





INTRODUCTION

Young people leaving state care are highly vulnerable to falling victims to poverty, crime, prostitution, abuse or trafficking. When this happens the consequences are often devastating for the individuals and have a far reaching and damaging impact on the wider community.

Centar Zvezda (Center Star) is addressing this problem by setting up and running Houses of Opportunity in Serbia in partnership with the Foundation for Social Change and Inclusion (FSCI). Tried and tested, the House of Opportunity Programme, first developed by the FSCI in Bulgaria in 2007, has proved to be an effective response, transforming the lives of young people just at the

point when they are most at risk. Center Star is in an excellent position to lead this venture due to their experience in providing help for young people without parental care in orphanages as well as those who are getting ready for an independent life after leaving the social care system. But Center Star urgently needs your help if it is to continue offering this much-needed support to young vulnerable care leavers.

Please read on to find out about the desperate situation of care leavers in Serbia, the progress of the House of Opportunity Programme in Serbia so far, its costs and how you can help.



1. THE SITUATION FOR CARE LEAVERS IN SERBIA

In Serbia there are approx. 6,500 children and young people without parental care in the social welfare system; hundreds come out of the system every year. At 18, young people have to leave state care. The state only provides some support for those care leavers who stay in higher education¹.

Most have nothing - no home, no money, no family and no idea of life outside an institution. In this state they are very vulnerable to falling victims to crime, prostitution, abuse or end up homeless and in poverty.

¹Cf. Opening Doors for Europe's Children, Serbia report 2014

2. THE HOUSE OF OPPORTUNITY PROGRAMME - AN EFFECTIVE RESPONSE

The House of Opportunity Programme (HOP), first developed by the Foundation for Social Change and Inclusion (FSCI) in Bulgaria in 2007, aims to transform the lives of vulnerable young people, particularly those who have grown up in state or foster care and who have no-where to go when they have to leave. The programme provides care leavers with up to two years of life skills training,

employment opportunities and accommodation in a family-style, small group home.

FSCI's team of qualified professionals have experience and knowledge of how to set up and run a residential training programme to equip vulnerable young people with the tools they need to live successful, independent lives free from crime and prostitution.

3. PILOT PROJECT - THE HOUSE OF OPPORTUNITY PROGRAMME IN SERBIA

Center Star opened the first House of Opportunity in Belgrade in Nov. 2015 and in Niš in Oct. 2016 with the help and support of The FSCI. Since the start of the programme, eight young people have benefited from the programme in Belgrade and six in Niš. According to the director of Center Star and the House Manager of HOP Belgrade, the HOP has a very significant impact on the lives of its participants. For some of them this is a new beginning. Their lives are turned around completely.

Before entering the HOP they lived in dysfunctional families facing violence, alcoholism, poverty, hopelessness, or in orphanages, on their own without support of an adult who would show them the right path and prepare them for the real world and an independent life. After being in the House for a while they start feeling safe, accepted and loved. They have a place where they belong; they are free to make mistakes and still experience that they are accepted.

Two young people summarise what joining the programme has meant to them:

“This programme supported me when nobody else did. I had to leave the orphanage without a certificate, family or a place to stay. They helped me to concentrate on finishing my education; I got a passport and for the first time I went abroad. Now, I found some relatives and my heritage. I will finish my education, find a job and start a new life. Without support at the right time - I was very close to committing suicide.”

“I spent my life with some members of family but without parents, in poverty, without adequate support. I missed out on my childhood and on one year of education. Right now I am successful at the University and in sport. I feel safe and protected in the HOP, and I am grateful for everything that I have in this programme.”

Both Houses of Opportunity have been on national and local TV several times. This gave the team the opportunity to raise awareness about the project and the lack of provision nationally with regard to children growing up in care when they turn 18. Reporters often mention that they are touched by the stories of the young people and encouraged by the project. They are impressed by the way the staff team works with and teaches the young people.



“Who knows what would have become of my life, or where I would be now, if I hadn’t joined the programme.”
Jerko, HOP Belgrade

4. NEXT STAGE OF THE PROJECT - REQUEST FOR FUNDING

Since our pilot project made a real measurable difference in the lives of disadvantaged young people, we would like to proceed to stage two. The financial support from FSCI was limited to two years. This means we are particularly seeking funding to be able to keep the House of Opportunity Belgrade open beyond 2017.

Average cost for one House of Opportunity in Serbia (6 residents):

The yearly cost is €32,500

The monthly cost is: €2,700

A place per month is: €450

Will you consider supporting the House of Opportunity in Serbia?

If you are part of a church or a teacher, is your church or school interested in offering financial support and friendship to the young people in the House ("twinning")?

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you would like any further information.

Contact details:

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UK donations

Bank transfer:

Acc. name: FSCI (UK)

Santander, 53 Silver Street,
Salisbury, SP1 2NG

Sort code: 09-01-29

Account No: 11340290

Cheques: FSCI (UK)

PLEASE SPECIFY FOR

HOP SERBIA

INTRODUCTION TO CENTER STAR

Center Star was founded in 2013 in Belgrade and is an association of citizens who promote fostering and provide help for young people without parental care in orphanages as well as those who are getting ready for an independent life after leaving the social care system.

Our mission is to help vulnerable young people receive an education and become independent, with the financial and moral support necessary for them not to feel abandoned but to become contributing members of society.

We also provide help and assistance to young people from single-parent families or from very poor families who are unable to afford education for their children.

Watch an introductory video.

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INTRODUCTION TO FOUNDATION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE AND INCLUSION (FSCI)

The Foundation for Social Change and Inclusion (FSCI) was founded in 2008 to help revive hope and restore dignity to some of the most vulnerable and marginalised individuals and communities in Bulgaria.

Besides the House of Opportunity Programme, FSCI runs two other programmes:

Social Enterprise Programme - Practical projects that give young adults social and employment skills such as the HOPE Restaurant.

The Early Years Education Programme provides a vital pathway into education for Roma children.

The dangers that young people face when leaving state care at eighteen, the high school drop-out rate and social isolation of Roma children and the challenges vulnerable young people face when looking for a job are not just limited to Bulgaria.

That is why FSCI is offering its programmes to NGOs throughout the Balkans region inviting them to join its FSCI Development Programme. So far seven partners from Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Moldova and Serbia have joined which includes the provision of networking opportunities, training, a HOP operating manual and support.

Currently FSCI and its partners operate 11 Houses of Opportunity in Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia & Herzegovina and Albania.

www.fscinet.org

Foundation for Social Change and Inclusion: Reg. Bulgarian NGO
175633540

FSCI (UK): Reg. Charity in England & Wales
1170914

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