

PREPARE FOR LEAVING CARE

Together with 11 partners, SOS Children's Villages International designed two projects that were granted funding from the European Commission (DG Justice) and that aimed at

- developing and implementing a state-of-the-art training programme for care professionals who work directly with young people leaving care in order to equip them with the skills, knowledge and tools they need to work with young people in transition.
- creating a supporting network for care leavers, and
- awareness raising and advocacy activities

Young people with care experience were integral to project implementation at national and international level. In the course of different project activities, **the voices of young people** with care experience were listened to from ten European Union countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Spain. Through peer-to-peer interviews, young people shared what worked for them during the leaving care process, what should remain the same and what should change, as well as what skills, knowledge and experience people who work with care leavers need to have.

From these findings the Prepare for Leaving Care Practice Guidance and Training Manual were developed in partnership with CELCIS. To date, this training has reached over 1,000 care professionals in the ten European countries. Not only were young people with care experience participating in developing the training material, but they were also co-delivering the training at national level. This participatory approach gives care professionals the opportunity to hear first-hand how young people are experiencing the leaving care process and to reflect together on how to improve these experiences for future generations of care leavers. Participants of the training greatly valued the participation of young people as co-trainers and said that *“Now I have new tools for working with young people, and I will use them”* and *‘This kind of training has made me reflect out of the bubble.’*

In conclusion, this experience gives to these care leavers the opportunity to make a network in between many young people from all over Europe who has lived similar experiences. They feel understood, heard and with the constant desire to raise their voices all together. Enrichment is the word which better describes the whole project. Everyone who contributed to it highlighted how important is the participation of the youth and how useful it is for those who are with them during their lives. It consists on a mutual exchange: young care leavers learn from care workers and vice versa.

Moreover, it provides the chance to meet professionals of the sector who are involved in the care leaver's life. Prepare for Leaving care opens their eyes and helps them to get into someone else's shoes. It is important to remember that young people in alternative care need adequate support when they reach adulthood and prepare to start independent lives. Care professionals play a key role in empowering young people for their futures. 'Prepare for Leaving Care' is built on the experience of the project Training Professionals Working with Children in Care, and specifically addresses the rights and needs of young people on their way to adulthood and independence.