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Family strengthening program. Evaluation report

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Family strengthening program. Evaluation report

Ștefan Cojocaru¹ (coord.), Daniela Cojocaru², Ovidiu Bunea³,

Abstract

The evaluation aimed at measuring the impact that the Family Strengthening Program run by SOS Children's Villages in district 1 of Bucharest had on children, families and communities. In order to do this, 125 beneficiaries' files (86 closed cases and 39 working cases) were analysed. In order to collect quality data, interviews took place with 9 mothers and 6 children and with the program' staff, as well as focus groups with the beneficiaries whose files were closed, focus groups with beneficiaries from the existent beneficiaries category and focus groups with partners.

Keywords: program evaluation; impact evaluation; theory-based evaluation; family strengthening intervention; social intervention; efficiency; efficacy; sustainability.

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Family strengthening program. Evaluation report

Executive summary

The evaluation aimed at measuring the impact that the Family Strengthening Program run by SOS Children's Villages in district 1 of Bucharest had on children, families and communities. In order to do this, 125 beneficiaries' files (86 closed cases and 39 working cases) were analysed. In order to collect quality data, interviews took place with 9 mothers and 6 children and with the program' staff, as well as focus groups with the beneficiaries whose files were closed, focus groups with beneficiaries from the existent beneficiaries category and focus groups with partners.

Relevance of the program

The program of SOS Children's Villages is focused on the target group set for the program's objectives. In fact the services are provided for the children at risk of being separated from their parents (low condition of the families, poverty, families with numerous members, mono-parental families), risk of abuse and neglect, risk of not having the conditions for healthy development. The analysis of the beneficiaries group offers data regarding the confirmation of those criteria within the group of program's beneficiaries. The evaluators observed that the parents' level of education is generally very low, which gives few chances to the parents for finding a job; the families' economical situation is poor, 91.2 % of the families being under the poverty threshold; most of the parents had no job at the moment when accessed the organization' services; the families' living conditions at the moment when entered the program were poor: many of them improved these conditions.

The program offered by SOS responds to the needs of the children and families by offering services for different needs:

- In order to improve the nutrition it offers material support. From the view point of the amount offered for each child as financial support, the evaluators consider that this measure of providing the differentiated support according to the number of children is adequate for the families' needs. As a recommendation, the evaluators consider that, after 9 months since the case was opened, the value of the economical support could be gradually decreased until the case would be closed, so that the family would go through a transition period in managing own budget. The parents and children who participated in the interviews and focus groups mentioned that their food considerably improved after receiving the social tickets and they could afford to buy products that they did not use to eat previously.

- In order to ensure the health condition, the organization offers support for accessing the medical services, registering to the family doctor, watching the treatments, financial support for acquiring the medicines that are not for free. The social workers encourage the parents and children to make periodical check ups for monitoring their health condition. Not all the cases that urgently needed support for medicines benefited of support from the organization. That is why it is strongly recommended to supplement the budget for this expenses category. Out of the statements of the parents and staff, the evaluators found out that they consider that the beneficiaries' health condition improved (both children and parents)
- In order to ensure the education needs, the organization offers support for registering the children in kindergarten and school, school materials, support and counselling for parents in order to support and motivate the children for education. Most of the parents who participated in interviews and focus groups mentioned the special school results, also confirmed by the SOS staff. The social workers monitor the children' school situation and intervene when the children have troubles. From the evaluators' viewpoint, SOS could organize a centre for helping the children with learning difficulties and for supporting them with the homework, since at home the parents cannot help them, especially because of their low level of education.
- The psychosocial support mainly consists of the counselling for parents and children. The parents and children comply with the appointments set for counselling. The evaluators' recommendation is to intensify the home visits; each case in part could benefit of at least one visit per month. In order to ensure these services additional costs for transportation are necessary. The families' living conditions, especially of the closed cases, have obviously improved and the beneficiaries have admitted that they were the result of the support received from the organization.

Program's Efficacy

The program's efficacy refers to the results obtained in improving the living conditions of the children, as well as their parents, in accessing the educational, social and medical services. All the cases that benefited or still benefit of SOS services were supported for getting access to these services. Moreover, closing the cases is decided depending on the level of self-reliance that the family achieved as a result of the services received from the organization. The self-reliance is considered a key result of SOS intervention and can also be considered a filter concept for the evaluation of the whole services system offered by the organization. The main idea that also appears from the files analysis, but also in the discussions with the beneficiaries and staff is to achieve improved living conditions in the family, accessing the social, educational and medical services in the community, as well as developing the abilities and capacities to

access these services without any help when the case would be closed. The management of own budget, accompaniment from the organization, counselling and support for obtaining the legal rights are forms of support designed to increase the degree of family' self-reliance.

Program's Efficiency

From the viewpoint of the services' costs per child, the evaluators consider that they are low compared to the services offered, so the resources are used with maximum of economy. From the evaluator's point of view, the costs per beneficiary cannot be reduced without affecting the quality of services. It may be necessary to raise the budget for ensuring a higher frequency of the home visits and ensuring proper spaces for counselling.

Sustainability

The fact that the SOS organization works in partnership with the public institutions and other NGO-s is a prerequisite for continuing the activities after the SOS involvement ends. At the same time, the evaluators find that the emphasis on the prevention services started to develop, but an institutional and inter-institutional practice efficient enough is not yet consolidated. Thus, currently it is not possible to cease the SOS involvement in the prevention services. But, on the contrary, some resources should be directed for continuing and developing such services. The public institutions have not yet incorporated the SOS activity, standards and working methodology, and ceasing the SOS involvement would be a loss for the category of beneficiaries that the program addresses to. From the evaluators' viewpoint, at the moment of the evaluation, there were not enough progresses regarding handing over the responsibility to run the prevention activities to another partner. The new law of the children has started to produce effects since 2005, but there have been not enough communitarian networks that could take over the services at the moment when SOS would withdraw. The participation of the main partner, respectively GDSWCP, developed in the wake of the common work with SOS, but has not yet the capacity to absorb this practice.

Beneficiaries' Participation

The beneficiaries were involved in naming the program and setting the conditions for the services contract. The evaluators consider that the organization could involve more the beneficiaries (parents and children) in designing, planning and implementing the project. Such kind of an activity was initiated by the organization and resulted in recommendations made by the parents to organise some support activities for doing homework and make a children club for spending the leisure time.

Lessons Learned

An efficient intervention is generated by several factors: the staff's level of education, partnership with other services providers and combination of all kinds of services diversified and adapted to the beneficiaries' needs. SOS has developed an efficient intervention model, based on the partnership with the local authorities and other services providers, cultivating a respectful and trustful relationship with the beneficiaries.

In order to be efficient and sustainable for developing the family's self-reliance an intervention should last at least 9 months. The families who benefited of support, including material support, for a period between 10-16 months, obtained the higher self-reliance. A longer timeframe results in increasing the families' dependency on the support offered and diminishing the chances of the families to become independent.

The change in the adults' attitude to their children is also a result of the counselling sessions and is accelerated by the social worker's attitude in the relationship with the adult. Understanding the child's needs implies encouraging their participation to all the actions that regard them and the possibility to develop services for and together with the children.

In order to increase the family's self-reliance the activities by which the parents were encouraged and supported to find a job were very important. The involvement of the organization in this process was strength in building and consolidating the families' self-reliance.

Learning and experiencing the management of own budget encouraged the families' self-reliance (giving the social tickets was a decision that encouraged this); the parents' savings led to the improvement of the children's living conditions.

Supporting the parents for registering their children in kindergarten or school is an opportunity for an intervention with beneficial long-term effects on children. After the cases were closed, all the children continued to go to school. The children learned this behaviour and their parents assumed it.

Accessing the medical services, registering on the lists of the family doctors were other forms of support from the organization. These things increased the degree of access to this kind of services. The parents had the possibility to take the children to medical check-ups, appeal to these services without being guided anymore by SOS, and learn to comply with the medical prescriptions in case some treatments were necessary.

The appreciation of the children by the SOS employees for their school results made the parents to become also aware of the importance of these attitudes. They accepted to organise their children's personal, intimate spaces and posted any mark of the children's successes. All these are forms to motivate not only the children, but also the adults.

The improvement of the children's food was another result of the economical support provided to the families, and all the interviewed beneficiaries recognised this.

Recommendations

1. Child centered activities: During the discussions within the focus groups the need for organizing child centred activities was emphasized: school support, socialization activities, leisure activities and group activities, as well as the child's involvement in planning this kind of activities.
2. Even the GDSWCP has identified this need for counselling and support centres for parents and children and would like to develop such programs in cooperation with SOS Children's Villages.
3. Continuation of the activities for increasing the community awareness and involvement in the abandonment prevention and family-strengthening program.
4. Development of a support network: support families. The existence of a resource centre for parents can contribute to organising a support network by the involvement and preparation of some support families. SOS has already experienced this, especially with the ex-beneficiaries of the program.
5. Development of day care centres meant for preventing the separation of the children from their families. In Bucharest there are not enough day care centres for children.
6. The analysis and directing some material resources - spaces as well as money - from the villages towards the family strengthening programs.
7. In order to reduce the dependency of the families on the services offered, the evaluators recommend to gradually decreasing the material support offered to the families starting from the ninth month since they have been beneficiaries of the program.
8. Ongoing training of the staff involved in the project in the fields: parenting education, peer support group, counselling and child's participation.

Introduction

Description of evaluation objectives

Evaluation aims to measure the impact that the Family Strengthening Program run by SOS Children's Villages had on children, families and communities identify the most efficient types of interventions and analyse different practices that led to success. At the same time, the evaluation is a way to analyse the activities and results on the target groups and operate recommendations regarding the guidelines of the development and refinement of the staff interventions for the families in risk of abandonment. For research we used theory-based evaluation model (Stake, 1967; Chen and Rossi, 1983; Chen, 1990a; 1990b; United Way of America, 1996; Funnell, 2000; Cooksy, Gill and Kelly, 2001; Cojocaru, 2009; 2010). In evaluation, the 5 criteria necessary for evaluation the program impact were taken into account: 1) relevance, 2) efficacy; 3) efficiency; 4) sustainability; and 5) participation. Thus, the interventions and the way they adapted to the target groups' needs, the extent of objectives achievement, costs analysis, capacity to sustain and continue the program shall be analysed, as well as the modalities promoted for the involvement and participation of the beneficiaries and partners in the development of the program.

Evaluation questions

1. What impact did the program have on the lives of the participating children in the target group, on their families, as well as on the community?
2. How relevant, efficacious, efficient, sustainable and participative the program's interventions are?
3. What lessons can be learnt from the program that can be used for the further development of the program?

Methodology

Brief description of the data collection process

Stage 1: The evaluation team read the organization's documents, the policies and procedures manual, the papers presenting the project, in order to know the program implemented by SOS Children's Village.

Stage 2: Evaluation started with making a database that included data regarding indicators about the characteristics of all the program's beneficiary families, which implied studying the 125 files of all the program's beneficiaries (age of parents, health

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condition, marital status, living conditions, income and jobs, alcohol use, abuse and neglect of the children, number of children in the family, the age of the youngest child in the family) and interventions they benefited from (counselling, house visits, material support, general information regarding the family planning and birth control education, participation in support groups and parental education courses, support for finding a job, support for connecting to the community resources, support for mediation of relationships with the extended family, support for obtaining the identity documents, support for registering in school, kindergarten or for continuing the studies, participation in recreational activities etc.). The implementation team, using the beneficiaries' files, completed the data.

Stage 3: Based on the statistical analysis of the data included in the files and on the analysis of the beneficiaries' characteristics and types of interventions, depending on the status of the cases (closed or still active), certain families were identified who participated in focus groups and individual interviews. 9 participant families accompanied by 6 children have been thus chosen for interviews.

Stage 4: The focus group with the partners. For this focus group representatives of partner institutions who know the activity of the family strengthening program run by SOS Children's Villages and who work in partnership for solving the working cases were chosen (representatives of GDSWCP, kindergarten leader, doctor who works in a family planning and birth control education cabinet, NGO representatives).

Stage 5: Focus groups with the beneficiaries. In order to have an as accurate as possible image of the family situation, interventions and their impact on the beneficiaries, two focus groups with the beneficiaries were organised: one in which 8 beneficiaries mothers participated - closed cases - and a focus group with 6 mothers - active cases.

Stage 6: In order to collect quality in-depth data, 9 individual interviews with the parents were carried out, as well as 6 interviews with the beneficiary children of the SOS Children's Villages' program focus on appreciative interview (Cojocaru, 2008b; Sandu, Cojocaru, and Ponea, 2010).

Stage 7: The completion of information continued by taking 4 interviews with the staff of the SOS Children's Village, as follows: one with the program's national coordinator, one with the local coordinator of the program in Bucharest, one with a program' social worker and an interview with a social worker who works in the organization's village in Bucharest.

Stage 8: Analysing the data in the beneficiaries' files. The expert evaluator randomly read the beneficiaries' files - the closed cases, as well as those who still work, in order to identify practices regarding the documentation of intervention and the way it can be found in the beneficiaries' files.

Description of quantitative and qualitative research methods

In the evaluation quantitative, as well as qualitative methods, have been used orientated by mix methods strategy (House, 1994; Greene and Caracelli, 1997; Patton, 2001; Cace C., 2002, Cace S., 2003, Cojocaru, 2010a). The statistical analysis aimed to identify the types of cases, the services offered at the level of the whole population beneficiary of the program between 2004- 2007. Thus, in order to obtain these data, a data base was made, where all the beneficiary families were included, for whom a series of indicators were filled in, regarding the condition of the family, as well as the interventions made by the staff for each case.

The following techniques were used for collecting the qualitative data: documentation, semi-structured interviews and focus group.

Documentation: the study of the information from the documents that are at the base of the intervention, results of the program and choice of a quality representative sample. The quantitative analysis was used starting from some general data about cases (average duration of intervention, characteristics of the target groups, indicators for results measurement). After this process the types of specific cases were identified (cases closed, working cases, successful cases, failure cases etc.). The analysis of the documents also implies the analysis of the interventions from the viewpoint of the interventions in the beneficiaries' files and an analysis of the working tools used.

Focus group: used for obtaining the information from the beneficiaries and focus group with the stakeholders. Therefore, a focus group with the program's beneficiaries was organised - cases closed, focus groups with families who benefit of services and a focus group with the stakeholders (partners from the community - GDSWCP, NGO, School, and medical cabinets).

Individual interviews with the beneficiaries and staff. The beneficiaries were selected based on a quality sampling. Thus, 19 interviews were organised in total, as follows: 9 interviews with the beneficiary parents, 6 interviews with the beneficiary children, 1 interview with the project coordinator and 2 interviews with the staff who offers services, 1 interview with a social worker in SOS village.

Regarding the quantitative methods, the statistical analysis of the cases was performed. For each case a form with indicators was filled in (age, gender, number of children, period when they were provided with services, services received, changes of the situation etc.) which was the base of the statistical, quantitative analysis.

Description of sampling and size of sample

The beneficiaries who participated in the focus groups were randomly selected from the list of the cases according to their status: closed or active.

In order to select the beneficiaries for semi-structured individual interviews 5 closed cases and 4 active cases were selected (Cojocaru, 2007), depending on the intervention duration, services received, family situation and number of children.

Involvement of the project team in the evaluation

The program team was involved in all the evaluation stages, in elaborating the working methodology (guide of individual and group interventions), as well as completing the evaluation design, contacting the participants and organising the focus groups, in the preliminary stage of setting the indicators and making the data bases which included relevant information in the beneficiaries' files, giving feed backs to the intermediary evaluation reports.

Description of the program

Short description of the program (location, history + current condition, duration, beneficiaries/participants, budget)

Location

Family strengthening program runs in Bucharest and in two districts of the country, respectively Sibiu and Bacau. The program that has been evaluated is implemented by SOS Children's Villages Bucharest.

Management/administration systems

Under the conditions of the financial resources for this program, the human resources are properly used; the program is well structured from the viewpoint of intervention and increase of the self-reliance degree of the beneficiary families. In fact, out of the interviews made with the staff, as well as with the beneficiaries, a priority direction of the program's philosophy was found, respectively the family's self-reliance for ensuring optimal conditions for the children's development, education and care (Cojocaru, D., 2008). In Bucharest two social workers work within the program, out of whom one is also the coordinator of the activity in Bucharest. The national coordinator supervises both of them. The national coordinator supervises and coordinates the activity in the family-strengthening program in three areas of the country: Bucharest, Hemeius and Cismadie. The project's team constantly works in partnership with the local authorities. The human resources involved are well trained and permanently willing to improve. The program' staff cooperates well to each other. They work in a team and develop partnership relationships with the beneficiaries. Also the staff's training level is high, needs for training were identified, in order to develop group interventions amongst the beneficiaries (preparation for organising parenting courses for parents, peer support

groups), as well as needs for training in order to improve the counselling skills. The activities are scheduled according to the beneficiaries' specific, and the intervention plans are made together with the project's main partner, respectively GDSWCP, district 1, Bucharest. In order to monitor the results of the work with the families, SOS Children's Villages organises meetings with GDSWCP district 1, Bucharest, who also participates in these meetings for monitoring and self-evaluation of the actions that SOS Children's Villages have taken.

History

SOS Children's Villages Romania has established a family strengthening program in line with government strategy. The family strengthening project Bucharest started in 1999, by supporting 10 families and developed until 2003 up to sustaining a number of 20 families and 75 children/year, through material aid (buying and distribution of food, clothes, medicines and sanitary products) and a number of five places in the SOS Kindergarten. SOS has offered this social support due to the involvement of the existing social worker from CV Bucharest, which managed in the first semester of 2004 to bring two volunteers for these activities. The three persons have gradually begun to offer some counselling to the beneficiary families, by simply talking to these sometimes desperate persons and helping them to set priorities for the emergency situations and have the courage to take a first step in order to overcome the crisis situation.

These families were selected by SOS together with the local Child Protection Authority, which developed during 2003 into the first General Department for Social Work in Bucharest.

In 2005 the project reached the greatest development, having a number of 64 families with 185 beneficiaries. In the same time the services were differentiated and new working tools for the families have been set up. Currently the project has its own staff: a project coordinator and a social worker.

Characteristics of the beneficiaries

Since the program has started, 125 families benefited of the SOS Children's Villages family-strengthening program, out of which, at the moment of evaluation, 86 were closed cases and 39 active cases. Since 2004 until the moment of evaluation 419 children benefited of services, out of which 68 were active cases in August 2007. All the beneficiary families were included in the evaluation process.

In order to have an as accurate image as possible about the target population the evaluators have analysed the 125 files of all the program's beneficiaries. The evaluators present in the following a few data regarding the family situation, according to the following indicators:

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The mother's age – the average age of the beneficiary mothers is 32.5, the most frequent ages being between 24 and 34 years old (43.2 % of the total population). Evaluators note that 3 of the mothers are deceased and there is a percent of 16 % young mothers, aged between 16 and 24.

Mother's age	Frequency	Percent
16-18 years	2	1.6
18-24 years	18	14.4
24-34 years	54	43.2
34-44 years	30	24.0
44-54 years	17	13.6
54 and more	1	0.8
Deceased	3	2.4
Total no of families	125	100.0

Table no. 1. Mothers' age distribution

Father's age – the father's average age is 36.7 and most of them are between 24-34 years old (24.1%) and 34-44 years old (21.6%). The evaluators note that out of 125 families provided with services within the program starting from 2004, in 42 families the children are only with their mothers (fathers disappeared, imprisoned or unmarried mothers).

Father's age	Frequency	Percent
16-24 years	3	2.4
24-34 years	31	24.8
34-44 years	27	21.6
44-54 years	16	12.8
54 and more	6	4.8
Missing data	42	33.6
Total no of families	125	100

Table no. 2. Fathers' age distribution

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Mother's level of education – from the data analysis we see that, generally, the beneficiary mothers have a low education level (54.1% have less than 8 grades) and 14.8 % out of them are illiterate. This increases the vulnerability and reduces the chances to find a job.

Mother's education level	Frequency	Percent
Illiterate	18	14.8
Less than 8 grades	66	54.1
Professional school graduate	30	24.6
High school graduate	7	5.7
University graduate	1	0.8
Total no of families	122	100

Table no. 3. Mother's education level

Father's education level – we see that the same characteristic is kept in case of fathers, 62.0% have less than 8 grades and 3.8 % are illiterate. Thus, the fathers also difficultly find a stable or socially valued job.

Father's education level	Frequency	Percent
Illiterate	3	3.8
Less than 8 grades	49	62.0
Professional school graduate	22	27.8
High school graduate	5	6.3
Missing data	46	-
Total no of families	125	100

Table no. 4. Father's education level

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Family income – we see that most of the beneficiary families are confronted with a high poverty level (91.2% out of these have a income level below the minimum wage), some of them benefiting of help from the state. Even though they are supported by the state, by receiving social financial help, this is not enough for ensuring a decent life to the families. This proves the fact that one of the cases selection criteria is met by the organization’ staff, respectively the vulnerable families with low income.

Income level	Frequency	Percent
Income below the minimum wage	114	91.2
Income over the minimum wage	11	8.8
Total no of families	125	100

Table no. 5. Family’s income level

Mothers’ jobs – we found that the low life level was generated by the lack of a job: 70.5% of the mothers do not work and 7.4 % work only occasionally. On one side, this is due to the low education level and on the other side to the great number of family’s children. Out of the total target group, only 13.1 % have a stable job. Out of the data collected from the files the evaluators found that out of the 16 mothers who work, 7 were supported by SOS Children’s Village to find a job that they kept and still work on it.

Job (mother)	Frequency	Percent
Mother has a job	16	13.1
Mother has no job	86	70.5
Mother works occasionally	9	7.4
Mother is a pupil	1	0.8
Mother is a student	1	0.8
Mother is retired	9	7.4
Mother is deceased	3	-
Total no of families	125	100

Table no. 6. Mother’s occupational status

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Fathers' jobs –the evaluators found that the ponderosity of the cases when the fathers work permanently (26.6%) or occasionally (31.6%) is higher than in the case of the mothers. It is interesting that out of the 21 fathers who work permanently, 15 found a job with the organization' support. 31.6 % of the fathers do not work, and 8.9 % of them are retired, especially due to some chronically diseases.

Job (father)	Frequency	Percent
Father has a job	21	26.6
Father has no job	25	31.6
Father works occasionally	25	31.6
Father is a student	1	1.3
Father is retired	7	8.9
Father do not live with the family (disappeared, imprisoned, deceased etc.)	46	-
Total no of families	125	100

Table no. 7. Father's occupational status

Marital situation – marital status essentially influences the living level in the family, the family' stability and the way the domestic environment meets the children's needs. The evaluators found that most of the families are legally made (in 55% of the families the parents are married), 27.2% of the families are consensual unions and 22.4% are monoparental families (28 families in total, out of whom 3 are families only with the father).

Marital status	Frequency	Percent
Married	55	44.0
Consensual union	34	27.2
Monoparental family	28	22.4
Parents divorced	3	2.4
Non response	5	4.0
Total no of families	125	100.0

Table no. 8. Family's marital situation

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Alcohol use in the family – the evaluators see that the mothers in the target group do not use alcohol (94.3% do not drink alcohol); and ponderosity of the fathers who do not drink alcohol is also high (67% of them do not drink alcohol). In the first analysis this seemed paradoxically, because in general in the families with problems this behaviour is quite often found. After the evaluators made the focus groups and the individual interviews with the beneficiaries the evaluators saw that a great part of them belong to the Pentecostal religion, and this encouraged them to give up drinking alcohol. In turn, the evaluation team find many families amongst the organization’s cases (SOS Children’s Villages), because there are many families with several children who face social-economical troubles.

Alcohol use (mother)	Frequency	Percent	Alcohol use (father)	Frequency	Percent
Mother does not drink alcohol	115	94.3	Father does not drink alcohol	61	67.8
Mother drinks alcohol	1	0.7	Father does drink alcohol	14	15.6
Non Response	6	4.9	Non response	15	16.7
Total no of families	122	100	Missing data	35	-
			Total no of families	125	100

Table no. 9. Alcohol use in the family

Abuse on the child and neglect – the fact that in the family there is no alcohol use in general reduces the risk of abuse or neglect of the child (in 80.8% of the families such situations were not recorded); this is also due to the organization’s intervention by counselling and information oriented on preventing the abuse and neglect as well – these were topics of supervision sessions. Even though the figures indicate a low number of abuse a cases (statistics refer only to the serious cases) the social workers of SOS Children’s Villages noted situation of children’ neglect within family. In the table below the situation of the abuse cases at the moment of evaluation is presented, and this is also a situation generated by the influence of the intervention of the social workers from SOS Children’s Villages.

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Abuse, neglect of the child	Frequency	Percent
There are no cases of abuse, neglect	101	80.8
There are cases of abuse, neglect	16	12.8
Non response	8	6.4
Total no of families	125	100

Table no. 10. Abuse and neglect of the child in the family

Health condition of the parents – out of the analysis of the data included in the beneficiaries files the evaluators see that 68.9% of the mothers and 62.2% of the fathers have no major health troubles. Moreover, the evaluation team must mention that 30.3% of the mothers and 26.7% of the fathers have health troubles, some of them being retired duty to chronically diseases.

Mother's health condition	Frequency	Percent	Father's health condition	Frequency	Percent
Mother has no health troubles	84	68.9	Father has no health troubles	56	62.2
Mother has health troubles	37	30.3	Father has health troubles	24	26.7
Non response	1	0.8	Non response	10	11.1
Missing data	4	-	Missing data	35	-
Total no of families	125	100	Total no of families	125	100

Table no. 11. Parents' health condition

Support from the extended family – existence of a support from the extended family (housing, material support, children surveillance etc.) is an advantage for some of the families who go through a crisis time (Cojocaru, D., 2009). By analyzing the data in the clients' files, the evaluators see that more than half of them are in a way or another supported by the extended family (56.0%). On the other side, 40% of the cases worked with don't received support from extended family.

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Support from the extended family	Frequency	Percent
No support from the extended family	50	40.0
Parents are supported by the extended family	70	56.0
Non response	5	4.0
Total no of families	125	100

Table no. 12. Support from the extended family

Housing conditions – the house condition is an important indicator of the beneficiary families’ state of vulnerability (Cojocaru and Cojocaru, 2008). The lack of a house is a very important problem for the families, being the most serious problem that some of the beneficiaries of SOS Children’s Villages confront with. The families thus try to find different kind of solutions for ensuring minimal living conditions for them; some of them abusively constructed or live in improvised houses (9.6%) or with the extended family (31.2%). The evaluators see that a part of these families own a house (26.4%) or pay rent for a social house (16.8%) or to private owners (15.2%). Most of the families have utilities (electricity, water) in 64.0% of the cases.

To a little extent those are equipped with proper furniture and equipment (36.8%) and are clean and taken care of (35.2%). The endowments refer to the bare necessities for the whole family (blankets, closets, tables, cooking machine, refrigerator etc.), as well as for the children (a table for doing their homework). In general, the families have no debts accumulated for utilities or running costs (24.8% have debts for less than 6 months and a single case has accumulated debts for more than 6 months). This is also the result of the financial support offered by the social tickets that SOS Children’s Villages has given to the families. Due to the fact that these tickets can be used for buying food, the families succeed to pay the utilities and avoid accumulation of debts out the low income that they have.

House condition (multiple answer)	Frecvency	Percent
The house is improvised/ilegal constructed	12	9.6
The house is own property	33	26.4
The house belongs to the state and the family pays rent	21	16.8
The house is private property and the family pays rent	19	15.2

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The family lives in some relatives' house	39	31.2
The family lives a some friends' house	1	0.8
The family lives in some acquaintances' house	2	1.6
The house is euiped with utilities (electricity, water)	80	64.0
The house is equipped with proper furniture and equipment	46	36.8
The family has debts for less than 6 months	31	24.8
The family has running costs debts for more than 6 months	1	0.8
The house is clean and well taken care of	44	35.2

Table no. 13. Living condition

The number of children in the family – the average number of children in the family is 3.3 related to the beneficiaries' families. In total, starting from 2004, services have been offered to 419 children. Most of the families have two children (30.4% of the families), but there are many families with a great number of children (14.4% of the families have four children, 8.8% have five children, 3.2 % have 9 children).

No. of children in the family	Frequency	Percent
1	23	18.4
2	38	30.4
3	14	11.2
4	18	14.4
5	11	8.8
6	8	6.4
7	7	5.6
8	1	0.8
9	4	3.2
10	1	0.8
Total no of families	125	100

Table no. 14. Number of children in the family

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Children's health condition – out of the analysis of the data included in the beneficiaries' files the evaluators see that in 74.4% of the families the children have no major health troubles and 24.8% of the beneficiaries' families have children with such problems. The families who have disabled children are included (16) in the total number of families, who have children with medical problems (31), 12.8 % of the beneficiary families have disabled children.

Children's health condition	Frequency	Percent
Families where the children have no health troubles	93	74.4
Families where the children have health troubles	31	24.8
Non response	1	0.8
Total no of families	125	100

Table no. 15. The children's health condition in the family

Disabled children in the family	Frequency	Percent
Families who have no disabled children	109	87.2
Families who have disabled children	16	12.8
Total no of families	125	100

Table no. 16. Disabled children in the family

The age of the youngest child in the family – distribution of families according to the age of the youngest child can be seen in the following table. One can see that 47.2% of the families have little children (0-3 years old) and in 22.4 % of the beneficiaries families the children are of pre-school age.

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The age of the youngest child in the family	Frequency	Percent
Pregnant mother	3	2.4
0- 1 year	32	25.6
1-3 years	27	21.6
3-7 years	28	22.4
7-14 years	32	25.6
14-18 years	3	2.4
Total no of families	125	100

Table no. 17. Age of the youngest child in the family

Number of beneficiaries

No. of beneficiary children

The total number of beneficiary children is 419 because a part of the children benefited of services for longer than one year. Out of the 419 beneficiary children in the SOS Children's Villages' program, 351 are closed cases and 68 are active cases at the moment of evaluation.

Year	No. of beneficiary children
2004	111
2005	185
2006	189
2007(January- June)	158
Total 2004-2007	419

Table no. 18. Number of children beneficiaries of the program

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Budget

Project budget

Year	Euro	No of deserved children	Cost per child in euro
2004	12178.93	111	109.72 Euro
2005	31326.73	185	169.33
2006	33435.54	189	176.91
2007 (January – June)	19913.6 (for half year)	158	126.04

Table no. 19. Total budget of the project on years

Observation: the cost per child for 2007 is calculated in relation with half of the budget for 2007.

Budget structure (euro)

	2004	2005	2006	2007	Total
Current working expenses	3105.44	17218.34	18957.63	20281.66	59563.07
Personal costs	2636.92	11130.24	11522.93	16692.95	41983.05
Travel expenses (car/oil, subscriptions, tickets (subscriptions) for volunteers)	207.63	938.85	758.31	1197.64	3102.43
Medical expenses	6228.94	293.99	300.91	300.91	7124.75
Administration (phone, paper, photo, visitors and meetings, service xerox)	0	1745.31	1895.76	1354.12	4995.19

Table no. 20. Repartition of the annual budgets on expenses categories

Description of the overall objectives of the program, activities and results expected after the implementation of the program

Overall objectives of the program

The Family Strengthening Program implemented by SOS Children’s Village aims to help the children at risk of losing the care of their families to live in a caring family environment. In cooperation with the local authorities and other services providers, the organization offers direct services to the families and communities, in order to help them to efficiently protect and care for their children.

Duration of intervention

The fact that an intervention meant to prevent the child’ separation from their parents is absolutely inefficient if lasts less than 3 months is well known (Cojocaru, 2005; 2010b). Out of the analysis of the data regarding the duration of the case intervention, the evaluators find that the average of the support period for the closed cases is 10.1 months. At the same time, the evaluation team find that there are cases that benefited of intervention and support from the organization SOS Children’s Villages for longer than 12 months, respectively 35.0 % of the total of the closed cases. The table below presents the intervention duration for the families who benefited of services and at the moment of evaluation were closed cases. The average duration of intervention was thus calculated only for the closed cases.

Duration of intervention for closed cases a	Frequency	Percent
0 - 6 months	39	45.3
6 - 9 months	8	9.3
9 - 12 months	9	10.5
12 - 18 months	12	14.0
18 - 24 months	11	12.8
24 - 30 months	5	5.8
30 - 36 months	1	1.2

36 - 42 months	1	1.2
Total no of children	86	100.0

Table no. 21. Duration of intervention for the closed cases

Out of the total of closed cases (86), 19 benefited of post services, which means 22.0 % of the cases. Post services are monitoring activities of family' self-reliance after they do not benefit anymore of the organization support and are necessary for its development. In the post services time the family can appeal to the organization' support if their condition grows worse as a result of unexpected problems. The cases are monitored by the home visits, meetings in the organization's office and, when it's about critical situations, discussing the cases with the child protection department. Out of the total number of closed cases only 2 benefited of services after the post-services period. The decision to re-open a case after the post-services period was made when the respective families have gone through major changes after the case was closed (for example, a case was re-opened because the mother died and the family situation got unbalanced and the second one because the mother manifested a mental illness and required a special treatment and financial aid for this treatment).

Recruitment of the cases

Cases referral the from the GDSWCP district 1, Bucharest

The cases recruitment system can be a model for Romania, regarding the work in partnership with the local authorities. The cases are assessed and selected as a result of the proposals made by DGSWCP and the system seems to work efficiently. Any family who faces problems first of all addresses to GDSWCP that, in its turn, depending on possibilities and the identified needs, refers the cases towards different non-governmental organizations. Each of these NGO-s who made a partnership with GDSWCP mentions the characteristics of the families that they can work with and the types of services they offer. Thus, SOS Children's Villages assesses in detail the situation of each family referred by GDSWCP and, selects the cases that will benefit from services, depending on their needs and organization's possibilities.

"We work with the General Direction of Social Welfare and Child Protection of district 1. In fact, the beneficiaries are from the neighbourhood of district 1 (of Bucharest, our note). And we have clearly set criteria for the selection of the beneficiaries. They (GDSWCP, our note) know these criteria, by the convention we agreed with them and, by official letter, we ask them to present us the cases that comply with these criteria, that we have in the

program. We always ask more cases than we have available, because we go and assess them, even though they make the initial evaluation. Out of several situations they present to us, we choose the most critical situations, discuss about the cases with Adina (the leader of the prevention service in GDSWCP, our note) from the viewpoint of these criteria and we choose the proper cases that are in the most serious need.” (I2, coordinator, the Family Strengthening program, Bucharest, August).

“We did not succeed to support ourselves only with his salary and then we tried to the Child Protection. We told them about our situation and they guided us here (SOS Children’s Villages, our note). They asked us for evidence papers, we brought the papers and they sent us here... in 2004... They came at our home, saw how we used to live and helped us until July this year” (I4, beneficiary parent, Family Strengthening Program, August).

„The girls from the Child Protection (GDSWCP, district 1, our note) sent us to SOS. We needed help. The pension was about 2 million and we couldn’t make it at all. I was forced to reach the girls from the Child Protection. I submitted the file, they sent it to SOS and the problem was solved. This was two years ago. At that time we had nothing left, only the pension of two million. It is very difficult to live with so many children... (I5, beneficiary parent, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„We found out about them from the Arch of Triumph (the office of GDSWCP, district 1, Bucharest, our note). We submitted there a request for help and they sent us here. And then the ladies from here came to our home to see what the situation was and what we needed... (FG1, closed cases beneficiaries, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„We were to the Arch of Triumph (the office of GDSWCP, district 1, Bucharest, our note). They make some files and then they send them here. Those from here came at our home, made a social investigation and since April last year we entered the program” (FG2, active cases beneficiaries, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

The criteria for selecting of beneficiaries

The program' social workers select the social cases depending on the poverty of the family, number of children in the family, needs of the family and children, existence of health troubles amongst the family members and low-income. At the same time, when the number of cases referred by the GDSWCP district 1, Bucharest is higher than the organization's capacity to offer services, the social workers prioritise the cases depending on the seriousness of the problems the families are confronted with and the urgent need for intervention. It worth mentioning that within the detailed assessment of the family situation, the social workers also aim to identify the parents' willingness for change, their motivation and capacity to make efforts for improving the family situation.

„Families with several children, with financial and material difficulties, parents who have a potential for being good parents, but no necessary abilities for bringing up and caring for their children, so that they need a support for finding out how to do it; parents who are confronted with the lack of a job, marginalized, labelled; Rroma families or parents with a low education level, so it is very difficult for them to find a job; situations when health troubles occur in children, as well as in parents, and this is another great impediment in finding a job or acquire medicines. There are also children who quitted school and then we try to support them, either by preventing the school abandonment and keeping the child in school, or preventing the lack of education by encouraging the entry of the child in kindergarten and then in school. Broadly, this is the target group of beneficiaries” (11, national coordinator, the Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„We have a list of criteria that reflects this very aspect: families with several children, with health troubles, with a low level of education, poor families, families that go through a crisis, who have certain needs, so that they need support for improving their conditions, develop their abilities and bring up the children as well as possible” (12, coordinator, the Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„The colleagues from GDSWCP propose us several cases out of which we select some. The criteria are set in the partnership convention; those related to the difficult situation are important, as the urgent need for support. The parents' desire to do something in this respect adds to this; all (families, our note) are in need, all of them, but we want to see that the parents have also the desire to do

something for getting better. They are, let's say, in a more difficult situation, in a crisis, as we say..." (I3, social worker, the Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„Those from the Child Protection sent us here. The girls from here (the social workers, our note) asked us for the papers that proved the disease, asked us if the children went to school, if everything is ok in our home and guided us on the right way. I consider that here we received more as a help and a support..." (I5, beneficiary parent, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

The content analysis of the criteria presented by the employees of SOS Children's Villages shows us a common view regarding the definition of the working group, attachment to mission and vision, efficient communication between employees, work with common definitions that lead to coherent and unitary practices in the field of the interventions undertaken.

Types of services offered through the program

Different types of services are offered within the program meant to strengthen the family, prevent the separation of the children from their parents and improve the living conditions:

- Counselling: since the program has started all of the 125 beneficiary families, have benefited of counselling;
- Material support consisting of help for buying food – all the 125 families beneficiary of the program received material support from the organization;
- General family planning information and birth control education – out of the 125 families beneficiary of the program 111 got information in the family planning and birth control fields and were guided towards specialized family planning cabinets;
- Support for health – all the families received support for health, and, when necessary, benefited of support for buying the medicines that were not ensured by the state for free;
- Support for finding a job – 84 parents were guided to find a job; out of all the cases supported in this respect, 15 fathers and 7 mothers have found a job by the organization's help;
- Connection to the community resources – all the beneficiary families (125) were connected to different services offered by public and private providers in order to obtain the legal documents, support from authorities, education and health;

- Support for mediating the relationships with the extended family – out of the 125 families, SOS Children’s Villages encouraged and mediated the strengthening of the relationships with the extended family in the case of 71 families;
- Support for obtaining the legal documents (identity cards) – 22 families who had no legal identity documents of the parents or children were supported to get them;
- Support for registering the children in a form of education (kindergarten or school) -115 families received support for registering the children in kindergarten or school by guidance, advocacy and support for school materials;
- Recreational and socialization activities for children – the children from 80 families, beneficiaries of the program of SOS Children’s Villages participated in activities carried out by the organization for socialization and spending their free time.

Counselling

Counselling is an individual form of intervention by which the specialists of SOS Children’s Villages help the parents to develop their abilities and skills to take care of their children; the children are counselled for improving their relationships with the parents, encouraging the participation and attendance in school and sharing some house holding tasks. The counselling activity takes place at the organization’s office as well as at the families’ houses. The counselling activities are usually scheduled so that the beneficiaries become aware of the fact that they receive this service within the program. In the focus groups and interviews the evaluators noticed that some of the beneficiaries even used the word “counselling” for describing their meetings with the specialists who worked in the program.

The counselling is one of the main forms of interventions carried out by the organization’ staff in the work with the parents and children beneficiaries of the program and has noticeable results. Out of the statistical analysis, the evaluators see that all the cases instrumented, the closed, as well as active ones, benefited of counselling. The social workers are aware of the importance of the counselling in changing the beneficiaries’ attitudes; when changed, they result in changes of their behaviours to themselves, their partners, as well as to the children.

“Regarding the services, we want to say that first of all we offer counselling... and there are indicators that show that this kind of intervention results in changes... The most visible is the general aspect of the very parent who comes to us. In the first meetings, they come not very tidy or clean. We also counsel them regarding this aspect, we try to explain them that it would be good to take care of

their aspect and in the next meeting we could see changes... It is also visible in the houses... the house is cleaner, better taken care of, the child has his special place, regardless how small the house is.” (I3, social worker, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„First of all, the social counselling with the parents seems to me very important ... and with the children we do very little when they come here (at the office, our note). We succeed to discuss with them when we go to their houses, but is too little... we should do it more and have a special place for this” (I2, coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

The counselling is accompanied by material support and activities with the children. The counselling is oriented towards the encouragement of the attitudes and behaviours that develop their parental skills; the cases that benefit only of counselling are isolated. Out of the social work practice the evaluators have found that the parents were more receptive regarding the counselling and carrying out the activities set together with the social worker when material, economical help is added to this form of support.

„I see things like this: what we do is divided in three big areas that we cover almost entirely. First of them is what we do with the parents for developing their parental skills and everything we work with them in counselling, so that they would work properly with their children. And this is the first step in developing their abilities; then it is the material support part that, unfortunately for our families, is a very important one. And there are very few cases when we work strictly by counselling. And then it is the third part, with the activities and everything that means strict support for the children. Here we want to work and we stumble across the needs of the children and parents and we gradually try to cover them.” (I2, coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

Needs for improving the counseling activity

Special space equipped for counselling

Along the evaluation the evaluation team have found that there were not enough spaces for ensuring counselling. Even though the meetings hall and administrative office exist, they are not especially organised for counselling. Moreover, if the children accompany the parents, they have no especially arranged space to play or to spend the time while their parents take part in counselling.

„We have this room for counselling and our office that we share. Very often it happens that my colleague and me meet the families for counselling at the same time and we share the rooms. It is even more difficult when they come with their children, since they have nobody to leave them at home with and we have no special room for the children where they could stay while we carry out the counselling. It is a problem because there are women who come with small children who cry or make noise. And it is necessary to shorten very much the meeting; we overlook aspects that we could discuss with the parent, since we cannot do it because of the child. (I3, social worker, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August)

Staff training in counselling techniques

One of the training needs identified by the staff would be training in counselling technique. Beyond the fact that it is one of the main forms of intervention, in order to produce the results expected, the staff has to improve their abilities and knowledge related to counselling.

„Regarding the training needs, we could focus more on parental education and social counselling. This year we mentioned this as a training need, in order to develop ourselves on the part of social counselling and its techniques” (I3, social worker, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

Material support offered to the family

The need for material support

In the wake of the statistical analysis of the data in the documents in the beneficiaries' files the evaluators saw that absolutely all the families (the closed cases, as well as the active ones) benefited of economical help or still do. The economical support was given after the assessments carried out by the social workers in the family's house and its quantum varies depending on the number of children.

„They also have financial support needs, since most of them have serious material problems and then the social tickets are a mean to offer them this financial support.” (I1, national coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„The financial support initially consisted of food that we used to buy. It was about the basic food for families. In 2004 the support

was the same for all families. We used to allocate an amount per family, and it did not matter if the family had 2 children or 10. At the end of the year, after we have made an evaluation, we realised that it was not quite fair, since the needs were different. Then we made a project budget per child, so that the food packages were qualitatively differentiated, depending on the number of children in the respective family” (I1, national coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„Everything we received was extremely helpful. I had no money for medicines, because all I had must be divided between bread, rent and medicines and I was always giving up medicines. Calcium, E vitamin, magnesium that I must never lack, the head pills and liver pills helped me very much. The money for food, detergent, the sugar, the oil, all these helped me, were very good for me” (I2, beneficiary parent, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„They gave us food valuing 35 lei for each child per month. We have nine children” (I12, beneficiary parent, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„The material support was the most important for us. This helped us to get to the surface. At that time it was very difficult for us. We were borrowing money, and when we took the salary we had to return them and again we had no money. We did not know what to do and we had no food anymore. We were helped and we were very happy” (I4, beneficiary parent, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„The foods tickets value 280 lei. They matter a lot to us. I buy food for the children and everything I need. They have food in school and this helps us. I could not afford it, because I had to pay the garbage service and other things from my income...” (I5, beneficiary parent, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„I give at least half of them (social tickets, our note) on pampers...” (FG2, active cases beneficiaries, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August)

Social tickets – support for developing the family budget management abilities

The social tickets are tickets with value that the family can buy food with. The use of these tickets is a form of support with impact not only on the administrative efficiency, but also on the beneficiaries (Cojocaru, 2009a), with a few significant advantages:

- The time for acquiring products necessary to the family is transferred to the family. Thus the social workers save time and resources for transportation that they can use for professional interventions (counselling, home visits, mediation of the relation with the school, contact with the authorities, obtaining the identity documents, support for finding a job, identification of potential sponsors etc.)
- By using the tickets the family can buy what they really need and when they really need;
- The tickets are an exercise for the family to manage a small budget for buying food and are a step towards self-reliance;
- For some of the families providing this support in tickets is, at the same time, a form to save money, which determines some of the parents to invest in their house, children's education or health.
- The tickets contribute at increasing self-esteem and maintaining the dignity of the clients, developing the decision-making capacity, regarding the identification of needs and meeting them.

The differentiated distribution of the tickets depending on the number of children is a decision meant to ensure an even distribution of the organization's resources for the economical support.

„I realised that, unfortunately, we were allocating a lot of time for these administrative activities: buying and making packages. There have always been problems with the storage of food. We have found a program with special tickets. (II, national coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„These tickets have different values. We continue to offer 35 Lei per child/month. The tickets have values of 5, 10, 15 Lei and we give them different tickets, so that we ensure the respective amount of 350 per child. We saw here a great advantage: the social workers did not lose so much time with packages and we were able to spend more time with the families and there was an opportunity to develop abilities of family budget management. Either we, SOS, support them financially, or not, they still have an income, regardless it's minimum wage or allowances, and it's important how they use it.

And we emphasized on achieving and developing these budget management abilities with a list of food, with what they needed. Practically we made a procedure how to give these tickets. And you could see in the files a food list, with what they save or not for paying the utilities costs, what food do they need and what do they buy for children and, naturally, checking them clearly and strictly.” (I1, national coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„Ms. M. [the social worker, our note] came at our home and made a social investigation. Then she told me they would help us with some food. At the beginning I used to come and take them. Then there were food tickets valuing 70 lei, for two children. And it’s good, it matters a lot, because we buy what we lack. And is better with food tickets (social tickets, our note), because we buy what we need and when we need... we don’t spend all of them at once. The children were glad. Even last evening they came with me and we spent a ticket valuing 15 lei, because we don’t use all of them at once, and they bought what they wanted at that moment”. (I8 beneficiary parent, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„I think it’s a great idea, because one can go and buy what they need. We could buy food, but also hygiene products, detergents. It is very important that they used to check our tickets so that we couldn’t buy alcohol...” (FG 1, closed cases beneficiaries, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„At first, they used to give us food. I think it’s better now, with the food tickets. You cannot spend all of them. And this is an advantage, we buy exactly what we need right then and then we discount them... Of course, you can go and buy meat, toothpaste, pampers, water, because the water is a problem. The children got diarrhoea because of the water. We have no conditions; the water has to be boiled... (FG2, active cases beneficiaries, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

On the other side, the use of the tickets is also a form of conditioning and motivating the beneficiaries to follow the decisions they made within the counselling process. The need for economical support and the motivation to get this support from the organization determines them to act for changing their situation. The education is even stronger because of the fact that by being included in SOS Children’s Villages program they cannot benefit of economical support from other organizations at the same time.

The material support and beneficiaries' dependency

Beyond these advantages of the economical support, when ensured for a long time (and, let's not forget, some families benefit of support for more than two years), providing them with this support for a longer time can result in dependency. Sometimes the beneficiaries consider that it is easier to get this support (especially if they have several children and the value of support is higher) than to find a job).

„At the beginning the financial support is very good. In my opinion, it should not be given for a longer period because it creates dependency. I think it is important to offer a financial support to the family at the beginning because, for sure, there is pyramid of needs and then, gradually, we should withdraw the financial support, continue to work, and replace it with another kind of services, more centred on children, on the parents' needs. (II, national coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

“Maybe that's why it would be useful if the value of this support gradually decreases in time, so that the families are motivated and put in motion to find long-term solutions, in order to increase their income by finding a job. On the other side, for gradually reducing this hunger for support it is necessary to develop new services (parents' education, making support groups for parents, children, organising special spaces for help with the homework, spending leisure and recreational and socialization activities for children etc.).

“In most of the cases the families benefit of material support from the moment we open the case until we close it. Unfortunately, the other kinds of services are not enough developed... In order to be able not to give tickets anymore and offer the other kinds of services you must have these services. Or, so far we had no place where to carry out these kind of activities...” (II, national coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

“With these tickets that I get since two years ago, the children had food permanently. But I don't know what I shall do when they will finish. It will be more difficult with the electricity. The child's allowance ends in December since he is two years old. But what to do, everything has a limit, this is it...” (I5, beneficiary parent, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

Some of the cases maintained the dependency on the organization's material help. They did not succeed to become self-reliant. This is especially the situation of the mono-parental families who have no support from the extended family.

„As long as we had help from here, we could do some things. But since we had no more, we could do nothing. Especially now, when I'm thinking that I have five children in school and I do not know anymore how to distribute the allowances...” (FG 1, closed cases beneficiaries, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

Beneficiaries' perception regarding the help received

All beneficiaries appreciated the economical support, which meant an important support for the children and parents. It is also invoked as a cause of the good school results, of the fact that they could attend the kindergarten and school and of the prizes the children got in school:

“I am proud of my children's achievements. The girl graduated the eight-grade exam and the boy took the first prize. He was good at school from the first grade and, since the fifth grade when the prizes are given, he took the first prize and the second prize in the sixth grade. He also attends the gymnastics contest and is one of the first ten in our district. And these successes are due to several factors. It is a complex of factors. First of all, as a mother, I watch them; I set them a schedule to comply with. Secondly, the help that we got in food, because I cannot send them to school starving and they could have not learnt in this way. And third, it is their state of comfort because they know they have a help.” (I10, beneficiary parent, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„I have the youngest child 7 months old, another one 1 year and six month old and one of 2 years and 7 months. I gave them birth, I was afraid of God, I gave them life and I want them to live. The oldest is here, to the people who helped me so much, with meal tickets, clothes, shoes, as it was. The children were able to go to school, I gave them shoes and I dressed them. I could not take all these from the pension because we could not afford them... (15, beneficiary parent, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

At the same time, some of the beneficiaries put the quality of their relationships with the staff on the first plan as importance and the economical support on the second:

„If I should say what matters to me the most of what I received from the organization this is closeness and on the second place, the material support”. (I 10, beneficiary parent, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„For six months they have helped us with different kinds of food: oil, sugar, biscuits, what was necessary in a household. They were very good for me, since my parents were retired and they could not help me... This was in 2004... (I 11, beneficiary parent, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

On the other side, by the economical support received for food, medicines, school materials, clothes, a part of the families saved some money with which they improved their house and acquired different necessary equipments and furniture:

„We got help from here, and from our salaries we renovated a room, we built, we could something more. We had no stove in both rooms, so we could not live there. With the help from here, we succeeded to save some money and we made a new stove...” (I4, beneficiary parent, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

“We consider that they helped us, we made the house, we bought school materials, they did something good...” (FG 1, closed cases beneficiaries, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„I built my house, I put the roof on it, but I did not completed it. These help supported me a lot. Even though I was buying the food...” (FG 1, closed cases beneficiaries, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„Where I cook I have no kitchen. I have two rooms where I cannot live and other two liveable rooms with a corridor, but no kitchen. And I was in great need to do something, we had the cement and I never succeeded to collect grit stone to put it there. It gets dirty and it has to be washed. I bought a metallic door, I put it, and of course it costs me. I bought another wood door that I needed in a room, cardboard on the house - and I needed a lot of it, because my house is longer - as well as a cooking machine. I also made a small

wardrobe and a small table...” (FG 1, closed cases beneficiaries, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

“My greatest achievement in the last 6 months is that I bought a new wardrobe and some things in the house... The tickets helped me a lot to save money...” (FG 1, closed cases beneficiaries, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„As long as it helped me, I realised. Ms. A knows. I had no gas, neither cement in the yard, I had no floor. And we made the floor in one room, we put (...) because it was windy and the mould was gathering there and the children used to get cold, to get ill. And this was all. We put cement into our yard, we made the fence, I was content...” (FG1, closed cases beneficiaries, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„And we made the fence, we put a door and some gritsone...” (FG 1, closed cases beneficiaries, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

Support for health

Support for acquiring the medicines

In order to ensure the family’s health, the organization supports financially the families for acquiring the medicines, especially in the cases when they are not paid by the state, watch if the medicines are administered and guide the parents and children towards the usual medical check-ups.

„We offer them support for medicines, in case the glasses or a certain type of medicine that is not paid by the state are needed. We offer this support for the children, as well as for the parents. (I1, national coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„We ask them (the parents, our note) if they gave the medicines that the doctor recommended to the children. They go to the doctor, they make the usual check-up and if they have health problems we ask them to bring a medical certificate or a recipe, because many times they do not even know what diagnosis they got. Then we explain them that we want to see the papers in order to be sure. And the support for medicines is additional to the social interventions.

Initially it was provisioned only for the children's health problems. They have many compensated medicines and they did not need this so much, so we started to extend this help to the adults, because it is important for them to be healthy, in order to ensure favourable conditions for bringing up the children in their families... And the help depends from case to case. We have a budget, not a very big one, but we try to balance it..." (I3, social worker, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

"The children are healthy. I have some health troubles, my husband has sight troubles, but the children are healthy... And when we needed medicines and they were not for free, those from here (SOS Children's Villages, our note) helped us to buy them." (I4, beneficiary parent, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„Two months ago Ms. M. [social worker, our note] gave me the medicines. Then she bought them, because I bought the recipes at that time and she bought the rest. Not all of them were for free, I had no money ... and the girls recovered." (I8, beneficiary parent, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

At that time I needed the medicines the most. I had a recipe that costs more than two million. I used to take 28 – 30 pills every day. I was retired, so my income was quite low. I had to pay the rent and the Town Hall was very close to kicking me out, because we were not ok with the house. At that time we came here and the girls who were in charge took us over (I was taken over by Ms. A (SOS social worker, our note)). Then we went together, I don't know what she did, but she bought me the whole recipe. And we started our way together with them. Afterwards, it was very well, we were coming here, I was taking my medicines, discussing, they were coming to our home, and they were very nice. When I consider we rehabilitated on that period - we had a six months contract and indeed I felt quite well. I followed a psychical and psychological treatment and everything was necessary. With their help who have always supported me, I succeeded to solve my problems. (I12, beneficiary parent, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

Accompaniment for increasing the access to the medical services and health condition monitoring

The support for health consists not only of helping the families to buy medicines, but also of helping them to access the medical services, register to a family doctor, go to the doctors in the family planning and birth control education cabinets etc.). The social workers do not directly accompany the family to the doctor, but get them in touch with the doctors, contact them and discuss with them about the children's problems, watch the way the parents follow the doctors' recommendations in the children's treatments, as well as their treatments.

„We ensure that they have a family doctor and go to a family planning cabinet. If they do not go to the cabinet we recommend to be sent to a family planning cabinet... and for the small children we watch if the mother vaccinates them.” (I1, national coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

“We try to mediate or to create a relationship with the family doctor, as a first step. Many of them now have a family doctor or we have lists with the doctors and we guide them to register there. We monitor this thing by the certificate they bring from the doctor, we support them in taking the treatment especially for the children and especially if the income does not allow them to buy medicines. As support services, we try to guide them to go to make medical check-ups, both adults and children. We did not use to do this, but we started to put in the services plan from the very beginning that they need to make the usual medical check-up. Even the parents, if they have no health problems, we try to make them understand that it is necessary to do it, at least once a year.” (I2, coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„We guide them towards family planning cabinets or professional consults for the mothers and we have a partnership with a cabinet where we guide the mothers to go and monitor this, support them with money for medicines, when necessary”.” (I3, social worker, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

One of the objectives of the house visits and counselling sessions is related to the health condition of the children and parents.

„The girls [social workers, our note] use to come to our home. They always ask about the children, health, school...”(I10, beneficiary parent, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

Results of the support for improving the health condition

Both the staff involved in the project, and the beneficiaries, are aware of the results of the support received for improving the health condition and accessing the family planning and birth control education services. Of the total of mothers who accessed the family planning and birth control services (111), around 60% used birth control methods, even though in certain situation their religion forbade this (especially for the Pentecostal parents). At the moment of evaluation, 15 children had health problems, but not serious ones (no chronically diseases).

„As a result of these interventions [counselling, support, accompaniment, our note] the family’s health condition improved and there were great progresses especially with respect to the family planning. There were some situations with families of Pentecostal Religion and they refused from the very beginning to use a birth control method and then I told them: OK, it’s important for you, as a woman, at least to go at a medical consult. Just a consult.” And they accepted. This was a first step. When they went to the consult they were informed what could they do, what methods, what alternatives they have - at least they had the information. It was the same with those who had an education level and were able to read, we used to print them documents and this meant: “Take and read!” This is because they use to say: “No, no, no, I do not want, I won’t have other children” until a new pregnancy occurs. At least now they know where to go...” (I1, national coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„The fact is that every time when we needed something, they have never closed the door to us. For me SOS was that support I relied upon. It was that “something” that I had at my back, as a support. Last year when I had to go to hospital to recover and I had some very expensive medicines to take. I do not know what Miss from here did, they entered, discussed with the leadership, I took these very expensive medicines and she said we would talk again. So, they always opened the door to me. They were the pillow that I could put my head on. They were extraordinarily nice and now I am ok, I solved my problems and I can take care of my children.” (I12, beneficiary parent, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

Support for education

Forms of support provided by the organization

The support for the continuation of studies or registering the children in kindergarten or schools is one of the main intervention directions of the employees of the Family Strengthening Program run by SOS Children’s Villages. The support consists of directly supporting, counselling, encouraging and guiding the parents to register the children in a form of education and also school materials, clothes and indirectly of economical support offered as the social tickets. The costs for education are quite high and it is almost impossible for the families with several children to ensure them what they need. The social workers thus aim at supporting the family in registering the children in schools, since due to their lacks they tend to postpone registering the children and, in time, even give up registering the children in school. The evaluators consider that this initiative meets the needs of the children and families and is offered in a critical moment, especially when it’s about the beginning of the children’s education.

	Frequency	Percent
Families who did not get support	2	1.6
Families who did get support	115	92.0
No response	8	6.4
Total	125	100

Table no. 22. Support given for registering the children in kindergarten or school and for continuing the studies

The evaluators see that out of the total of the families supported by the organization between 2003-2007, 92.0% received support for registering the children in kindergarten and for continuing the studies. This is one of the activities that meet the needs of the children who benefit of the program. These families received not only guidance for registering the children in a form of education, but also the necessary material support for the children to be able to attend the school or kindergarten.

“The school costs quite much, around 3 – 4 million per child. It is much for a family who has just 2 children, not to speak about 11.

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And the tendency is to procrastinate “for the next year”. And the next year is the same, so the risk for the child remains without education is very high.” (11, national coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August,)

Beyond this support, the social workers monitor the child's school situation, keep in touch with the kindergartens and schools and teach the parents how to put their children in value, appreciate their successes and find modalities to do this visible for children as possible. The social workers visits into the families promote this appreciative attitude, by advising the parents to give a special space for highlighting the child's successes.

„In school, as well as in kindergarten, we start by finding out how much do they (the parents, o.n.) know about the school or kindergarten addresses, and we provided them with this information. We help them to make a file for registering in kindergarten or school, we guide them and also monitor their steps by the contacts we have with the Child Protection Direction. We call at kindergarten and check, we ask the parents for the children's notebooks and discuss with the children about what do they do in school. They bring me notebooks and diplomas. I work with the parents advising them to put their children in value on this side related to school. When we go to visit we discuss with the parents to provide the children with a space for the children's diplomas, regardless as small the house is and they are very fond of this.” (12, coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August,)

„I went to visit a family with seven children who live in one single room. I told them that it was important for each child have own space. And when I visited them again they have showed me that they put in one corner of the house the diplomas and next to it a toy that they got from us. And the children were very delighted that they decorated that small and poor room.” (12, coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August,)

The employees of the SOS Children's Villages, together with their partners, initiate different actions for finding sponsors who will directly support especially the children who get into the first grade, by providing them with the whole necessary support for their debut into school life (school materials, school bags, uniforms, sport equipment etc.). We all know that the school is the second factor in socialization and very important for the future adult development; the support for school does not aim only to register the children in school, but also to support them, so that they would not feel

disfavoured compared to the other children, benefiting of all the necessary things for attending the classes.

„Speaking of school, every year we organise celebrations for the new pupils. Last year we did this for the first grade pupils from the disfavoured families, in order to help them, to support them. Many times they postpone school, the children grow up and then in fact they do not register the children in school anymore. We also help them with school materials for all the children who go into the first grade. We provide them with school materials, uniforms, school bags and sport equipment - a minimum of the necessary things for school. With the other sponsorships received or the resources from support families, we organise a special event together with the Child Protection Direction.”(12, coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

The material support for registering the children in kindergarten and school is accompanied by counselling and guidance for parents, so that they come to redefine this important event in their children’s lives; they succeed to go from a definition of the situation as difficulty or burden, since they have no resources, to valuing the education and to the fact that is necessary for their children to attend the school or kindergarten.

„Beside counselling, we also provided some families with material help, school materials and what the children need in kindergarten or school. In general, is better, because the parents believe in the idea that they must register in kindergarten or school, as the case may be.” (13, social worker, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„We have also got clothes and school materials for the children. They have also guided us, advised us how to do house holding, how to behave with the children” (15, beneficiary parent, active case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August)

As the evaluators have mentioned above, GDSWCP Bucharest, district 1, mainly refers the cases instrumented by SOS Children’s Villages. When the case is registered and the family situation is evaluated in details, SOS Children’s Villages ensures a quantum of services amongst which the support for education.

„We appealed the Child Protection Direction for solving the problem with our girls' kindergarten attendance and they sent us to SOS. SOS helped me to register them in kindergarten. Now the girls are in school.” (I8, beneficiary parent, closed case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

Lack of places in kindergarten and crèches

A problem identified in the discussions with the staff, as well as with the partners and beneficiaries, is the lack of the places in kindergarten and crèches. In fact, this is a problem at the national level. That's why, beyond the fact that the organization' staff advocates for the children registered, they promote a strategy for making the parents responsible, guide and support them, so that they take steps in this respect.

“Unfortunately, the need is greater than the offer. Either in crèche, or in kindergarten there are not enough places. From the first months of the year we try to guide them because the places there are a big problem. And we want the mothers, the parents understand that it's their responsibility to search and register their children. They have much time at disposal and still they say: “I would like you to find a place”. We explain that this is not possible: “You are the parent, we just support you financially”; they just have to find where to register the child. We ensure that they brought all the papers, and then we ask them for a certificate that proves the registration in kindergarten ...” (I3, social worker, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„It is very important also for registering in kindergarten, although, unfortunately, the places are limited and is really an effort to succeed to register their children in kindergarten, since there are no places. Moreover, they had to face the rejection from the kindergartens' managers who did not want to register their children.” (I1, national coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

Need for support with the homework

Another problem identified by the staff, as well as the parents, is the need of additional preparation of the children for doing homework. The parents' low level of education, the mothers' overload with house holding activities, the occasional works of the father that takes a lot of time, result in the fact that the children are confronted with difficulties in doing their homework, in school adaptation and in complying with the teachers' requirements.

„All the children attend school. I strive to keep them there. I get tickets and I got school materials; these helped me very much. One of the boys is registered in a school in order to complete the eighth grade because he didn't get his remove and from there he would go to the vocational school... I do not know how to help them with the homework. The girl also had problems, she did pass the eighth grade exam at Geography and Romanian. Now I registered her in the vocational school and we shall see next year what will she do...she would need a few hours of school support.” (15, beneficiary parent, active case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

“I do not do homework with them. They help each other. I also told to the teacher that what I learned was different, so if they understand from he classroom, ok, if not, I do not know. They learn from the classroom, especially the middle one, and she does the homework alone, at home...” (18, beneficiary parent, case closed, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„The boy went to kindergarten for two years and this autumn he would go to school. I have one problem with my nine years old boy. In fact, he is in the first year of school; he was not very good in school... I thought he was lazy and he did not want to learn, but he was not lazy (...) he was a little ill, he had rachitis, and I pity him. I want to find someone to help me with him, because I have five children in school and I would like somebody to take care of him. I cannot take care of this child with the school. He is a clever boy, I think he could do more, but he needs somebody to support him with the school. (FG1, beneficiaries closed cases, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„We identified the need of the children of being supported with the homework. Many of the parents, even those of the children from the small classes, having no education, cannot help them even with very simple things. We identified this need, the need for school support. We even found persons who can do this, with the help of the volunteers, but the problem was the lack of space in here.” (13, social worker, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„Being able to develop the direct work with the children. We wok with the parents and this has good results, but at a moment we get blocked, because we ask the parents for things like “Your child must

go to school. "Ok, they say, but I can not help him with the homework". And this is an obstacle for us." (I2, coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

"When I come here, I learn some computer skills. I stay here together with the lady around one hour and she helps me... I like to work on the computer and I come once a week..." (I13, beneficiary child, active case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

Support for the connection with the community resources

As any non-governmental organization, SOS Children's Villages has limited resources for the activities of abandonment prevention and family strengthening and has as objective connecting the beneficiary families to the educational, medical and social resources of the community. Maybe that's why, regardless the support provided to the families, SOS Children's Villages succeeded to connect all the beneficiary families to the resources in community (100%). The evaluators thus see that GDSWCP district 1 of Bucharest covers different costs (payment of crèche, kindergarten and day care services, parental education courses, support with special equipment necessary to the disabled children etc.). The relationships with the kindergarten and schools, family doctors, with the family planning and birth control cabinets, with different potential employers and other nongovernmental organizations, offer the possibility to SOS Children's Villages Romania to connect the beneficiaries to these resources. The employees use the existent services network for guiding and referring the beneficiaries towards these providers according to the beneficiaries' particular situations. The community is an important resource that can support the families in overcoming the crisis, as well as for socialization and social integration of the beneficiaries).

„The Child Protection Direction. They pay the crèche, kindergarten and day care centre services. Most of these services are subordinated to them, so we guide them to the Direction, to our colleague and he tells them what to do." (I3, social worker, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„There is a parental education course at the Direction and a part of them go there. We had no resources..." (I3, social worker, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

"I talk to Ms. M. I also did those courses "How to become a better parent" and another course in the Child Protection Direction. Ms. M. used to call me and tell me about those courses. They used to

announce me when the courses were starting and I went to all of them. I did not miss anything when she summoned me.” (I8, beneficiary parent, closed case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„The cases are referred to us from the Direction; we make the evaluation based on our criteria and, depending on this evaluation, the cases are taken over or opened or, if they do not correspond to the criteria and we can not meet one of the needs of the respective family, we make a recommendation. We send them to another NGO that we know or to the Direction for another kind of service. We refer the case to other organizations. For example, we had a case of a physically disabled mother and she needed an invalid chair. Otherwise they (the family members, o.n.) were coping with their situation. The children had no problems in school, everything was ok, but the need of an invalid chair was their problem. And the people were very honest and told us that this was what they wanted when they applied the request at the Direction. It would have been aberrant to include them in the project. Obviously, some food packages would have been good, as for anyone, but this was not their need... So we contacted those from “Motivation”, an organization from Bucharest, we put them in touch and the family got what they needed. We make these recommendations... We justify why they do not correspond to our criteria and what we recommend in the respective situation...” (II, national coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

Support for finding a job

The support provided to the parents for finding a job is another crucial activity that contributes to the family’ self-reliance and decrease the dependency on the services received. The evaluators noticed that, out of the 21 fathers who work permanently, 15 have found a job with the organization’ support and out of 16 mothers who have a permanent job, 7 have found a job with the organization’ support. The employees of SOS Children’s Villages identify the employment opportunities, take the initiative to discuss with the potential employers, counsel the parents for encouraging them to find a job, mediate the relationships with the potential employers, prepare the parents for the employment interviews and encourage them to keep their jobs.

„To quite a great extent, those that we helped have found a job lately, because we have identified a partner, a cleaning company,

who hires persons with no studies. We have a partnership with them, so we send them there, but this was just in the last few months. So far we used to put newspapers at their disposal, help them to write their CV-s, according to the requirements and they succeeded to find a job. Many of them prefer to work without documents. We try to explain them that this is not good, since they have neither medical insurance, nor rights. But this is what they are offered on the construction sites, occasional work.” (I2, coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

“Here we worked very much on the idea that nobody helps you endlessly, if you do not want to be independent, to take care of yourself and your children and to handle the situation by yourself. This was important for finding a job, even though it’s maybe not the most wonderful or the best-paid place to work, but they still earn an income. And then we helped them with the documents, we showed them how to make a CV, how to introduce themselves at an interview, they made phone calls or announcement from our office.” (II, national coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„Lately I found a cleaning company who was employing people. We contacted them and (...) directly the families that we (...) in the program. I do not know how many were sent, I think around 10 and about 3 of them were employed. This is the rate. They cannot become self-reliant if they do not start to earn money. Moreover, the parents are models for children and if the children see you staying like this and getting money from the state, why would they go to work? Why would they do something in their lives if somebody comes and brings the food to your door? (II, national coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

Support for mediating the relationships with the extended family

Out of the analysis of the data in the beneficiaries’ files the evaluators saw that 56,0% of them do not benefit of support from the extended family (see Table 12), for different reasons: the extended family needs help too, the family members live in other localities, they are not interested in providing support etc. The support from the organization consists of counselling the beneficiaries to re-establish and encourage a good relationship with the extended family, encouraging them to visit the extended

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family members and to ask for help from the extended family when necessary. On the other side, in the difficult, critical situations of the beneficiaries, the staff meets the members of the extended family for motivating them to help the beneficiaries. At the same time, the evaluation team must notice the fact that the organization' staff can focus more on this direction, by organizing family councils in which several members of the extended family can participate. It would be an additional effort, but the mediation would have visible results. Mediating the relationships with the extended family can be a constant practice in intervention and the evaluators recommend training the staff in this respect.

	Frequency	Percent
Families who did not get support	6	4.8
Families who did get support	71	56.8
No response	48	38.4
Total no of families	125	100

Table no. 23. Support for mediating the relationships with the extended family

“We did not get help from the relatives when we needed it. On the contrary, we helped them as we could, working. We have no one to rely upon. They also have no possibilities to help us with money or something else. If we remained without money or food for children, I used to go to the private food stores, buy detergent and food and paid when I had money. But with the relatives I could not do this. And the relatives from my side are far away, in the countryside. I haven't seen them for one year. (14, beneficiary parent, closed case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

“The children are brought up by the grandparents, I work very much and they are quite attached to the grandparents and quite away from me. I have the house in the same yard with my parents and they helped me very much to bring them up.” (111, beneficiary parent, closed case Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

Home visits

Home visits are a form of support for the family (acknowledged as such by the participants in the focus groups) and a way to keep in touch with the family. On the other side, the families are motivated to produce changes in the living environment because they know they would be visited (they clean the house, become more attentive with keeping the cleanness, praise themselves with their achievements and feel good when appreciated for their successes in this respect).

Frequency of visits	Frequency	Percent
Weekly	9	7.2
Twice a month	3	2.4
Monthly	19	15.2
Once in two months	94	75.2
Total no of families	125	100.0

Table no. 24. Frequency of visits to the beneficiaries' homes

The evaluators notice that the frequency of the family visits varies very much, the emphasis being on the visits once in two months (75.2% of the beneficiary families). At the same time, the evaluators noticed that out of the total of the active families (39 families were benefiting of services at the moment of evaluation) 92,3% of them receive services once in two months.

The frequency of visits depends on the particular situation of the family, on the crisis the family goes through and the duration of the case. The evaluators recommend an intensification of the home visits, so that there would be at least one monthly visit to the house of every family. The intensification of the visits may have a beneficial influence upon the family, which the beneficiaries who participated in the individual interviews and focus group emphasized.

Frequency of the visits	Frequency	Percent
Monthly	3	7.7
Once in two months	36	92.3
Total	39	100.0

Table no. 25. Frequency of the visits to the homes of the active cases beneficiaries

This strategy of diminishing the frequency of the visits and involving the family in activities outside the home environment (coming to the office for meals tickets, counselling, participation in recreational and socialization activities) is a vision adjusted to the need of family' self-reliance and its conditioning for being active and interested in solving the problems they are confronted with.

„When we go to visit, we do not just go there for an inspection or to criticize. And if, for example, they buy things that seemingly they do not need, we discuss about this...” (I2, coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

Recreational and socialization activities for children and parents

The statistical analysis of the data shows us that out of all the beneficiary families of the program, 64.0% participated in recreational and socialization activities.

Participation of family members	Frequency	Percent
Family members did not participate	27	21.6
Family members did participate	80	64.0
No response	18	14.4
Total no of families	125	100

Table no. 26. Participation in recreational and socialization activities for children and parents

Play Bus

The most appreciated activity is “Play Bus”, since it offers the possibility of interactions between children and between children and adults.

„[SOS Children’s Villages, o.n.] carried out different activities in kindergarten. “Play Bus” took our children to Sibiu for one week. We could not do so, since we had no possibilities. The children were very glad. They were very nice and good to us.” (I4, beneficiary parent, closed case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„All my three girls took part every month in the “Play Bus” activities, which were very educational; they learned about hygiene and enjoyed it very much. I used to bring them there...” (I8,

beneficiary parent, closed case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„We have been many times to “Play Bus” and is very nice, we play, colour, paint our faces...” (I18, beneficiary child, active case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„The Play Bus was once a month and I went there with my boy. The girl could not come, since she was in the eighth grade and she had to learn more. There are very beautiful educational games. Usually it takes more than one hour. After that he got a bag with sweets, toothpaste and toothbrush. And wafers, chocolate, juices... he was really happy.” (I10, beneficiary parent, active case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„We went to the Play Bus on Christmas Celebration, to some contests organized for the children, here, in the yard. It’s nice, because we have fun and meet other children.” (I14, beneficiary child, active case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

For the SOS Children’s Villages staff, the “Play Bus” was also an opportunity to know the parents, the children and the interactions between them even better” (I2, coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„For me the activities with the «Play Bus», where the parents were also invited were a good opportunity to observe the relationship between the parent and child. When I saw that the mother just watches the child, I knew that I should work on this in the counselling hours or I asked the child: “Why do you not play?” (I2, coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„One of my best collaborations was the project “Play Bus” which offers monthly activities with the children and parents and we carried it out in the village or in community in parks.” (I1, national coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

The summer camp

Another activity very much appreciated by the beneficiaries was the camp in Sibiu County, important event for the families that brought not only a great joy but also special life experiences for participants.

The SOS camp is a summer camp for 10-14 years old children coming from families with low material condition. A camp series means 7 days for a group of 30 children and 2 adult accompaniments. In the camp the accommodation and meals are for free for the children and their accompaniments. Trips and travels are organized, offering the children the opportunity of knowing and admire the beauty of the landscapes in that area, socializing and enjoying their holiday

„...there was also a camp in Sibiu. I stayed there for one week together with my brother. I would like to go there again, if it is possible...” (I16, beneficiary child, closed case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

“They need children, friends, colleagues. Now they want very much and eagerly expect this camp that would be again in Sibiu with the same children as last year. They have been there last year for one week and they came back very much changed. I did not recognize them anymore: happy, glad, they could not even speak to me...” (I6, beneficiary parent, closed case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

The activities in the village were very much appreciated, especially the one in which the children and parents participated in sowing the trees (I2, coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

“We took part in sowing trees. I was there with my youngest son. The media was there too. They sow trees and got back very delighted. I am sorry that we could not go to the skating rink when invited. At that time we were painting the house and they could not leave me alone. We have been here at the “Play Bus” and it was very nice.” (I12, beneficiary parent, closed case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

Support from the local authorities and other organizations

The beneficiaries appreciated the support provided by the GDSWCP district 1 of Bucharest, especially regarding the bigger investments (money for rent, connection to electricity, water etc.)

„Every time I went there, every time I asked for their help it was extraordinary. I have no words to say how much they did help me. I asked for the money to pay the rent, they made a social investigation and I got the money I needed. Then I had debts at the electricity, then I needed to pay my house. We got psychological assistance from Mrs. C. [from GDSWCP district 1, o.n.]. Personally, everywhere I went I got help, from SOS, from Town Hall, from the Child Protection Direction” (I12, beneficiary parent, closed case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

“I bought parquet, because we had cement on the floor and there was a lot of dust under the carpet. I put cardboard on the floor so that I was able to put a carpet. Now we need to find someone. We painted the house... those from the Town Hall helped us with the house water supply plant, because we wanted to buy it, so that we could mount the washing machine that we bought in leasing. We have sewerage; there is no water in the neighbourhood. He helped us, made us some papers and we got 10 million from the Town Hall for the house water supply plant.” (I4, beneficiary parent, closed case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

Encouraging the child’s participation and free expression of opinion

The free expression of opinion is one of the child’s rights that must be also practiced by the parents. Even though the social workers from SOS Children’s Village promote the compliance with this right, the evaluators consider the things are just at the beginning. It is necessary that the organization to continue the educational activities, by informing the children with respect to their rights and offering the parents education for respecting these rights. Out of the parents’ discourses we could see that they tend to watch and control the child. For example, the evaluators noticed the effect of “Play Bus” on the parents, going from the role of watcher and observer to the role of participant; the fact that the parent gets involved in the games, participates and interacts with the child is an indicator of the attitude change towards the child.

“I encourage them [the children, o.n.] to express their opinions. If they come with their mother, I ask the child something and the

mother responds instead, I say: "No, let's talk to him/her" and I encourage the children to freely express their opinion and I tell them what responsibilities do they have, but also what rights and how the relationship should be. Sometimes the parents are more too authoritarian." (I2, coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„What rights do I have? I do not know... I can stay home until the age of 18, if she wants, she supports me, if not, she does not... this is how it happens everywhere. At the age of 18 you must leave... ” (I16, beneficiary child, closed case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„I don't know what are my rights... To be free. To do what I want...” (I14, beneficiary child, active case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„I have the right to study, to play, to eat, to be a good child, to have clothes, a house and a family, to express my opinion...” (I17, beneficiary child, active case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

That is why, in order to organise different recreational and socialization activities, the evaluators recommend meetings with the children for planning what they propose for further activities. The children's participation implies, from the evaluators' viewpoint, placing the child in the middle and organising the activities according to what they define. The central, but at the same time marginal position of the child - namely the activities that the adults planned for the children - could be thus avoided.

Making the child more responsible is a result of some initiatives of the SOS Children's Villages staff, by which they aimed to help the family members in the distribution of the house holding tasks. Thus, together with the parents and children, they set a schedule with the responsibilities that all the family members assumed; it was posted in the house and everybody complied with it. This was a fun, but at the same time very efficient, way to organize the house holding activities.

„Together with my mother and the ladies from here we made a weekly schedule in which we wrote what responsibilities each of us has, we posted it and each of us was doing something... this was useful because we did not argue anymore and we helped our mother with the tasks...” (I16, beneficiary child, closed case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„The lady made a schedule for us. I clean the yard.” (I17, beneficiary child, active case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„We have a schedule, one of us cleans the kitchen, the other one the rooms, one stays with the youngest children... we are eight brothers and each of us does something” (I15, beneficiary child, active case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„Usually I clean our parents bedroom, the living room and our bedroom.” (I17, beneficiary child, active case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„(...) the girl and the boy help me. The boy helps his father with all the tasks, the girl helps me with cleaning and washing. This is good. I liked very much how the schedule looks like, everyone has his task marked with a little star” (FG1, closed cases beneficiaries, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

Self-reliance and participation of the family

The final aim of the program is the family' self-reliance, so that they would be able to offer optimal conditions for living, development, education and care for their children within the family. We noticed that 94 % of the closed cases succeeded to improve their living conditions, arrange the house, build another room, repair the roof and equip the house with the necessary things. The economical support was extremely helpful, not only for ensuring the basic needs, but also for the opportunity offered to the family to build hopes, future plans, which are the same important for the family' self-reliance. Part of them succeeded to acquire the apartments property of the State at moderated prices and thus solved one of the most critical problems the beneficiary families are subjected to.

„The material support helped them very much to make future plans, become self-reliant and plan their lives. They had the trust to invest in some things that they did not even dreamed about until they joined the program. A mother with nine children, who washed by hand all her life, bought a washing machine and, receiving help, she planned her expenses very well. We counsel them, so that they would manage their budget very well. And we do so every month. They bought a washing machine knowing: “I get this material support at every six months and I can guarantee I can pay for it. It is about domestic use things that are very helpful for a mother with nine

children. They painted the house or that they built another room for children, made a stove that would warm them in winter time. In some situations, this material support helped them at least to have food.” (I2, coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

In order to measure the family’ self-reliance the evaluators took into accounts a few indicators that the employees checked when they proposed closing the case:

- Existence of family’s own budget that is administered in the benefit of its members. A job – it is the main source of income. Out of the total of 125 families, 27 have at least one parent employed and 5 have both parents employed.
- The family’s capacity to manage the family budget – capacity experimented and developed throughout the project, amplified by the social tickets use; offering this economical support was a good intervention for developing managing own resources skills.
- Savings management – the fact that the families invested their savings in consolidating their houses, enlarging them and endowing them with the bare necessities is an indicator of the interest for self-reliance; without the SOS Children’s Villages support they would have remained in the same situation, in poor houses that did not offer conditions for living, education and care for the children.
- The parents’ availability and capacity to access community services without being anymore accompanied by the SOS Children’s Villages employees; from the discussions with the program’s beneficiaries who are now closed cases, the evaluators have found that they access educational, social and medical services for parents and children without appealing anymore to the services of SOS Children’s Villages;
- Registering the children in kindergarten or school and their attendance to these forms of education; the school attendance and the parents’ involvement are other indicators for the increase of the family’ self-reliance; all the parents interviewed use to participate in the parents sessions organised by the schools or kindergartens and at the celebrations organised by the children.
- Accessing the medical services when medical problems occur and giving the treatments prescribed by the doctors; all the beneficiaries who are currently closed cases and took part in the data collection for evaluation are registered to the family doctor, benefit of medical services for free, take their children to the doctor when medical problems occur without needing the help of SOS Children’s Villages anymore.

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- The management of family resources and mobilizing the resources of the extended family; more than a half of the cases instrumented by SOS Children's Villages (56.6% of the families) have strengthened their relationships with the extended families. 38.4% of the families have no relatives or their relatives are in a different area of the country and they did not kept in touch.

„First of all a family is self-reliant when has own budget, namely at least one of the parents has a stable job with work record. The children go to school and are well taken care of. For example, they should know how to manage their budget. We want to be sure that the children are safe, and not to hear tomorrow or the day after tomorrow that the children are maltreated or something else. So we want to know that they have attended parental education courses, so that we are sure that we have checked the respective family. Maybe there are some other necessary skills too - knowing to cook. I met a woman who only knew to cook potatoes soup...” (FG 3, partners, representative of GDSWCP district 1, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

“I gave up asking for help. I have just their (children's) allowances and what my husband and me earn. Sometimes my husband feels he cannot do it anymore, for example a few weeks ago he did physiotherapy ... (I8, beneficiary parent, closed case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

“I think the counselling of the families, as well as the financial support, are very useful. And I think our intervention is based on a partnership with the family. They are treated with respect and trust. The message is very clearly transmitted: they are responsible for their children. We are beside them, so that they would bring up their children.” (I1, national coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„I have no job, my husband is a guardian in a kindergarten, close to our home, and the two eldest boys work now - car washing. They give us money when they have, but they need a food package every day, shoes, tea shirts, pants. Everything is expensive, we bought what was cheaper, but they were not resistant. But now we live much better.” (I4, beneficiary parent, closed case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„We succeeded to buy the apartment from the state and now we are very content.” (I11, beneficiary parent, closed case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

“He was looking for a job and he could not find it. Eventually he found, but a low paid one. There he learned, he was employed with little money, but he liked it and learned. He used to work until late hours, until 23.00, but he was quiet and learned. Then he had this idea to open a furniture workshop. It took very long, because he made two courses in design and carpentry. Now he opened a small workshop with what Ms. A (from SOS Children’s Village) helped us... I knew that, having the tickets, our food was ensured and I could use this for this and that for that. And then I bought tools, materials and I what I needed in the workshop. (I9, beneficiary parent, active case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

The participation of the beneficiaries in program development was mainly focused on finding a name for the program. The evaluators consider that besides signing a contract as a beneficiary of the services, the parents can be also involved in elaborating a vision regarding the program and also in some activities that regard them.

“We have been to a meeting when the SOS name had to be changed. We were 6-7 parents and we were asked our opinions. I came every time I was invited...” (I12, beneficiary parent, closed case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„We had a group meeting, in which initially we were looking for a name of the project. Then we thought to invite a few parents from our beneficiary families and ask for their opinions. There were the parents who knew us and knew what our project was all about and were able to give us a few suggestions. And this was the first part of the group... (I3, social worker, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

Community involvement in the prevention activities

The more an intervention involves the community in running the program for solving a problem, the more efficient it is. A social problem exists when the community become aware of its existence. SOS Children’s Villages has organised different public events for increasing the community’s awareness with respect to the difficult situations of the beneficiary families and asked for community’s help. Unfortunately, the community is

less sensitive to these problems compared to some others that it considers as more urgent (the case of the children remained alone after their parents left to work abroad, the disabled children, children from the child protection system). That's why the evaluators consider that the initiatives of SOS Children's Villages to organize information campaigns, raising community awareness are important steps in attracting new resources at the local level.

„We succeeded to identify a few support families. Everything occurred last year, when there was an article in a magazine about a few cases in the project. A few persons were touched by their story. They contacted us and helped us in our work with them. They come to give either money, or products. It is important for us to make them aware of the fact that these people should not be marginalized, that they live close to us and need our help. We can help the people who are in difficulty, at whom we look not so nicely on the street, because they smell bad. And we do help them. We have also worked with the kindergartens in the community, on the activity on the June 1. We went in every kindergarten, told them what we did, how we helped these children, their colleagues possibly, and they were involved in a campaign of collecting clothes, toys, books that they gave us. We gave them to the children on the June 1, and told them that some children, who collected all these willing to help them, gave us all these. In the end, the children in the project made some (...) that we gave in kindergarten and everything worked very well. The educator told us that this was an exercise for everybody. Also for them as specialists, to see that something is done for these children. We do not help these children with anything if we discriminate them. For the parents and children was also an exercise, because they made the packages together and this was a very good opportunity to discuss with the children about the poor children. “If they were your colleagues, how would you react, how can we help them? And so we tried to involve them.” (I2, coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August)

„Last year there have been four partner organizations who sustained the idea of offering the children school material when the school starts. It was about us, those from “World Vision”, the Direction [GDSWCP District 1, Bucharest, o.n.], “Princess Margaret” and that was all. In general, we contact all those interested and use this space that is good for such occasions. In kindergartens we call our the children. Last year was very good.” (I2, coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August)

“Finding sponsors is a problem, involving sponsors is a problem. Although the richest private institutions reside in district 1 (of Bucharest, o.n.), we do not succeed to attract them enough.” (FG3, partners, representative of GDSWCP, district 1, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August)

“I believed in those from SOS. I think in February is one year since those from SOS have invited me to an interview for “Tango” Magazine. I gave an interview, the article appeared and Ms. A from here, from SOS, immediately contacted me and said that a lady wants to know and help me. Even today I am still in contact with that lady. Every month I get three million in my bank account. The lady came to us on Easter, on Christmas with gifts... a good-hearted lady. The lady works in constructions and her husband is commercial manager at... On Easter this year another lady wanted to dress the little one, but she wanted to remain anonymous. She wanted to dress a child who is no older than the age of seven. Georgian was not yet 7 years old, his birthday was in May and she offered to the elder children a computer...” (I6, beneficiary parent, active case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August)

The involvement of the volunteers in the socialization activities with the children is a resource that the organization experienced and still wants to develop. Here there is again the problem of the necessary space for organizing permanent activities in which to involve the volunteers.

„We have made a network of volunteers; we have 5 volunteers students in Arts, Social Work, architecture; there are also artists amongst them who want to do activities with the children, but, again, we have no space for this. Here is another story, we tried a partnership with a school who offered us a space, but the respective school did not want to admit children from outside, so the beneficiaries could have only been the children in school who were not exactly our target group. So, we gave up the collaboration.” (I1, national coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August)

„“At a given moment we succeeded, also with volunteers’ help, to take the children from one-two families and send them into park and the mother could have a little time for her. And only then she understood that it was ok to do house holding, stay all the time with the children, but she had to understand that also needed time for

herself; it would be healthy for her and her children to do so.” (I1, national coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August)

Partnership with the General Direction of Social Welfare and Child Protection and NGO-s

The partnership with the GDSWCP can be considered a model. We must notice the common methodology and the maturity of collaboration between SOS and GDSWCP. From the evaluators' viewpoint, the working model that SOS Children's Villages and the child protection department use is a very efficient one. The mutual referrals of cases are a way to manage the resources of the two organizations, so that they adapt to the families' needs and the characteristics of the different types of services offered. For the partnership relationship to be efficient, the GDSWCP district 1 of Bucharest entitled an employee who works closely to SOS, and when the social workers have difficulties and obstacles in their activities, they discuss all these with the representatives of the GDSWCP. The selection of cases, the interventions proposed, as well as the expected results, is elements of the common planning of the partners regarding the support of each case in part.

„We work very well with the Direction. I work all the time at the collaboration with this partner... there are many specialists there, I think about 10, 15 social workers and many cases. I am glad that a person from there is responsible with the relation with SOS Children's Villages. It's ok. We make efforts to keep the relation with them. We try very much to bring them here. We have not so many cases and we are more organized and have more space for discussions. They also have not enough time, but concretely it' is very good. When we needed something we persisted and discussed: “Look, here, how do we intervene?” And they took time for us, so it was ok, we had no difficulties.” (I2, coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August)

For planning and monitoring the cases, SOS and GDSWCP have weekly meetings where they discuss and analyze especially the most difficult cases, in order to decide together what the next steps of the intervention are, how everyone of them can intervene in solving the problems of the respective cases.

„Monitoring of the cases is done by weekly meetings at the level of the Direction. I was going together with A., we had appointments with those from the Direction. We want to carry out real case

meetings, we gather all of them, but unfortunately there have been more serious, difficult and urgent situations with families and then we met with all the case representatives from there and discussed about each family. We let them know what we have discussed, we gave them copies of our instruments...” (I2, coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August)

This working modality based on a permanent communication was an opportunity for the partners to learn from each other, a possibility to share their experience and mutually knowing the services they offer and the possibilities to intervene. The common work is considered as the main condition for developing and keeping the partnership.

„We learned from each other. We tested each other and learned to anticipate each other’s desires and strive for doing something together. We have permanently believed in what we have to do together. I think this consciousness united us very much. We put there an important thing for the children, for their socialization, in order to see that all the institutions, the local authority is together with the non-governmental organizations who have an essential role in society.” (FG3, partners, GDSWCP representative, district 1, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„As far as I know, a collaboration convention, a partnership, should be continuous, it is important to go through some steps. So we, the technicians, meet and discuss the criteria and we think how to do it, how to we adjust the methodology, what the attributions are, what should we do, adjust, change etc. (...) then those from the strategies, programs check it. I know about that strategy. And then we go to the juridical department and the general manager for signatures. If we go through all these stages in row, then we know very well what everyone has to do. And we also know everybody’ specific work. What does each partner do? This and that. What does SOS do? This, that... and the other non-governmental organizations who are together with us; in total we have 14 partner NGO-s. ” (FG3, partners, GDSWCP representative district 1, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August)

Diversification of services and flexibility of intervention, as well as adjusting the services to the beneficiaries’ needs are the program’s characteristics appreciated by GDSWCP. The evaluators noticed the GDSWCP employees’ appreciation for the working standards developed by SOS.

„The beneficiaries’ needs are many. And the resources of the public administration are very little. Any resources that come from the public segment of community are welcome. By the fact that SOS have diversified their services and are more flexible they meet more segments of our common beneficiaries’ needs. Their involvement is very opportune, as well as the fact that they, as an organization who complies with those standards and rules, also helps us and common beneficiaries.” (FG3, partners, GDSWCP representative district 1, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August)

The partnership implies the work on cases according to the services plan, elaborated at the level of the local authorities and integration of specific intervention plans (made by SOS) within the services plans. This is a form of enforcing the standards in the field of the child protection that ensures savings in the management of the human and financial resources, unitary modality of working, common monitoring of the cases who benefit of certain services. The evaluators have also found the work in partnership in the analysis of the cases’ files. All the activities, interventions and services provided by SOS Children’s Villages can be found in these services plans elaborated in the Town Hall. The local authority thus recognizes the involvement and quality of the services offered by SOS Children’s Villages.

„By this Specific Intervention Plan we [SOS Children’s Villages] are a part of the multidisciplinary team that offers services and is a part of the Services Plan. The family doctors, family planning cabinets, schools, priests and the Child Protection Direction with the Prevention Direction are together with us, with all the services that they offer to the family. We send the SIP and, based on them, they make the services plan, cumulated – this is the job of the case manager, the case responsible from the Prevention Direction. We [SOS Children’s Villages, o.n.], with our interventions, appear in the Services Plan as specialist partners of the team.” (II, national coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August)

How do the partners and beneficiaries characterize the prevention program of SOS Children’s Villages

The Family Strengthening Program of SOS Children’s Villages is appreciated by the partners, because of the special qualities of the staff, their way of relating to the beneficiaries and respect for them, the attachment of the team members to the program’s mission and values, their beneficial involvement in the families’ lives and

orientation towards the families' self-reliance, the manifest interest for the results evaluation etc.

“When I am talking about SOS, about their program, the first thought that I have is the respect. Respect for the beneficiaries, as well as for the specialists in the field. The respect for the beneficiaries is shown in the way they speak and participate in ensuring their welfare and the way they aim to fulfil this. When we talk about the respect for specialists, we talk about their professionalism, dedication to the clients and quality of services.” (FG3, partners, representative of GDSWCP district 1, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„The collaboration with L. [SOS Children's Villages, prevention program, o.n.], both of us being from the public segment, was very good, but, implicitly, we have also collaborated with the public sector, with Mrs. C. from abandonment prevention. When we had meetings regarding the services plan we thought how it would be good for the others and us as well.” (FG3, partners, NGO representative, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

“She, L. [SOS Children's Villages, prevention program, o.n.], is the soul of SOS in here. We met her when she came to our kindergarten. Some of my colleagues, because of these small salaries and so many extra-curricular activities, refused to participate. But after we met her, I started to explain them what is the advantage, what we do, what beautiful things we can do and what help we can provide the children with. Then they were touched and they participated. The love for people matters a lot, I said.” (FG3, partners, kindergarten leader, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„The social worker has an extraordinary assignment. To teach the people [who required help, o.n.] to clean, to warn them that it is not good to let the children outside bare foot or undressed. There are many things, but these are delicate things if you want, important things that we do not have time to do anymore. Because of this we send most of the desperate cases to SOS. They [the employees of SOS Children's Villages, o.n.] can ensure such a quality of intervention and what we do is a plus...” (FG3, partners, representative of GDSWCP, district 1, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

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„It is extraordinary that SOS asked for this evaluation, because at least a piece of the project is evaluated. The Direction did not ask for this so far. We would really need an evaluation... and I think the evaluation of the prevention program from SOS would be useful for us, too. ” (FG3, partners, representative of GDSWCP district 1, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August)

The beneficiaries also appreciate the willingness to respond of the specialists who offer services when they need them, openness and calmness they manifest in the relation with the beneficiaries, economical support, the skills of the staff in appreciating the beneficiaries' successes etc.

„I liked very much those from here [the employees of SOS Children's Villages, Family Strengthening Program, o.n.]. They are persons you can speak openly to. There are very nice people here. They also came and visited us. I liked them very much. I have no reproach for them. I have even told them that when I come to them it is like I go to a psychologist. They are very understanding people and helped us very much with what we needed.” (I4, beneficiary parent, closed case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„They helped me very much. When I was desperate I used to appeal to them. I had some difficult times and then I requested different kind of help and they helped me with food, clothes and different things for the children.” (I11, beneficiary parent, closed case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

“Ms. M. is really very close to us. It is great to come and see her so close to you, see that she is glad with you. It matters a lot. She congratulated the children when found out about the prizes, kissed them and was really happy for them... (I10, beneficiary parent, active case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„She speaks to us kindly, she explains to us how to live with your family, children, how to be respectful people, not to beat our children, not to maltreat them, God forbid! We did not do it, only sometimes with a little stick, but we did not beat them...” (FG1, closed cases beneficiaries, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

What does a successful intervention imply?

We consider interesting to emphasize what ingredients are necessary for a successful intervention from the staff perspective: respect for the beneficiaries, working tools, the partnership with the GDSWCP, communication with the partners, planning and flexibility, partnership with the family members, confidence in what you do that you also transmit to the others, perseverance and tolerance.

„It means that I treat the beneficiaries with respect, (...) the working tools that we have help me very much and I am very glad that we developed them from our experience. The partnership with the Child Protection helps me very much because they have other specialists that we need, as the psychologist and complete me. This is all...” (I2, coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„Planning and flexibility, the good communication with the partners, with the adult in the family, with the whole family.” (I3, social worker, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„First of all the respect for the beneficiaries, confidence in what you do and that what you do is good. If you have this confidence in yourself and in your work you can transmit it to your beneficiaries. Also the perseverance in work, because many times you feel that is no bottom to it, and you give, and give and you see nothing, so you need flexibility and tolerance.” (I1, national coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

Results

We identified the following results out of the individual discussion with the staff: (1) Change in the adults' attitude towards children; (2) The adults understood the children's needs; (3) The relationships inside the family are more relaxed; (4) The children continued school; (5) Improvement in the living conditions; (6) Improvement of the health conditions; (7) Development of the parents' skills in appreciating the children's successes; (8) Increase of the family's self-reliance; (9) Preserving the beneficiaries' childhood; (10) Savings for consistent investments; (11) Beneficiaries' hopes and future plans; (12) Parents gave up abandoning their children; (13) Improvement of food; (14) Beneficiaries' satisfaction.

“When it's about the relationships in the family, the most easy thing to notice was the fact that the parents have a different attitude to their children, namely they understand their needs. And I think (...) the greatest progress in the relationship with the children and between spouses was that, when the financial situation improved, when one of the spouses found a job, the atmosphere became more relaxed and the relationship between husband and wife was more OK”. (II, national coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August)

„The children that we took in the project continued their school to a great extent, since we offered them school materials; for those who start the school we offer every year a whole package of school materials, school bag, uniform, shoes, sport equipment – not only us, but together with the other NGO partners and Child Protection – so that the child is able to go to school.” (II, national coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August)

“There were some families who had no progresses, because they did not want to do anything. But there were also families whose conditions improved very much, by the simple fact that they cleaned their rooms, made them more hygienic, painted the walls, washed their things, put them in order, in a corner. Moreover... in general they have little living space, but we insisted to find a corner, a small space where the children feel that is their place and have a diploma, because many of them have good results, very good children, so they should have a diploma, a picture, something in his place and do homework at their table. And they understood this need and arranged all these in the respective space.” (II, national coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August)

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“These were visible and also food and what they bought to eat, what they cook, what they do, but we insisted very much with cleaning. We have also insisted for the mothers to take care of and arrange themselves. How do you look is very important, because this is the way the others perceive you. As much as possible.” (11, national coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August)

“Because those from SOS helped me, I succeeded to make a small room for me. I had borrowed money and I was able to return them. The food was coming monthly, so we did not have to buy food anymore. We succeeded to return the money for the loan, for the girls. We paid 50 euro for the children treatment, a treatment with Aloe Vera and the sprays, which now are discounted and the rest you pay from own pocket. We said that it was necessary for the children, for their health and this was it. I recovered financially. I made my house, Ms. M. [social worker SOS Children’s Villages, o.n]. saw it. Now with the money from this work [he is a wall painter, o.n.] I want to make a bathroom and kitchen. The school will start and we have three children, not just one. I also told to Ms. M. in December, I recovered a little and I can handle it much better.” (18, beneficiary parent, closed case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August)

“The children are on the first plan, we want them to have what we had not at our parents. You know how the times were before at the countryside: difficult, a lot of work. At the age of 10 I already had enough with work. They only know about playing, so we said if we were like this, at least for them it could be different, they should be happy and have everything they want.” (18, beneficiary parent, closed case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August)

“There were difficult, even desperate moments, and I did not know what to do. I was divorced, I had four children, it was very difficult. I heard some rumours about this possibility of being helped from the Child Care Centre „Maresal Averescu”. So I appealed them first. It was during school time, I had no job, so I appealed them for help. Those from the Direction sent me here in SOS and they helped me. The older girls work both of them and they are also students. One of them is in the II year, the other one in the III. The other one went to Italy and we wait for her to come. The boy is in the eighth grade. (11, beneficiary parent, closed case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August)

„My mother, out of the money she had, did not pay her medicines and we were able to buy clothes or something else necessary in the house. Before this we could not do it...” (I16, beneficiary child, closed case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August)

„We reached an ex-dormitory and we bought the house. So now I do have a house. I still work on it. I want to transform it in one-room apartment with a bathroom and kitchen. In the future I hope I will offer my children a house as civilized as possible...” (I12, beneficiary parent, closed case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August)

„At the difficult moments I thought that maybe it would be a solution to give my children to an institution. But now I do not think that somebody could separate me from them. The solutions came from other places, so we did not do this and we shall not. Not because I have no trust in them, but because I trust myself that I can bring them up alone. I prefer to wait for the money for medicines or for a food package, but to have them beside me, than to give them there...” (I12, beneficiary parent, closed case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August)

„An important achievement is the fact that we saved some money and I can put parquet. We bought the parquet, the cement, because this also matters, we got a washing machine from someone and we were super ok all winter. Regarding SOS, I intend to come once to those who helped me, and invite them to our home and show them what we did achieve in the last years” (I12, beneficiary parent, closed case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„We made a kitchen with their help, because we had no kitchen. They helped us with food, with everything they could, so we could save money. I bought materials and we made the kitchen. We only had a small kitchen and so many children. So, we saved money and bought materials and we built the kitchen together with the children. A larger kitchen, so that we can have space” (I7, beneficiary parent, closed case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

“At least now, when we recovered a little, even though we have no home, every Saturday and Sunday I take some time and go with the children in the park, with all the three of them, when the elder ones want to play soccer. Before, I had no time and I could not think

about it... I could only see the problems of our house..." (I6, beneficiary parent, closed case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„It is much better for us compared to what was before. We can buy food" (I15, beneficiary child, active case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„For example, my father had no buy food anymore, because we got tickets from here. Anyway, we had no money to buy food; we got some things and now with these tickets is better. For example, we could not afford to buy meat, because it is expensive and now, with the tickets, they told us we could also buy meat. It is very good so, we are very content" (I17, beneficiary child, active case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„(...) we play with them. They teach them how to play in Play Bus, so we do not have to say all the time: «Stay like this, be good...»" (FG1, beneficiaries, closed cases, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

Relevance of the program

The program of SOS Children's Villages is focused on the target group set for the program's objectives. In fact the services are provided to the children at risk of being separated from their parents (low condition of the families, poverty, families with numerous members, mono-parental families), risk of abuse and neglect, risk of not having the conditions for healthy development. The analysis of the beneficiaries group offers data regarding the confirmation of those criteria within the group of program's beneficiaries. The evaluators observed that the parents' level of education is generally very low, which gives few chances to the parents for finding a job; the families' economical situation is poor, 91,2 % of the families being under the poverty threshold; most of the parents had no job at the moment when accessed the organization's services; the families' living conditions at the moment when entered the program were poor: many of them improved these conditions.

The program offered by SOS responds to the needs of the children and families by offering services for different needs:

1. In order to improve the nutrition it offers material support. From the view point of the amount offered for each child as financial support, the evaluators

consider that this measure of providing the differentiated support according to the number of children is adequate for the families' needs. The evaluators' recommendation is that, after 9 months since the case was opened, the value of the economical support could be gradually decreased, until the case would be closed, so that the family would go through a transition period in managing own budget. The parents and children who participated in the interviews and focus groups mentioned that their food considerably improved after receiving the social tickets and they could afford to buy products that they did not use to eat previously.

2. In order to ensure the health condition, the organization offers support for accessing the medical services, registering to the family doctor, watching the treatments, financial support for acquiring the medicines that are not for free. The social workers encourage the parents and children to make periodical check ups for monitoring their health condition. Not all the cases that urgently needed support for medicines benefited of support from the organization. That is why it is strongly recommended to supplement the budget for this expenses category. Out of the statements of the parents and staff, the evaluators found out that they consider that the beneficiaries' health condition improved (both children and parents)
3. In order to ensure the education needs, the organization offers support for registering the children in kindergarten and school, school materials, support and counselling for parents in order to support and motivate the children for education. Most of the parents who participated in interviews and focus groups mentioned the special school results, also confirmed by the SOS staff. The social workers monitor the children' school situation and intervene when the children have troubles. From the evaluators' viewpoint, SOS could organize a centre for helping the children with learning difficulties and for supporting them with the homework, since at home the parents cannot help them, especially because of their low level of education.
4. The psychosocial support mainly consists of the counselling for parents and children. The parents and children comply with the appointments set for counselling. The evaluators' recommendation is to intensify the home visits; each case in part could benefit of at least one visit per month. In order to ensure these services additional costs for transportation are necessary. The families' living conditions, especially of the closed cases, have obviously improved and the beneficiaries have admitted that they were the result of the support received from the organization.

Program's Efficacy

The program's efficacy refers to the results obtained in improving the living conditions of the children, as well as their parents, in accessing the educational, social and medical services. All the cases that benefited or still benefit of SOS services were supported for getting access to these services. Moreover, the decision to close the cases is made depending on the level of self-reliance that the family achieved as a result of the services received from the organization. The self-reliance is considered a key result of SOS intervention and can also be considered a filter concept for the evaluation of the whole services system offered by the organization. The main idea that also appears from the files analysis, but also in the discussions with the beneficiaries and staff is to achieve improved living conditions in the family, accessing the social, educational and medical services in the community, as well as developing the abilities and capacities to access these services without any help when the case would be closed. The management of own budget, accompaniment from the organization, counselling and support for obtaining the legal rights are forms of support designed to increase the degree of family's self-reliance.

Program's Efficiency

From the viewpoint of the services' costs per child, the evaluators consider that they are low compared to the services offered, so the resources are used with maximum of economy. From the evaluator's point of view, the costs per beneficiary cannot be reduced without affecting the quality of services. It may be necessary to raise the budget for ensuring a higher frequency of the home visits and ensuring proper spaces for counselling.

Sustainability

The fact that the SOS organization works in partnership with the public institutions and other NGO-s is a prerequisite for continuing the activities after the SOS involvement ends. At the same time, the evaluators find that the emphasis on the prevention services started to develop, but an institutional and inter-institutional practice efficient enough is not yet consolidated. Thus, currently it is not possible to cease the SOS involvement in the prevention services. But, on the contrary, some resources should be directed for continuing and developing such services. The public institutions have not yet incorporated the SOS activity, standards and working methodology, and ceasing the SOS involvement would be a loss for the category of beneficiaries that the program addresses to. From the evaluators' viewpoint, at the moment of the evaluation, there were not enough progresses regarding handing over the responsibility to run the prevention activities to another partner. The new law of the children has started to produce effects since 2005, but there have been not enough communitarian networks that could take over the services at the moment when SOS would withdraw. The

participation of the main partner, respectively GDSWCP, developed in the wake of the common work with SOS, but has not yet the capacity to absorb this practice.

Beneficiaries' Participation

The beneficiaries were involved in giving a name to the program and setting the conditions for the services contract. The evaluators consider that the organization could involve more the beneficiaries (parents and children) in designing, planning and implementing the project. Such kind of an activity was initiated by the organization and resulted in recommendations made by the parents to organise some support activities for doing homework and make a children club for spending the leisure time.

Lessons Learned

An efficient intervention is generated by several factors: the staff's level of education, partnership with other services providers and combination of all kinds of services diversified and adapted to the beneficiaries' needs. SOS has developed an efficient intervention model, based on the partnership with the local authorities and other services providers, cultivating a respectful and trustful relationship with the beneficiaries.

In order to be efficient and sustainable for developing the family' self-reliance an intervention should last at least 9 months. The families who benefited of support, including material support, for a period between 10-16 months, obtained the higher self-reliance. A longer timeframe results in increasing the families' dependency on the support offered and diminishing the chances of the families to become independent.

The change in the adults' attitude to their children is also a result of the counselling sessions and is accelerated by the social worker's attitude in the relationship with the adult. Understanding the child's needs implies encouraging their participation to all the actions that regard them and the possibility to develop services for and together with the children.

In order to increase the family' self-reliance the activities by which the parents were encouraged and supported to find a job were very important. The involvement of the organization in this process was strength in building and consolidating the families' self-reliance.

Learning and experiencing the management of own budget encouraged the families' self-reliance (giving the social tickets was a decision that encouraged this); the parents' savings led to the improvement of the children's living conditions.

Supporting the parents for registering their children in kindergarten or school is an opportunity for an intervention with beneficial long-term effects on children. After the cases were closed, all the children continued to go to school. The children learned this behaviour and their parents assumed it.

Accessing the medical services, registering on the lists of the family doctors were other forms of support from the organization. These things increased the degree of access to this kind of services. The parents had the possibility to take the children to medical check-ups, appeal to these services without being guided anymore by SOS, and learn to comply with the medical prescriptions in case some treatments were necessary.

The appreciation of the children by the SOS employees for their school results made the parents to become also aware of the importance of these attitudes. They accepted to

organise their children's personal, intimate spaces and posted any mark of the children's successes. All these are forms to motivate not only the children, but also the adults.

The improvement of the children's food was another result of the economical support provided to the families, and all the interviewed beneficiaries recognised this.

Recommendations for the program's further development

In the wake of the data analysis we see a few opportunities for developing the abandonment prevention and family-strengthening program.

1. Child centered activities: During the discussions within the focus groups the need for organizing child centred activities was emphasized: school support, socialization activities, leisure activities and group activities and the involvement of the child in planning such kinds of activities.

„First of all we would like to develop the child centred activities much more. We want to do this, from school support to socialization activities, including group activities with the children, setting the educational side on different topics. And we would like to do more parental education and support groups with the parents (I3, social worker, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

2. Even the GDSWCP has identified this need for counselling and support centres for parents and children and would like to develop such programs in cooperation with SOS Children's Villages.

„We want to make counselling and support centres for parents, because in Bucharest we have no such counselling centres. For me it is a utopia, but I can not find the way to found such a counselling centre...” (FG3, GDSWCP representative, district 1, Bucharest, kindergarten leader, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

These kinds of resource centres for parents and children could be organized within the Village. For example, out of our observations, we can say that generally 60-65% of the village's capacity is occupied and the reality of protection changed in the last three years (decrease of the number of children in institutions, increase of the number of the children in foster care, emphasis on the new legislation changes regarding the abandonment prevention and institutionalisation etc.). That's why, a development opportunity would be that one of the houses in the village (especially the first one, at the village entrance) would be transformed in resource centre for parents and children that can function as a club for children and an education centre for the parents. Moreover, the spaces can be distributed so that group support for the parents can be organized.

3. Continuation of the activities for increasing the community awareness and involvement in the abandonment prevention and family-strengthening program.

„As a vision, I see the program much more active in the community, more present. The people should know about prevention. Now, there is SOS, Play Bus, the village, but the prevention must be known. We even have a logo, a girl with a picture. And seeing these things, the people should know that it's about prevention and what happens there and how can we help them. At the present time this does not happen in the community. I want it present in kindergarten and schools, with much more solid partnerships in which we should work together with the kindergartens an schools and family doctors. This is my vision.” (I1, national coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

The peer support groups and parental education were identified as other opportunities and forms of interventions that could result in an increased efficiency: the values and norms promoted by the peer groups members and more easily shared and followed by the parents; the group intervention is more efficient and less costly; it succeeds to build interactions between members (who otherwise are socially isolated) and change the ways of thinking and acting of the parents by the others' influence, centred on appreciation of success and not on punishing the lacks or deficiencies.

“In the future? More many activities with the children and parents. Much more. With the parents - let's call them support groups on different topics. I would start with this one.” (I1, national coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„We think very much about working groups with the parents, on a certain topic that they may find interesting and that we tried for years to transmit it to the parents. I imagine, and for sure it happens this way, that they discuss very relaxed between them and we just moderate the same message. And the children need some space to stay, because this is also a problem. The parent do not come at many activities that we organize because have no place to let the children. And there should be a room somewhere close, where the children are involved in activities with volunteers or provided with school support, since they have great troubles with school. The parents are sometimes illiterate or semi-illiterate and can not help their children in school, so we need this...” (I2, coordinator, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

„We identified this need for a space for diversifying the services. A group intervention means different results and maybe an increased efficiency. The problem that I identified I also consider as an opportunity for developing the program, for example, the lack of a space. If I organize group activities, let's say with the parents, I should also have a special space for the children. Many of them (the parents) come with the children. So, a space for play or for spending the time while their parents are involved in these activities would be really useful...” (I19, social worker in the village, SOS Children's Village, Bucharest, August).

4. Development of a support network: support families. The existence of a resource centre for parents can contribute to the organization of a support network by the involvement and preparation of some support families. SOS has already experienced this, especially with the ex-beneficiaries of the program.

„I do believe in this kind of support family, I believe in this concept and I have heard from our colleagues, but no one has a clear strategy on the respective concept.” (FG3, representative of GDSWCP, district 1 of Bucharest, kindergarten leader, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

5. Development of day care centres meant for the prevention of the separation of the children from their families. In Bucharest there are not enough day care centres for children.

“I thought that if there is a centre closer to the area where we live, they could have a better education – a more organized one. But there is not, and there are no places in kindergarten, we searched. I would have sent the children to a kindergarten with a prolonged schedule, for making friends.” (I5, beneficiary parent, active case, Family Strengthening Program, Bucharest, August).

Organizing day care centres/community centres within the SOS Villages would have certain advantages:

- The necessary resources for running such a program would be much more reduced than the permanent residence of the children,
- The contact of the children in the Village with those who attend the day care centre would be a form of socialization beneficial for both categories.
- Organizing such day care centres in the Village would be a model for Romania and not only;

- The activities organized in these day care centres would contribute to mobilizing the activities for the children resident in the village;
- The use of the spaces available in the villages and their efficient management would provide considerable savings for the SOS Children's Villages budget.
- Development on long term of some priority programs for the disfavoured children oriented towards keeping the children in the families and improving the family life environment, according to the national child protection strategy.
- Diminishing the risk of abandonment and permanent residence in family-type centres or institutions.
- Increase of the beneficiaries' number.
- High impact of the programs and strengthening the image of the organization SOS Children's Villages.
- Re-analysis of the human resources in the village and directing them towards other kinds of services.
- Diminishing the risk of school abandonment, improving the health condition etc.

6. Analysis and directing some material resources – spaces and financial resources – from the Village towards the Family Strengthening Program. The evaluators' indirect observations on the activities in the village, that were not actually watched explicitly, support the idea of an analysis and evaluation of the villages and the analysis of the possibilities to re-direct some resources of space, material and financial resources from their budgets towards the family strengthening program. Under the conditions of decreasing the children's number in the village, also generated by the development of the maternal assistance system, implies a detailed analysis of the villages' program and re-considering them from the perspective of the situation in Romania and priorities from the child protection field, with a special emphasis on the prevention of the separation of the children from their families, abuse, neglect and exploitation of the child by labour.

7. In order to reduce the families' dependency on the services offered, the evaluators recommend the gradual decrease of the material support offered to the families, starting from the ninth month since they have become the beneficiaries of the program.

8. The ongoing training of the staff involved in the project in the fields: parenting education, peer support groups, counselling and child's participation.

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