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PRESS RELEASE

NATIONAL CONFERENCE

CHILDREN ROUGH SLEEPERS – RUNAWAYS & HOMELESS: SHARING EXPERIENCES OF BEST PRACTICES & WHAT WORKS IN REDUCING ROUGH SLEEPING

Congress Centre Brdo pri Kranju

Friday, 14. 3. 2014, 9.00 – 16.00

National conference Nacionalna konferenca Children Rough Sleepers - sharing experiences of best practices & what works in reducing rough sleeping has provided **an interesting cross-section of the existing situation in the field of homeless children in Slovenia and highlighted key issues within the research area.** The national conference takes place under the **framework of a European project on homeless children (Runaway and Homeless Children Sleep Rough WHO), with the support of the Daphne program.** The project involves nine countries: **Slovenia, Great Britain, Hungary, Czech Republic, Spain, Portugal, Romania, Italy and The Netherlands.** **Six key speakers** talked about the **rights of young people in regard to treatment at the Social Care Centres, drug abuse as a potential cause of homelessness and sorting out the status of young people after they leave educational institutions.**

Mag. Tanja Fajon, MEP and member of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs gave particular importance to the conference. She opened the conference and highlighted that homelessness occurs in diverse forms and that according to the United Nations Convention there are 1,5 million children sleeping on the streets worldwide. Children are one group of the population that is most vulnerable to poverty. The economic crisis caused this problem to also escalate in Europe.

Prof. Kate Moss, the project leader from the University of Wolverhampton has stressed the importance of raising public awareness about the growing scope and extent of the problems of homeless children and youth. She pointed out that child homelessness in Slovenia is not so rare, but there are no statistics available. A big problem are young adults after leaving educational institutions, which can easily become homeless.

The guests were also addressed by **mag. Sabina Žakelj Pediček**, director of EuroCoop – Institute for European research and development, which leads the research in Slovenia and dissemination activities.

First speaker at the conference **Nenad Stojanović**, Director of the Social Care Centre in Grosuplje talked about the right of young people to professional treatment at Social Care Centres. Young people are a group which has a dedicated social interest and all the forces of this interest are focused on a single goal: put the youth on the right path and the right place at the same time. Most public institutions treat young people as a problem. Help offered to young people at SCCs should be based on their rights, not only on the rights of parents and institutions. Young people should have access to relevant information on the options for resolving problems as well as the ability to decide for themselves and be active in resolving their problems. The author presented a cross-section of the aid that is available to children and adolescents in Slovenia.

Situation of young people was also the topic of **assistant professor dr. Milko Poštrak**, professor at the Faculty of Social Work, who highlighted the issue of difficulties which young people face when they become adult and leave an educational, correctional or other related institutions or foster families and at the same time don't have contact with their families or these don't exist anymore. Young people are often left on their own. It's especially bad if, due to a prolonged stay in different institutions, they're left without legal residence, if their social networks are weak or non-existent, if their economic and cultural capital is low or non-existent. He researched the following topics: what are the options for these young people; how their status is formally defined; what are the powers and obligations of the Social Care Centres and other institutions in the field of social protection.

Chief Physician Jasna Čuk Rupnik, MD, spec. paed., from the Centre for the Treatment of Drug Addiction, Medical Clinic Logatec talked about drug abuse among young people, which can lead to homelessness. There are 18 centres for prevention and drug addiction treatment in Slovenia. Over 4.500 people are treated in these centres annually, the vast majority – due to heroin addiction – receive opioid medication: methadone, buprenorphine and slow-releasing morphine. CPTAID Logatec asked patients to voluntarily and anonymously answer questions about homelessness; have they ever had the need to sleep on the street, why and how they experienced it or if they have any friends or acquaintances who had this experience. Their age was limited at 18, although older drug addicts also have the need to sleep on the street. The lecture will also include personal stories from patients, who wanted to share this content with the public.

Assistant professor dr. Andrej Naterer, professor at the Faculty of Arts, University of Maribor gave a lecture focused on the phenomenon of street children in the world. He placed particular emphasis on forming of deviance, delinquency and subculture, as the primary social context outside the traditional frameworks of socialization. The article is based on material that was collected during anthropological fieldwork in Ukraine, India and Zambia between 2000 and 2013, and actualized with examples from Slovenia. The article analyzes the formation of deviant behaviour among adolescents with special emphasis on the process of integration and assimilation of alternative forms of life, such as life on the streets. The final part of the lecture included some proposals for the rehabilitation and reintegration of children and adolescents.

Tone Dolčič, Deputy Human Rights Ombudsman rounded off the conference with some open questions and dilemmas which the Ombudsman encountered during his work with children and also pointed out some key provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which must be taken into account when addressing the issue. It is important to comply with the rights of children and that the problem of homeless children in Slovenia is not a marginal issue.

More info:
www.childrenroughsleepers.tk

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