



Complex for social services for kids and families, Ruse: our approach to preventing aggressive behaviour among our young clients

Violence against/ among children is an extremely serious problem. Its impact on domestic harmony and schooling has serious consequences for child development. The team at KSUDS, Ruse has developed a repertoire designed to help prevent violence and aggressive self-expression and to provide children with the capability to resolve conflicts amicably. We conduct the following activities with children and parents –

- Workshops
- Adventure camps
- Special interest clubs that develop social skills

A resource group (including educational psychologists and advisers from schools in Ruse) meets on a monthly basis and focuses on the issue of aggression in all its different variations. The group discusses the most complicated cases of violence and the obstacles encountered in direct consultation with children and families. A support group for parents who are having difficulties in communicating with teenaged offspring who are victims of violence discusses the reasons for aggression against children and the ways in which it can be limited.

Our experience

In May 2006 we started a campaign for prevention of violence against children and involved our partners from the resource group in different roles. With their help, we've distributed a poster in schools and other institutions that demonstrates the emotional abuse inherent in the traditional authoritarian approach for disciplining children that, unfortunately, represents a model of behavior that is being reproduced generation after generation. Other campaign materials include an unfolding pyramid - "Educate me this way" - with parenting guidelines expressed by children. A brochure - "Be obedient parents!" - demonstrates positive models for raising and educating children and a green armband symbolizes participation in the campaign.

The campaign culminated in orchestrated activity on 1st June, the Day of the Child. While a team including staff and young clients of the complex were distributing pyramids, brochures and armbands around the city, representatives of the resource group were active in Ruse's schools. Pedagogical advisers and young volunteers met parents at the entrance and asked them to join the campaign, to wear the armband and accept the guidelines described on the pyramid and in the brochure. Teachers and ancillary staff were also invited to join the campaign. Those who agreed to participate received one or more sets of campaign products and agree to pass them on to friends and acquaintances.

The second stage of the anti-violence campaign was named: "Mine – yours – ours: a shared right to safety". The idea was to enter schools and other institutions in Ruse to demonstrate interactive workshops and, thereby, to launch a method of providing children with the personal skills needed to curb aggressive behavior. Again, we joined





forces with the resource group. At the outset, we invited our colleagues to attend a workshop demonstrating our work with young clients of the complex that was followed by discussion. School psychologists and educational counselors then partnered our specialists during the demonstration sessions in schools so that a working model could be prepared and used with other children.

We provided the resource group with a selection of project materials from state institutions and NGOs from which to draw ideas for their direct work on the implementation of the campaign. However, we needed to access schools where there was no designated educational psychologist or counselor. This involved submitting formal applications to school directors and other authorities to undertake workshops. Thanks to the effort of our network of peers interactive workshops took place in 10 schools in and around the city. The sessions were attended by around 150 children aged 9 to 18 years. The team that ran the workshops ensured each session was designed to take account of the age and abilities of the participants. During workshops, the children came to realize that, although they all had their own personalities and characteristics, they shared fundamental rights – the right to safety; the right to hold and express opinions. They came to understand various types of violence, conflict-free ways to communicate, how to respond and to whom to turn for assistance and protection if they become victims or witnesses of violence. Through case studies and participating in role plays, participants learned how to transform conflict - attack and defence - into cooperation. At the end of each session, the youngsters expressed their own messages about violence through "The tree of wishes".

In separate sessions of the clubs "VIP-zone", and "I Win - You Win" teenagers with different emotional and behavioral problems became involved in our anti-violence work. Using unconventional, interactive methods including art therapy and music, we explored issues such as human trafficking, sexual violence and self-destructive behaviour such as drug abuse and alcohol dependency. We looked at their impact on relationships – at home, at school and among friends and also considered the presentation of violence in the media and its impact on children.

We have a tradition of holding adventure camps in the picturesque river valley of the Rusenski Lom nature reserve. Shared adventure is a powerful learning mechanism that promotes the growth of self-awareness and an understanding of the impact your behaviour has on the world around you. In outdoor settings, and engaged intellectually, emotionally, socially and physically, young participants - mostly children with demonstrable aggressive tendencies – learn the value of cooperation and mutual support. Programmes are designed to promote group cohesion and a sense of camaraderie using a combination of humour and shared experience that is intense and invigorating. In such circumstances, any attempts to dominate, ignore or sulk lose their relevance.

