

THE “LEAVING CARE SUPPORT EXPERT PROGRAM” OF SOS CHILDREN’S VILLAGES CROATIA

SOS Children's Village Croatia is constantly strengthening its efforts to work together to enable young people in the process of leaving care the best possible preparation and support during the entire process of transition from care and in the period that follows.

From the day one a child enters the SOS Children’s Village preparation process starts because the main goal of all stages of care is to guide children and young people to become independent, self-sufficient, and participating members of society. It is an important milestone in the work of an SOS when youth take responsibility for their living situation, employment and for providing for themselves. All SOS programs, form Children’s Village, Youth Care and After Care Programs, support this process. They offer youth a variety of opportunities through which they can further develop their personality and prepare themselves for an independent life.

Preparation process starts more specifically in Youth Care and should last for all 4 years of their stay in the Youth Care (from light to intensive preparation) and it includes educational measures and psychological-pedagogical work with the goal of teaching youngsters the necessary social and life skills, to make living on their own and taking responsibility for their lives, to boost their self-esteem and encourage responsible behavior and development of social network outside SOS. Preparation of youngsters is focused on mastering basic life skills and developing the ability to fulfill elementary needs. Youngsters are encouraged to become more self-reliant with each passing year and to make independent decisions, while accepting consequences of their own behavior.

Structured preparatory phase begins no later than two years before moving to After Care programs. Preparatory phase is part of Individual Development Plan enriched with the concrete objectives and measures for the transition based on individual needs of each youth, local circumstances and current legislation.

According to the wishes and needs of Youth care leaders and educators, expressed needs of young people and recommendations from EU funded project "Prepare for leaving care", to include one more significant person/professional in the preparation process of leaving care, SOS CV Croatia established the position of Leaving care support expert. This position is unique in the Croatian alternative care system.

Leaving care support expert empowers young people who are in the process of leaving or have left the care system and begin the path to adult, independent life.

- He/she advises and supports young people in preparation for leaving care and in the after care programs in the development of social and life skills.
- Emotionally empowers and provides assistance to young people in demanding life situations.
- Informs young people about their rights, provides support in education, employment and job retention.
- Empowers young people in the after care programs to create conditions for the preservation and development of personal opportunities and a responsible attitude towards themselves and others.

The young people particularly emphasize the possibility to adapt the support to their immediate needs and that working with the expert means gaining real-life knowledge in a practical and fun way. As a

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result, young people made more meaningful contacts and widened their social networks. They face their real-life challenges such as managing their finances better, they resolve conflicts more effectively and show better educational outcomes.

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