



Life after institutional care project:
National round table Bologna

Creating a network to support social inclusion of out-of-family youths

Italian Ai.Bi Amici dei Bambini association - in collaboration with Emilia Romagna Regional Administration, the Social Department of Bologna Municipality and the CEIS and CSAPSA cooperative associations - will held in Bologna, on Wednesday **2 December 2009** a round table meeting to deal with the issue of out-of-family youths leaving the childhood protection system and their subsequent social inclusion.

The activity is part of the Life after Institutional Care project, co-sponsored by the European Commission. On of the activities carried on within the project was qualitative and quantitative research, carried on in five European countries (Italy, France, Latvia, Romania and Bulgaria) whose aim was to promote effective social policies for a full and effective social inclusion of out-of-family youths.

The Bologna event is going to be an ideal setting for an exchange between the parties involved in the project, local and central authorities, youths and charities that help children and adolescents with family problems, in order to create an ever-improving network to assist these youths that, after turning of age, must start a difficult journey towards independence.

The result of the research carried on in Italy was useful to draw out some guidelines that may be helpful to promote concretely the professional and social inclusion of those boys and girls as well as suggesting some solutions to the problems of lodging, health care and financial independence.

To read the agenda of the meeting please visit
www.childout.org

Life after institutional care. Equal opportunities and social inclusion for young people: identification and promotion of best practices
Creare rete per supportare l'inclusione sociale dei giovani fuori famiglia

Young adults and care-leaving in Italy

The care homes for underage boys and girls run by the CEIS (Solidarity Centre) and by the ELIOS social cooperative in Bologna province lodge a large number of "Unaccompanied Foreign Minors" (U.F.M.) under the care and tutelage of Bologna Municipality.

U.F.M. are underage foreign boys and girls without care and legal tutelage from their parents or other adults that may be identified as legally responsible for them. For these reasons, they are very vulnerable and they are among the people at higher risk of exploitation by criminal organizations.

In a large number of cases these boys and girls came to Italy fulfilling a specific "emigration mission" imposed on them by their families that pay large sums of money for the trip. Some others, like Afghan or Somali boys and girls, escape from war and reach Italy in order to obtain the political refugee status after months-long journeys that



leave them in critical psychological and physical conditions.

Nowadays, those underage boys and girls come from Albania, Morocco, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nigeria, Romania, Ghana, Egypt, Kosovo, China, Somalia, Afghanistan and Eritrea.

After their arrival in Italy, they are usually brought to specific structures for first reception by the police, that arrest them as a consequence of interventions for documents control, small thefts, brawls or just because they spontaneously give themselves up to the police.

In the first phase of reception, the foreign minors undergo an interview in which they are requested to give some information on their identity and on their immigration trip. The youths are then given some opportunities offered by community care structures: a house in which they will receive food, shelter and hygienic facilities until they turn 18, the regularization of their presence in Italy (i.e. the issuing of a visa), the access to projects aimed both at their full integration in the job market and at the achievement of full individual autonomy. In return, the youths must learn to live by the rules of the care home that may be briefly summarized in: "respect for the other people living in the care-home and care for the common spaces".

Contemporarily to the beginning of the 'life project' centred on every single boy or girl, that usually takes place 2 or 4 months after he or she made their entrance into institutionalized life in Italy, they move to one of our structures (the so-called phase of 'second reception') to go on with the project that will lead them towards an autonomous life.

When the youths turn 18, all the paradoxical conditions that the U.F.M. condition implies shows up. The boys and girls pass from the status of 'underage person' being granted, by Italian law, the right to be protected, assisted and helped, to the condition of 'foreigner citizen' thus becoming subject to very strict and harsh laws that take them in consideration only as ready available workforce.

All the system of protection that accompanied these youths in their institutionalised life ceases abruptly. They have a few weeks to leave the place that provided them for free with care, food, shelter and psychological support in the difficult moments of their growth. These young people must then be able to find lodgings and a job, if they did not had already found a regular one when they still lived in the care home.

Due to the period of economic crisis that afflicts Italy at the

moment and also due to the strictness of recently approved laws (such as the one known as 'Security Decree') that impose heavy restrictions on the conditions requested to obtain a Visa for U.F.M that reach adult age, it is much more difficult nowadays, for a young foreigner, to find a job, thus making the condition of those young care-leavers even more critical.

By Giovanni Mengoli, President CELIOS, CEIS group Bologna
www.gruppoceis.org

Bucharest and Bologna: everyday life from the care leavers' point of view.

A laid table, the close-up of a windscreen, a clothes shop. At first glance those pictures may seem casual snapshots but, with a more careful observation, the viewer may notice the five glasses on the table, the crack on the windshield made by a stone and the wedding dresses in the shop-window.

Leaving out fanciful impressions or suggestions, they will appear as simple but as meaningful as they truly are: the everyday life and the dreams of the boys and girls who took part in the project called "Growing-up Perspectives, Photographic Language as a Pedagogical Instrument for care-leavers".



The project was promoted by Ai.Bi. Amici dei Bambini within the range of the "Life after Institutional Care" European Project and has been developed between April and December 2009. The aim of the course, created and realized by the photographer Alberto Accettura, was to allow care-leavers to relate their experience of transition from institute to independence, in a direct and personal way, through the language of images.

In order to achieve this goal, the workshops gradually guided the participants towards autonomy in the practice of photography, alternating theoretical lessons to guided practice in town.

Twenty care-leavers, coming from Bulgaria, Italy, Latvia, Moldova, Romania and Ukraine attended the first meeting, held during the "Nice to Meet You" European round-table. The training continued in Bologna, involving eight other care-leavers from the CSAPSA and CEIS communities.

The pictures taken during the activities of the project were presented in Brussels and Bologna in specifically-focused round tables. Now they can be seen in the booklet "Just Turned 18 - Instruction Handbook" printed by Ai.Bi. - Amici dei Bambini.

In the first meetings, photography was a kind of lingua-franca that allowed communication between boys and girls of different nationalities. The possibility to communicate through photography was analyzed, by the boys and the girls, together with the ability to 'read' the pictures taken by their peers. The part of activity that focused on portraits and self-portraits allowed a reciprocal exchange of points of view. One of the goals of the project was to start a constructive dialogue between photographs and photographed.

The activity has been carried out in couples, thus encouraging pair-work and cooperation among peers in order to create a photographic narrative.

The language chosen by the boys and the girls to narrate

their daily lives is the one that characterizes adolescence, rich in codes and experimentation and constantly directed towards the discovery of new suitable forms to communicate their identity and aspirations. Analysing the matter from this perspective, besides delineating an up-to-date photographic depiction of contemporary life in Bucharest and Bologna, both inside and outside institutes, the pictures gave educators some hints to better understand and discuss with the boys and the girls the problems and interests of adolescents.

In some specific cases, the workshops were useful to discover some possible educational and professional vocations.

After the educational and formative activity, photography has become a constant presence in the everyday life of the CSAPSA girls, that were awarded a camera for the quality of their photographic report.

"I started noticing things that I did not notice before" said one of the girls watching the pictures shot by her. "I learned to read the expressions on other people's face", her room mate added. "This experience represented for everyone a moment of insight into themselves and into other people's personality and was useful to improve the quality of interpersonal relationship, both inside and outside the institute". This was the comment of CSAPSA educators looking at the smiles of the girls and boys in a group picture.

For further information please visit www.childout.org

By Alberto Accettura, photo-consultant of AiBi

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2010 Report on Child Abandonment

The path towards social inclusion of young people without parental care

In December the results of the project Life after institutional care project as well as the guidelines for a better social inclusion of care-leavers will be available in a specific Report, number of Amici dei Bambini series on Child Abandonment.

For further information please visit www.childout.org

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