A Message from the Executive Director

We all go through difficult times in our lives, and we need support in order to move on. For some people, however, these times arrive too soon, continue too long, and there is no one to turn to for support. The Cedar Foundation exists for these people.

With our work we contribute to the positive change in the lives of over 3000 of the most vulnerable children and young adults in Bulgaria. We provide immediate care to over 100, who live in our centers. Our purpose is to prevent their childhood traumas from standing in the way of a normal life and to let them know they have someone to count on. Always.

In 2019, the focus of our work remained the individual care for each child and young adult. But we also developed a new skill. We turned into storytellers, who talk about the cause and fight for it; who stand up for those who cannot do it themselves; who fascinate, and build trust.

The accomplishments which you will read about in the following pages are due to a devoted and highly motivated team. But even this team would not have been able to deal with the challenges of working with vulnerable groups on their own. For this, I am grateful that Cedar has a strong army of ambassadors, who tell our story, give their time, expertise and resources, rejoice in our achievements, and help us in our hardships.

Thank you for continuing to be on our side in 2019! My wish is for us to be together in 2020 as well. Because together we change lives!

Warm regards,
Alexanderina Dimitrova
Executive Director
The Cedar Foundation
The Problem and our Solution

Approximately 60% of the population believe that only the state has a responsibility to ensure disadvantaged children receive quality care and support.¹

More than 7000 children in Bulgaria grow up without parental care.²

Barely 12% of the social workers would recommend social work as a future professional development to their children and close ones.³

Bulgaria ranks 126th at charitable behaviour in the world, out of 146 countries.⁴

We, at Cedar, believe that disadvantaged people are our common responsibility. Over 3000 children and young adults at risk are supported by our work, and we provide immediate care to over 100 children and young adults.

We, at Cedar, take an active part in the reforms that are both shutting down state institutions for children and preventing child abandonment. We provide 24-hour individual care and specialized support to disadvantaged children and young adults. We support families of young people with intellectual disabilities.

We, at Cedar, support 93 professionals at our centers. We actively stand for the rights of the professionals in the social sphere to have fair and dignified working conditions and growth opportunities.

We, at Cedar, cultivate charity, by promoting corporate social responsibility and organizing different fundraising initiatives, aiming to increase engagement.

¹ “Attitudes towards the deinstitutionalization process and the provision of new social services in the community.” Alpha Research, assigned by the Agency for Social Assistance, November 2018.


³ “Attitudes towards the deinstitutionalization process and the provision of new social services in the community.” Alpha Research, assigned by the Agency for Social Assistance, November 2018.

⁴ CAF World Giving Index, 2018.
The Year in Numbers

1. **No1** biggest NGO provider of “Family-type center” social services in Bulgaria

2. **24/7** individual care

3. **93** people in the team, providing direct care to children and young adults

4. **11,000** hours of specialized therapy

5. **Over 3,000** children and young adults supported and 100 children and young adults in direct care
Provoking a Positive Change in Social Policies and Attitudes

In 2019:

- We were a co-organizer of the “Deinstitutionalization of Childcare: Investing in Change” international conference. Among the participants were over 250 experts and representatives from the European Commission, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, other national institutions, international and local NGOs from Europe, Australia, Central Asia and USA, social services providers and child policy specialists. As one of the leading organizations in Bulgaria, we ran a themed panel for sharing international and local experience, related to the role and quality of residential services.

- We received an overall contribution award for developing national partnerships, social policies and services in Bulgaria - “10 Years Partnership and Social Responsibility” from the National Alliance for Social Responsibility. The recognition of our work is a strong motivation to continue to provide quality care and provoke positive change in state policies and attitudes towards the disadvantaged.

- For 5 years now Cedar’s Executive Director, Alexandrina Dimitrova has been trusted to represent the non-governmental sector as a co-chair of the Permanent expert working group for deinstitutionalization. The group’s goals are the implementation of the Action Plan for deinstitutionalization, the monitoring of the process in Bulgaria and the overall improvement of the quality of social services.

- As an active participant in the preparation of the Analysis of the condition of family-type centers and the new Social Services Act, we advocated for their adoption and coming into effect. We spoke out against the campaign to abolish the successes achieved in the area of childcare, deinstitutionalization and the development of social services in Bulgaria.
Cedar in the Media

“Cedar’s work is a clear example that people are the key to successful social services - investment in discovering, keeping and protecting the social services employees from burning out, and focusing on the human resources in order to meet the needs of the vulnerable person.”

Mediapool.bg, *A Service from the People, for the People* - 10.12.2019, written by Martina Bozukova

“Children, who, before coming to Cedar’s homes, were left to lie in their beds all day, are now enjoying daily walks and suitable activities in the outdoors, in custom-made wheelchairs. The foundation invests a lot of efforts in socializing each child as much as possible, in making them as self-caring and as independent as possible. In finding them at least a part-time job, if they have the abilities for it, and helping them keep it. In making them feel useful. Happy. Each one, according to their capabilities.”

Dnevnik, *The Cedar Foundation, to whom the most difficult children are a cause* - 27.04.2019, written by Yuliana Koleva
Sharing Our Experience and Capacity Building

Cedar was a host of a 12-member delegation from Armenia, which included the First Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Policy, experts from state and local authorities, representatives of non-government organizations and UNICEF. The purpose of the visit was for the guests to gain experience from the current social services, good practices and lessons learned in Bulgaria, and then apply this experience to the deinstitutionalization reform which is under way in Armenia. The delegation visited the family-type homes and the foundation’s rehabilitation and integration center in Kyustendil, and was impressed by the individual approach towards each child and young adult. The guests shared that they will be happy to use and apply what they learned back in their country.

Cedar presented the subject of corporate social responsibility to over 700 human resources professionals at the HR Leadership Forum, organized by Capital. The presentation’s focus was how corporate donation can benefit all sides - business, company employees and the cause.

For over 2 years, Cedar has partnered with the British School of Sofia. We developed an educational panel - “Good Doer”, whose purpose is to introduce the students, age 13-18, to working with non-government organizations, the challenges of the social area, and the role of society. Together we ran fundraising campaigns, awareness campaigns, craft workshops with students from the school and children and young adults from vulnerable groups.

Cedar was a presenter at an international education seminar on “Strengthening civil society”. The presentation was part of Fulbright Bulgaria’s program. The participants had the opportunity to learn more about the capacity, public image and financial sustainability of the non-government organizations in Bulgaria, and experience the challenge to advocate for a cause and raise funds for it.
Provision of 24-hour Individual Care for the Children and Young Adults in our Family-type Centers

The project “Discover me. See me. Support me. Support for independent life and social inclusion.” was implemented between May 2018 and January 2020. It was funded by the European Union under the “Human Resources Development” Operational Programme and it targeted 62 children at risk and disabled young adults from the family-type homes in Kyustendil and Kazanlak. The activities included a vast variety of individual and group therapy - health, psychological, social and educational consultations; personal development support and gaining independence skills; social inclusion initiatives and engagement with the local community.

The activities focused on social inclusion, as well as improving creativity and independence skills, working on sensory therapeutic activities, and providing pedagogical and psychiatric support.

The results from the “Photodrama” and “Independent life skills” activities were presented to the Kyustendil and Kazanlak communities through organized exhibitions. Throughout the project, the following therapeutic programs were expanded and upgraded:

- Sensory therapy and integration
- Pedagogical work (help with school material)
- Social inclusion mentors
- Labour therapy
- Physiotherapy

Sport activities were also organized as part of the project, with the children and young adults from both cities participating. The activities energized and improved their overall physical and emotional state.
“Little things influence your big plans” was the motto of the program for independent life skills. It was facilitated by a psychologist and targeted 13 teenagers from Kazanlak, who are deprived of parental care. With this program, they had the opportunity to discuss topics like “Who am I?”, “What future do I dream of?”, “How can I take care of myself, look for a job, manage a budget?” and later on experience them through simulations and role-play games. The teenagers acquired skills like teamwork, creating group rules and following them. They discussed tolerance, sharing, and last, but not least - empathy. As a result, the atmosphere in the family-type home changed, became more relaxed and the young people started to demonstrate an increased level of understanding, maturity and flexibility in certain situations. These activities helped them to get to know themselves better, to become more independent, to upgrade the needed competencies, to become the engine of building their own future.

The project “Discover me. See me. Support me.” achieved its set goals entirely, by supporting and developing the children and young adults’ abilities for independence and social inclusion. The wonderful photographs from the “Photodrama” activity not only impressed the community at the closing exhibition, but they also gave the young people the opportunity to feel proud of themselves and their transformations into different roles. Placed on the walls of the family-type homes, they remind us of happy occasions.

We summarize the results of the activities on this project with the following thought:

Life is like a camera.
Focus on what’s most important,
Capture the good moments,
Transform the negatives
And if it’s not working, take another photo.
“Changes require a lot of time, patience and humility, especially for children and young adults, who have lived in institutions for so many years. The young adults participate more and more successfully in group sessions, they support each other and study together. We feel one step more confident.”

Svetla Vaseva, Manager of Family-type Residential Centers “Radiance”, Kyustendil

“Throughout the last year, we had a lot of reasons to be proud of the young adults’ achievements. As we work with them, with a lot of patience and perseverance, sometimes with a surprise we realize how accumulating knowledge and information can give a positive result. A lot of the young adults have acquired different educational and social skills, which helps them contribute not only to the individual therapy sessions, but also to the clubs, which were created throughout the year – “Photography” and “The Stage is Mine.” These two clubs combine useful activities with the pleasant ones, and in the process of rehearsal or going out in the community, the young adults learn about the world in a fun way. They no longer feel nervous going out in front of an unknown audience or communicating in an unknown environment. We are proud that our young adults perceive us both as teachers and as close people, whom they can trust, and they visit the center with great pleasure.”

The team of the Social Rehabilitation and Integration Center “Azure”, Kyustendil
Success Story

Every young person faces an identity crisis at some point and seeks the answers to difficult questions like “Who am I?”, “Who am I important to?”, “What is the meaning of my life?”. When you have been abandoned since your birth and nobody has looked out for you throughout all the years you have been living in an institution, you start to consider yourself “bad” and “unworthy”. You feel lonely, rejected, you don’t trust anyone. The young adults in our centers live with these traumas and despite our efforts, they often feel confused and lost. This is Anton’s case as well. He’s a teenager, who spent the bigger part of his life in an institution. He has been living in one of Cedar’s centers for over 5 years now. He goes to school, he’s sociable and sympathetic. At the beginning of last year, Anton went through a difficult period in his life and his behaviour took a turn for the worse. We approached the situation carefully, spent multiple hours having personal conversations and professional consultations to find out what was bothering him and how to address this issue. It was difficult for the team at the house, for the manager of the center and for the other children.

The solution came with an unexpected friendship. Anton started working with another young adult on the project “Young people help the elderly”, which we implemented with the local culture center. Together they helped at a home for the elderly. They read to the residents, accompanied them for walks and talked to them. There, Anton found his meaning and calling. He felt useful and appreciated. He saw what his strengths are and how he can be content. He relaxed, his behaviour improved and remained that way, even after completing the project at the home. Later he received a proposition to enroll in a course for a professional qualification and at the moment he continues to work with vulnerable people, part-time. The friendship also remained. Anton feels well and he welcomes each new day with a smile and enthusiasm.
Provision of Opportunities for Increased Independence for the Young People We Support

At our Social Rehabilitation and Integration Center we work hard towards helping each disabled young adult to become as independent as possible. This task has different dimensions for each person and we aim to individualize our approach, and to take into consideration the capabilities, as well as the personal preferences of the young adults who attend the center. We are all aware that it is difficult for disabled people to find professional opportunities in Bulgaria. This is why we keep in close contact with the local Labour Offices and we are proud to share that in 2019 we had 5 disabled young adults, who signed permanent labour contracts.

Our young adults’ participation at town festivals and events is also a result of our team’s efforts. Their work with parents also leads to better integration with local communities.
Building a Strong Organizational Culture

“I support the Cedar Foundation, because they provide love, a secure environment and a better future to the children in need. By participating in their campaigns and events, I help the integration and successful inclusion of disabled people in society, as well as working towards a more informed and more accepting Bulgaria.”

Victoria Biserova, volunteer

Team Trainings in 2019:

- **Safe Guidance and Assistance** to Children with Aggressive Behaviour - Karin Dom, February 2019, Varna
- **Rhythm Therapy** - Applied Aspects - Jon Sperry Ph. D., Trakia University, March 2019, Stara Zagora
- **A Motivating Interview** - an Approach Towards Working with Unmotivated Students - Jon Sperry, Ph. D., Veliko Tarnovo University, March 2019, Veliko Tarnovo
- **Facilitating Supported Decision-Making** for People with Intellectual Disabilities and Drawing up a Personal Life Plan – BAPID, February 2019, Blagoevgrad
- **Increasing the Capacity of Employees** in the Field of Child Protection, Social Services and Social Assistance - Social Welfare Agency, July 2019, Dupnitsa
- **Recent Changes in Legislation** in 2019 - Business Education Club, August 2019, Obzor
- **Models for Working with Families** - Know-how Center for Alternative Child Care - July 2019
- **Music Therapy** and Treatment Through Music - IJ Training Center, March/April 2019
- **Specialized Training of Teams** of Active Social Services for Working with Adults - Social Welfare Agency, Rin Consult, June 2019
Achieving Financial Stability

“I have been part of Cedar’s Board of Directors since 2015 and I proudly observe the sustainable development of the organization and the growth of its popularity in our society. Through the direct implementation of its work, Cedar positively influences the most vulnerable children and young adults in Bulgaria, and it also improves the local communities. Cedar actively helps the development of the non-governmental sector through sharing successful practices, which are appreciated not only in Bulgaria, but also in many European countries, where the organization has established partnerships.”

Natalia Kirilova-Todorova, Executive Director, Digital Marketing Group

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<th>Income</th>
<th>Amount in BGN</th>
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We would like to thank our donors in Switzerland for covering our administrative costs!
Why did we choose to work with the Cedar Foundation

“CMS Sofia has been a partner of the Cedar Foundation ever since its establishment more than 10 years ago. We support Cedar with great enthusiasm and willingness and many of our employees have been taking an active part in all their initiatives for many years now. This happens, because we share the same values and we believe that children are our biggest asset as people, and as a society. We are certain that the greatest forms of interest towards a child are constant care, attention and patience - qualities, which the foundation has. This is why we are happy to be part of its cause. As any business, we are also very careful in how we are investing our resources for corporate social responsibility, and we are confident in the foundation’s honest attitude towards its donors and the children under its care. We hope to continue working together successfully.”

Elitsa Ivanova, Partner, CMS Sofia

“It is Hilton’s commitment to support the communities we operate in in many different ways, by sharing what we have, spending our time and motivating others to follow. The Cedar Foundation changes children’s and young adults’ lives and we think that this is inspiring, uplifting and rewarding. According to Dr. Seuss, “A person’s a person, no matter how small.” - a statement that is very true!”

Christoph Glaser, General Manager, Hilton Sofia

“I support Cedar, because I know that what they do really goes to the children. It’s important for me that the cause I stand for is genuine. They have family-type homes in different cities, where children with severe illnesses live - illnesses like Down Syndrome, cerebral palsy etc., and their team looks after them 24 hours, 7 days a week. These children impressed me with all they have achieved, thanks to this care. I was also impressed by the social therapists, who work there, because this is definitely not an easy job and not a lot of people prefer it. And this cannot be played or set - here I saw children, who adore the people, who look after them. Yes, these children have problems, and they are severe. This is the reality. Wonderful people take care of them and they need support. We must help each other as individuals and as people, because we are part of this society.”

Aleksandar Aleksiev, Actor
“I wanted to work with Cedar, so that I could open the window to the real world for the children we educate. The world, which is not so wonderful and cloudless, as theirs. To inspire feelings of empathy, tolerance and desire to help, through charity. To let them feel the joy of being useful and receiving gratitude for your efforts.

Thank you for all the devotion you work with! This is the main reason why we dedicate our Christmas Charity Bazaar to Cedar each year! We called our cause “Warm Heart”.”

Tatyana Raykova, Director, Nursery and kindergarten “Merry Bells”

“Cedar is not just a cause. It’s a community, which brings change. A community, which unites energy and meaning.”

Stephan A. Shtereff, TV host, actor, activist
Board of Directors

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Manager, Squircle Capital Bulgaria

Julia Eskdale
Lawyer

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Director, Cedar Tanzania

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Executive Director, Digital Marketing Group

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Stilyana Kandjeva
Consultant, BICA

Hristo Hristov
Owner, HR Capital and Board Member, IAB Bulgaria
We would also like to thank all the individual donors and volunteers who continue to make our work possible.

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