaining independence is initiated upon a ward’s admittance to a facility rather than at the moment of leaving it;
- The person responsible for the overall process of social and professional development is a caregiver – mentor, not a caregiver – supervisor;
- General Individual Work Plans are replaced by a specific Individual Work Plan focused on preparing for independent life after leaving the facility.

In each Home for Children there are maximum fourteen children and five caregivers-mentors and a coordinator. One caregiver-mentor is directly responsible for two to three children and the work is done in 12-hour shifts. Each caregiver-mentor must be ready to work with a child in an emergency situation.

The model introduces the concept of mentoring to the educational work in care and educational centers; mentoring means mutual enrichment. It requires an attitude of careful interest, openness, empathy, honesty, respect and appreciation of the ward’s abilities. Wards need a caregiver who can be a role model by living according to their values. As such, a caregiver-mentor serves as a trusted counselor, who advises, supports and motivates the ward. First and foremost, they concentrate on the development of the ward as the primary goal. Also, they influence the ward to help him build a sense of responsibility for his life and development, and teach him to act pro-actively as opposed to reactively.
The caregivers-mentors work in the outside environment as well, where they concentrate on the individual needs of the children in their care. During this time contact is made with schools, counseling centers, bureaus, specialists, the labor market, employers and the child’s family. It is also a time for individual contact with a child in or outside of the Home.

Once a month the faculty holds meetings where various issues such as successes, failures, an individual ward’s plans or the Home’s current affairs are discussed. Additionally, specific tasks are set and assigned to caregivers-mentors. The meetings are overseen by the Home coordinator, who also advises and supports the caregivers-mentors.

A caregiver-mentor is a companion and partner, who has a prominent role in building the child’s independence at different stages of their development. The process of educating takes on a form of mentoring.

A caregiver-mentor supports the ward’s individual development. As part of preparing the ward for independence, including entering the labor market, the caregiver-mentor provides positive models, motivates the ward to gain knowledge and skills, which can be used in adult life.


The formulation of the plan requires knowing the child and their situation for which purpose analysis of the child’s strengths and needs and the genogram are utilized. The work plan, which is made to suit the child’s age, has to be clear, precise and based on the child’s and their family’s actual resources and needs. It should be focused on reuniting the child with their family or, if that is not possible, placing the child in a foster family or an adoptive family. If the child stays at the Home, the plan should be focused on preparing them for independent adulthood. The plan is formulated by the caregiver-mentor immediately after the child’s situation is determined. Specialists, who work with the child and their family, such as social workers, therapists and school counselors are included in the process of preparing and executing the plan.

The individual work plan outlines the objectives and actions to be pursued. A long-term plan spanning six months is formulated. Following the ‘small steps’ rule complimentary short-term plans are made, which frame specific objectives and actions for a 3-month period. Depending on the child and their family’s situation the plan can be modified more often. Implementing the objectives specified in the short-term plan translates into realizing the long-term plan.
In the plan, which is based on the child’s strengths and needs, the caregiver-mentor refers to the following five types of needs:

1. Care giving needs
2. Developmental needs and compensation of developmental delay
3. The need to strengthen family ties
4. The need to strengthen long-term, positive bonds with peers and adults
5. The social needs and those relating to team work

Within each category the caregiver-mentor uses subcategories and auxiliary questions helping to form adequate objectives for wards. A child’s strengths are defined within each category, which is the basis for subsequent work.
CHAPTER 2  : ROBINSON CRUSOE FOUNDATION

9.1 Overall picture of the visited institution.

Robinson Crusoe Foundation is a public benefit institution which provides assistance during the process of becoming independent and supports youth from foster care. For 12 years the Foundation has created practical self-reliance programs implemented on a country wide level. Moreover it has established local self-reliance centres, the so called vehicles of self-empowerment for children over 16 years old.

9.2 Good practice number 1: “vehicle of self-empowerment”.

This is Robinson Crusoe Foundation’s key program. It is aimed at helping youth to gain independence by acquiring the know-how and by shaping attitudes essential for independent life. The program provides both tutoring and psychological support. The foundation runs 8 centres (called vehicles) attended by 160 youth from various types of foster care (for example care and educational centres, foster families). A single group consists of 15 to 30 people between the ages of 16 and 24. They meets once every two weeks throughout the school year (from October until June). The meetings are hosted by the local staff – two supervised youth workers, trained by the Foundation. During the meetings there are games, simulation exercises and workshops on: constructive communication, business, practical life skills, money management, getting around on the labour market and laws concerning becoming independent. Each meeting lasts about 4 to 5 hours and they come in the form of workshops, so the participants learn through experience and practice. Attendance is not compulsory – each person can decide whether to attend more meetings after the first one.

A very important aspect of the workshops is the fact that youth from various foster backgrounds can form new bonds with each other and stronger individuals can serve as role models for the weaker ones. Through extra programs such as internships and classes on economics, the meetings serve as an introduction to the labour market. The youth worker plays a key role as a friendly adult, who wields no official authority over the young person. In interviews, Robinsons stress that support from people facing similar problems is the most valuable thing they get from the Foundation. It is that support which allows them to feel confident and focus on their careers.
9.3 Good practice number 2: The ‘Robinson on his own’ game.

The game is a simulation of running one’s own business which is held during the Robinson’s Summer Independence Workshops. Supporting businesslike attitudes and assessing one’s abilities in running a small business are objectives of the game. For a week, Robinsons run 6 companies specialising in cosmetics, catering and marketing. Before the workshop both the children and the consultants fill in a questionnaire, which determines their professional predispositions. Basing on their results they are assigned to one of the companies. Each company consists of 6 people, has its own headquarters and provides actual service for money. The companies’ objective is to make the most profit and stick to the rules specified in the ethical code. The team which gains the highest lead percentage wins and its team members get a prize funded by the sponsors. In the course of the game the participants receive training on the knowledge and competences required to run their own business. Once the game is finished, the participants offer solutions and recommendations for their professional development.

9.4 Good practice number 3: Educational triad.

The schedule of the educational triad consists of the following: a. Economics workshops b. “Robinson in the Black” board game where the players have to manage their own money c. A brochure on economics.

The series of economics workshops (point a) covers, among others, issues such as: setting up a company, creating a business plan, drafting marketing and advertising campaign.

The simulation game “Robinson in the Black” (point b) allows the players to learn about and work on the most important mechanisms related to managing home finances and shows the importance investing in self-development. As part of the stimulation the players make decisions, which have a long term impact on their finances, for example they choose their type of employment, increase professional qualifications and make investments. Moreover, they cover the cost of living (i.e. rent, food) and they purchase treats, thus accumulating “satisfaction points”.

“Robinson’s Economy” (point c) is a comprehensive and richly illustrated compendium on economics. The Foundation has also published a brochure on health, the law and gaining independence.
9.5  **Good practice number 4: Safe Internship.**

The objective of the program is to allow young people to gain their first experience on the labour market in a safe and friendly business environment. As part of the program we make it possible for Robinsons to get internships lasting a month or two weeks in industries consistent with their interests and educational path. In 2015 more than 60 internships were organised.

The advantages gained through the Safe Internship program are listed below:

- Increased self-esteem and motivation to get around on the labour market;
- Broader perspectives and learning about the specifics of chosen organisations;
- Getting references and evaluation of one’s potential;
- Meeting employers and mentors – friendly adults, who can demonstrate how a certain company works;
- Receiving internship gratuity or scholarship.

The internship is overseen by a mentor-volunteer from the company. Before the internship, the intern fills in a professional preference test; after the internship is finished they get feedback and evaluation. The whole process is supported by Safe Internship - an internet platform set up specifically for that purpose. It allows its users to log in (register); document the process (journal, pictures); share information (instructions, notifications, basic information on internship and participants); access tests (independence, professional preferences); evaluate (questionnaires for the intern, mentor and supervisor); present opinions, diplomas and certificates.

Robinson Foundation shares the content of the platform with NGOs and companies. Additionally, it administrates the page and makes sure the Safe Internship procedures are followed.

The internships are very popular among the care leavers while the youth workers use them as a motivational tool. A youth worker decides if a person is ready to take part in the internship and acts accordingly. The companies demand a certain level of maturity from the intern. The foundation makes an effort to allow each person to take part in two different internships to be able to try their hand at working in various fields and decide what suits them best.
9.6 Comments

9.6.1 History

The Robinson Crusoe Foundation was founded in 2002 in time of the movement of social schools in Poland. When they started working with disadvantaged young people growing up in residential care they offered group work in rooms of the institutions itself. Later the foundation decided to organize group meetings in separate rooms beside the care environment.

The main idea of the foundation in its offers for young people in care and the methodology access is the development of self-reliance. The Robinson Crusoe Foundation tries to realize this task on different levels.

Strategy of self-reliance for care leavers:
- Local networks to support the interests for care leavers
- Sensitization of local social services
- Improving the awareness for care leavers in local authorities and the government
- Involving companies and businesses in the foundations’ activities for care leavers (fundraising, internships, voluntary work of staff members e. g. in the camps)

The Robinson Crusoe has now 5 project coordinators and 20 workers in the field.

9.6.2 Group work with care leavers

Altogether, the Foundation provides care leaver groups in 8 Polish towns. Each group has up to 30 care leavers. Based on the central idea of self-reliance, the young people meet regularly with 2 youth workers to talk about their experiences from everyday life in residential care. An individual stays in a group from 1 to 3 years, depends on his/her needs. Games are introduced to improve the group's team spirit and open up possibilities for individual development. The group setting can also be a challenge, as participants argue within the group and have to deal with conflict. At the same time the group offers a chance to make new friends and develop a group spirit which can also be supportive in everyday situations. The carers are well informed about matters related to support and can provide advice on the subject.

The group work is also designed to prepare them for the transition from child and youth support outside the institution. Particular emphasis is placed on preparation for VET and work. The group work involves vocational guidance elements, but the independent program of the accompanied internship also links in with the idea of preparing care leavers for the transition to school, thus opening up the prospect of making it easier to enter the labor market.
The idea of the group work lies explicitly in strengthening their self-efficacy and self-reliance, and in continuously guiding the young people outside the residential/care context. Group work which is spatially located at a distance to the care environment has been shown to improve work in the group. It encourages the young people / young adults to see themselves as an independent group; they open up more and are better able to reflect on their own situation in care, and their prospects for the transition.

9.6.3 Our own experience of the group work

We took part in group activities with care leavers, during which we were actively involved in individual items on the programme. For this purpose, the group leaders prepared us for the workflow and what was expected of us. The group meetings which take place for about four hours every two weeks (on Saturdays) require intensive preparation. Our visit to the group was also discussed beforehand with the young adults and a methodology prepared. Accordingly, one major theme of this meeting was the English language. On one hand this allowed us to take part more effectively in the group process; on the other hand the young people were able to improve their English skills. We were warmly welcomed, with a lot of interest in our visit. Throughout the time we spent together at the group meeting there were good opportunities to familiarise ourselves with the atmosphere in the group, and even to interact with the care leavers during group games. It was particularly interesting to observe the group dynamics among the young adults. When it came to actively taking part in group games, in certain situations they encouraged one another, but they also acted very critically towards one another at times. There was one long discussion, for example, about the question of who would be interested in a paid job abroad for six weeks.

This situation was interesting in two ways:

- The group leader brought up the possibility of spending time abroad during the summer holidays, gathering work experience which could prove a great opportunity for personal development and be a useful item on their CV. The Foundation would advance the cost of travel, and their earnings would be high enough during their stay to pay back their travel expenses while still leaving them with an attractive sum. They were told that this model had already been tried out with some care leavers, who had had very positive experiences with it. The model presented falls under the mentoring activities which the Foundation offers for VET and work – though only for a small number of care leavers.

- During the discussion on this opportunity it became very clear that the group work was already having a major effect on the young people. At first there was no real interest in the scheme, mainly as the group leader held the presentation in English so as to simultaneously improve the young people’s English skills. However, the group leader held back from further promoting the scheme following the very attractive presentation, and left space for what was initially a situation of silence. Finally, one girl signalled her interest in the programme, which had come about through one of the Foundation’s contacts.
In the end, she took on the role of considering the advantages of a stay abroad, especially a paid one, and was very insistent that the other group members should think about taking part. This sparked a very fruitful group process, at the end of which another three participants were considering a trip abroad. During this stage, the group largely acted independently, and the result set off a long-lasting process of reflection.

This example showed how important the work of the Robinson Crusoe Foundation can be for young people. On one hand they are given opportunities to promote their educational career and plan their entry onto the labour market; on the other hand the group provides a protected space where they can test themselves out and participate in fair social discussions.

9.6.4 Simulation games to prepare for the transition

Another string to the Foundation’s bow is developing simulation games and playing them with the care leavers. These simulations are about playfully dealing with and reflecting on challenges with care leavers in a realistic yet safe situation – challenges, such as dealing with money, which are relevant to everyday life and will soon be falling under the young people’s responsibility. In these simulation games, care leavers are given various tasks and try to solve them with the roles they are allocated. Every year the Robinson Crusoe Foundation organizes and runs a summer and a winter camp in certain parts of Poland. Up to 40 care leavers can take part in each camp. At the camps, the young people take on a great deal of responsibility for organizing the daily schedule. The simulation games are played during the camps. Sponsors (e.g. members of a large bank) provides funding and staff (volunteers) for these summer and winter camps. There are thus staff members who might, for example, add to the simulation games with experience from their occupation. This makes the simulated everyday situations even more varied and authentic. This is one way the Robinson Crusoe Foundation supports care leavers’ educational prospects.

9.6.5 Assisted, safety internships

We have visited local Polish Post office where we met the director. Poczta Polska (Polish Post) works in close cooperation with the Foundation’s internship program. Care leavers are regularly placed in post offices. The care leavers carry out a two-week internship here during the holidays and are paid about 120 euros. Both the young people and the post office director realised that a four-week internship would be more worthwhile. The internship is used for vocational guidance. At the same time, the young people gain insights into the working environment and an average day at work. For some it is already a challenge to get to work on time and find their bearings in this new environment. Meanwhile, the fact that the internship is paid creates a high level of motivation to complete it, and also gives them acknowledgement. The workplaces offering the internship know that these are young people growing up outside the parental home, and usually have deep feelings of responsibility and acceptance if the internship does not go smoothly. At the same time, mentoring from the Robinson Crusoe Foundation helps deal with and eliminate conflict at an early stage. The directors of the workplaces offering the internship sometimes take over a role as a mentor, offering the young people a safe insight into the working environment, but they also themselves benefit from their involvement and from working with the Foundation.
10.1 An overall picture of the visited institution.

The County Center for Family Support (PCPR) in Otwock is administrated by Otwock County (southeast of Warsaw) and thus is financed from their budget. PCPR operates in accordance with relevant legislation on local government and social care from 1998 to 2004 and County Council rulings.

PCPR are responsible for the following:
- Analyzing financial and social conditions with regard to families in Otwock County as well as supporting and promoting the family unit;
- Aiding families with special needs and offering emergency assistance;
- Operating social assistance houses, foster homes and care and educational centers;
- Cooperating with other county organizations, municipal and city social assistance centers, the Catholic Church and churches of other religions and various NGOs, which support and assist families and provide social care as part of their objects clause.

PCPR cooperates with the Family Affairs Commission of Otwock County Council and other commissions, especially in terms of compiling and executing social and family policies decided on by the county government. The detailed list of PCPR’s responsibilities is extensive. To make sure that the reader is aware of the complexity and magnitude of those responsibilities we present it in its entirety.

In Poland there are 314 counties and 66 cities with county rights and they are the ones, who are responsible for implementing the following tasks:
- Compiling and executing county strategy for dealing with social issues, with emphasis on social care programs, programs supporting disabled people, and other programs, whose objective it is to integrate individuals and families from high risk groups (after consulting territorially relevant municipalities); providing specialist consulting;
- Providing care in foster families, provision of partial financial coverage of the cost of living of the children placed in foster families and remuneration for professional foster families for being ready to take in a child and providing care and education for children they are not related to;
- Providing care and education for children partially or fully deprived of parental care, especially by organizing and running adoption and care centers, care and educational facilities for children and youth, which include day care centers with cross-municipal reach; establishing and running child and family support programs;
- Covering the cost of living of children from the county who are placed in care and educational centers or foster families, also in those outside their county;
- Providing financial support for the following: gaining independence and continuing education for people leaving family and socialization type care and educational facilities, social assistance houses for children and youth with intellectual deficiency, houses for pregnant women and mothers with minors, foster families and shelters for minors, juvenile correctional centers, specialist schooling educational facilities and youth educational facilities;

- Help in assimilating into the environment for people having trouble adjusting to everyday life and youth experiencing adjustment deficiency, who are leaving family and socialization care and educational facilities, social assistance houses for children and youth with intellectual deficiency, houses for pregnant women and mothers with minors, foster families and shelters for minors, juvenile correctional centers, specialist schooling educational facilities and youth educational facilities;

- Help for people who were given refugee status and have trouble assimilating into their environment;

- Running and developing social assistance house infrastructure with cross-county reach and housing people who have been referred there;

- Running halfway houses for people from various counties and county assistance centers, including houses for pregnant women and mothers with minors;

- Running crisis intervention centers;

- Providing information on laws and rights;

- Work training and professional development for social care employees from the county;

- Providing methodological advice to the management and staff of organizational divisions of social care in the county;

- Undertaking any other necessary action according to current needs, which includes the creation and execution of shield programs;

- Preparing reports and passing them to the relevant governor (wojewoda) – both hard copy and digital format (using the IT system);

- Preparing a estimate of county needs in terms of social care;

- Helping refugees as part of individual integration program and paying social security according to the laws concerning the National Health Fund (NFZ) for these individuals;

- Running and developing the network of assistance centers for people with mental disorders;
- Implementing government social care programs, which aim to protect the status of individuals, families and social groups and the develop specialist assistance;

- Helping disabled people to cover the costs of physiotherapeutic camps and rehabilitation equipment, orthopedic supplies and aids, financing sport, culture, tourism and recreation; helping to eliminate architectural, communicational and technical barriers;

- Supporting people affected by domestic violence or other crises; legal and psychological counseling.

Supporting foster care youth is only one of the many responsibilities PCPRs have. We have visited the center in Otwock because its staff has changed the way of thinking within the existing system. Otwock was one of the first places to change the existing child care system by replacing big orphanages with Houses for Children. The concept for the change in how a facility works, agreed on by the councilors of Otwock county, was the first of its kind in Mazowieckie province. Orphanages housing 30 children, together with the teachers, administrative staff and caretakers were converted into small houses for 14 children. There are 3 houses like that in Otwock.

Although good practices in helping young people enter the labor market are the focal point of this report, in this part we decided to concentrate on the good practices that come before. They can serve the whole system as an invaluable example of how to prepare a child to successfully go through the process of gaining independence. The staff at PCPR explained to us that we can’t help the children later on if they lacked personal development in the early stages of their life. Even if we prepared the best country or EU level programs, there can be no success without the youth and youth workers ready to implement them.

10.2 Good practice number 1: System and individual diagnosis.

An analysis of the lives of almost 400 people brought up in orphanages in the last 10 years served as a basis for the revolution that has taken place in Otwock. The analysis was carried out by an independent company commissioned by PCPR. There is no obligation to do such research in Poland, so it was a grass root initiative. The subjects were asked about the following: their relationships (close relations), work, education, housing situation and debt level. The research showed that only 15.5% did well at all of the above. The results were shocking all the more so that the PCPR in Otwock had an excellent reputation. This gave rise to the question of why great commitment does not bring desired effects. The need to bring about change coincided with a proposed foster care bill, which foresaw the discontinuation of large scale orphanages.
Standards for individual work with a child and their family were developed on the basis of the results of the research. Polish law does allow such work but usually there is no time or money for it. Otwock county decided to raise PCPR’s funding thus enabling it to implement an ambitious individual program. The county authorities operated on the assumption that it is reasonable to support children in the early stages of development instead of providing help for an indefinite period of time when they reach adulthood.

The first question posed was about the deficiencies children from institutional foster care have. They formulated almost 40 categories: a low sense of security, low self-esteem, lack of self-efficacy, avoiding responsibility, emotional immaturity, fear of independence and adulthood, lack of trust of others, low openness, low self-awareness, difficulty in showing emotions, lack of family support, the feeling of emotional rejection, strong family conflicts, rebellion, the problem of violence, experimenting with drugs and alcohol, passiveness, avoiding failures, tendency to take on blame, escape into the virtual world, inadequate life aspirations, fear of intimacy, egocentrism, inability to cope with tension, low perseverance, inability to care for oneself (the need to be attended to), inability to manage money, lack of regularity, lack of interests, falling behind in school, social awkwardness, health issues, lack of basic knowledge about health and hygiene, no knowledge of the law, housing and social difficulties.

For each diagnosed problem PCPR proposes a tangible solution – to seek out the source of the deficiency and build an Individual Therapeutic Plan. Additionally, work is being done to reinforce abilities in each of the following aspects – physical, intellectual, social, self-sufficiency, cultural and professional.

The new system, which now garners wide interest, will be evaluated in a few years and we will learn if and how the independence success rate has changed. Diagnosis and individual work provide a good understanding of youth situation and needs and thus serve as a good starting point for supporting a professional career. Otwock county authorities hope to benefit from the effects of the Abeona project in terms of recommendation of good practices and youth worker trainings. They do realize that the success of the foster care wards will be measured by their successful entry into the labor market.

10.3 Good practice number 2: Team work.

The implementation of the Individual Work Plan is overseen by a team consisting of a caregiver, social worker and psychologist. The team discusses the situation of each ward weekly. The specialists support the child’s development and initiative through highlighting individual work (about 5 hours a week). What is more, the children are involved in everyday functioning of the house they live in. Both the children and caregivers take care of their common welfare by emphasizing the homely atmosphere and developing bonds. Just like in every other home, the residents have actual chores to do.
You have to do homework, laundry, cleaning, ironing, cooking and plan the next day etc. The essence of success lies in the staff’s professionalism and dedication and in the children’s willingness to improve themselves and to overcome their habits and limitations.

Unfortunately, the seemingly natural situation where the caregivers have plenty of time for individual contact with the wards, while the team provides regular supervision and the youth feels at home, is an unusual occurrence. Success is possible thanks to PCPR’s director’s cooperation with the county council, the creation of an ambitious vision as well as obtaining proper funding and organization. Countrywide, the emphasis on bureaucracy, lack of ideas on how to improve the situation and insufficient funding are the norm.

In Otwock, the road to independence begins when a ward is 15 and means the individual work is intensified. In most cases, at 18 or 19 the ward leaves the facility and either gets an apartment form the city or returns to the family home.

An adult ward can, but doesn’t have to, start to execute the Individual Independence Plan in accordance with the law. The country law states, that only those wards, who start the program are eligible for benefits. In this aspect, the solutions implemented in Otwock, do not differ from the general standards. The person gaining independence is supported in implementing their Individual Independence Plan by the independence assistant – a volunteer, for example, the director of the facility, the caregiver, psychologist, teacher or somebody else chosen by the person gaining independence.

The Individual Independence Plan is prepared by the person gaining independence and the independence assistant, supported by the relevant social care body, who decides whether or not to grant aid. The plan is prepared at least a month before the ward comes of age, taking into consideration the ways and forms of:

- Supporting the person gaining independence in their contact with family and environment
- Receiving education
- Obtaining professional qualifications
- Helping to gain access to health insurance
- Helping to obtain adequate housing
- Securing a job
- Helping to obtain the relevant benefits

The order or actions and time to execute them (for example graduation) are taken into account while preparing the Individual Independence Plan.
The person gaining independence can apply for the following forms of assistance:

- Funds for continuing education
- Funds for gaining independence
- Help in getting household equipment in tangible assets
- Help in obtaining adequate housing, including halfway houses
- Help in securing a job
- Financial aid is a social benefit and is available under the following conditions:
  - The child was placed in a facility or with a foster family by the court’s ruling;
  - The person gaining independence is capable of living on their own;
  - The person gaining independence spent at least a year at a facility or with a foster family;
  - The person gaining independence meets the financial criteria;
  - The person gaining independence entered the Individual Independence Program.

Interviews with the children showed that the presence of a friendly adult is crucial to the creation and implementation of the independence plan as well as to dealing with the formalities. It can be anybody - a caregiver or a curator appointed by the court. What matters is a sincere concern and the time dedicated to motivating the young person to undertake the appropriate steps. In Otwock, finding such a person is easy thanks to the work model they have. Just as in the rest of the country this is a voluntary position, for which the assistant gets no payment or funding.

**10.4 Comments. Visitors impressions.**

The building we were given the chance to visit had two floors. Downstairs there was a large, cosy living and dining area which was lovingly decorated, along with a housekeeping room, the office and a bathroom. Upstairs were the children’s bedrooms. The children all shared a room in twos. The bedrooms had a small glass panel in the door and were very tidy. I found both points rather disconcerting. The carers explained that it was important to make sure the place was clean and tidy, as the foster care supervisors might always come round to check the institution, and this was very strict in Poland.

I took the glass panel in the door to mean that the young people are sometimes observed during the night when they are asleep. When a new child is admitted, in particular, he or she is observed for at least 24 hours to find out what problems there are. To do so, a list is used which was developed by a team of social workers and authorities. This list contains about 40 problems which children and young people might have, extending from low self-esteem to financial problems or issues with drugs. The team, which also includes a psychologist, then discusses how to deal with the problem in question, and an individual plan is developed. In addition, the carer has the opportunity to visit a specialist and seek his or her advice on how to deal with the particular child’s problem.

The carers explained that they were able to describe the problem better than the child, having observed the child over a long period, and that if the child went to the therapist him- or herself, it took a lot more time to reveal the problems.
11.1 An overall picture of the visit.

During the one-week visit, we were met by a wide range of activities and views of the transitions which young adults go through when moving from residential care to independent living. We were given an extensive introduction to the Robinson Crusoe Foundation, its history, its structure, its activities and methodology, its aims and its pedagogical ideas. We also met care leavers for individual interviews and visited a group of young people from residential care in Warsaw who were encouraged by the foundation to meet regularly to exchange ideas and engage in activities together. Moreover, we were introduced to various residential care institutions and partner institutions involved in the transition to VET and work. More information can be found in Appendices 1-4.

11.2 Good Practices.

GROUP WORK

The group work already offered by the Robinson Crusoe Foundation in many Polish towns fills a gap in the current support system by preparing young people from residential care for independent living. The situation in the homes, with large numbers of places and a highly institutionalised nature, makes it almost impossible to offer individual preparation at an early stage. In particular, it is very hard to develop stable, long-lasting relationships between the carers and the children and young people. However, relationship work is a particularly important prerequisite for a successful transition from residential care. This relationship work is an especially important element of group work at the Robinson Crusoe Foundation. The groups, which last two years, allow trusting relationships to be developed both with the group leaders and with the other participants.

Another disadvantage arising from the way that homes are organised is the lack of opportunity to experiment with everyday matters. The young people often do not learn to cook, to go shopping themselves, to wash their clothes, to deal with money etc. These social skills and practical everyday abilities are, however, vital if they are to run their own household. The group work brings up and tries out these skills to the extent that the setting allows. The simulation games and he camps, in particular, are involved in extending care leavers’ horizons of experimentation and experience.
SUMMER AND WINTER CAMPS WITH SIMULATION GAMES, LEISURE ACTIVITIES, GROUP PROCESSES:

Many young people who grow up in care have few opportunities to get to know special activities such as travel, sports and culture. However, it is precisely the experience of carefree life events and group processes which motivates them to achieve something in their lives, and which opens up the opportunity for them to deal with the biographical experiences which weigh upon them. For many care leavers, taking part in a camp is a step in their development which has a lasting effect. Among other things, this particular setting is more likely to stimulate learning processes than their everyday living environment. This intensive time at the camp thus also means, for example, a chance to set off some career prospects and perhaps continue the process through a subsequent internship. As such, the camps help, if indirectly, with their character-building and for some are thus an important step in their integration into the VET and labour market.

INTERNSHIPS:

For some time, youth unemployment in Poland was the highest in Europe. It has now stabilised at about 21% (source: EUROSTAT, 11.01.2016) and is thus roughly in line with the European average. Though the Polish economy is undergoing a clear economic upturn, many young people still work on temporary employment contracts. Some have several jobs at once.

At present, however, the VET system in Poland does not offer any variety or interchangeability. Vocational training in school is also not tailored to meet companies’ needs, meaning that many graduates do not subsequently find employment. In view of this, educational support and vocational integration for care leavers needs to be a matter of particular concern in child and youth welfare to prevent these young people from being left behind before they have even entered working life. The Robinson Crusoe Foundation’s model of assisted internships provides a good opportunity to bring young people into contact with a working environment, so that they can reflect on their occupational interests at an early stage and gain insights into what they are required to do at work.

LOBBYING FOR CARE LEAVERS:

The internships and engagement with actors from a working environment during the group work not only open up opportunities for vocational integration for the care leavers themselves but also raise the actors’ awareness of the care leavers’ situation. Networking with other companies (e.g. during sponsoring or when participating in the camps) helps care leavers come into contact with the business environment and benefit from its resources. This could become part of youth worker training, in that the aim is not only to give care leavers access to the working environment in individual cases but also to create structural openings and support for disadvantaged young people on the local VET and labour market. Lobbying would be a medium-term tool for this purpose.
11.3 Analysis of needs.

From the German context of residential care, we have gained the insights that

- Not enough informational resources are available specifically aimed at care leavers with their needs as they transition to independent living;
- Networking and group schemes for care leavers can achieve constructive, long-lasting reflection on their own situation in life and, ultimately greater empowerment among their peers;
- Early preparation for the transition to VET and work, involving relevant actors (schools, youth welfare services, employment agencies, the job centre) needs to be more firmly rooted locally, e.g. by means of networked specialist committees, joint workshops with young people and experts and also including businesspeople;
- Spaces for experimentation, such as internships, summer schools, trips abroad, etc. need to be used and funded more intensively than vocational preparation schemes, to balance out disadvantages and raise care leavers’ motivation for gaining educational qualifications.
12 CONCLUSION

In the conclusion meeting we collected the main points we became aware during the week. They are described in brief below and then explained in more detail in terms of their significance for care leavers’ vocational integration.

- One basic point which stands out is that the VET system in Poland is very different to that in Germany;
- It was also seen that most residential care on offer is institutionalised, with large institutions still seeming to predominate;
- Networking between schools, residential care, educational promotion and transition management to the VET and labour market could, as in other countries, be further developed in the interest of this successfully leading care leavers into work and an occupation;
- Group schemes are an exceptional means of providing care leavers with long-lasting support in character-building. They open up the opportunity for good social peer networking and offer access to other resources which the Foundation offers (camps, internships and individual advice);
- Internships are a good connection between school and vocational experiences.

One basic point which stands out is that the VET system in Poland is very different to that in Germany. In Poland there are no schemes for in-company VET. Care leavers can go to university, like about 40% of young people in Poland. There are also scholastic VET routes. Most care leavers do not study at university which, considering the high percentage of young people who do, means that they can be said to suffer an additional disadvantage in terms of educational opportunities.

One aspect which can be helpful in this regard is working with actors from a working environment during the internships and group work. The internships are doubtless a good means of gaining an insight into everyday working life, though some interviewees believed that two weeks were too short.

It was also seen that most residential care on offer is institutionalised, with large institutions still seeming to predominate. The residential group we visited in Otwock was a rare exception among the smallest institutions. One point which stood out here was that it was usual for children and young people to share their rooms with one or more others. In one of the institutions visited, the assistance was very controlling in character, with all the rooms being open for observation by the carers.

Altogether it was seen during the exchange that the Robinson Crusoe Foundation is very well versed in occupying a niche position as a mediator for care leavers between the public care system and the education system or labour market. It is characterised by offering care leavers independent support, so is not caught up in a conflict of interests between the care institution and sponsors. For care leavers, this position means that it does not act as an institution following the orders of the state in providing care, but can instead carry out educational and group work with care leavers based on its own agenda. The range of schemes offered by the Foundation opens up long-lasting trusting relationships with care leavers.

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At the same time, the Foundation sees itself as a lobby organisation making other social actors aware of care leavers’ situation. With its programme of assisted, protected internships, for example, the Robinson Crusoe Foundation helps raise awareness for care leavers’ situation within companies. By helping to provide paid internships and mentor the young people, they provide care leavers with financial, educational and social resources. This partnership between the Foundation and companies adds to the social acknowledgement of care leavers. Their experience on the internship makes their upcoming careers guidance seem more real, and the young people deal more practically with their career prospects. The companies’ involvement is also an investment in the community. Especially if a good relationship develops between the internship directors and the care leavers, they can act as good examples, and may perhaps set an example when they later start work. This integrates care leavers into the education system and working life not only in terms of each individual case but also structurally.

The conversations with care leavers showed that they want help and need spaces in which to experiment. This relates not only to transitions to VET and work but also to preparing for independent living as a whole. It is difficult to see these two aspects separately: success at school and at work can only be achieved if the young people can prepare appropriately for their future life and have a certain degree of self-confidence (this is seen by the Robinson Crusoe Foundation as the basis). Equally, they will not succeed in gaining an independent life unless school matters and preparation for VET have been sorted out.

The Robinson Crusoe Foundation provided us with a range of materials which could be used wonderfully for work with care leavers internationally and could, for example, be part of the youth worker training course on the Abeona Project. There are also various types of information material, e.g. about how to deal with money, which could be transferred to other countries. Their basic information about entering vocational education and training, and about the labour market (looking for an internship, looking for work, job applications, interviews, preparation, how to behave when in employment, etc.) could also be developed as a basis for the different countries.

The simulation games for care leavers are extremely challenging and motivating with great pedagogical value. They produce direct results and are interactive. They could be used during work with the residential groups themselves.

The summer and winter camp events are probably not a model which could be transferred to the same extent to other countries, but the idea of going on a trip together opens up various opportunities:
- Learning in a group;
- Being away from their usual living environment;
- Gathering experience outside the heavily institutionalised, regulated living environment in residential care;
- Interactivity required during the camp.

Simulation games during the camp, and the involvement of volunteers, make this learning environment more intensive. Alongside other elements from the camps, they could be transferred to other countries as preparatory material. This material could also be supplemented by a handout on group work with care leavers which could also be used in other countries.
### Appendix I. Schedule for the Abeona Youth Workers Exchange in Warsaw.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>WEEK DAY</th>
<th>PLACE</th>
<th>MORNING</th>
<th>LUNCH</th>
<th>AFTERNOON</th>
<th>EVENING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>7.01</td>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Warsaw</td>
<td>Welcome at the FRC office with the president, chief.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Safe internship program: interview with graduate and mentor</td>
<td>Arrival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.01</td>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>Warsaw</td>
<td>Introduction into the organization structure, programs; discussion on the exchange program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.01</td>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>Warsaw</td>
<td>Visiting Robinsons meeting.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19.00 Meeting with expert on the foster care from Warsaw University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.01</td>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>Warsaw</td>
<td>Interview with Robinsons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.01</td>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>Otwock</td>
<td>PCPR Otwock – visiting a head quarter of residential care in Otwock.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Visiting house for children, interviews with youth and the youthworkers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>12.01</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Gdańsk</td>
<td>Visiting GFIS</td>
<td></td>
<td>Visiting cafe and hotel where youth are employed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>13.01</td>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>Warsaw</td>
<td>Summarizing meeting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Appendix II. Meetings with youth workers.

We met professionals working in different settings in residential care:
Justyna: a group leader for care leavers in Wroclaw, who also works as a psychologist at the local child and youth care office.

Jakub: head of the exchange programme in Poland, works with young people on the internship programme and prepares a winter camp for care leavers.

Aurelius: founder and president of the Foundation.

Magda: CEO of the Foundation.

Jarek and Basia: heads of the care leaver group in Warsaw.

Dr Kolankiewicz: director of an orphanage for disabled children and young people, also a researcher at the University of Warsaw on historical questions around growing up in orphanages in Poland.

Staff at the residential group in Otwock and at the GFIS.

13.1.3 Appendix III. Meetings with youngsters.

ZUZIA
She has a five-year contract (IPU) with her residential care institution. She will get a flat for one year before her transition to independent living. The care institution will cover the cost of furnishing her flat for one year as long as she does not fall pregnant or drop out of or fail her training. There is a firm arrangement to meet her support worker regularly as part of the assisted living scheme. In the institution itself, up to five children live in each room. Zuzia herself, aged 18, shares a room with two children below the age of 10. She says that she does her homework when the other children are asleep. She would like to study, and can receive support up to her 27th birthday as long as she is in vocational education and training. She has a boyfriend whom she likes to visit. This takes the pressure off her regarding the living situation in the institution. When asked whether her teachers are understanding about her situation and perhaps give her special support, she replies that some of them feel sorry for her, and others act normally, but that there is no special support from the school.

The interviewee complains of a lack of good preparation or advice on all issues relating to the transition from child and youth welfare. She says it would be useful for them to be shown the consequences of their own decisions, and would like information about where to turn to or what to do next.

In her view, major financial support is necessary during the transition period, but she says that there are unfortunately no special workshops or career guidance schemes; as a result she is pleased that she has learned about the chance of doing an internship through the Robinson Crusoe Foundation. She relates that she is currently doing a paid internship at electronics shop. She is allowed to temp and earn another €1200 a year.

The City of Warsaw is contributing financially to her driving licence.

ANIA
Ania is 17 years old and has been living at her grandmother’s house for the last 6 years, now with her 5-year-old brother. A social worker from the welfare office visits regularly when Ania is in school, so is actually responsible for her grandmother; she does not know him/her. Instead, she has a good relationship with a staff member from the court, who comes to see...
her for about half an hour once a month to see if everything is OK. In Poland the courts which make the decision on a child or young person being taken into care remain responsible for them later on. Ania attends a secondary school specialising in the programming and was also involved in “Food for Good”. Moreover, she carried out an internship at the post office as part of the youth worker exchange. Ola would like to move out of her grandmother’s home as soon as possible, as she feels controlled by her (e.g. she is not allowed to go to the disco). She generally gets on better with her mother than with her grandmother. Because of this, she has asked for a flat of her own. The Robinson Crusoe Foundation has helped her gain more self-reliance; for example, she now finds it easier to go to the authorities. Ania also explains that she and other young people can receive financial support for volunteering, which they can then use to fund something specific, such as a driving licence.
13.1.4 Appendix IV. Meeting with stakeholders and partners on professional integration.

THE HEAD OF POST OFFICE.
One stakeholder we met was the leader of a Polish post office. She mentioned that the companies where care leavers do their internships benefit from this cooperation. They get new ideas and energy of young people. They look on their own organization with a more analytic view when they have to explain and involve the young people in their daily processes. They also realize that they could be very important for care leavers as their mentors. Some of them keep in touch after the internship ends. She sees her task during the internship not only in giving orders, but in listening to the stories and impressions of the care leavers themselves. She does not talk with the young people only about work, but about their lives as well. She remembers her first steps in post office and the crucial role of her mentor, who was encouraging her in finding her own way and concentrating on the client. During the internship care leavers have the chance to get in contact with other adults than youth workers, parents and teachers. That is an important experience for them.

THE LEADER OF NGO.
The leader is trying to set up a similar type of group as Robinsons in her own city though with differences from FRC in the structure and content. Her work is part of a project, and is thus funded through the project, not with money from a foundation. In terms of content, she mainly concentrates on the two topics of “sport” and “work”. For example, she previously invited a female Polish boxing star to do a training session with the young people and get into conversation with them. She also works closely with figures from the working environment (such as companies from the region) who act as mentors to the young people. All the young people can choose a mentor from a list of cooperating companies, so as to learn more about that occupation. She has reported that there had been some problems. She and her group work meet with some resistance from the carers at the institutions where the young people live. They argue that the young people’s week is already packed with school work and other leisure activities, and that they have no time for any other activities. However, the real reason for their resistance may be that they do not want the young people to talk about their different residential groups, as it might make trouble if someone felt disadvantaged in their own residential group.
AN EFFECTIVE RESPONSE TO CARE LEAVERS’ PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION