



**FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM
FOR CHILDREN LIVING
AND/OR WORKING ON THE STREET
AND CHILDREN AT RISK**



Save the Children



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Save the Children believes that every child deserves a future. In the countries of Northwestern Balkans we work every day to ensure the healthy beginning of children's lives, the opportunity for learning and protection from violence.

When a crisis occurs and when children are the most vulnerable, we are always among the first to come to help and among the last who are leaving. We ensure that we respond to the specific needs of children and make sure that their voice is heard. We achieve long-lasting results for millions of children, including those children who are most difficult to reach. We give our best to children - every day and during the crisis - transforming their lives and the future ahead.

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FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM

preface

Save the Children for over a decade actively works to improve the position and rights of children and protection system for children living and working on the street, both globally and regionally, as well as in North West Balkans (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia). Save the Children co-organized Days of General Discussion with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child called „The rights of all children in the context of international migration“, held on September 28, 2012 in Geneva, enabling children in migrant situations to be heard, with a special emphasis on Southeast Europe region. Bearing in mind that children migrate for various reasons, voluntarily or by force, within one country or between countries, with or without their parents, such migration exposes them to various risks of violence that are, in most cases, invisible to institutions of the social protection system.

In order to get involved and provide support in resolving the issue of „children on the move“, Save the Children, through strategic partnership with other institutions, was the first one to react focusing on research of this phenomenon, preparation and implementation of different programs and building professional capacities as well as establishing and supporting operation of day centers for children living and/or working on the street, and later for children at risk. Since 2008, since the first Day center was established up to day, with the support of Save the Children, local partner organization/service provider staff has been investing a lot of effort to provide support with psychological counselling, inclusion to educational system and retaining children in education, providing meals for children and other services aiming to ensure a higher degree of protection of children and increasing their resilience to risks they are exposed to. Simultaneously, Save the Children advocates for improvement of models and standards of Day centers and their work, assisting institutions and organizations to integrate them into the official social protection system in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro. A structured and organized support in a safe environment (as well as field work) for children includes provision of different services.

Day center have proved to be an extremely important and quality social service that was missing in the social protection system in localities where they were established. With a clear methodology and standard of work, day centers represent a more responsive and flexible response to the needs of children, as primary beneficiaries of center's services. Also, they were recognized as allies to institutions of social protection system when it comes to timely, early identification of problems of families and children through preventive field activities.



In an effort to provide comprehensive support in the area of child protection, Save the Children conducted an in-depth analyses of parenting challenges that families, beneficiaries of day center services face, with a focus on existing models of support provided in work with said families. The analyses concluded that no conceptual framework exists when it comes to service providers of the region, nor a defined program of work with families, which pointed toward necessity of providing support to building capacities of professionals who work with families. Following recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child related to developing measures to prevent need for placement of children to alternative care, i.e. separation of children from their families, Save the Children initiated development and implementation of Family Support Program with the objective of strengthening capacities of service providers and improving their competencies in work with families, day center beneficiaries.

We believe that the developed program represents a novelty in the area of professional development of experts working in child protection in order to better plan and provide services to families at risk. This program provides a quality framework for planning and implementation of activities focused on strengthening parents and developing their parental competencies. We trust that immediate application of the Family Support Program and monitoring of its results in practice can help determine the extent of its contribution to better and faster achievement of positive outcomes in the lives of children living and/or working on the streets and children at risk, their families and local communities.



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INTRODUCTION

Building a comprehensive and efficient system of protection and support of children living and/or working on the street includes a wide spectrum of activities, starting with improving the normative framework and its alignment with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other relevant child protection documents to developing various programs and services as adequate response to specific needs of this extremely vulnerable group of children, establishing clear procedures and coordination mechanisms and inter-sectoral cooperation. Diversity of population of children living and/or working on the street and significant differences between them, place a demanding task before the professionals working with them, requiring a wide spectrum of both general as well as specific and special competencies and also high sensitivity and motivation to work with this group of children.

Family support program (FSP) intended for families of children living and/or working on the street was developed as a part of Save the Children activities supporting service providers (day centers in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro) for children of the region living and/or working on the street.

This program and accompanying Guidelines for its implementation were preceded by conducted analysis¹ of models and practices of work with families of children working and/or living on the street. The goal of this analysis was understanding of context, characteristics and position of children living and/or working on the street and their families, locally available existing services and new possibilities of support. The analysis contains review of conducted research, normative framework and reports, as well as results of surveys conducted in nine service providers day centers for children living and working on the street.² Models of work with families were analyzed in relation to experience of service providers in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and Montenegro (MN) and the broader practice context, globally developed and supported by Save the Children and other international organizations.

Although it took into consideration all aspects of work of service providers, the focus of the analysis were activities aimed at strengthening service provider's capacities and improving their competencies for work with families of children living and/or working on the street. The reason for this lies in the reconfirmed experience in work with children at risk, corroborating in favor of the thesis that support for families of children at risk is a key precondition to effective and enduring assistance for achieving a sustainable change in a positive direction.

¹ See document: Analysis of models and practices of work with families/parents/guardians of children living and/or working on the street, authors: Nada Šarac, Iva Branković, Svetlana Živanić

² Humanitarian organisation Altruist, Mostar; Youth center „Vermont“, Brčko; The Citizens' Association for the Promotion of Roma Education Otaharin“, Bijeljina, CPU „Discipline center for juveniles“, Sarajevo, Association „Žene sa Une“, Bihać, Association „Nova Generacija“, Banja Luka, Ecumenical humanitarian organisation, Novi Sad, Center for Social Work Novi Sad, Center for youth integration, Belgrade and Center for children's rights, Podgorica



The challenge we sought an answer to while developing this program was to structure it well enough that it can provide a reference framework and enable realization of all its key phases in every environment, while leaving enough space and remaining open for organization of interventions in accordance with beneficiary's needs and capacities of the surrounding. Also, it is important to emphasize that, although specifically developed to respond to needs of families of children living and/or working on the street, this program can be used in work with other target groups of children at risk.

First two chapters represent an introduction. The first one is dedicated to conceptual theoretical framework of the program and it presents modern approaches in work with families. Besides theory of contemporary social work, it presents in brief psychology theories and directions important for understanding and organization of treatment of children in day centers and work with their families. This chapter entails representing of basic principles of work children and families that make a value assessment framework of the program and determine its purpose as well as specificity of applied methodology of work.

In the second chapter we briefly look at some of the characteristics of families of children living and/or working on the street and children at risk, primarily emphasizing the situations and circumstances in which the program should not be implemented, but that require undertaking of different activities aimed at resolving critical situations after which the family can join the program. Emphasis is on families whose children are included in day centers, shelters or another community day care service.

The third chapter is the central part of this document and it offers a detailed illustration of the Family Support Program. It defines the purpose, objectives and tasks of the program, roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders, place and duration of the program, phases in application of the program and evaluation of program's effects. This chapter draws attention to importance of competencies of immediate implementers of the program. At the end, provided are recommendations for implementation of this program in practice.

A three-day training program was created related to application of this Program, attended in late 2016 by 12 professionals from 6 Day centers for children living and/or working on the street from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro.³ In early May 2018, the three-day training was organized again for 29 professionals from 8 Day centers from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia⁴. Evaluation of realized trainings as well as results of application of the program in work with families in 2017 and in the first months of 2018 indicated that service providers recognize the importance of application of structured approach in work with families and they find that the Program provides a good framework for planning and implementation of activities aimed at empowering parents.

³ Humanitarian organisation Altruist, Mostar, Youth center „Vermont“, Brčko, The Citizens' Association for the Promotion of Roma Education Otaharin“, Bijeljina, Association „Žene sa Une“, Bihać; representatives of day centers in the process of formation in Podgorica and Nikšić, Montenegro.

⁴ Day centers from Mostar, Brčko, Bijeljina, Bihać, Banja Luka, Podgorica, Nikšić and Belgrade



1. CONCEPTUAL - THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND PRINCIPLES OF THE PROGRAM

1.1. Modern approaches to work with families

This section provides illustration of theoretical starting points we consider crucial for the offered concept of the family support program.

Modern social work theory

For theory and practice of modern, integrative social work, it is important to introduce holistic and ecological system perspectives. These approaches emphasize the needs and difficulties of beneficiaries and goals of social work derive from them. The beneficiary is perceived as a complete individual who, in a way, represents a product of the entire context of growing up in a specific environment. Therefore, the purpose of social work is to enhance and improve adaptedness between the beneficiary and the system the beneficiary is connected with, in line with social justice, along with awareness that both sides of the process have difficulty adapting. Ecological system impact in social work accentuate:

- Individuals and their social environment are in constant interaction, which leads to constant changes on both sides
- Individuals are active participants of their own development, which means that the relationship between an individual and their environment is reciprocal
- There is holism, connection of subsystems within the global system, thus changes in one subsystem cause corresponding alterations in subsystems that are closer or further of the individual.

These points represent one of the basic frameworks for development of support programs for families of children living and/or working on the street or at risk. Functioning of such children depends on their interactions with surrounding systems, but also from availability of resources that may enable and facilitate their functioning. The purpose of social services in this context is creating conditions and strengthening capacities for adequate functioning of the individual in their environment, as well as making community resources available to each individual.

The extended role of professionals in day centers is derived from previous perception, since the professional has multiple roles: direct implementer of certain activities, coordinator, representative, negotiator, service provider in partnership and cooperation



with the child and the family, who also take over responsibility for implementation of their protection plan.

Methodology of work in a day center should be aligned with methodology of social work deriving from ecological system perspective and which defines social work as an integrative model of social work, realized through integrated functioning of social and other community services, according to problems and needs of user groups. Methods of social work enable action at different levels of the society system in order to ensure quality service to user groups.

Psychological theories and directions

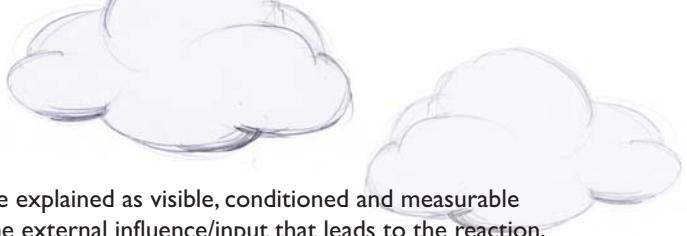
Work with families of children living and/or working on the street and children at risk requires understanding of complexity of this occurrence and its multi-factor conditionality. When it comes to level of the individual, it is important to understand their connection with events in their life in order to apply most effective course of treatment in the center. Psychological theories and directions, and we would like to underscore developmental psychology theories, social learning theories and cognitive-behavioral theories, as well as existential-humanistic theories, are vital for understanding the phenomenon and organizing support for children and their families.

Developmental and psychodynamic theories

One of basic psychological postulates of importance to this program is understanding the individual as an entity developing continuously from birth through the end of their life span, and that this life-long development is based on multiple developmental processes. Psychology offers an array of theoretical approaches perceiving a child/person at different levels of behavior and psychological processes.

Developmental theories, starting with psychodynamic to modern developmental theories, accentuate besides developmental process, unconscious processes that affect behavior and the necessity of becoming aware of them in order to correct inadequate forms of reaction. Psychoanalytic theory, especially narrow band theories deriving from it, such as ego psychology and Neo-Freudian theory, emphasize the importance of experience to actual behavior. Previous experience, unconscious, transfer and counter transfer are key terms in these theories assisting our understanding of child's behavior. Day center professional's role, according to these models, is to provide support for the child to become aware and understand their emotions and attitudes that may block their relations with others, as well as to assist the child/family to resolve own emotional and social conflicts. The effect of this approach lies primarily in achieving a positive change at the level of child's personal development related to problems of growing up.

Social learning theories and cognitive-behavioral approach in this context start from a basic assumption that every behavior is learned. This concept has grounds in physiological experiments and theories of classical conditioning, empirically proving that a number of behaviors represent a result of person's reaction to stimuli they are exposed to in their



social environment. Behavior can be explained as visible, conditioned and measurable reactions. It is the orientation to the external influence/input that leads to the reaction, and less attention is paid to the internal processes that lead to response. Based on this approach, human behavior is learned behavior, and as such, it can be changed depending on requests/inputs coming from the outside environment. Accordingly, asocial behavior is also learned and can be «unlearned» i.e. changed by adoption of new, prosocial behavior. This corrective learning is gradual, learned step by step, through special trainings and treatments through which a child adopts specific skills, later combining them into complex behavior or a complex social skill.

We will mention cognitive behavioral therapy and rational-emotional-behavioral therapy (REBT) as therapeutic directions begotten from this approach, showing a high level of success in treatment of children with behavioral issues and their families. These therapies have developed a broad spectrum of methods for improvement of life skills self-control skills, overcoming stress, resisting various developmental challenges or temptations, adopting prosocial forms of behavior, etc. REBT stresses out the importance of self-acceptance and high-level tolerance to frustration, as main cornerstones of a psychologically healthy person. Key premise of this theory is that behavior is not determined by the actual events in life, but it is cognition of them that represents a main determinant of human emotions and behavior. Basis of REBT is that no man, regardless of the kind of his unadapted and asocial behavior, is no less worth than other people. According to this theory, two fundamental psychological disorders – ego disorders (treating self as bad or less worthy individual) and discomfort disorders (insisting on comfort in life and a cozy course of life), are present in description of behavioral problems. The third wave of cognitive-behavioral therapy generated development of several integrative directions among which the schema therapy which recognizes the necessity of a comprehensive understanding of behavioral problems and personality disorders through connection of psychodynamic and cognitive-behavioral concepts in assessments and interventions. This approach acknowledged the meaning of early development and childhood and adolescence experiences, focusing on emotional needs as one of key factors of development of adaptive and maladaptive functioning schemes of adulthood. From the perspective of this approach, quality of parents' response to basic emotional needs of the child in early childhood and adolescence represents a dominant factor determinative of whether the child will develop into an integrated and responsible individual or have certain issues related to psychological functioning and behavior.

[Humanistic-existential approaches](#) are based on humanistic concepts relying on the “here-and-now” principle in their work with beneficiaries (Barker, 1995). From this concept many others were derived, such as consultative approach (Rogers), transactional analyses (Berne), logotherapy (Glaser) etc. Application of the humanistic model in day centers focuses on child and family, their current problems and needs. Child and family discover new solutions based on their experience and new knowledge offered by center's professional over the course of the treatment. Method used in this model is indirect, while the emphasis is on the process taking place here and now.

[Positive youth development concept](#) - this orientation's focus is positive development and positive, healthy functioning, whereas the basis lies in belief that every child carries an inherent tendency toward self-actualization, and that in a suitable





environment, every child will be able to develop all of their human potentials. Day center's task is to empower the child, family and local community. The approach relies on eco-systemic orientation, establishing and fostering partnership and trying to achieve change at all levels of child's life and development (individual, family, group, community), (Stakić 2008).

System approach to family

System approach to family derives from general systems theory and it is of major importance for the treatment of child and family in day centers. We would like to stress out the importance of identifying developmental tasks of both child and parents during child's growth, since their inadequate solution influences occurrence of behavioral problems. The following concepts are of significance for understanding behavioral problems/disorders: family roles and limitations, hierarchy of roles and responsibilities, responsibility and partnership in parenting, parental competencies (consistency, power of decision-making, permission to grow up...) parent's partner relationship. Ground assumptions of system approach to family make the basis of program of work with parents and accompanying training program, given that the focus shifts from direct work with the child toward further inclusion of the family, as well as of wider social environment factors that may influence changes in behavior, adoption of appropriate forms of behavior and successful functioning of the child and family.

1.2. Basic principles⁵

Modern theoretical concepts and binding national and international documents represent the grounds for defining the value framework i.e. basic principles steering work with the child and family included in Family Support Program. These basic principles form methodology guidelines, significantly determining the purpose of the program and specificity of applied methodology of work.

Respect for the rights of the child

Family support program for families of children living and/or working on the street is fully based on respect of basic rights and interest of the child, as defined by The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention contains 54 articles, referring to four categories of rights that ought to be ensured: **right to survival** (they entail right to life and right to satisfaction of existential needs); **development rights** (include all prerequisites necessary for normal and complete development of child's full potentials); **protection rights** (rights that include protection from all forms of child

⁵ Adapted from Stakić, Đ. (2008) Konceptualno-metodološki okvir za rad sa decom u sukobu sa zakonom u zavodskim uslovima, Podgorica.



abuse, neglect and exploitation) and **participative rights** (granting children the opportunity to actively participate in community life).

(Unconditional) acceptance of the child/family

Every behavior, including maladaptive, represents child's best effort to cope with the world as he experiences it. Experts (professionals and volunteers) implementing the program need to build a relationship with the child and family, entirely free of depreciation. Child and family are accepted as they are, with all of their needs and potentials, but also their troubles and difficulties they face. Respect of unconditional acceptance principle creates a sense of trust and sincere support on behalf of the child and family, which are preconditions to their active participation in the program. Unconditional acceptance relationship entails absence of condemnation or labeling and creates a good basis for developing trust and cooperation, as a prerequisite for joint work on correcting bad behavioral forms. It is important to underline that unconditional acceptance relationship does not include justification of risky, dangerous or asocial behavior, but support to children and their parents in understanding their erroneous choices and dysfunctional behavior and discovering opportunities and means of changing them.

Flexibility and individualization

The principle of individualization, built on the premise that each child/family is a unique and distinctive unit, offers to the Family Support Program a wide and flexible approach, adaptable to needs and possibilities of every single family included in the program. Solely a flexible and individualized program can provide for positive change and overcoming of problems that child and family face. In order to consistently follow this principle, the Program also offers interventions in the local community aiming to develop an extensive support network, to efficiently satisfy the needs of the child and family.

Participatory approach

Starting from the observation that the power of change lies with the child and the family, not in the application of the program, all key activities in implementation of the program imply their active participation. For that reason, it is necessary to establish and continuously develop cooperation with the child/family involving their participation in creation, evaluation and review of work plans. Participatory approach implies division of responsibilities for realization and sustainability of set goals and durability of achieved positive changes. It is of utmost importance that the child/family understands and accepts that no progress is possible without their full participation, motivation to achieve set goals and mutual trust. It should be emphasized that participatory approach is not the principle of only work with families, but that it needs to be promoted and established with regard to other stakeholders in the local community involved in the support network, such as centers for social work, schools, employment services, health care institutions, etc.



Positive parenting and positive discipline in everyday parenting⁶

In applying the Family Support Program, day centers promote positive parenting principles and positive discipline in everyday parenting as dominant approach to raising and education of children, which integrate modern scientific knowledge on healthy child development, results numerous research on effective parenting including child's best interest ad a right of the child and primary principle applied in work with children. The Family Support Program integrates all key elements of positive discipline: providing warmth and closeness; providing order and structure; understanding how children think and feel and solving developmental problems of children. Day center staff is trained for application of all principles and elements of positive discipline in direct work with children, but is also capacitated to educate parents to nurture the same approach in everyday parenting. This provides a stimulating framework for child development, characterized by a uniform, harmonized and synchronized pedagogical approach at home, in school and in the program implemented by the Day center.

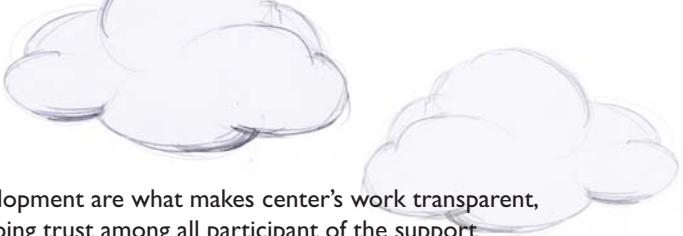
Holistic approach

Day center nurtures a holistic approach in their work. The holistic approach entails multidimensionality in treating key problems of the child/family, which demands not just team work within the day center, but also a broad multidisciplinary approach which includes other professionals and institutions. The complexity of child's needs demands a comprehensive approach to their satisfaction, that is not achievable solely through Day center services, but also through their inclusion in programs and services beyond it. It is important to accentuate that holistic approach-based support network does not include just professionals, but also volunteers who may play a key role in providing support for child/family and strengthening their potentials.

Planning and transparency

Planning of day center's work is carried out, on one hand, at the level of service as a whole or its individual programs (such as Family Support Program), and on the other at individual level, i.e. at the level of work with individual beneficiaries of the day center. Precise planning includes identifying goals and tasks to be accomplished, strategies for their achievement, precise timeline, as well as division of roles and responsibilities related to the implementation of the plan. It is very important to use clearly defined progress assessment criteria in the process of planning, since they represent a basis for their redefinition and evaluation of achieved results. It should be emphasized that day center beneficiaries' work plans and participation of beneficiaries, as well as

⁶ Durrant,J., Positive discipline in everyday parenting – Translation of this book from english was provided and financed by Save the Children North West Balkans, 2014.



participation of others in plan development are what makes center's work transparent, which is very important for developing trust among all participant of the support network.

Orientation toward strength/protective factors and cultural competence

Every family, even if unaware of it, has healthy potentials regardless of difficulties it faces or complexity of its situation. The primary task is that such potentials are recognized, activated and put to use for further development of the child. Regardless of efficiency and methods applied in work of day centers, no progress can be expected if parents and child are not motivated to activate own potentials and recognize the power of personal growth and development within themselves.

Process of strengthening begins during the first contact with the child and family, through provision of assistance and support in understanding their own situation and problems, as well as recognizing the strength necessary to overcome them.

Strengthening process is carried out on three levels simultaneously: individual, family and social. At individual and family level, strengthening focuses on reinforcing of protective factors, building self-confidence and gradual taking over of responsibility for own life, and on the social level improved availability of local community resources and better care for family, i.e. child and his development. Day centers for children living and/or working on the street or at risk, develop culturally sensitive programs based on acceptance of cultural and ethnic differences, tolerance and position that such differences represent a cultural treasure, not an obstacle for work. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to know and understand the way in which cultural, ethnic, minority or marginalized groups view themselves and their family environment. By integrating this principle in all aspects of their work, day centers develop a high level of cultural competence, disabling any attempt of imposition of values and lifestyles of one, usually dominant, ethnic-cultural group to another.

Also, widespread are prejudice toward families living in poverty reflected, among other things, in perception that, in such families, parental skills are less developed and that they do not have the capacity to provide the child with necessary care, attention and protection.

In fact, we know that most poor families protect, nurture, and support their children. Parents who raise their children in difficult circumstances, burdened with poverty and other existential problems can use certain educational styles that imply increased discipline, which is necessary to minimize exposure to potentially harmful influences. Therefore, whenever we assess parental skills, we need to take into account the contextual framework in which the family lives.



2. CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN OF FAMILIES INCLUDED IN DAY CENTERS

Fostering a positive, strength-based approach involving non-condemning and respectful attitude is of special importance for creation and implementation of **family support programs** for children beneficiaries of day centers. These are mainly poor families from marginalized groups, facing many challenges related to protective factors.

Parents of children beneficiaries of day centers' services are usually exposed to high levels of existential anxiety, which significantly reduces parental capacity to cope with daily responsibilities and obligations, to dedicate to establishing and nurturing of quality relationship with their children, care for them and educate them. The consequence is that parents do not tend enough to their children, do not monitor their behavior and movement and often do not know where their children are, whom with and what they do. Relationship between parents and children are often considerably disturbed and characterized with lack of warmth, closeness and commitment. The lack of positive affecting in the relationship usually manifests as retreat, indifference, neglect, avoiding of the child, open rejection, even abuse, exploitation through direct incitement or coercion of children to work on the street. Maladaptive attachment is associated with a range of emotional difficulties of the child, from low self-esteem, through reduced abilities to cope and deal with developmental problems, to a reduced level of social competence, aggressive behavior and problems in accepting prosocially oriented peers. When it comes to the educational style of this group of parents, it is often characterized by absence of knowledge, skills and effort to set clear expectations and rules of behavior, monitor their respect and consistently apply the age-appropriate stimulating, incentive and/or disciplinary measures. Most often, there are no rules at all, so children do not have a clear idea of what is expected of them, and the reaction to their behavior moves in the extreme, from absence of reaction and indifference to draconian sentences that are completely inappropriate in relation to the "offense" committed. In such families, they often establish a sort of extorted relationship, so problematic family (and partnership) relations condition the problematic behavior of children, and vice versa, the problematic behavior of the child underlines the dysfunctional reactions and behavior of the parents.⁷ This creates a kind of vicious circle from which no one can come out without the support and incentive of the outside. However, this is precisely what creates the possibility of providing adequate support to families of children using day care services by implementing appropriate programs aimed at identifying and mitigating risk and emphasizing and strengthening protective factors.

⁷ Stakić, Đ. (2008) Konceptualno-metodološki okvir za rad sa decom u sukobu sa zakonom u zavodskim uslovima, Podgorica.



2.1. Contraindications for the application of Family Support Program

It is important to emphasize that while working with families of children living and/or working on the street and children at risk, we can often perceive some of the **high risk factors such as presence of criminal behavior, domestic violence, i.e. abuse, neglect and exploitation of the child as well as abuse of psychoactive substances**. If it is estimated that existing domestic violence endangers child's safety, such a situation requires immediate notification to the competent institutions and services. The existence of domestic violence can also be detected during work with the child and family at a later stage of work. In the case of violence that cannot be stopped and endangers the safety of the child, such a situation also requires, in addition to the immediate notification of competent institutions and services, termination of implementation of the initiated work program with the family, until the problem is resolved. When it comes to abuse of psychoactive substances, once daily consumption and serious consequences of consumption such as dependence are identified, the family is not included in the program, i.e. the initiated work program with the family is stopped, whereas the family is motivated to enter the treatment of addiction, followed by notification to competent institutions about the identified problem. During a specially organized interview, parents are presented with all the facts related to the perceived problem of domestic violence.

The program cannot be implemented with families that do not have **minimum existential living conditions, until such conditions are provided**.



3. THE FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM – PURPOSE, GOALS AND PROGRAM PHASES

The Family Support Program (hereinafter FSP) offers a model of work with families of children living and/or working on the street. As it deals with an, according to many key criteria, extremely diverse population, the program is flexible and open for adaptations to particularities, needs and possibilities of families it is intended for and their living conditions.

Taking into account the fact that parents/families are the most direct and influential factor in the process of physical, cognitive, social and emotional progress and development of the child, the **FSP** promotes a balanced approach to risk and protective factors in an attempt to reduce and neutralize the effects of risk factors and **stimulate the effects of protective factors**. In this sense, the FSP, whenever possible, stimulates positive, develops potentials, improves skills, encourages functional relationships and connections, i.e. **promotes strengthening of child, parents, family and their connection with the informal, personal and/or formal community support network**.

The strength-based approach in providing support for the family is characterized by several dominant forces or protective factors: *parental resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, availability of concrete support and development of social and emotional competence of children.*⁸

Area of support	Support goals:
Parental competence	Improved knowledge about parenting and development of children – understanding of child's development and required parental strategies to support physical, cognitive and social progress and emotional progress and development; Improved quality of interactions between parents and children allowing the child to develop the ability to clearly communicate, understand and regulate emotions, as well as to establish and maintain relationship with others.
Parental resilience	Improved ability of overcoming stress and functioning regardless of challenges, difficulties and traumas
Social connections	Improved ability to establish and maintain positive relationships providing for emotional, practical, informational and spiritual support.

⁸ Strenghtening Families – a protective factors framework (2005) Center for the Study of Social Policy, Washington.



Combination of these factors defines three areas that the FSP focuses on. These areas of family support are presented in the table below, together with goals set for each one of them.

3.1. Purpose, objectives and tasks of the program

The purpose of this program is to help children living and/or working on the street and children at risk to reduce or eliminate inappropriate, (self)threatening and risky lifestyles, overcome their developmental problems and develop prosocial behavior and views within their family environment.

Specific objectives of the program are aimed at prevention and/or reduction of risks of separating the child from family through promoting family relationships and communication within the family, parental skills and problem solving skills, promoting prosocial behavior and connecting families with resources in the local community:

- improving parental skills for responsible (positive)⁹
- building capacities for efficient overcoming of life problems and coping with crisis situations
- building capacities for efficient parenting and overcoming problems in raising children¹⁰
- better understanding and satisfaction of child's needs in line with their age and developmental phase
- improving family relationships and family cohesion
- training families for building personal/informal support network
- training families/parents for establishing contact with representatives of relevant systems and use of services at the local level

Program's objectives are achieved by solving the following **tasks**:

1. **mobilizing and including** children, parents and other family members in the program,
2. **motivating** child and family to recognize and accept the need to change and persist in work toward that change
3. **assessment** – assistance to child and family in understanding risk and protective factors, forms of dysfunctional family relationships that lead to emergence, maintenance and complication of the problem
4. **reducing or eliminating problems** (improved behavior) through individual and group forms of work to improve communication in the family, as well as to improve parental competencies (knowledge, skills, attitude).

⁹ Strengthening Families – a protective factors framework (2005) Center for the Study of Social Policy, Washington

¹⁰ Durrant,J., Positive discipline for everyday parenting (2014) Save the Children North West Balkans

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5. **generalization** of achieved changes and development of strategies for their maintenance through connection with local community resources and enabling their support

3.2. Program's intention and stakeholders

FSP is intended for work with families of high risk population of children living and/or working on the street who are beneficiaries of day center services and for whom an individual service plan was designed. It has been stressed that this is a diverse group whose members share presence of multiple and complex problems dramatically disrupting family functioning and thus jeopardizing the needs and rights of the child. Also, there is often an ambivalent attitude or resistance in terms of acceptance/inclusion in the program, insufficient co-operation, tendency to give up and regressive outbursts.

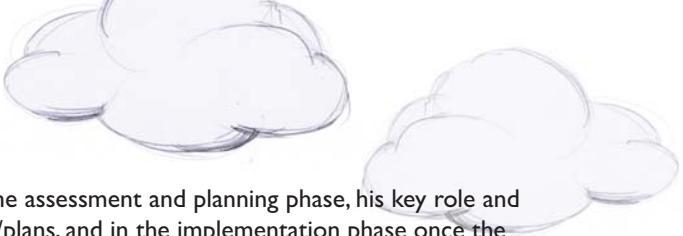
The program does not include families with evident **presence of criminal behavior, acute domestic violence, i.e. abuse, neglect and exploitation of the child, as well as abuse of psychoactive substances.**

The family can be included in the program only after such problems are solved and under control.

The program focuses on the family, but it is not determined in advance who will, in what way, to what extent and at what stage of the program be involved. The decision to get involved in the program and engagement depends on results of a functional assessment, which answers the question of the role a specific person has in development and maintenance of the problem, who can play an important role in motivating family members, who is searching for solutions and providing the necessary support. In line with this, aside from the parent/ caregiver, the program includes brothers, sisters, other members of the extended family, and persons outside the family system who play an important role in the emergence or maintenance of the problem, or may play an important role in overcoming the problem and sustaining the achieved progress. At the very beginning, in the inclusion phase, based on admission/initial assessment data, the presence of as many family members as possible should be ensured and then, in relation to the assessment of their actual significance, decide who will be involved and at what stage of the program. Whenever possible, the implementers will insist on including male family figures, **primarily fathers**, as their active participation has been of great strategic significance, i.e. that fathers can play a key role in achieving and maintaining positive changes in family functioning and child's behavior.

In any case, key stakeholders of the program are the professional, parents (and other family members) and the child.

The professional – has an active role that transforms and changes over the course of the program. At the very beginning, he seeks to engage and motivate family members to cooperate, to help them recognize the need for change, to make clients out of



passive service recipients. During the assessment and planning phase, his key role and responsibility is for made decisions/plans, and in the implementation phase once the desired change occurs, he may play the role of advisor/educator/instructor/trainer/ only to reach a dominantly supportive role in the generalization and change maintenance phase.

Parents and other family members – are key stakeholders and their active participation is required, but its intensity varies through different phases of the program. They participate in all phases of the program, from motivating and encouraging other family members, through participation in assessment and planning, to mastering new parenting skills that contribute to improvement of overall parental competencies important for maintenance of achieved changes.

The child – child's best interest is the primary principle and guiding idea, but the focus of attention shifts from the child toward family and family relationships. The child is expected to cooperate at a high level, as well as to gradually take over responsibility for his behavior and general development.

One of key principles in working with children emphasizes the importance of social connections, i.e. the necessity of aiming all interventions to strengthening positive social networks in child's life. Social connections are equally important in relation to family. Success of day center depends on how accepted this program is within the community and how reciprocal cooperation with schools, social, health and other relevant institutions and non-governmental organizations is. Of vital importance in work is to **establish quality, continuous cooperation of day center and center for social work as basic institutions of social protection system** in charge of protection of this extremely vulnerable user group.

3.3. Place of implementation and program duration

Family support program is highly flexible when it comes to location, place and time of program implementation. As one of key tasks is to engage and motivate the family to participate and remain in the program, it is commendable to respect **the rule that family determines place and time** for meetings. That may be the space family uses or service provider space, but the choice is left to the family to make. The exception to this rule are situations when family/parents are included in group forms of work such as educational workshops¹¹, lectures etc. which take place in a common, prearranged space and time.

FSP is carried out through a **series of meetings** with the family, but also in a **set of activities undertaken between these meetings**. The dynamics, number, duration and content of activities during the meetings are defined by an individual family support plan, to match the needs and potentials of a particular family.

¹¹ For example, workshops with parents for application of positive discipline program



As this is a pilot program whose results will be tested in practice, the initial idea is **to implement the program with an individual family for 4 - 6 months, through 14-20 meetings**. Exceptionally, the program can be implemented **longer period of up to 8 months**. The number of meetings dedicated to each phase of program's realization depends on set goals and tasks for a specific phase and on the extent of family's readiness for the following phase. Some families will take more time and meetings in the motivation phase (with a possibility of never reaching the next one), whereas others will require more meetings and support in the generalization and change maintenance phase.

Initial/test concept is the following:

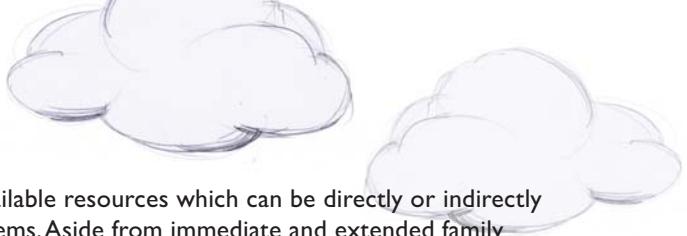
- Inclusion and motivation phase: 2 – 5 meetings with the family
- Assessment and change of behavior phase: 9 - 11 meetings with the family
- Generalization and change maintenance phase: 3 – 4 meetings with the family

The frequency of meetings, or number of meetings per week is conditioned by nature and complexity of the treated problem, family's motivation and ability to cope with them. When treating a family with low or unstable motivation, or a family of a child at high risk, it is desirable to organize engagement and motivation meetings twice a week during the first two weeks, and in assessment and improvement of behavior phase (the two intertwine) once a week, until the generalization and maintenance phase when meetings can be held less frequently, once in two weeks or less often. Lower frequency of meeting at this phase of the program is prescribed due to the fact that family needs more time to apply and reinforce new communication forms, new rules and other benefits acquired over the course of the program.

3.4. Phases in FSP implementation

Family support program is carried out through several key steps or phases not just interconnected and inter-linked, but intertwined, yet they are separately described and considered because each of them has specific objectives and tasks achieved through specific activities, methods and techniques. When it comes to assessment, there is a phase dominantly focused on assessment (of the family system and relationships within it), but essentially, the assessment is continually conducted throughout the phases and it represents a basis for progress evaluation and review of the plan.

- **Mobilization/engagement phase** – in a way represents the introductory phase, a step preceding entry into program. A series of activities are conducted in this phase **aiming to inform, notify, engage and inspire cooperation** not just the **family, but all other community stakeholders** whose role can be important for the implementation of the program and further maintenance of acquired benefits. Usually, the difficulty and complexity of family problems and the significance of thorough work in this phase stand in relation of mutual reciprocity to one another. As families that this program is intended for belong to a high risk group of families facing multidimensional problems, in this phase it



is important to mobilize all available resources which can be directly or indirectly engaged in resolving the problems. Aside from immediate and extended family members, these are different professionals, volunteers, representatives of government institutions (center for social work, school, health centers, local administration...) as well as non-governmental institutions. In order to achieve success in this phase it is important that day center continuously and systematically works with local community resources, using protocols on cooperation to define general rules, roles and responsibilities and manner of cooperation. That would allow for actualizing of cooperation i.e. including and engaging important stakeholder in work with the family. The goal of this phase is to present the program to all relevant stakeholders and explain benefits it can deliver. It is essential to insist on positive expectation of family members, where readiness of counsellors/therapists to meet the family at the time and place of their choice can be helpful for presenting the program in a way that the family can understand. **Strategies and `interventions** used during this phase require, on one hand patience and persistence/determination, and on the other, sensitivity, devotion, respect for individuality of each family. During the first contacts with the family, active listening, accepting the views of the family, avoiding confrontations, reframing and focus shift or meaning are commonly used.

- **Motivation phase** – is important in work with all families, especially the ones not prone to cooperate and change, or with those who expect that (some) other people and circumstances will change and that this would positively affect them and their problems. Commitment to succeed is of key importance in this phase, bearing in mind that families that this program is designed for are weakened, unmotivated (or with inconsistent motivation) and lack faith in possibility of change, due to their exposure to chronic stress. **Goals** set for this phase are aimed at **creating a positive motivational framework** that will enable beginning of work on changing behavior and reducing and/or eliminating problems. This is achieved through a set of **tasks and activities** undertaken by the professional during 2-5 meetings with the family, the most significant being the following:

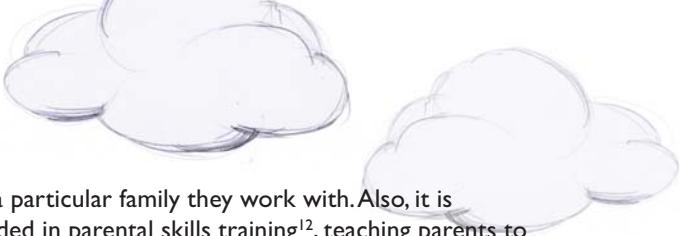
- establish a balanced, individual, professional, but warm relationship with all family members;
- focus on the family and relationships within it;
- assist parents in overcoming the feeling of hopelessness;
- raise hope for the possibility to improve the situation.

Main **skills and strategies** in this phase include non-directive counselling, active and reflective listening, non-evaluative approach, sensitivity and acceptance of diversity, readiness of the professional to cope and bear with family problems (sending a “message” that he is not shocked, terrified or intimidated by difficulty or intensity of family’s problems). During the first few meetings with the family, which are dominantly dedicated to motivation, the professional does not focus on change in behavior, but takes on to discover and interrupt forms of extremely negative interaction between family members. To that regard, as important interventions, he uses *diversion and interruption* of dysfunctional forms, by reframing and focusing on positive. He actually uses two connected techniques: change focus and change



meaning techniques. The activities in this phase need to be carefully planned, based on a thorough assessment of parents' motivation levels and application of strategies for motivation, as well as for negotiation. In this phase, the professional should cooperate with all colleagues from the day center who will be working together to motivate and mobilize family resources, which is especially important when it comes to parents with underdeveloped parental competencies or parents who send their children out to the street to bring money and who have the lowest level of understanding the damage such practice causes, as well as the lowest level of motivation for change. Indicators of family's preparedness to move on to the next phase include behavior pointing to diminished ambivalence and resistance and a certain readiness for change.

- **Assessment phase** - it was previously mentioned that assessment holds a specific role and place in the family support program and that it should not be confused with the assessment carried out as a part of the professional process and service standard by a team of day center professionals at the time of child's admission to the center. Here we are referring to a phase of the Family Support Program that is dominantly focused on **assessment of the family system and relationships within it**. The focus is primarily on family members and connections relevant to problems of the child who uses day center services. Also, the assessment phase intertwines with the motivation phase, shares its timeline but assessment activities are mostly conducted outside and between the meetings with the family. The assessment is conducted through analyses of minutes or notes from these meetings, but then expanded to assessment of relevant relationships outside of the family circle. This is to search for functional relations of alternative and/or transitional nature that may be of temporary assistance to family member/s until such time that they are strengthened, or of relatively permanent help, i.e. over a longer period of time. Certainly, this assessment is carried out in consultation with other members of the expert team. **Assessment goals** ought to be in closest connection to defining paths and models of overcoming the problem that is the subject of our work with the family. Thus, assessment goals should direct us toward interventions in the family system that will result with reduction or elimination of dysfunctional relations contributing to emergence and maintenance of child's problems.
- **Change/improvement of behavior phase** – moving on from previous, preparatory phases to this, central phase of the program should be regarded as a **process**, so to that matter, even once work on change of behavior starts, we will need to "go back" to strengthening and reestablishing motivation or reviewing or clarification of the nature of a certain family relation. In general, a sign or a signal that this phase may be entered is when family members start expressing hope that change is possible while negative behavior is reduced, even by little (for example: everyday fights and mutual accusation are less frequent and/or the child regularly comes to the center). The professional's role in this phase of the program is more active and directive than in previous and following ones. The professional has multiple roles, reorganizes, teaches, models new behaviors of family members. He gives "homework" to help family members improve their skills. It is desirable that therapists/counsellors develop their own approach and master a broad spectrum of interventions and techniques in order to be prepared to properly respond to



specific requests and needs of a particular family they work with. Also, it is desirable that parents are included in parental skills training¹², teaching parents to encourage and support positive behavior, use discipline techniques etc. To this regard, they can be assisted by a number of various instructions and manuals¹³ on positive parenting whose content and presentation should be adapted to possibilities of a particular family. Also, many other strategies are at their disposal through which they can improve family relationships, such as communication trainings, conflict solving trainings, providing information and guidelines for parents, including parents in creative programs for change of behavior. At the same time, children can be engaged in the area of improving skills related to communication with peers and adults. **Program's objectives are generally focused on development of stimulating, nurturing family relationships that can be maintained over a period of time that will allow for them to positively reflect on child's emotional, social and cognitive growth and development.** Specific goals of the program refer to change of inappropriate behavior (or lifestyle), reduction and/or elimination of risky and/or problematic behavior and conflict or dysfunctional relations. When it comes to a particular family, development of ideas and definition of goals to achieve starts upon engagement with the program. At this stage, these ideas are formulated into an **action plan** that serves as program guide, basis for progress monitoring and revision, as well as foundation for evaluation of program's overall effects. **Family action plan**¹⁴ represents an integral part of Individual child plan that service providers create in line with professional process requirements and service standards. The plan is highly individualized and contains the following mandatory elements: goals to be achieved, tasks and persons responsible for their realization as well as deadlines i.e. the timeframe.

- **Generalization phase** is primarily intended to support the family to **sustain, expand and foremost maintain the positive changes**, resulting from the FSP implementation and all other efforts of the day center. The role of the therapist/ counsellor in this phase differs from behavior improvement phase, in the sense that he needs to, in **cooperation with the family**, focus on following **key goals and tasks**:

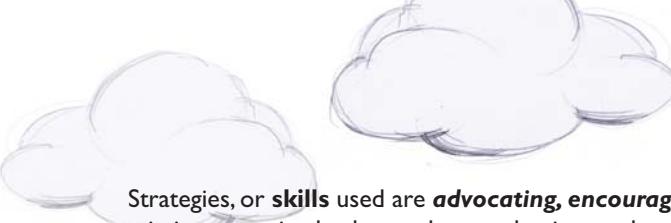
- Extend application of achieved positive changes to new situations and/or contexts
- Anticipate situations that carry risk of relapse and plan its prevention risky
- Activate personal, family and community resources as support in maintaining the positive changes

In this phase, the professional focuses on cooperation with existing resources in the local community, ongoing since the first phase, phase of mobilization and engagement.

¹² We recommend parental skills training adapted from Durrant,J., Positive discipline in everyday parenting (2014) Save the Children North West Balkans

¹³ Durrant,J. Positive discipline in everyday parenting (2014) Save the Children North West Balkans

¹⁴ Plan's form is attached to the Guidelines



Strategies, or **skills** used are **advocating, encouraging, connecting** aimed at forming missing, restoring broken and strengthening weak connections, thus improving the relationship between the family and local community.

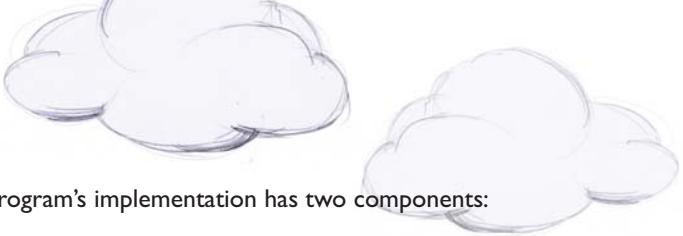
Program termination and exit criteria – expected outcomes of program implementation, i.e. criteria and indicators used to determine achievement of set goals are defined for each family during the first phase of the program. Clear definition of criteria is important for regular progress evaluation as well as for selection and change of strategies and interventions. During work with family, criteria can change, become stricter, raised or lowered. What matters is that they are defined and made clear to all stakeholders in every phase of the program. The Family Support Program is a structured, relatively short and behavior change focused program, placing its outreach in realistic framework. A satisfactory level of achievement thus limits to **neutralizing key problems in family functioning**. This practically means that conditions for completion and termination of the program are met when **risky behavior of the child, which in this case means living and/or working on the street, or at risk of such lifestyle, is eliminated or reduced and when risks of child neglect and/or abuse on behalf of the parents are placed under control**. Visible improvement in family functioning can be observed when the family starts to independently activate various protective factors on its own, focus on available resources in the community or in the personal social network aspiring to reduce or prevent future life difficulties.

3.5. Results of FSP implementation

The Family Support Program offers a model of work with families of high risk population of children living and/or working on the street and children at risk. It is a structured, multi-phased, behavior change focused, short-term program which promotes a balanced approach to risk factors while potentiating effects of protective factors. Evaluation of realized training programs and results of program's application in work with families in 2017 and first months of 2018, showed that service providers recognize the importance of application of a structured approach in work with families, consider that the Program offers a good framework for planning and implementation of activities focused on strengthening parents.

Given the short implementation period and observing the fact that only a few day centers applied it, Family Support Program's direct implementation remains one of the most important of future tasks and challenges, along with monitoring of its results in practice and determining the extent to which it contributes to better and faster achievement of positive outcomes in lives of children living and/or working on the street and children at risk, their families and local communities.

Therefore, special attention will be paid to monitoring effects of program implementation, but also evaluation of its most important elements, components and dimensions:



The evaluation of Family Support Program's implementation has two components:

1. **Program implementation process evaluation** – refers to procedural dimensions of the program, phases/steps of program's implementation, number of meetings with the family in each of program's phases, areas of operation, carried out interventions and their effects.
2. **Program implementation results evaluation** – refers to the effects of program's implementation in work with particular families in relation to achieved **changes in child's behavior**, as well as in relation to the degree of **satisfaction** with the overall process of program implementation.

Both components can be evaluated from two perspectives:

User perspective – parents/family and child

Service provider/day center perspective – conducted by the support program

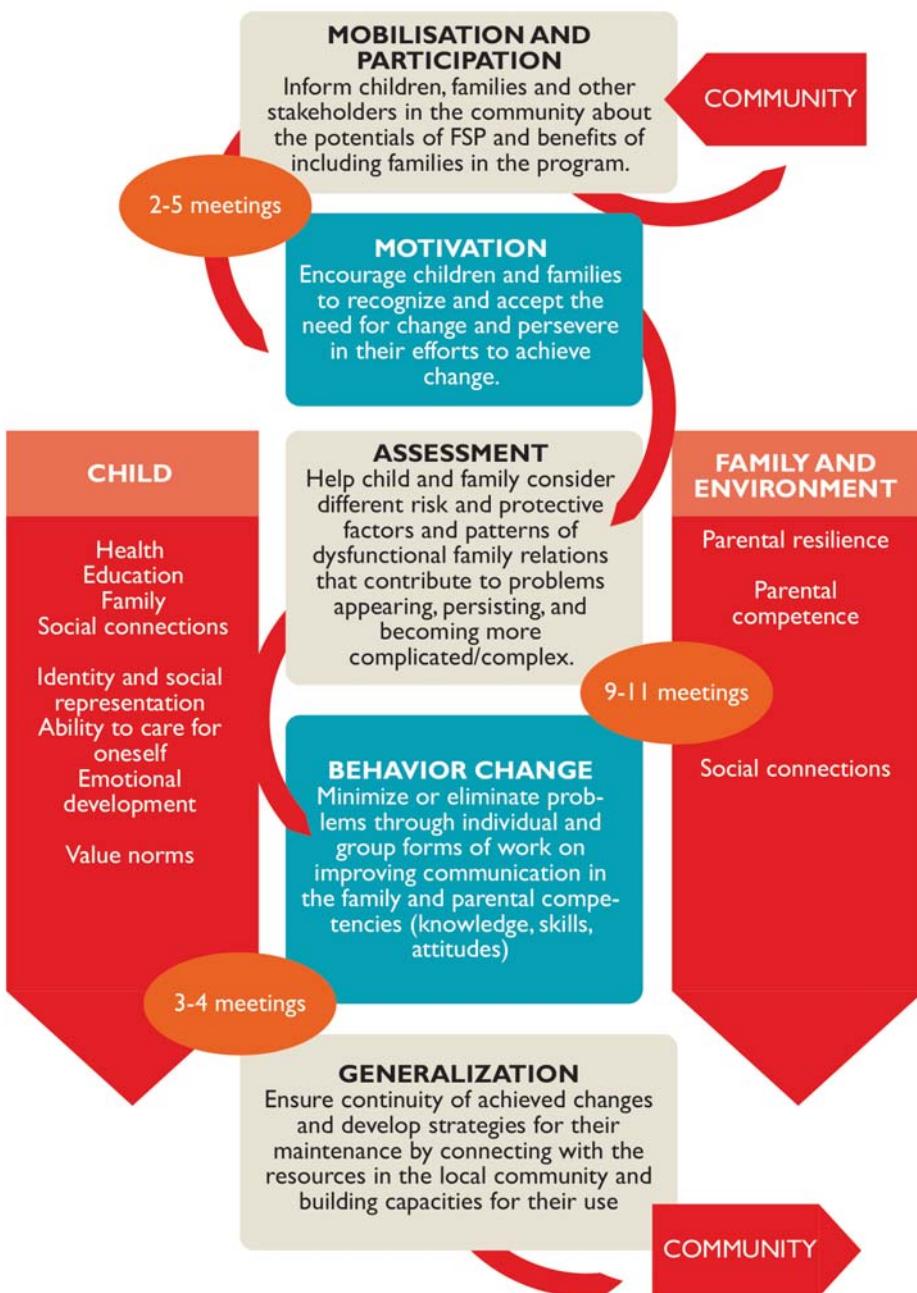
3.6. Qualifications and competencies of program's professionals¹⁵

In order to ensure consistent application, and systematic evaluation-based commitment to continuously improve the program, day center as program implementer needs to attract and retain qualified and competent staff, program associates. Its staff should possess appropriate level of knowledge acquired through academic studies and continuous professional education. They need to have skills adopted and developed under **supervises professional training**. Continued availability of supervision and regular process of supervision of all professionals who are in direct contact with the child and family will enable review of own practice, activities and interventions carried out by a professional, relationship with service beneficiaries and other colleagues or team members. A supervisory process so designed and conducted will represent a strong pillar of personal growth and development and a powerful factor in preventing professional burnout. All staff should possess an appropriate level of maturity to take reasonable decisions, as well as personal character required for direct work with children and families. Personal qualities entail: warmth and acceptance; readiness to display nurturing and tolerant attitude toward children and adults; ability to apply consistent professional relationship and flexible approach in work with children and families. Staff also needs to have an appropriate life experience in order to be able to understand children and families, local communities and cultural characteristics of those whom they work with.

¹⁵ Stakić, Đ. (2008) Konceptualno-metodološki okvir za rad sa decom u sukobu sa zakonom u zavodskim uslovima, Podgorica.

Schematic presentation 1. FSP phases

Family support program for children living and/or working on the street and children at risk (FSP)





4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM

Review of research and literature in the area of provision of family support services or models and practices in work with parents of children living and/or working on the street and children at risk shows that there is not just one effective program or model, but there are different practices established and adapted to local characteristics of particular families and their children. These models are usually not tested on a wide sample and their effectiveness not verified outside of the contexts they were created in. The experience of service providers from different meridians also point out to the first and basic recommendation that a program of work with family must be adapted to essential needs of children and families using their services in a particular territory, real possibilities of service providers and their circumstances, as well as to available resources.

Common characteristics of functional models, and therefore the assumptions for the model of work with families of children living and/or working on the street in the region are as follows:

1. Based on **clear principles and value framework**:

- early intervention, cultural sensitivity; participation of child and family in defining goals and expected outcomes; focus on family strengths; practitioner reflexivity

2. Activities in work with child and family that (are):

- Wide in range: from informing, through interventions aimed at increasing motivation for engagement with support activities for the child, to activities related to enhancing parental capacities and strengthening parents
- Based on modern theoretical and methodological concepts of work with families: ecological system approach, positive youth development, positive parenting, etc.
- Structured and based on assessment of family's needs, design of family action plan containing clearly defined goals and expected outcomes, monitoring of program implementation and its regular revision by the professional or the team.
- Involve beneficiaries' local community to the fullest extent, through hiring community mediators, public figures, etc.
- Entail short-term and long-term interventions that include family and community and a broader support network



3. Organization-level programming that implies:

- Clearly defined range of service, corresponding to organization's possibilities in relation to families it works with, with a program containing a set of activities and outlined responsibilities for their implementation
- That all professionals working with families must have the same reference framework, based on a consistently applied structured approach
- Existence of a methodology for monitoring and evaluation of activities, based on a flexible approach to planning in which existing solutions/strategies are tested and adapted to the needs of families.
- Commitment to ensuring sustainability of service as well as long-term and continuous availability of support.

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