

Annual Report 2020

Cedar Foundation





A message from the Executive Director

Dear friends,

2020 was a difficult year for us all. But for us at the Cedar Foundation, this was also a year in which we proved that we can handle anything, as long as we are together - as a team and also as a community of people, united in the cause of helping others.

Our main priority was and remains the protection of human lives - those of the vulnerable children and young adults in our care and those of the people who are with them around-the-clock. We had to be flexible, our employees had to work even harder, we had to provide them with a safe work environment and to invest in more disinfection methods, personal protection equipment, therapies and new activities.

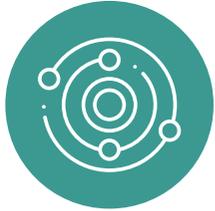
In 2020 we lost some potential donors and sources of financing, but our long-term supporters remained by our side. We were also able to attract new supporters to the cause. We had successful online fundraising campaigns and we started organizing our traditional charity quizzes in a digital environment. And our biggest event - our charity ball - became the first hybrid fundraising event held in Bulgaria, which gave the opportunity of people all over the globe to participate and donate.

Our advocacy throughout the year was also very successful. We managed to influence governmental decisions in support of family-type centers and despite unfounded protests and delays, the new Social Services Act came into effect on July 1st 2020.

So, if we can summarize this year, not just for us at Cedar, but for all of us as a community, we can say it was a year of togetherness and support. This is why I'm grateful to each and every employee of the Foundation, to our friends and partners, who are by our side and believe in our work. Together we change lives!

Best Wishes,
Alexandrina Dimitrova,
Executive Director

Our mission



We collaborate with institutions and actively participate in the process of deinstitutionalization of the care of disadvantaged children in Bulgaria.



We promote the rights of children and adults with disabilities.



We cooperate with businesses in sharing social responsibility.



We stand up for the rights of the professional community of social workers.



We take direct care of children at risk and young adults with disabilities in family-type centers.

The year in numbers

2000

work hours wearing safety masks

250+

online team meetings

300

hours overtime

365

days of therapy from home

1-st

hybrid charity event in Bulgaria

0

COVID-19 infections in the children and young adults in the family-type centers

No 1

Largest NGO providing “family-type center” social services in Bulgaria

Advocacy

Our advocacy for the rights of workers in the social services sector and the functioning of the residential social services led to a number of key governmental decisions.

Through taking an activist stance and encouraging debate in the media we were able to contribute towards the mass testing of workers in the family-type homes. Moreover, the government decided to grant additional funding to all social services.



With our support, the new Social Services Act came into effect on the 1st of July 2020, despite the unfounded objections and delays which stood in its way.

There is still a lot of work to be done on a number of regulatory documents, as well as the adoption of the national social services map. Notwithstanding, the adoption of the new law is a step in the right direction towards the implementation of reform in the social sphere with a focus on the quality of the care provided and an individual approach towards those in need.



We took part in the production of a report on the effects of the pandemic on children's lives in Europe.

The Eurochild report "Growing up in lockdown: Europe's children in the age of COVID-19" brings together information gathered in the period August - September 2020 from 25 countries across the whole continent. Our contribution related to the functioning and management of family-based care placements, and the related deinstitutionalization policies.



Following our initiative, the Supreme Administrative Court declared void a provision in the Methodological Guidance on the Social Support Act as a result of a violation of the public consultations procedure.

This court ruling reminds institutions that following an open procedure, in agreement with the parties involved, is what assures fair decision making, and is part of the democratic process. This case serves as confirmation of the crucial role that civil society organisations have in protecting the rights and interests of the people they support.



Cedar in the Media

“Through our media appearances throughout the year we strengthened our image as an organization which skilfully seeks solutions in order to initiate new activities, to be a pioneer, to implement donation campaigns and despite the abnormal situation, to continue caring for the most vulnerable children and young adults.

In 2020 we were able to raise the issue of social services on a number of occasions and we were a sought-after speaker in various leading media such as Bulgarian National Television, Bulgarian National Radio, Darik Radio, Focus Radio, Capital, Dnevnik, Mediapool, etc.

Questions concerning the healthcare of children and employees in the family-type centers were raised at a National Operational Headquarters briefing and as a result measures were taken to test employees in centers nationwide.

The important message that we sent through the media to the authorities in this crisis year was that it is necessary to care for the employees of the family-type centers and social services. Providing quality care to vulnerable people can only happen with the support of those who work with them directly.”

Aneta Filipova, PR Expert

The media sought our expertise and views on multiple topics, including:

- 📌 Quality control of social services in Bulgaria;
- 📌 Investment in employees and care standards in social services;
- 📌 Socially responsible business and the community;
- 📌 The difficulties and challenges that family-type centers face during a pandemic;
- 📌 How isolation affects disadvantaged children and young adults;
- 📌 The Social Services Act.



Sharing experience



In the beginning of 2020 we had the opportunity to welcome to our Kyustendil homes our colleagues from Maria's World Foundation. Our social therapists told them about their work, gave some demonstration therapy sessions with some of the young adults with intellectual disabilities, and discussed different methods of inclusion in art and labour therapy. The visit also focused on the special interest clubs and workshops that we offer and our colleagues from Maria's World shared their experiences in creating work habits and skills, the selection of suitable work matched to the clients' interests and their inclusion in the labour market.

We were invited, together with more than 40 organizations from across Europe, to the Eurochild annual meeting to share the challenges and good practices of running family-type centers during a pandemic. In her presentation, our Executive director Alexandrina Dimitrova shared the measures taken by the Foundation to guarantee the physical and mental health of the children and young adults who live in our family-type centers, as well as of our employees. The importance of good planning, operational flexibility and good interaction with the media as a mechanism for influencing the authorities were among the main outcomes cited.



Fieldwork

“The past year was marked by many challenges for the teams in the family-type centers in Bulgaria. Besides the usual tasks, which are anything but straightforward, they faced new difficulties connected with Covid-19. Apart from having to be even more careful with the physical and emotional state of the children in care, they had to explain to children with intellectual and behavioural difficulties why it is not possible to leave the house, to go to school or meet friends. Managing change, crisis management and risk reduction require strong team spirit and organizational support.

As an organization we are proud to note that in 2020 none of our children and young adults was affected by Covid-19, thanks to the daily care and strict safety and disinfection regime.

The Cedar residential services teams are heroes in this extraordinary time. With their courage, motivation, flexibility and resilience, they became the keepers of the life and health of the most vulnerable. Each and every person of the residential social services front line deserves applause.”

Vanya Stratieva-Dimitrova, Program Director



Highlights of the residential services work

In Japanese the word “crisis” means “danger” and “opportunity” at the same time. This is why we rather consider 2020 as year of opportunity, despite the uncertainty and dangers. Here are the opportunities we gave the children, young adults and our teams during the past year:

To start a new kind of self-evaluation and self-perception

In January we opened an exhibition of photographs taken by children, who have been deprived of parental care, during photodrama sessions*. The aim of the photographs was to raise awareness of the capabilities and potential of these children and young adults. The event attracted great interest and was a source of pride for not only the young adults themselves, but also their teachers, friends and schoolmates, colleagues from different services and the representatives of the local authorities, who participated in the opening. This positive experience helped the children and young adults go through the challenges of the next months sustained by the energy of these initial cheering emotions and the memory of them.



To guarantee a safe working environment for our employees

In April we provided a new bus for Kazanlak in order to transport the employees who live outside the city during the emergency situation with limited inter-city transportation. We also used it to deliver groceries and hygiene products to the four houses.

* Photodrama - a psychodramatic therapy method through which the children and young adults enrich their own story, based on the reality they live in.

Fieldwork

To move, work and learn

We continued activities relating to special interest clubs. Cooking, gardening and tourism are just a few of the clubs which the children and young adults join. Through these clubs they acquire new skills and learn to care for and respect nature, as well as one another.



To apply courageous and innovative approaches in therapy

In the summer we had the opportunity to visit an equestrian center, to get to know the character and daily routine of the horses, to ride them and take care of them. Communication with the animals brought a lot of positive emotions to the children and young adults; it triggered both their curiosity and desire to continue these meetings. We hope that in 2021 we will have the opportunity to permanently add this therapy method to our work.

To improve our online working skills

During the emergency situation we provided to all those children with study needs electronic devices with internet access, as well as the necessary subscriptions for digital textbooks and platforms. This aided the improvement of the children's and the teams' technical skills.



To provide care to more young adults

In June, despite the emergency epidemic situation, two girls were urgently accommodated. In a short space of time we had to carry out a quick reorganization of the house space so that we could provide single rooms for the new girls. We are grateful and proud of the children and the team who did everything in their power to aid a smooth integration period and provided the girls with family comfort and a warm welcome to the Cedar family.

To trust

At the end of September, together with the children from our Kazanlak centers we participated in a one-of-a-kind experience - a sensory journey through the city, organized by the Sensory Theatre Sofia. This innovative activity was aimed at building the trust between participants and helping them develop empathy towards other people's experiences, making them more confident when facing unusual situations.



“An unforgettable sensory journey, far beyond what can be expressed in words or seen with one’s eyes. We listened to the world around us, we filled ourselves with more presence and realization of the present moment and yet again we realized how important trust is.” – Neli Boneva, manager of our services in Kazanlak, shared after the walk.

To preserve ourselves, get closer and grow

The social workers and therapists who worked directly with the children put in over 300 hours overtime throughout the year, they worked with a reduced staff and lived under quarantine without being able to communicate with their families and loved ones, risking their physical and emotional health. Despite the difficulties, the tiredness and fear, they helped each other, supported each other and their main priority remained the help and care for the children and young adults. Today, they are closer, stronger and a shining example of dedication, resiliency and solidarity.

Fieldwork

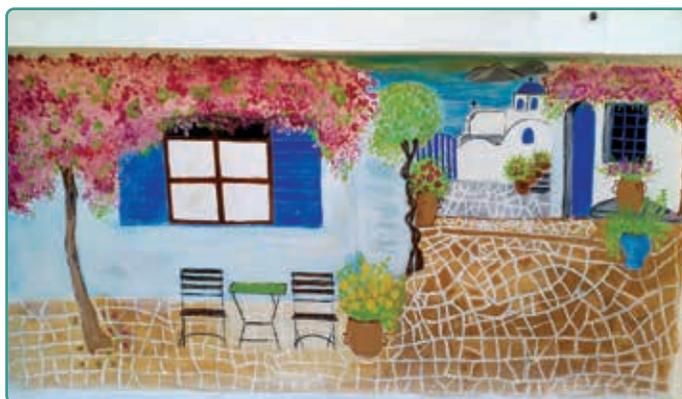
Support for young adults with disabilities and their families

In 2020 a number of activities and events involving the socialisation of the young adults were impeded by the emergency measures to tackle the epidemic and the need for social distancing. Despite that, thanks to reorganisation of the whole activity and associated programs, we were able to achieve great results. We transitioned to online work with the young adults. We updated the annual programs of the specialists involved - part of the activities was substituted by others, more suited to remote and external work.

Work highlights of the Social Rehabilitation and Integration Centre

📌 We achieved new and completely unexpected results - improvement in the digital literacy of users and the use of different applications for gathering useful and educational information.

📌 As part of the on-site work throughout the summer season we put into effect a new therapeutic program - "Beautiful Garden", including a lot of art and labor activities in the outdoors, thanks to which the yard was renovated. We constructed a rock garden; we painted and plastered; we drew on the yard walls; we created products from old car tires, etc.



📌 We also worked with parents individually and remotely on subjects such as coping with the accumulated stress and fear caused by the epidemic situation; discussing difficulties with the therapeutic work with their children; recommendations for training and enhancing the things learnt in a home environment and filling the young adults' daily routines with structured activities.



The team shares

How has your work changed throughout the past year because of the pandemic?

The way we shop for the children has changed. All products are delivered to the house in order to prevent the risk of infection in the big food stores.

We no longer let outsiders see the children and my colleagues and I try to carefully choose the people we meet with and the places we visit during and outside working hours.

We have switched to remote communication with the auxiliary services.

We had to suspend the activities in bigger groups and to change some of the special interest clubs in which the young adults participated. The concept that we need to keep distance in order to preserve the health of the adolescents and the team has become part of the daily routine.

In the beginning of the pandemic we had constant discussions with the young adults about why we need to stay inside, why the daily routine is changing. We used different visual materials to illustrate our point. There were a lot of verbal and nonverbal questions about the face masks. Some young adults would ask me about it daily, while others would directly try to pull my mask off because they were not used to seeing me like this.

How have you adapted to the new situation at work during the last year?

Adaptation is hard and slow and I would say it is still not fully done. The children have difficulties understanding why sometimes they are not allowed to go out, to attend birthday parties or other events that are important to them. We encourage them to observe strict personal hygiene; we have put up signs as a reminder; we keep them informed of the current situation in Bulgaria and throughout the world. We occupy their time with sports, art activities, lessons and discussions about the responsibility they have to protect their own lives as well as the lives of the others in the house.

Maya Tsoneva, Manager of Family-type Homes and a Protected Home, Kazanlak

The intensity of therapies has increased. In some of those we introduced anti-epidemic measures and rules - for example, colouring drawings of both cleaned and uncleaned hands and others. We placed more emphasis on working with the "Toy Library"* in order to teach the young adults how to play together during their leisure time. We brought variety to morning gymnastics with various pieces of fitness equipment. We also frequently practice folklore dances at home in order to avoid completely doing without the club in its previous form.

Tsvetomira Milenova, Social Worker, Family-type Residential Centers "Radiance", Kyustendil

* Universal way of communication and support resource in childhood development

Success stories

As brave as ever and looking forward

Pavel and Rado* are two adolescents from our family-type center who had to grow up much faster than their peers. They spent their teenage years with us, but in 2020 our paths parted. They are always in our thoughts, but we are also at peace as they have demonstrated their sense of responsibility and aspiration to have an independent life.

Pavel had always dreamt of handling everything by himself and having his own funds. As a result 2 years ago he started a part-time job after school. Combining work with studies helped him learn how to prioritise his tasks and feel satisfied at what he achieved and earned as additional income. Now, months later, Pavel no longer lives with us, but we keep in touch and are confident that he is still doing well.

Rado decided to take charge of his own life and went to work in the Czech Republic. He put in a lot of effort, got a driving licence and showed great courage by undertaking this step. His parting from the Cedar team was very emotional and difficult. He shared with us that Cedar is his real family and he feels sad that he has to leave it. He expressed his gratitude for all the opportunities, the tireless care and support through difficult moments. We recently met and learnt that he is well, he lives by himself and is completely independent. He is as brave as ever and looking forward.



* The names have been changed.

Driving challenge

After earning a number of scholarships and putting a lot of diligence and perseverance into everything she undertakes, she is now the proud owner of a driving licence. Rosi is in her last school year and knows that the day when she has to leave our family-type center is approaching. But until then she does everything possible to gain confidence and to be more independent and self-reliant.

Because of this she decided to take a driving course which she insisted on paying with her own savings. As with everything else, Rosi undertook the driving challenge with serious intent. She breezed through both the theoretical and practical parts, and passed her exam at the first attempt. This resilience and willingness to push forward will help her achieve her dream of soon becoming a university student.



Training for the teams in the centers

June 2020 - training conducted by “Karin dom” on the subject “Sensory-motor activities. How to stimulate the child at home or at school, Center for special educational support”;

July 2020 - training conducted by “Karin dom” on the subject “Intolerable behaviour and how to work with parents for faster results”;

September 2020 - Art therapy training facilitated by Elitsa Velikova, psychologist and art therapist

Online training “AMBIT in the Deinstitutionalization Reform - How to work with young people and children who do not want our help?”

* The names have been changed.

Charity campaigns and events

“The past year was very dynamic from a charity point of view. Unfortunately, due to financial difficulties, many companies and individual donors ended their support for lots of different causes. Despite that, charity in Bulgaria does continue to rise, including in 2020. It’s interesting that along with charity campaigns in support of the Covid-19 fight, we observe interest in other causes, which allows us to see the crisis as a platform for building a donor culture in general.

For us at Cedar, the limitations on holding live events brought a decline in our fundraising income. On the other hand however, this gave us an opportunity to measure the digital maturity of the organization and to head for new, braver online fundraising solutions. Solutions which bring our mission beyond the limits of a hall, a city or a country, and which are accessible to different audiences. We proved to ourselves that we are flexible, proactive and united in difficult times. “

Iva Hadzhiyska, Fundraising and Communications Director

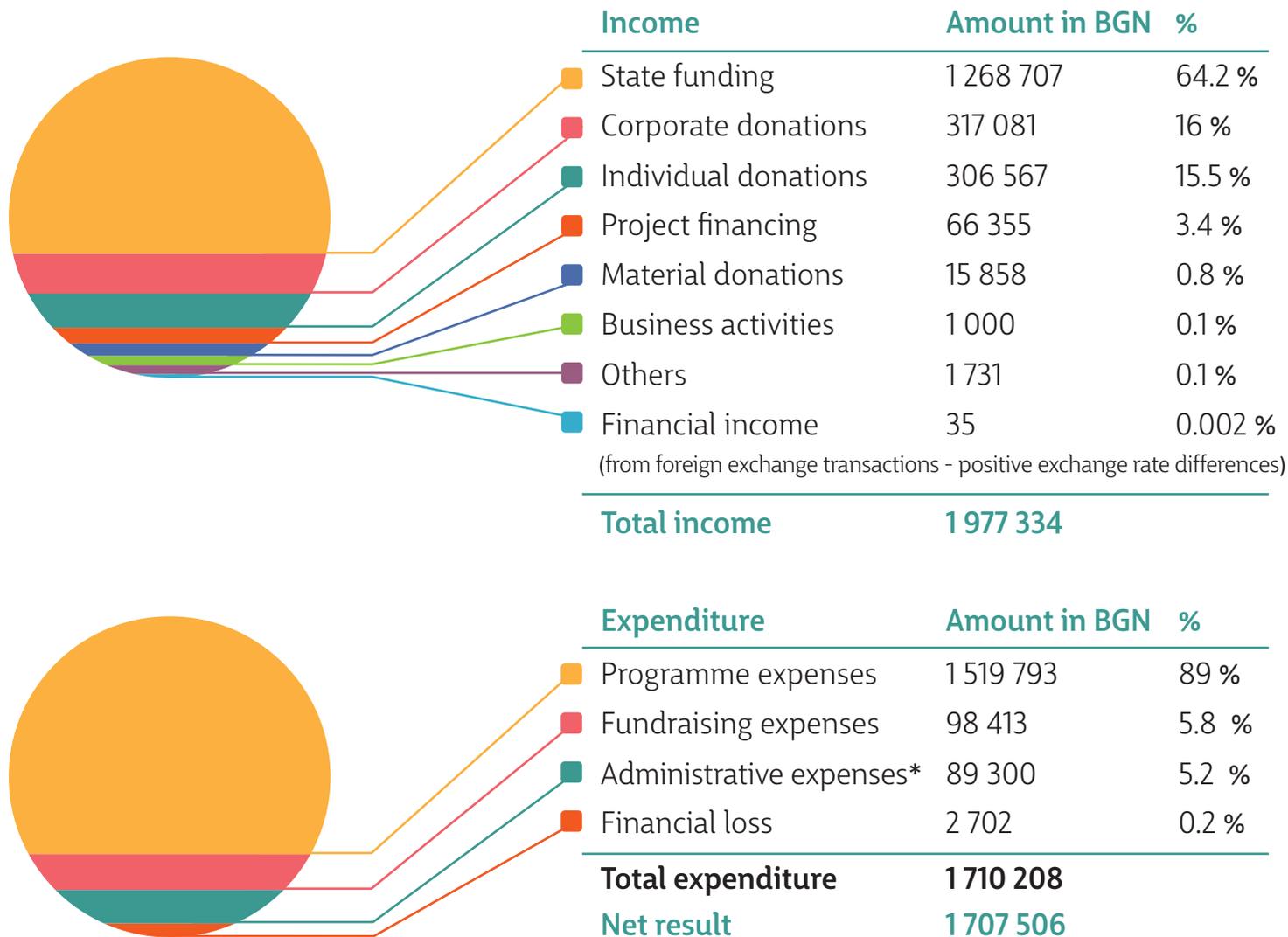
- 🏠 The Foundation’s traditional and much loved charity pub quiz was adapted to an online environment and welcomed its first participants in the spring of 2020. Its success brought more quizzes, which we adapted for different companies, as a part of their corporate social responsibility programs.
- 🏠 We held Bulgaria’s first hybrid charity event - in an online environment, as well as live - with participation across 5 different countries. Through the event we managed to engage and interest new supporters and raise funds for the children and young adults in our centers.
- 🏠 We did several online fundraising campaigns in Bulgarian and foreign crowdfunding platforms.



Financial Report

“As for large parts of the world, 2020 was one of the most challenging years ever for Cedar. In the face of these extraordinary times the Foundation not only continued to provide first-class care in a financially disciplined manner, but also found creative new ways to reach donors and raise the required funding. The Foundation enters 2021 on a solid financial footing, mindful of the need to continue on this path in order to be able to offer its services on a sustainable basis over many years to come.”

Christopher Eskdale,
Chair of the Board of Directors



* 100 % financed by our partners from Cedar Switzerland

Partners

"I am extremely impressed with how the Cedar team has managed to maintain their usual determination, creativity and 'business-as-usual' attitude during the pandemic to continue to provide a high level of care to their residents as well as to the Cedar support network"

Bryan Turner, Director,
Resolute Asset Management LLP



"For another year we happily support the Cedar Foundation's cause. We share the same values and we strongly believe that a positive change in the lives of children and young adults at risk is possible. These young people must know that they are not alone. The Foundation's results are impressive. This proves, yet again, that when you put your heart in your work, good things happen."

Hristo Iliev, Executive Director, AG Capital



"We are happy that in 2020, again we had the opportunity to support the Cedar Foundation in their year-round charitable good cause. This act inspires us to be better as people and better at what we do. Especially in the year which, alongside the difficulties it brought, once again reminded us how important it is to have solidarity."

Vesela Dabova, Executive Director, Dabov Specialty Coffee

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We would also like to thank all our individual donors for their support throughout the year.

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