



From Institutions to Community Living – the Case of Bulgaria

A Story of an Unfinished Business



The Beginning

Late 1990s

- International organisations reported too many CHILDREN in residential care,
- Human rights NGOs – BHC, Open Society Institute – investigated the appalling conditions in large institutions,
- Donors provided funding for community care – World Bank loan (Child Welfare Programme), European Commission, many private donors

Political and Cultural Environment

- Different vision for action
- No political will for real change
- Strong lobby of service providers
- Boom of NGOs and flow of money to support “community services”



Parents' Groups

- Addressed the government for services and more money – failed with the rights
- Donors and charities became generous
- Parents' groups started running day care and rehabilitation centres

“Wasted Money, Wasted Time, Wasted Opportunities”

- PHARE Programme – €20 mln
- World Bank – another €20 mln
- Bulgarian taxpayers money – millions of BGN
- Private donors – impossible to catch all of them
- In-kind donations - never reported to the full extend



Abandoned Children of Bulgaria

- Triggered vast charity campaigns to collect more money
- Engaged high level political figures
- “New community services” became regulated by law: sheltered, protected, etc. housing

The Gap

- Human rights
- Environmental barriers
- Mainstreaming
- **DISABLED PEOPLE REMAINED SPECIAL , GROUPED BY DISABILITIES AND PLACE OF RESIDENCE**



Deinstitutionalisation (DI)

Change residence?

Change status?

CHANGE THE STATUS!!!

- Open up kindergartens, schools, public transport and all services to all people
- Compensate the disablement through technical aids and personal assistance
- **EMPOWER DISABLED PEOPLE through PEER COUNCELLING, SKILLS AND COMPETENCES**



PUBLIC AWARENESS

**A GOLDEN CAGE
IS STILL A CAGE!**





Lessons Learned

- DI is not about money! DI is about redistribution of **POWER!**
- Families are great supporters but rarely **AGENTS OF CHANGE**
- Professionals should be given a role but not the **CONTROL**
- “Nothing for us without us” **DOES NOT** necessarily bring **CHANGE!**

Protest and Demonstrations

