

SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES LITHUANIA

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2016

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SOS Families



Professional Foster family

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1 Section: Annual Report

1.1 Summary of SOS Children's Villages Lithuania work in 2016:

The year of 2016 moved forward in protecting child rights because the President of Lithuania initiated a dozen of legislative changes.

In the eyes of SOS Children's Villages Lithuania 2016 was the year of expanding services with municipalities, revision of internal processes and advocacy on national level.

On the national level, it is important to keep in mind the D-I action plan signed in February 2014 outlined how the number of children in institutional care will go down by 2020. The main goal was to prevent institutional care, legislate family type care for children and initiate professional foster care:

- Each of the present 93 care institutions will only care for 30 children or face closure by 2020 according to D-I action plan and new regulations.
- Community based care when up to 8 children can live in a small group home was defined as an alternative.
- Professional foster care will be the main alternative to save children from institution care.
- Leaving care will become the new norm for all children who grow up in care or in families at social risk.

Due to ineffective and slow political process, none of the alternatives have been legislated. Child protection offices in 60 municipalities in Lithuania struggled to ensure children's safety as care institutions are full, municipalities care about lowering numbers of children in institutions and end up leaving children in unsafe homes. The management of one Kaunas hospital came out to tv shows to highlight the severity of abuse for children problem, by presenting pictures of children how were hurt and presenting numbers of how often this happens in this hospital.

Child protection law got stuck behind the reform of Labour Code and never got to parliament. 2016 was also election year, which stalled all processes even more. A major shift in parliament was the result of parliamentary elections in October, which ended up with a new majority Farmers and Green party and new cabinet of ministers.

During all this uncertainty, the President of Lithuania took charge in April and started a 2 year campaign called Safe Lithuania. 4 campaign pillars are:

- helping families to prevent separation,
- promoting fostering, adoption,
- preventing abuse in families.

SOS Children's Villages Lithuania became an official partner of the campaign for Safe Lithuania and worked together to prepare legislation. SOS Children's Villages Lithuania also became the promoter of professional foster care at the request of the president's office. During a series of meetings at the President's office, we had an opportunity to meet 59 municipalities, promote alternative care and advocate for children's rights.

We are proud to have supported and consulted on President's legislative initiatives, which were submitted by the President's office 11 January 2017:

- Professional foster care legislation – Civil code changed to include new form of care, law of social services amended to include a network of professional foster parents, which can recruit, train, sign contracts and ensure quality of professional foster parents.
- 1 day limit for Child protection office to react to unsafe situation for children – unfortunately children are left in unsafe situations as there was no time limit to react;
- 2 months for parents to show that they will be changing and commit to a plan, otherwise Child protection will be asking the court to temporary suspend parental rights;

- 12 months max temporary suspension of parental rights. After that suspension is permanent, unless parents show real changes. Until now children were left without a chance to be adopted as suspension of parental rights used to be renewed by courts many times.
- Systemic neglect was defined as abuse against children which will require Child protection officers to act. Lithuanian parliament voted to stop all kinds of abuse against children 13 January 2017.
- Free legal counsel for adoptive parents and foster parents.

In 2016 SOS Children's Villages Lithuania greatly expanded services.

We become nationally known, as a leading expert and hope this will increase the potential for fundraising:

- Full case management for families at social risk in Vilnius, South Lithuania and Siauliai. In Total strengthening families for 583 children.
- Professional foster care was started which increased the number of children in care to 124. Professional foster care also allowed our organisation to show the international best practices for care of children.
- Our team was successful in winning public tenders in municipalities, which gave us an increase of 21% of funding for services

To compare:

Services	2016	2015
Children in care	124	100
Children FS	583	287
Families in FS	309	152

During 2016 a lot of focus was placed on improving of organisational processes:

- Large band salary review was conducted and 100% of bands were modified according to market analysis and confirmed by SOS Children's Villages International.
- Organisation of care workers working schedule was changed to reflect actual working time. Contracts were amended with SOS Mothers to 1.5 FTE. All Contracts with family assistance were amended to reflect working hours during the day and during the night. Transparency of payment was very positively accepted by the concerned employees.
- Psychological support for the trial period of care co-workers was introduced, in order to reduce the rate of turnover within the first year of employment.
- With support from regional office, all leaders were trained in the new Child Safeguarding Policy in April. All of the new policy documents have been amended to local language and process reviewed.
- New program structure was piloted together with SOS International office members and colleagues from Estonia. It was reflected in the budget for 2017 in order to give leaders a chance of working through a different way of budgeting.
- Organisational structure was amended to allow for expanding of services and ensure a more effective operation both on National Office level and program level.

- Another new aspect of our work in 2016 was working in partnership with other NGO's . On national level we were presenting a unified front in regards to professional foster care, through preparation of legislation of behalf of NGO association for Children's rights. Locally, SOS Lithuania invited partners to bid for service projects together. It was the first in underfinanced NGO sector, but proved to not only strengthen our negotiating position, but more importantly elevated to a different level of understanding and mutual cooperation.

Another important aspect of 2016 was to reintroduce SOS Children's Villages Lithuania mission and values for all employees:

- Value day to share personal and organisational values was held in February for the first time in SOS Lithuania.
- To reconnect with one another a day to relax together was introduced and met with great enthusiasm based on high participation.
- To see the fruit of SOS Lithuania, Youth programme organised the first day of SOS Alumni and started, what hopefully will become a tradition of maintaining close contacts through working together and assisting each other in life. Youth Links project now serves as the first step towards closer ties.
- 21st Birthday was celebrated with live testimonies of children who grew up in SOS and SOS Mother in retirement, which again united in a common goal to create a family for each child.
- Christmas workshop was suggested and organised by care co-workers, where children and other employees were invited to participate and create thank you gifts for partners and supporters of 2016.

While expansion of services and our work in advocacy have been very successful, one of the main challenges in 2016 was fundraising. We were successful in attracting more big corporate partners, and achieved our targets with on off donations, however attracting and maintaining committed individual givers has pushed the fundraising results down. There were obvious technical reasons due to changes of the banking system, which stopped automated monthly payments and it took a better half of the year to get all of the processes back on track. Looking forward we have all the processes necessary in line, amended our strategy and monitoring and have high hopes to reach 100% of our fundraising goals for 2017.

Our partners of 2016 have made our work possible by supporting new initiatives like Career Consulting Program and funding to support the needs of expanding services. Our fundraising turned a corner by promoting social responsibility in corporate business through a variety of meetings and participating in high level national conferences. Social responsibility and supporting social partners is still at it's infancy in Lithuania, so being a flag bearer may be a long road, where perseverance and creativity will be key to success. Through high visibility that our advocacy work provides we hope to attract both individuals and companies ready to support SOS Children's Villages Lithuania goals and mission.

Our overall income for 2016 was around 2.1 mln EUR. Our expenses for 2015 were covered by:

- 1.2 mln for services from government or municipal funding,
- 422 K was raised by Fundraising
- 470 K subsidy from SOS International

Outside of SOS Children's Villages Lithuania the situation in the country has not improved much with regards to social justice. European Commission Country report for Lithuania points out social inequality in Lithuania is one of the highest in the EU, and has been increasing since 2012.

Statistically, 1.7% of children are deprived of parental care, which is double the European average. Though the numbers of children at risk or without parental care show a slight decrease, when compared to decrease in population, it becomes apparent that children at social risk increase in percentages.

Children at social risk (According to Social services informational system data.):

Social risk families & children	2013	2014	2015	2016
Number of families at social risk	10.228	9.768	9.909	9.685
Children in families at social risk	20.561	19.066	19.665	18.727

Children deprived of parental care:

Children deprived of parental care	2013	2014	2015	2016
Children without parental care	10.225	9.221	9.221	9.112
Children in institutional care	3.821	3.276	3.276	3.187
Children under 3 in institutional care	N/A	404	359	283

Economically, the situation in Lithuania is stable and here is a comparative overview of the economy in numbers¹:

Measure	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Annual change in real GDP	2,8	-14,9	1,6	6,1	3,7	3,7	3,0	1,7	IIIQ 2
Annual change in inflation, %	8,5	1,3	3,8	3,4	2,8	0,4	-0,3	-0,1	IIIQ 0,6
Average monthly salary, EUR	671,7	613,5	614,4	629,9	646,4	677,8	714,5	735,1	IIIQ 793
Average unemployment rate,%	5,8	13,7	17,8	15,4	13,4	11,8	10,7	8,3	IIIQ 8,0

¹ Source Department of Statistics of the Republic of Lithuania

1.2 Time schedule for Major Events in 2016:

January	February	March
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NMT meeting. • End of Performance evaluation period. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board meeting • Value Day • 4th review of 2014 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand Training for new employees • Start of Professional Foster Care
April	May	June
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1st review of 2016 • NMT meeting • Reconnect Day • Child Safeguarding Policy training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial audit • Audtrain for certification • SOS Alumni Day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board meeting • General Assembly Innsbruck
July	August	September
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2nd review of 2016 • NMT meeting • New Program Structure training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CV youth transition to Youth facility • 21st Anniversary of SOS CV Lithuania 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget formation • Board meeting
October	November	December
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic planning workshop 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3rd review of 2016 • NMT meeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board meeting • Christmas Celebration in SOS CV

3 Facility Reports:

3.1 SOS Children's Village Vilnius Programme:

SOS Care – 124 children:

- 12 homes: SOS families, Small group homes, Short term placement.
- 11 SOS professional foster families
- 1 Youth Facility

Professional foster care marked the beginning of 2016, with the team creating standards of care as there was no national legislation. Vytautas and Jurgita became the first professional foster parents in Lithuania.

- Throughout the year Vytautas and his wife became a home to three children. One was able to be reunited with grandmother, two were returned to relatives.
- Jurgita and her family became a temporary home for 6 children throughout the year: two got to go back to their aunt, for one SOS Lithuania had to find a permanent guardian, for two a long lost father was found by SOS Case managers and one is still awaiting his new permanent family placement.

From two families, we grew to 8 and then 11. Navigating by trying to piece families together and creating new families has been time consuming. CV Vilnius restructured, new team members were brought onboard and everyone strongly feels this is the way to go, despite the hard work and unclear legislation.

SOS families remained a sign of good care. Outside of daily life raising children, we planned for moments of reflection and planned for more independent family life with SOS mothers taking full charge of family decisions. Systemic audit of long term care was performed to identify the necessary changes. New national regulations to reduce the number of children living in care institutions to 30 place will also be a challenge on SOS families, which can only succeed if all the care coworkers are ready to take a new turn and feel they are supported throughout the way.

Working with challenging teens was transformed by providing a care team focused on structured routines just for them. Short term placement increased the turnover of children and thus demanded more resources to be poured in working with biological families seeking reunification of children.

Challenges in providing quality of care for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties due to lack of services in the country. Often we need to fill the gap for these children by providing assistance in kindergartens and schools, however that is not enough as different type of specialists are needed to support SOS families. Narrative therapy, Playtherapy, Canithery are methods started by our specialists, however long term programs are needed which are as of yet non existent in Lithuania.

For 2017 the outlook is very positive as at the end of the year a long negotiation for funding finally gave results and the cost for care of children was raised in Vilnius municipality.

SOS CV Vilnius / SOS Professional foster family

How to prevent a baby of one month of from care in an institution, when there is no one to care for the baby? SOS Professional foster parent Ausra is unique in Vilnius as she is the only one accepting babies into her home, family and heart. It is a temporary solution, she always says, we are the safe heaven before the baby find a permanent family. She has had three in 2016, one was raised by her for 4 months before SOS Lithuania was able to compile all kinds of documents and help present the baby for adoption. Another tiny human was only a couple weeks old and suffering from drug abuse of his parent's related affects, which meant that Ausra and her family held the baby in their arms for a whole month, before his little body could relax from tension and muscle pain, and he too, was happily adopted. This served as a life lesson to her teenage child to never assume the safety of addictive substances. Ausra and her family and how safeguarding a third baby, who still awaits his permanent home in the loving care of this professional foster family.

3.1.2 Vilnius Family strengthening

189 families was the biggest expansion in services in 2016. Starting to work in 5 elderships in Vilnius where SOS CV Vilnius program won the public tender and carries full responsibility for all families at social risk living in 5 elderships.

- Family strengthening was restructured into teams, where one case manager accepts the role of coordinating a team to ensure quality, proactivity and support for colleagues.
- Assessment and takeover of new families was an arduous process, which resulted in change of management.
- When no national criteria for safeguarding children is available it falls on the personal responsibility of SOS Case managers to be diligent, forceful and maintain a watchful eye in order to protect the children.
- New services of addiction, family therapists as well as Food bank are now regular services to support families.
- Group activities ranging from day centre for children, parenting and social skills groups for parents are growing in demand which the team is happy to provide.

Overall how to work for the system and also change the system was and remains our biggest goal and challenge.

Our work with families at social risk has given us enough background to push for changes in Lithuania to promote services for families as such, not only families at social risk.

- We are now working with the ministry and providing a framework of how to assess children's needs in families that are facing any difficulty.
- Case management has been included into the new law of Child protection as the best way to ensure child safeguarding. The law will be in parliament in 2017 spring.

With the start of public tenders for services we are jumping into 2017, where we hope to:

- continue to expand SOS professional foster family network in Vilnius.
- Vilnius municipality have confirmed appointment of SOS CV Vilnius to become the service provider for supporting children with emotional and behavioral difficulties from 6 to 12 years.

Most importantly we are in line to start a two 3 year projects: Support center for Foster/adoptive parents for Vilnius municipality and prevention work with families that face difficulties. NGO that provides psychological support is our partner in both projects. These projects could pave the way to new type of long term funding for services.

Family Strengthening story

A story where family strengthening and care intertwines is best illustrated with a young mother, who suffered from addiction and could not provide a safe home and care for her little baby daughter. A close friend, a neighbour mostly took care of the baby when situation became too risky at home. Child protection took the decision to separate the baby and that's how she came to SOS short term care. Working continuously with the mother a treatment program was found, where she was accepted. Her one weekly call was always to the case manager of short term care to enquire about the little one. Life changed for both mother and daughter and after a trial month, the mother was allowed to live with her baby daughter in the rehabilitation facility for a couple of months until the end of treatment. Close contact is maintained to keep them both safe.

3.1.3 Vilnius Youth Facility/ Youth programme:

Youth program has gone from strength to strength.

2016 was the first year when working with teens living in CV Vilnius was focused on Lion's Quest program. Just as importantly attracting new youth to join the program from families at social risk and other care homes for children. Youth living in Youth facility created their own brand with the sole purpose of creating products for sale and thus saving for special holidays abroad.

The first Alumni day for children who grew up in SOS CV Vilnius was organized out of sheer enthusiasm to try and reconnect. It proved both interesting and helpful to hear what young people wish SOS Lithuania would assist them with and how they can assist others leaving SOS Lithuania.

Summer jobs and internships have become a daily routine. A new challenge is set to help youth determine what future they want by trying to get summer jobs they want, and not only the available options. Earning money was the idea behind the new brand, which will label all products that youth create for sale.

As before, corporate partners supported with enhancing social skills and assisting in creating networks. For this, Youth Links project came just in time and was happily taken by those living in youth facility and those who have left for independent life.

SOS Youth Program / SOS Youth Facility

There are 4 young men living in Youth facility who are from families at social risk. Here is why we do it. Child protection brought a 16 year old to the doorstep of Youth facility, when his grandfather was hospitalised after a stroke. It appeared the young man was on the autism spectrum and also had a mother, and grandmother both with mental illnesses and unable to support anyone.

The young man was severely neglected, had used to life in unsanitary conditions, in constant tension and unable to socialise. During the first days in Youth facility, the young man suffered another tragedy, death of his sole career, grandfather. The burial of the grandfather was the first step to build a relationship, as no one else was capable of handing the situation.

The young man is in high school, very skilled with computers and proficient in English. It was his daily life that was creating problems. His grandfather did all the shopping and taking care of everyone, as his grandson suffered from autism spectrum disorder, often not diagnosed and not dealt with in Lithuania. With support of Youth worker the young man is finding his way back to normal life, learning all the basic life skills from washing himself to buying food and even planning his future. Together with his youth worker he visits his mother, now safe in psychiatric hospital and often wonders, "what would have happened to me, if I never came to youth home?"

3.2 SOS Children's Villages South Lithuania Programme:

- 90 Family strengthening families,
- Day centres in Alytus and Pivasiunai

3.2.1 Varena Family Strengthening:

We have increased number of families in full case management in municipality of Varena from 34 to 50 in 2016. This very rural area, where families were left with their problems for decades always puts our work into long term perspective. Part of our services is to prove child protection authorities with the need to safeguard children and thus take them into care.

Working creatively is our moto in Varena. Family conference method was tested as means to involve the entire family group, this proved difficult as extended families are often at social risk as well. However, it also served as a catalyst and shows without a shadow of a doubt that the safest place for children is in care.

Attracting psychological support, organizing group activities for children and youth are essential as in some families, the only possibility is to show another life for youth.

- Career consulting program was aimed at 16 – 18 year olds.
- Emotional self-understanding groups were aimed at 12 – 14 year olds.

One unique solution for 2016 was to move a mother and daughter from desolate surroundings to a different town in order to save them from abusive grandmother, place the little one in the kindergarten, assess the young mother's mental health and find her work.

The work in Varena is intense. Often faced with being a last resort for families, we end us organising services to exterminate cockroaches, diagnosing potential tuberculosis and working with mentally disabled who cannot support children on their own. Our work requires more specialist support and more resources, which we hope to attract in 2017 as we emerge from solving the most dire situations.

3.2.2 Alytus and Pivasiunai Day centres:

South Lithuania program includes three municipalities, and while working with full case management in Varena, in Pivasiunai and Alytus SOS Lithuania has Day centres and works with families, whose children attend Day centres. EEA grant was dedicated to train teams on how to work with families, where primary responsibility lies with municipality social workers. Our teams have defined their role primarily to strengthen the relationship between children and parents, to educate parents in how to cope with children's behaviour and be part of the child's life.

2016 was a fun year of testing a variety of methods in working with children:

- Learning social and hygiene skills was a program for younger 7 – 12 year old children.
- Training village children to grow vegetables and build a greenhouse as they have never done that.
- Attracting the elderly from the nearby elderly home to sit and chat to children.
- Every kind of activity from knitting, sowing, making jams and preserves for winter to meeting all kinds of people representing professions.

Trying to support families, often means securing food parcels and proper seasonal clothing. Unfortunately, children's illiteracy has become an issue even in youth 13 and over, which changes the priorities of the Day centre teams from developing life skills, to teaching basic skills like reading and writing.

The work with children is rewarding as change happens in daily interactions, them learning to wash hands, give a hug, read a book and most importantly acquire a dream for their future.

The story of two sisters / Pivasiunai day centre

A 17 year old became pregnant and gave birth, while still living with her mother and sister. With the baby on the way and no income in the family, SOS Lithuania called out for support. Baby things were fundraised as well as financial aid, first of all to determine parental rights through a DNA test, essential when applying for social support.

The sister, who is 15 was our regular at the Day centre and the one who shared about her sister's new baby bump. The 15 year old also participated in Career consulting program that SOS Lithuania started for the first time in 2016. At the end, she won a trainee job at the Day centre and worked for a whole months, before having to return to family duties.

The whole family is part of Pivasiunai family strengthening. A small village of just 300 inhabitants, but generations living at social risk with no end in sight. Our plan with this family is to keep the 15 year old in school and to create conditions for the 17 year old to return to grade 11 and hopefully graduate.

3.3 Family strengthening in Siauliai and Camp in Karkle

Early in 2016 an opportunity came to bid for a one year public tender to offer Family strengthening services in Siauliai, North of Lithuania. We took the opportunity as Siauliai was part of SOS Lithuania 2020 strategy, where we hope to develop an additional program North West Lithuania.

SOS Lithuania won the tender and received full responsibility for 34 families at risk in Siauliai city. Our aim was to establish SOS Lithuania as a service provider in Siauliai in the wake of D-I public tenders for alternative care services.

A positive cooperation was formed with municipality, which has agreed to assess the needs of all children living in families with difficulties in order to prevent families ending up at social risk. Throughout 2016 partnerships were created with Siauliai university, Food bank, crisis shelter, psychological support and most importantly with municipality.

A large part of families at social risk in Siauliai have grown up in the nearby 5 children's care facilities and often lack life skills and understanding of proper care of children. Very quickly group work was started in a local school, where cooking with families allowed to form connection and start developing family support plans.

A continuation of services is planned for 2017, which allowed SOS Lithuania to bid for partial funding to start care services, that will be cofounded by Siauliai once started.

797 Children spent time in Karkle during the season of 2016 from over 20 organisations.

The camp has been a place where children from care home, special needs children and children from families at risk can come to enjoy a summer holiday and in most occasions see the sea for the first time in their lives.

In 2016 Karkle became a family strengthening camp, as groups from Varena, Alytus, Pivasiunai and Siauliai were brought with hope to witness the connection between parents and children and strengthen the relationship through a variety of activities.



The camp also hosted difficult teens and provided them with short term summer jobs on daily maintenance of the camp. Children from other care homes, as well as children with disability were the main guests of the season.

As usual, all the renovation is being done by the team themselves. To support the operations, 2016 saw long overdue investment into a water well, which will now provide sufficient supply throughout the busy summer months. Though Karkle is self-sufficient, the vision is to see this camp become the yearlong promoter of SOS Lithuania by creating a home for youth, who would live and apprentice as hospitality service and cooks and train by working at the social café in Karkle camp main building.