

THE “16+” YOUTH CENTER

The “16+” Youth Center was established to support homeless and unemployed people between 16 and 25 years of age. The needs and the problems of this groups were identified through a research conducted among 150 homeless young people.

Most of the youngsters who come to the center (67%) are from Sofia. 49% of them have no homes at all. They live in shafts and abandoned houses and usually gather around the Central Railroad Station, the Lion’s Bridge and the Sheraton Hotel.

The team of the Youth Center is trying to find solutions to the problems confronting these young people, to increase their motivation and to inspire a sense of belonging.

The youngsters who come to the Center receive clean clothes and access to sanitary facilities. Upon arrival the health status of each one of them is carefully established in order to minimize the risk of venereal diseases, AIDS, and other infections. If needed, they are directed to specialized healthcare centers and hospitals for further tests and treatment.

The “16+” Youth Center cooperates with the National Center on Drug Dependence, the National Emergency Aid Institute, the Center for Venereal Diseases, as well as with different NGOs addressing health problems confronting children and young people at risk.

THE PROJECT FOR IMPROVING THE HEALTH STATUS OF ROMA THROUGH TRAINING AND EDUCATION

In 2001 the team of the St. Nikola Foundation developed a project for improving the health status of Roma through training and education, which was financed by the Open Society Foundation – Sofia and includes four separate programs: “Social Workers for the Roma Community”, “General Education”, “Preventing Sexually Transmitted Diseases”, and “Nurses for the Roma Community”. The project involves the following activities:

1. Developing a special training program on the new healthcare system for medical staff that would work in the Roma community
2. Identifying young Roma women with good school grades who are willing to continue their education in a nursing school. More than 100 girls from across the country applied.
3. Selecting candidates for the General Education Program based on their average grades from secondary school, a test and an interview. 80 young Roma women applied, 40 were approved.
4. Organizing a three-month General Education Program, which was completed successfully by 28 participants.
5. Developing a Social Workers for the Roma Community Program in cooperation with the Continuing Education Department of the New Bulgarian University.

The main goal of the project is the improve the quality of healthcare and the health status of the Roma community in Bulgaria by training Roma medical staff who would understand the health problems of community and would contribute to solving them.