

**Project name: Support the successful start of independent life for young people who are leaving care**

**Project description:**

One of the most important moments in every person`s life comes when they leave their homes and parents to start their independent life and make responsible decisions. Some young people await this moment with excitement and readiness while others feel anxious and even fearful. What is most crucial in this life period is the family support available to the young person, as a precondition for building independent living skills for successful start into adulthood.

For young people who are living in different care settings this period could be especially difficult, and maybe the one of the most challenging in their lives. They have to leave their foster families or different care facilities at a much earlier age than those youths who live with their biological families. Young people who are leaving care face many more obstacles, challenges, lack of stability, unlike youths who make this transition relying on the security from their families and relatives.

Care Leavers are those young people who leave care or are getting ready to leave care because they have reached the age when they are no longer entitled to special protection and assistance from the state care system. In Bulgaria the state care system does not provide any support programs for care leavers which could often cause a crisis or critical situation just because the young person did not feel prepared and supported making this crucial step.

**SOS Children`s Villages Bulgaria** is a non-profit organization that provides various social services to children who are separated from their families. Currently the organization supports more than 70 young people living in different forms of alternative care – foster families, youth homes and small group homes, all managed by SOS Children`s Villages Bulgaria.

One of the most significant programs that SOS Children`s Villages Bulgaria implements is called **Semi-independent living program for young people in SOS youth care**, which has the specific goals to provide the essential and needed support to young people and help them prepare to become independent after they leave the care facilities.

The **main tasks** of the SIL Program include:

- To support and plan the process of transitioning from living in a care setting to being independent young person;
- To support the young people in their first steps into adulthood when there is a period of “trial and error”;
- To help them find a safe place to live;
- To support them in finding jobs;
- To facilitate social inclusion of young people;

- To decrease feelings of insecurity and anxiety caused by sudden leaving of care and to prevent the abrupt breakdown of emotional relationship with the team.
- To maintain the built relationship with the young person so that whenever they need emotional support, they know they can rely on us.

The **SIL program** uses individual approach based on needs` evaluation and the individual development plan, meaning that the young person identifies their own needs and formulates their own request for support.

When care leavers sign up for the program, they receive regular consultations and discussions on several major topics:

- Civil rights, access and relations with different state intuitions;
- Job hunting - how to find and keep a job is not only critical for admission to the adult world but also is an important survival skill for which there is little in the way of formal, structured preparation;
- Where to live – how to negotiate rent contracts, find suitable roommates, etc.
- How to become more qualified – what skills could be further developed and through which professional courses;
- Emotions and feelings – care leavers feel especially vulnerable during this period and more than ever they need emotional back up and encouragement;

The **SIL Program** also includes financial support given to young people while they are part of the program according to the program`s requirements. The funds given are distributed in 4 categories:

- Financial support for rent or renovation of an inherited property;
- Financial support for health conditions;
- Financial support for education (university fees or qualification courses);
- Employment;

**Goal:** The goal of the **Semi-independent living program** is to provide support, counseling and resources to young people who are leaving care in such a way that they become capable to:

- Achieve sustainable employment;
- Receive higher education;
- Receive stable income;
- Finding proper housing;
- Take personal control and responsibility for their lives.

SIL Program also uses mobile technology to develop young people`s employability skills. SIL Program aims to maximize the impact of mentorship programs using a digital platform that connects young people and mentors; it allows them to communicate, carry out online training sessions and share digital content to boost employability skills.

SIL Program aims to:

Use the power of mobile technology to scale mentorship programs, break down geographical and limited time barriers and allow mentors to digitally support a number of young people.

Establish “circles” - networks in which mentors guide and build skills of a number of young people in a specific topic of support for their training and employability.

Provide a community of practice to mentors from various corporates.

Connect the corporate world with the civil society by working together in the achievement and effective contribution of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

Mentors will contribute to youth development as follows: Revision and support in the creation of their personal SWOT and CV. Job interview simulations. Teaching a soft or technical skill at a basic level, in accordance with their experience and/or expertise, which could be:

Soft skills: Team work; Assertive communication; Emotional intelligence Leadership Etc.

Technical skills: Labor rights; Career guidance; Marketing; Logistics; Customer Service; Microsoft Office (Word, Excel); Entrepreneurship; English language Etc.

### **SIL Program: Online mentoring**

The online mentoring implementation process of the SIL Program Project is divided into the following three stages:

1. **Planning:** The first stage consists of carrying out the initial actions of coordination, planning and preparation for the execution of the mentoring process.

2. **Execution:** The second stage consists of developing mentoring sessions and interactive activities with the participating young people and mentors.

3. **Monitoring and evaluation:** Finally, we will proceed to carry out the monitoring and evaluation of the execution process, and conclude with the key outcomes.

Throughout the guide we will describe each one of them and the actions to be conducted for a successful development. We must stand out that the proposed structure may be adapted to the local context.

The platform

In order to carry out the project, we will use the Workplace digital platform. This is a social network created by Facebook for corporates and organizations, where their members can interact in a similar way like on Facebook. However, Workplace is a fully

independent platform characterized for being exclusive for organisations and accessing to it, is only by invitation. Therefore, it is necessary to create an account for each new user. It does not allow to link to a Facebook account.

All participants of the project will access to the Workplace of SOS Children's Villages by invitation of the administrators. Once received the e-mail and logged in to the platform, we must proceed to complete a user's profile. The profile is an important section, as it helps to identify the various users of the platform indicating who are young people or mentors, in which SOS programme they participate, where they live, etc. If you want, you can add a profile photo. It should be noted that it is required that all participants, young people and mentors, complete their profile before starting to interact in the group.

**The final result for care leavers is that they feel capable to enter adulthood equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge and confidence so that they have equal start along with all other young people.**

The Semi-independent living programme is funded entirely by donations. In Bulgaria the state child protection system does not provide support for young care leavers. That is why the SIL Programme is crucial for every young person as a first step in the preparation for successful entering into adulthood. The programme has no deadline because all youths that come into SOS facilities will need and benefit from it. Our goal is to maintain the quality the Programme as long as possible, to adjust it according the needs of the young people so that we can provide the complete and best possible support to all care leavers.