

The following text is a project description of Quality4Children and can be used as a basis for press releases etc.

“Quality4Children“: a pan-European project on the subject of “out-of-home care of children and youths“

Europe is growing closer and closer. Against the background of the dynamics of a common European economic area there is also need for pan-European initiatives for coping with social challenges. One of these social challenges is the well-being of children and youths who cannot grow up in their original families. With the project “Quality4Children”, three big international organisations working in the field of out-of-home care of children have launched an initiative aiming at guaranteeing and improving the chances of development of hundreds of thousands of children and youths in Europe who cannot grow up with their biological parents. SOS Children’s Villages, IFCO (International Foster Care Organisation) and FICE (Fédération Internationale des Communautés Educatives) have established a close partnership to join forces for implementing the project.

How can the chances of development of children and youths in out-of-home care, who cannot grow up with their original families, be guaranteed and improved? Which “Good Practices” in the field of out-of-home care have proven successful from the point of view of the children and youths involved, their parents and care persons? What quality standards for the different forms of out-of-home care can we derive from this? And finally: How can we implement these quality standards? It’s these questions that “Quality4Children” focuses on.

What has happened so far and what do we plan?

32 European countries are involved in the project. In all these countries project coordinators have been appointed to collect in their respective countries “Good Practice” stories regarding the care of children in out-of-home care. By means of the narrative method of “storytelling”, the children and young people in particular, as well as their biological families and care persons, will get the chance to tell their story, which means that they play a substantial role in the development of quality standards. Some members of the Quality4Children steering group are youths, which will guarantee proper consideration of their point of view in the project

An essential stage in the framework of the project was the first European congress “Quality4Children“, which took place in Gmunden/Austria on 1st/2nd June 2005. The congress provided the expert audience with a comprehensive overview of the numerous steps taken to improve the chances of development of disadvantaged children and youths in Europe. Apart from being able to meet care persons, experts and politicians, the participants also had the chance to talk to the young people involved.

The project is designed as a long-term project, with the interim results being further developed to formulated quality standards in cross-national teams. The quality standards will be available by the end of 2006, to be implemented directly afterwards and will be evaluated on an ongoing basis. At the same time Quality4Children will build a European network of representatives of

youths involved, people working in the field, representatives of the Scientific Community, representatives of youth welfare authorities and responsible politicians.

Quality standards in out-of-home care: an example

What do these standards comprise? Let's take the example of "care": the standards involved say that children must be adequately involved in all decisions regarding their life. Together with their carers, children and youths should, for instance, reflect on which school they will visit and when and how they will take their first step into independence.

One standard establishes that the children's family, social and cultural resources are to be maintained to the best-possible extent. This means that children and youths who are placed in out-of-home care should preferably stay within their home community to allow them to continue visiting the same school and seeing the same friends.

Another standard stipulates that children with special needs must receive adequate care and that their care persons must be trained and supported accordingly. Furthermore, the special significance of cooperation with the original family of the child is emphasized, i.e. regular contact with the biological family is fostered and supported professionally. Yet another standard deals with supporting and accompanying children and youths in developing their independence by, for instance, from an early age giving them responsibilities which are adapted to their age and individual development.

Each standard is described in detail by defining responsibilities, guidelines for action and risks and includes the appropriate reference to the "UN Convention on the Rights of the Child". Additionally, they each contain the corresponding quotations of those who provided Good Practice stories ("storytellers").

For more information on Quality4Children please visit our website www.quality4children.info or contact us by phone +43 / 512 / 3316-0 or e-mail (quality4children@sos-kd.org).