



## **Building Bridges**

- Inspiration catalogue for better integration of separated children in Europe



# Building bridges

This catalogue is intended to provide **inspiration for establishing good practices** when separated children are granted residence in an EU member state. The catalogue collects some of the experiences that have been accumulated in the course of the project entitled, 'Better Integration of Separated Children – capacity building and exchange of good practice to prevent the violation of their rights'.

**Separated children are** children under eighteen years of age who find themselves outside of their native country and have been separated from both of their parents or their primary caregivers.

They have often been subjected to traumatic experiences in their country of origin or in the course of their flight. These children must compensate for a lot, not least in terms of language and education, in a very short period of time.

Separated children often have very few relations in their new country. The few relationships they have to adults are often to persons of authority or social workers. The children are often intensely occupied with worries about their parents and other family members.

At the same time, separated children are obviously very different from one another. They all have unique potential and personal resources. While acknowledging this, the partners behind this project are of the opinion that it is important to remain aware that ensuring the care for and well-being of separated children requires a particular focus. Failure to remain aware of this fact can result in the loss of an enormous potential.

**The 'Better Integration of Separated Children' project** aims to strengthen the integration of separated children after they have been granted residence in European states by further developing the capacities of the professionals working with separated children and facilitating the exchange of good practice.

**The project is carried out with financial support from the EU Commission.** Save the Children Denmark is the project coordinator, while the partner countries are Slovenia, Slovakia, Poland and Austria. As part of the project, all of the countries have carried out desk studies focusing on good practice and the gaps in the protection of separated children.

'Better Integration of Separated Children' is a rights-based project based on the belief that the best integration can only happen when children are able to



fully enjoy their rights. Each of the gaps represents a breach in the rights of the separated child and therefore also presents a hurdle to the best integration.

The project has involved many discussions as to when something can be referred to as a **good practice**. We will refrain from deciding when a specific project or initiative is good enough to be able to be called a good practice. Instead, it is our hope that this catalogue will provide inspiration and strengthen all of us in our efforts to find good, rights-based

solutions in our efforts to ensure separated children the best introduction to a new society and opportunity to become equal citizens.

*The project partners*

For more information: [www.betterintegration.eu](http://www.betterintegration.eu)

# Much more than a school

*In Southern Germany, the Schlau School has been very successful in providing separated children with an education and an access into German society. This success is mainly due to the school's extraordinary commitment to these children and its ability to meet their special needs.*

Munich in Southern Germany – a city with much more than 800 separated children and a growing number of children arriving. In a classroom, 11 boys and a single girl are bent over their German grammar books in utter concentration. Today's lesson is on the past perfect tense. The students have been told to find the verbs in a text and conjugate them. Mustapha pauses at the word *survive*, which he does not understand. The teacher, Lilli, helps him out by giving him an example in German: *I survived the escape from Afghanistan.* "So what do you think *survive* means?" she asks. "Oh, right, it means *not to die*," answers Mustapha, "I didn't die on the trip from Afghanistan to Germany".

What unites the 12 students in this classroom is exactly that: surviving their escape. And now they are starting a new life in Germany. To help them on their way, the Schlau School in Munich has developed a special schooling model, which, in the words of school principal Michael Stenger, is "much more than a school".

- What makes our school unique is mainly our focus on the value of the human being. We tell the children that they are valuable, that they have potential and that they can build a better future for themselves. This is news to many separated children, who have often been through bad experiences during their escape

and consequently lack confidence in the grownups and authorities they encounter. But students here start to feel that we believe in them right away. And that makes our students more motivated than others, explains Michael Stenger.

To maintain this trust in them, the students are required to comply with clear disciplinary rules however:

- When a new student starts school, we sign a contract where the student promises to do his or her very best. And we react immediately if, for instance, a student is not on time or does not show up for class. Not because we want to punish them, but because we want to show that we care about them. And of course it's for their own good as well because it ensures that they make the most of their lessons, says Stenger.

## Committed to children

Another important principle at the Schlau School is its commitment to the lives and histories of all its students.

- Our team of teachers and social educators know each and every one of the 140 students attending this school. It means a lot to the students that we can help them handle their problems and challenges, even the ones that they encounter outside of school. For instance, we know when someone is feeling sad, and we can help if somebody's uncle just died or if somebody's asylum case is going badly, says Michael Stenger.

Working together with the children's guardians is a natural part of the staff

members' commitment to each individual student. And just like other schools have parent-teacher meetings, Schlau regularly invites the guardians of the students to meetings and events. Furthermore, the school's social educators offer after-care sessions for those students who have passed their exams but are still in need of a little advice or a helping hand to move on in their lives.

## Small classes and important exams

The entire structure of Schlau supports the school's deep personal commitment to the school's students. Classes are small, with about 15 students in each, and the teaching and exams are adapted to the level of each individual student.

- When students start attending Schlau, they are tested and placed according to their proficiency, in German and math for instance. But since the schooling of the students varies – some are illiterate while others have already had seven or eight years of schooling – the speed with which they learn varies significantly. That's why the students may skip a form or level at any point if they learn rapidly, explains Michael Stenger.

The same level of flexibility applies to exams:

- We cooperate with two regular schools; there our students have to do the exams typically within two or two and a half years after their arrival at Schlau. Our students have to write the same exams like the German pupils. The regular schools tell us, what our students have to know, and when we see any difficulty for the moment in any subject, we have to change our language of teaching, so that the student can follow, Michael Stenger says.

## Vocational training

95 % of Schlau's students finish their exams and consequently gain access to a better future in Germany. But Schlau has also started a successful partnership with a number of businesses, which means that many students are offered a job immediately after finishing their exams.

- We have made these businesses commit to offering our students shorter or longer vocational training courses. And it's a huge success. The students get a taste of what a working life is like and learn something about what they would like to do. And the businesses realise that these young people have a tremendous lot to offer their community and Germany in general, Stenger concludes.

**The recommendations of the partners:**

- Every separated child should have access to education.
- Educational opportunities and integration programmes should be designed and tailored to the separated child in order to initiate a positive, long-term integration process. Preliminary programmes that would facilitate the inclusion of separated children into school should be established. Specific and adapted material and textbooks should be used in such programmes.
- The qualifications and potential of each separated child should be assessed better, and more specialized opportunities should be developed. These opportunities must take into account the fact that some separated children are unable to complete an academic education. The treatment of separated children and the programmes offered to these children should focus on the development of their skills and competences.
- Furthermore, intensive support measures should be offered to any children who are able to complete a more conventional education program. Awareness of and familiarity with best practices should be further developed. Separated children must also be provided with opportunities in addition to their language classes, including extra-curricular recreational activities, where their language skills are stimulated.

**The school is my new family**

Ramadan Ahmed was just 14 years old when he escaped from Somalia. Alone. Like so many other children, Ramadan had to get away from war, conflicts and a country that was no longer able to offer him the protection and safety that is the right of any child. His entire family had saved money for a ticket to Russia. They thought and hoped that it would also be a ticket to a safe life and a brighter future.

But for Ramadan, the road to safety turned out to be very long. Human traffickers took him from Russia to Romania where he lived on the street at the mercy of other people and developed a dependence on alcohol to forget himself and his tough situation. He then came to Sweden where it was rumoured that life was good. He only found loneliness. He returned to Romania and to an encounter with the Romanian police who sent him out of the country to Germany.

**For the first time, I can think of a future**

Today, he feels safe, he says. And Schlau is one of the reasons why.

- Before, it was just today, never tomorrow. I drank as if every day was my last. Now, for the first time, I can think of a future. This school has changed my life, explains Ramadan Ahmed.

The crucial turning point in Ramadan's development was when he, in his own words, "got a new family":

- All the students at this school know exactly what it means to be a separated child. But we have almost forgotten it. We no longer regard ourselves as separated children because the school – the teachers as well the other students – are our new family. A family who believes in us and gives us a second chance, says Ramadan.

He also praises the flexibility with which Schlau treats each of its students:

- The school tries to suit each of us. If we do very well in a subject, the teachers make sure that we get to move to a class where we fit in. We do not have to go from level 5 through level 6 if we are good enough to handle level 7. In this way, the school values each and every one of us, says Ramadan.

# Help to build bridges

*Rudersdal, a Danish municipality, has employed a psychologist to ensure that separated children receive a proper welcome to Denmark. The psychologist is responsible for helping children navigate the municipal system and to build bridges over the ambivalence that can develop between the world they come from and the world in which they are now trying to create a life for themselves.*

Let's call him Ahmad. He is 16 years old and struggling with his thoughts and feelings. His parents sent him away from the dangerous situation in his home country so that he could be safe and happy somewhere else. His family spent all of their money on his ticket. Now he has arrived in a Danish municipality. But Ahmad is not doing well and does not feel comfortable. His feelings do not match the hopes and expectations his parents had for their son's future. And his parents are still in the middle of a war zone. What in the world has happened to them, he thinks, and how can I be happy when they are still suffering?

But in some ways, Ahmad is lucky. Because he was sent to the Municipality of Rudersdal, where he met Mozdeh Ghasemiyani. She is a psychologist, employed by the municipality in order to ensure that separated children are taken care of from the very beginning. She has met a lot of children like Ahmad and has specialized in helping them adapt to a new life in a new country and to live with the ambivalence that marks the lives of many unaccompanied refugee children.

## **Trust takes time**

In order to help the children with their situation, it is decisive that they deal with the same person throughout the integration phase in the municipalities – the entire lengthy process. Mozdeh Ghasemiyani explains:

- In the beginning, I'm just another authority, and many of the children are used to being frightened of authority figures.

So I spend a long time establishing trust. For example, we go for walks together instead of sitting across from one another in an office, and I'm slowly able to get to know the individual child. I assure them that they do not necessarily have to tell me their entire story, because doing so can be very difficult. Instead, we talk about specific, concrete things, such as where they would like to live, and I get a sense of what they're capable of, when they react aggressively, whether they display any sign of self-destructive behaviour and that kind of thing. It usually takes around half a year to establish a trusting relationship with a separated youth.

- The young people develop a personal relationship to me. But that also involves a constant fear of being let down. That's why it takes so long before they're able to trust that I won't let them down or all of a sudden disappear, Mozdeh Ghasemiyani explains.

## **What is a municipality?**

Once trust has been established, it is a major challenge to communicate a large amount of new knowledge to children or youth, including information about schools, foster families and caseworkers.

- We start from the very beginning. Many of these young people don't even know what a municipality or a caseworker is. In their home country and during their journey they have met police, human smugglers and immigration officials. These people have been associated with great uncertainty and fear. In that light, it can be difficult to understand that a caseworker is someone who can help you, arrange for the payment of money, but at the same time also control you, Ghasemiyani says.

The separated children and youth have to go through a difficult adjustment process while learning how things work in their new country.

## **The difficult adjustment**

- The young people have to learn their role as individuals in a society where they are not subjected to traumatic experiences. They come from a world of war, which their brain has been programmed to function in. Theirs is not a world of small problems. Everything is about life or death. So, for example, if their application for funding to buy a computer is turned down, the problem is quickly blown up into something enormous. Their surroundings don't always understand this, Ghasemiyani explains. Their surroundings have to understand who the separated children are, but these children and youth must also learn to understand themselves, why they react like they do, and learn to cope with their reactions.

- I often have to be creative when carrying out this work. Many of these young people don't talk a lot. For that reason, I use techniques such as art and drawing therapy. I work with masks and get the children to paint the fronts and backs as a way of getting them to express their feelings and the ambivalence that is consuming so much space in their lives, Mozdeh Ghasemiyani says. →

*Mozdeh uses techniques such as art and drawing therapy. She works with masks and gets the children to paint the fronts and backs as a way of getting them to express their feelings and the ambivalence that is consuming so much space in their lives. This painting and other paintings in this catalogue are examples of the separated children's art.*





Mozdeh Ghasemiyani

### The whole way

Mozdeh Ghasemiyani accompanies the young people the whole way. From their arrival in Rudersdal until their boxes are unpacked in the home of their new foster family.

- Throughout the entire process, I work to establish the flexibility that's so necessary in work with separated children. They're different than other children, and there's a special need for them to quickly establish an ordinary everyday life. But the system isn't designed to operate quickly.

The young people must wait a long time for long answers to various questions, and doing so can be difficult. I therefore work to involve the youth from the beginning and continuously explain the steps in the process so that they don't feel neglected or set aside, Ghasemiyani explains.

Mozdeh Ghasemiyani follows the individual child throughout the entire integration process, and she is also very conscientious when the time comes to say goodbye.

- That way, the youth also learn that 'goodbye' doesn't mean the same as in their past lives. Life hasn't fallen apart and it goes on, Ghasemiyani finishes.

### Recommendations of the partners:

- Regarding health care and the treatment of trauma, the separated child has the same rights as every other child; access to health care should be guaranteed and accessible. Caseworkers and other professionals should know how to support a child who has undergone traumatic experiences.
- Separated children should be assured appropriate psychosocial and psychotherapeutic treatment, appropriate psychosocial programmes and leisure activities that meet their needs and interests.
- Offer the child a structure, a normal daily life and routine which gives them a reason to get up in the morning.
- It is important that every person working with the integration of separated children maintains a strong focus on the fact that the separated child is *a child*. And children have special rights and needs. Respect for the experiences and maturity of the separated child should never mean that they are deprived of any rights. The professionals dealing with separated children must at all times maintain their focus on the best interest of the child, and they should involve the child in the decision-making process.
- The responsible authorities must provide the resources necessary to ensure the participation and integration of separated children. When talking about positive integration, the separated child is prevented from fully participating in life in society when they have to worry about renewing their residence permit or providing for themselves financially or if their social support is so low that that it inhibits their active participation in the community around them.
- The capacity building of professionals and the sharing of knowledge should be secured through educational opportunities and networks for professionals. That way, good practice will continue to be discussed and secured.
- Fewer bodies of local authority (e.g. municipalities) receiving separated children would mean more specialized treatment of the separated children, as the local authorities would then be able to develop their expertise and become specialized.

### Checklist: A good reception in the municipalities

The municipalities have an important responsibility to ensure that separated children under age 18 are received well, are given a warm welcome and receive the support they need – the support they have the *right* to receive. Save the Children Sweden has therefore published a comprehensive checklist with good advice and recommendations aimed at ensuring the best possible reception of separated children.



Mansour Nouri

# Adults are important

Mansour Nouri came to Denmark from Afghanistan as a separated child at age 11. His childhood in the Lindhøjgård children's house provided him with the support from adults he needed to get to where he is today.

His father was shot by the Taliban and his mother died of cancer. So 11-year-old Mansour Nouri and his older brother were very much alone when they finally arrived in Denmark in 2003 after a lengthy journey that took them through countries such as Turkey and Malta. Nevertheless, Mansour Nouri, today 19 years of age, does not look back on his childhood as being lonely. To the contrary, he has been surrounded much of the time by other children and social workers who have been at the right place at the right time. Mansour has spent much of his youth at the children's house, Lindhøjgård, in Lyngø outside of Copenhagen – a safe haven after the anxiety and insecurity he felt immediately after arriving in Denmark, when he was sent to the Red Cross reception centre for separated children followed by a couple of other children's houses.

- The adults were the most important for me – so there were people to keep me in line and get me out of bed in the morning, Mansour explains. Today, Mansour is living in a group

home close to Lindhøjgård, where the young people take care of themselves.

## Equal relationships

Mansour started in grade 8 in the local elementary school, and his everyday life was much like the life of any Danish child: Get up, go to school, come home, get some help from an adult to do your homework, recreational activities, and dinner. He had his own bedroom, but the sense of community he enjoyed together with the adults and other youth – five boys and two girls – was important.

- It was very social, it was really good. We played foosball, soccer, and went to different recreational activities.

Mansour graduated from the local upper secondary program this past summer and is currently taking electives in mathematics at a business college in Copenhagen and spends a lot of time doing volunteer work. Some of this work is in the European SCEP network, which he helped establish. The network helps separated children to learn about their rights. When he thinks about the relationship between the social workers and the children living at Lindhøjgård, he describes them as being equal.

- In contrast to the other places I've lived, it meant a lot that you could feel the adults were happy when they came to work – it wasn't as though they were forced to come. We felt that they really enjoyed being together with us.

## Become isolated

Unfortunately, not all separated children have the opportunity to live in a children's house like Mansour. Many separated children end up living alone in their own little flat without the supportive framework and network that the children's house has to offer. Mansour knows a lot of other youth who were left to themselves in one of the municipality's apartments.

- They isolate themselves and don't really feel welcome in Danish society, Mansour explains.

And regarding his own life – how would it have turned out without the Lindhøjgård children's house?

- I don't think it would be too good. Maybe I would have been drawn into crime or come to spend time together with groups that are up to no good. Out there – that's where you have to turn to find love and a sense of togetherness.

But at the same time, Mansour would also like to be able to give himself a pat on the back for the results he has achieved.

- I'm not about to give the children's house all of the credit for me being where I am today, he laughs. - But the support from the adults meant a lot to me. And it's definitely certain that I wouldn't be where I am today without them.

## Friends for life

Now he is standing on his own two feet. And that is also a good thing.

- I've figured things out and I'm able to take care of myself. But Mansour isn't entirely on his own. He lives together with two other youth, and they eat together and are able to give each other a hand in their everyday lives. The social workers from Lindhøjgård are also still around – just in a different way.

- We will definitely keep in touch. Our relationship is still very strong, and I think that it will last for many years. And his friendships with the other children? Will they also last?

- For sure. We've grown up together!

## Recommendations of the partners:

- Caseworkers, guardians and all of the relevant actors should consider the fact that the children are in the host country without their parents and therefore have special needs. The aim should be to create a family-like environment marked by an atmosphere of joy, love and understanding.
- The accommodations provided for separated children should be based on an assessment of the best interest of the child. The options should be carefully considered by the child together with their guardian. To begin with, younger separated children should be offered care in a foster family, while children over age 16 should also be offered the opportunity to live in a residential institution. Separated children should never be placed together with children with behavioural problems.
- Clear guidelines for how to receive a separated child – the kind of support the child should systematically be offered, the different roles and mandates of the professionals taking part in the life of the separated child – should be developed. This would help secure the equal treatment of every separated child.
- The separated child should be housed in a place where their development is in focus regardless of their protection status. Separated children should be provided with suitable and sufficient accommodations specialized for children in order to fully address the individual needs and specific characteristics of a child. No child should be placed in a flat alone, with only a caseworker visiting a few times a week, unless they are actually prepared to do so and it is deemed to be in their best interest. Nor should a child ever be placed among children with behavioural problems (e.g., placing separated children together with national children who have run afoul with the law); it is crucial to remember that the separated child requires security and attention.
- If a separated child fulfils the criteria to receive extended care after turning 18, they should receive such care – like any other child in the country in question.

# Connecting people

A stable adult you can trust. A person from whom you can get help and with whom you can share life's questions – big and small – which is alpha and omega when you are all alone as a child in a foreign country. In Germany, for instance, legal guardians provide support throughout the entire integration process, and a volunteer mentor arrangement in Austria has recently won a distinguished prize for its work with educating volunteer mentors for separated children.

Abdi fled from Somalia and the war being fought between adults. For he did not want to be any part of the war. Before fleeing, he had sat in prison for six months and was facing the possibility of spending the next ten years behind bars. So when Abdi's mother and aunt were able to pay his way out of prison, he had no choice but to flee the country. His long, difficult journey ended in Austria. Here, he was initially placed in an asylum centre, where he heard that it was possible to get a volunteer mentor via *asylkoordination österreich*, an Austrian NGO. - When the time came for me to move out of the centre, I didn't really know anyone. I needed someone to know – someone I could trust, someone who could help me. Therefore I applied for a mentor, Abdi explains.

Today, Abdi's volunteer mentor is the anchor in his everyday life. They talk together on the telephone almost every day, he gets help with paper work and to prepare for meetings in connection with his asylum case, as well as help to stay in touch with his family in Somalia. But most importantly of all, he has found a friend and a source of personal insight into life in Austria.

And this friendship and insight mean a lot for the mentors and separated children alike.



- I signed up as a mentor because I wanted to do something good. But I also get an enormous amount out of the relationship. I have developed a very special friendship with a young person who is in the process of growing up. I have learned so much about things I didn't know anything about in the past. Being a mentor simply opens my mind, explains one of *asylkoordination österreich's* 180 volunteer mentors, Verena Pawlowsky.

## Prize winning education

The volunteer mentors in the *asylkoordination österreich* programme, connecting people, have no formal or legal obligations. But many have a serious personal obligation to be there for the young separated child. For the mentors to be able to live up to this obligation, they complete an education programme that covers the asylum legislation, life as a separated child, traumas and life as a refugee, the mentor role and intercultural communication. This training has very recently received an award from the Austrian Ministry of Arts, Culture and Education for its high quality.

- We put a lot of work into how we educate our mentors, because it's not always easy to establish a good relationship between a mentor and a separated child. It takes time and requires a lot of knowledge, determination and involvement. We support and accompany the mentors, so that their relationship to the young person becomes a stable and lasting relationship, which is so important for the separated child, explains Klaus Hofstätter, coordinator for connecting people.

## Legal guardians

Connecting people is based on the personal commitment of volunteers. This commitment may not at all replace the legal obligation of the authorities to appoint a guardian.

Stability is also one of the key words in the German professional guardian programme.

- The guardian is usually the person in Germany the separated child has known the longest. While teachers and the personnel at asylum centres come and go, the guardian must be the child's pillar of support; the person who knows the child personally and is familiar with the child's case, who is always on the child's side – a partisan and at the same time someone with the legal power to act as a guardian, Thomas Gittrich

says. Thomas Gittrich works with the guardian programme in Munich. Here, the professional guardians have a total of 40 cases each and are partly paid by the municipality. Their responsibility is first and foremost to ensure the children the protection to which they are entitled as well as to support, represent and counsel the child or young person in connection with their case.

- We need to employ more guardians. But it's difficult to find personnel. And it takes at least one year of training before the guardian can begin working independently with the massive responsibility it means to become a professional guardian for a separated child, Thomas Gittrich states.

## Recommendations of the partners:

- Every child should receive a guardian immediately upon arriving in a municipality. The main objective for the guardian is to bring the view and the best interest of the child to the decision table.
- The guardian plays a central role in the course of the integration process and in the life of the separated child. The guardian must be close by and available to the separated child.
- Clear guidelines regarding the function of the guardian should be worked out, and the knowledge of this function should be communicated to the professionals who will be dealing with the child.
- Every separated child should be provided with clear information about the role and limitations of the guardian.



# A network for life

*A football. An exhibition. A network. The integration process can be difficult for separated children if they do not have any recreational activities and a social network. Serge – who came to Slovenia as a separated child – helps other children and young people in the same situation to break the sense of isolation with which some of these children struggle.*

The conversation begins carefully. He is speaking in low tones and short sentences. But after five minutes, his voice grows louder, the sentences grow longer, and he begins to ‘talk’ with his entire body. The topic of conversation is the youth network of Separated Children in Europe Programme, SCEP, and Serge’s enthusiasm becomes quite obvious.

- It was amazing – the first time I met the other kids in SCEP. Think – there were others in the same situation that I was! I got the feeling that I wasn’t alone. And that gave me an enormous sense of energy, says Serge.

He arrived in Slovenia at age 16 after fleeing from Cameroun, in western Africa, for religious reasons. In comparison to the rest of Europe, Slovenia receives a relatively limited number of separated children, so Serge did not meet many others who were in the same situation as he was.

- I had to start from the very beginning and build up a new network. I started by playing football, which is something that everyone can do together. But when I got home to my place after practice, I was all alone – totally alone, he says.

Serge got in touch with the network of separated children in Europe via Slovenska filantropija, a Slovenian NGO. He was invited to a meeting in Amsterdam, but had not really thought that he would be particularly active.

- But I gradually found out that I could learn a lot from the others and from the activities carried out in the network. And I found out that I actually had a lot to offer. Working together, we have accumulated a lot of knowledge about what it is like to be a separated child in Europe. And we have been heard, because there are so many of us, Serge explains.

## **Nobody should be alone**

Serge is now using the energy and experience he has gained from his involvement with SCEP to getting separated children in Slovenia to become a part of the local community. Both together with other separated children as well as Slovenian children and youth.

- In my home in Cameroun, there were always a lot of people – uncles, aunts, friends and neighbours – I’m used to living with a lot of other people around me. That’s one of the reasons why it has been difficult for me to accept that separated children like me and others are so very alone. I want to change that, so I’m now trying to help other separated children and young migrants.

- In Europe, people live more on their own. But the things that bring European children and youth together are school and their recreational activities – like playing guitar, football and dancing. Separated children are just not a part of this community, so therefore I thought that we could arrange some activities and events so that the separated children aren’t just sitting there on their own, Serge explains.

## **When the Afghanis danced**

One of the events that Serge emphasizes as being particularly positive was an exhibition carried out by the separated children in a popular forested area near the Slovenian capital of Ljubljana. Here, the separated children interpreted Slovenian culture in writing, painting and via music.

- We set the exhibition up and arranged a picnic in the area on a day in which many Slovenian people were on a trip to the forest. It was an enormous success. Many people stopped by and learned something completely new. The separated children and Slovenians had the opportunity to talk with one another. And even though it takes a long time to become familiar with a new

culture, we all got the sense that people were actually interested in learning about other cultures. It meant a lot to the separated children and the curious Slovenians, Serge tells us.

He remembers one particular experience from the day:

- Some of the separated children from Afghanistan participated in the exhibition. They are usually very closed and difficult to connect with. But that day, they danced. Because they felt as though they meant something. That they existed. For me, it was completely overwhelming to see them so open and happy at such a large event and with so many people.

And then there is football. In the course of the conversation, Serge repeatedly returns to the issue. Why is it that he lights up like that when he is talking about his football practices and about the time in the autumn when he co-organized the international tournament “Football Against Racism”?

- Having friends means everything. If I didn’t have my football, I probably wouldn’t have had any friends. And I mean that completely seriously. Football saved me, Serge concludes.

## **Recommendations of the partners:**

- Children should be supported to engage actively in the society around them, and the civil society should be encouraged to become involved on a voluntary basis.
- Efforts must be made to ensure that separated children receive the necessary support to form social relations (e.g. contact families, recreational activities, cultural or religious networks, contacts with their ethnic communities and with youth organizations). It would be optimal if a network of mentors could be developed consisting of persons who arrived in the receiving countries as separated children themselves who are thus able to guide the newcomers in the municipalities.





## Listen to us!

The Meeting Place is for anyone who came to Sweden as a separated child  
The network's recommendations

# Listen to us

*Separated children have the right to be heard and have influence on the decisions concerning their lives. Just like all other children. In Sweden, the Save the Children project entitled 'The Meeting Place' helps guarantee a voice to separated children.*

- We would like to hear your thoughts and experiences regarding your living conditions. Have you lived in a children's house, in a centre for families or with relatives? What worked well? What didn't work? And what would you like to change? What was the staff like where you were living? How would you describe your perfect home or flat?

Those are some of the questions from Save the Children to the many separated children who are in the process of beginning a new life in Sweden. The Meeting Place project gives these children a chance to respond.

- The Meeting Place aims to provide opportunity to separated children to talk about their experiences and how they were received in Sweden. The project developed as a reaction to the fact that Swedish authorities do not systematically collect knowledge about how separated children have been received. There's a lack of ongoing follow-up in terms of what is good and what is bad from the perspective of the child, explains Linus Torgeby, Save the Children Sweden.

### A call to the municipalities

The backbone of the project is Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which clearly states that children have the right to express their opinions and be heard. On that background, Save the Children is hosting a number of arrangements in which separated children have the opportunity

to share their opinions concerning various issues.

- We find that children enjoy being given opportunity to share their experiences. For some of them, it's possibly the first time that anyone has shown interest and listened to them, their experiences and their opinions, Linus Torgeby says.

The Meeting Place began as a project in Gothenburg, but the idea is spreading and has put down roots in several other parts of Sweden.

- The Meeting Place project has helped focus attention on how separated children have the right to be included and heard – e.g. at the municipal level when decisions are to be made about where the children are going to live, Linus Torgeby explains.

On the background of the children's experiences and opinions, Save the Children has formulated a number of specific requirements and recommendations for the authorities and municipalities. Volunteers in Save the Children's local branches help spread the word at the local level.

- In so doing, we're able to make the municipalities aware of the children's own experiences and carry out considerable advocacy work aimed at guaranteeing the best possible conditions for the children, Linus Torgeby explains.

### Recommendations of the partners:

- Every state should respect the article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, saying that the child has the right to express his or her opinion freely and to have that opinion taken into account in any matter or procedure affecting the child.
- Authorities and caretakers involved with the separated children have an obligation to listen to them and learn from them.
- Good practices and methods for involving the say of the separated children should be developed and shared.

### When?

24 September, 2011, 10am–5pm.

We serve food, coffee and cake. We meet and share experiences and exchange opinions. We have a good time, meet old friends and make new ones. In the evening, we head over to Tivoli together. IKEA pays for the tickets.

### Where?

The School of Design & Crafts, University of Gothenburg. Kristinelundsgatan 6.

### You:

Came to Sweden as a separated child and have lived here for at least 1½ years.

## Better Integration

If you would like to know more, you can contact the project partners:

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## Overall principles for better integration

- Durable solutions based on an individual assessment of the best interest of the child should be found when making decisions on the child's future. All talk about integration loses meaning for a child with a limited residence permit, who fears return.
- Individual solutions taking into account the specific circumstances of the separated child should be an aim in every decision relating to the individual child.
- It is important that the professionals working with the separated child are honest and keep their promises – they must provide the child with all of the relevant information concerning the integration process.
- The personal development of the child should be supported in all of the actions relating to the child.

To find more information about the project visit the project website: [www.betterintegration.eu](http://www.betterintegration.eu)



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