

# A Multi-Sector Approach to Early Childhood Services



INTERNATIONAL  
STEP by STEP  
ASSOCIATION

## EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT COMPLEXES IN BULGARIA

The Early Childhood Development Complexes of the For Our Children Foundation (FoC), Bulgaria, provide several different socially integrated services concentrated within reach, together forming a safety net for children and families.

The FoC in Bulgaria has created the Early Childhood Development Complexes in Sofia and Plovdiv to pay attention to the initial, most important years of every child's life and to provide support before it is too late.

In addition to working directly with children with disabilities and developmental difficulties and supporting families in vulnerable situations, the FoC organizes training sessions for prospective adoptive parents and foster families. It also focuses on the prevention of violence, the development of parental capacity and more.

### Why the first 1,000 days?

The first 1,000 days of a human life are the most important. During this period, the architecture of the brain is formed, largely determining how the child will develop into an adult. This will affect a person's physical and mental health, their ability to learn, earn a living and contribute to society, as well as how happy they will be.

Any lack of adequate and complete care in these 1,000 days will have irreversible consequences, leading to a number of social and economic deficits for the child and for society as a whole!

## About the cross-sectoral power of the complexes, and their overall impact

“ Investment and support in the first seven years of life are a guarantee for the successful development of children and their future successful integration and realization in society. We focus our efforts not only on supporting children from an early age, but also their families so that they can cope with the challenges they face. In order to provide the best care, we created the Early Childhood Development Complexes in Sofia and Plovdiv. The biggest advantage of complexes of this type is that in one place, through one entrance, children and families receive all the necessary support provided by different specialists.

We have a clear strategy for the development of the organization that we have been following and adapting since establishing the FoC. Upon this, our success is based. The main pillars for us are the development and expansion of services for children and families, an integrated approach, the implementation of innovative practices and maintaining a high level of competence in the team. The funding of our activities from various sources guarantees the sustainability of the Foundation and gives us the peace of mind to develop our services and implement innovations that we would not otherwise be able to afford.



In the Complex for Early Childhood Development, we provide and develop various social services for: the optimal development for children from early childhood; support for a safe family environment; and overcoming the risks for the life and health of the children. We join forces with specialists from the health, educational and social sectors to ensure more children develop fully and have a happy childhood in a family environment, to ensure a better future for Bulgaria. We have gathered in one place the whole palette of services for children and families, so that they will have access to a psycho-motor room and toy library, a sensory room, and specialized cabinets for working with a speech therapist, a psychologist, a rehabilitator. ”

*Ivanka Shalapatova, Executive Director  
of the For Our Children Foundation*

# An example of cross-sectoral collaboration and coordination in early childhood service provision

The Early Childhood Development Complexes in Sofia and Plovdiv are focal points for cross-sectoral cooperation between health, social and educational sectors. Early Childhood Development Complexes are not only centers for providing social services for children and families, but also a place for professional discussions about the quality of services. During such meetings, the professionals not only share their experiences, but make commitments towards children (for example, a GP to monitor the health status of a child and the immunization status for enrolling a child into kindergarten). The interinstitutional way of working provides space for innovation and improves the quality and efficiency of the final results in the light of the main goal: the well-being of children and families.

Experienced and convinced of the effect of cross-disciplinary cooperation, the FoC is moving towards the creation of a permanent team that will have advisory functions in relation to complex cases and facilitate access to various institutions. Working in a cross-disciplinary team and involving external specialists such as consultants, educators and other professionals, the Early Childhood Development Complexes provide better continuity for the child (for example, when transitioning to kindergarten), as the specialist there has consulted on the case in this team and is familiar with the child's history. With the consent of the parents, the full package of information about the child is provided: level and degree of development, pros and cons, and abilities for adaptation and socialization. Professionals prepare a joint plan with parents, and are allowed to work inside kindergartens. This allows the child to adapt to the new place and at the same time teaches the specialists in the kindergarten how to work with the child. Inside the Early Childhood Development Complexes, different teams, with their different experiences and expertise, interact with each other, providing a "holistic model" of support to children and families.

## **What contributes to the success of the ECD complexes?**

Coordination meetings are held in the Complexes. The coordination mechanisms among the different services within the organization improve the performance and provide comprehensive support and opportunities for children and families. For example, a child placed in residential care receives comprehensive support from all specialists in the complex, leading to the assessment of early childhood development, while simultaneously working with specialists from the Community Support Center or from the Day Care Center (i.e., a rehabilitator).



The **Early Childhood Development Complex in Sofia** is driven by the desire to provide space for young children and families who need support. The complex unites five centers working in close cooperation and provides specialized support tailored to the needs of children and parents. The centres are:

[Community Support Center “St. Sofia”](#)

[Community Support Center “Happy childhood”](#)

[Family-type accommodation center “Children’s House”](#)

[Foster Care Center](#)

[Daycare Center “Development”](#)



# A child- and family-centered service

The Early Childhood Development Complex carries the spirit of the family, its importance for the growth and development of the child as a person and, last but not least, the chance to provide a happy childhood for all children surrounded by the support, care and love of a family.

The Complex is a natural continuation of over 10 years' work carried out by the FoC in Plovdiv. Through the Center for Public Support "For children and parents", founded in 2009, the Foundation has enabled over 2,000 children to grow up in a secure and developing family environment.

Thanks to the Complex, the children of Plovdiv have access to professional, integrated and comprehensive support to develop their full potential. Also, families in difficulty can find reliable people that can help them improve their parenting skills and give them the confidence to take the best care of their children.



# Ensuring quality services

Receiving feedback from people using the services of the centers of FoC is part of the quality management system of the Foundation. People can give feedback at different levels of the work in different ways. The methods of receiving feedback are tailored to the individual characteristics of beneficiaries (age, literacy, and specific needs). Feedback can be gathered both in writing and orally and the consideration of opinions is of utmost importance for the development of the services in centers. The feedback collected from the social services and program activity users is periodically summarized, analyzed, and the opinions, suggestions and testimonials received from beneficiaries are reviewed. A plan is developed on how to make improvements in cases where negative feedback is received, and how to continue the development of the positively received components of the work.

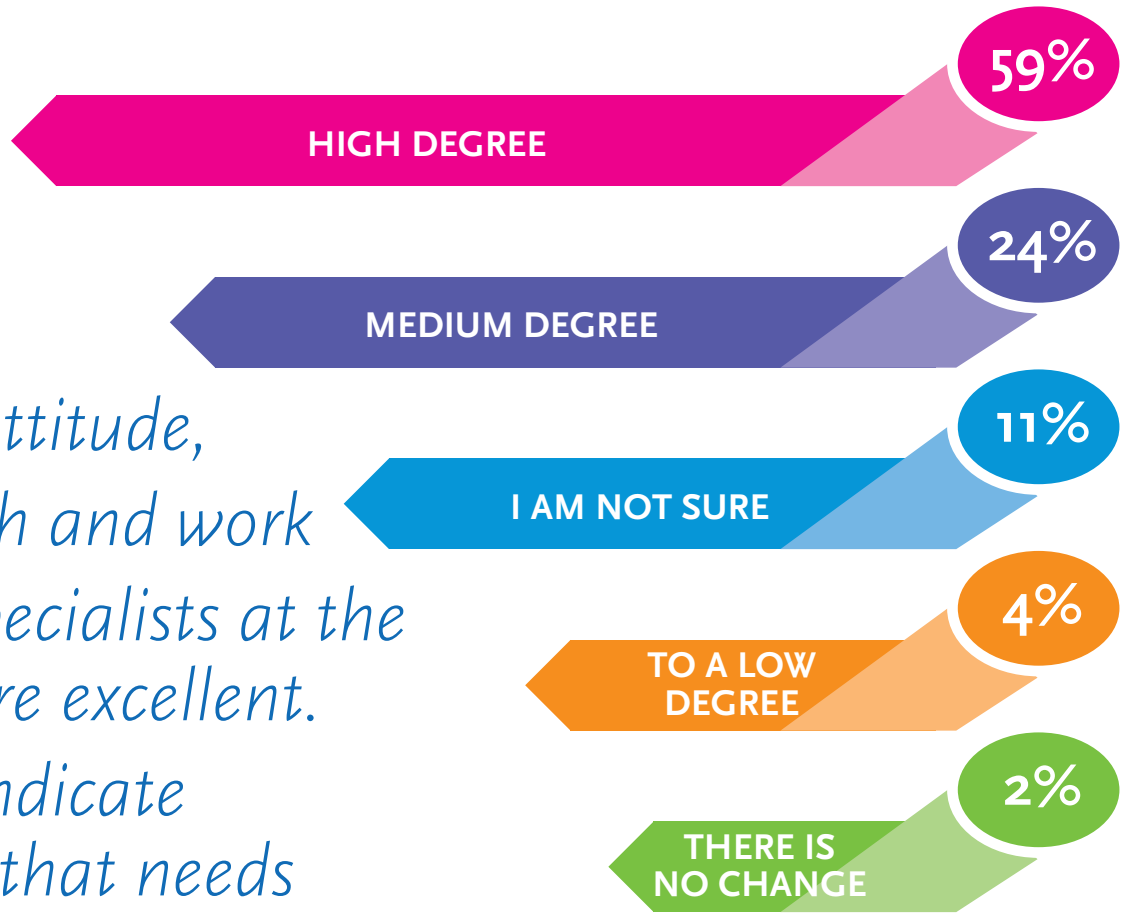
## INITIAL EXPECTATIONS OF BENEFICIARIES VISITING THE CENTER (%)



## LEVEL OF SATISFACTION FOR THE SERVICES AND WORK WITH SPECIALISTS

“In your opinion, to what degree did the services that you used and the work with the Specialists contribute to a change in the initial needs?”

“The attitude, approach and work of the specialists at the center are excellent. I can't indicate an area that needs to be improved.”





The International Step by Step Association (ISSA) is an early childhood membership association which serves as a learning community and a champion for quality, equitable and integrated services. The ISSA network is a dynamic mix of expert organizations, ranging from NGOs to research institutes, from public bodies to early childhood services, primarily from Europe and Central Asia.

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