



Annual Report 2018

Contents

YEAR AT A GLANCE.....	1
TARGET GROUPS.....	2
INTERVENTIONS AND IMPACT.....	3
Children from vulnerable communities.....	3
Children from residential-care institutions.....	5
Children with disabilities.....	9
Refugee children.....	10
Children in hospitals.....	14
CAPACITY-BUILDING.....	17
MONITORING AND EVALUATION.....	23
KEY ACHIEVEMENTS.....	27
ADVOCACY WORK.....	27
PLANS FOR 2019.....	29
CASE STUDIES.....	30

YEAR AT A GLANCE

In 2018 Worldwide Orphans Bulgaria (WWO Bulgaria) successfully implemented existing programs and launched new projects and initiatives. “Play for Achievement”, WWO Bulgaria’s first kindergarten-based project launched in 2017 was completed in June 2018. It focused not only on direct work with the children but also on their screening and the research of the impact of the Foundation’s programs. The results showed that even in the educational environment of the kindergarten, the Element of Play® programs are not only successfully integrated in the everyday activities but also lead to progress in child development. This inspired us to continue with enthusiasm and start a pilot project called “Play and Art” in a kindergarten in the Roma community in Sofia.

Our work with refugee children and their families became more settled both by extending the programs and socializing the group in the community by empowering the mothers. This was possible due to a grant provided by the International Women’s Club.

The “Play in Support of Hospital Care” conference not only disseminated the pilot experience we gained in the Targovishte hospital but confirmed that WWO is one of the very few organizations in Bulgaria working towards changing the hospital environment for children. As a result, one of the biggest hospitals in Northern Bulgaria, the one in Rousse, joined the Element of Play® network.

WWO extended its advocacy work and influence by becoming a member of two national alliances – The Alliance for Early Childhood Development and the Childhood without Violence Coalition. In addition to providing expertise to the key messages of the two alliances, participation opened new and more mature opportunities to improve programs and create new partnerships. WWO promoted the European Quality Framework for Early Childhood Care to partners, which led to designing project proposals for 2019 to support local organizations to develop their own practices in the context of the European framework.

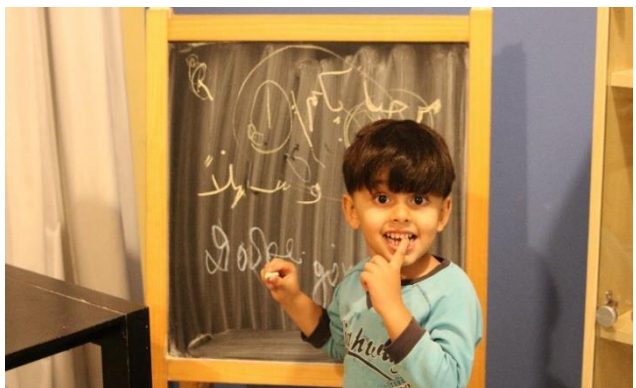
In 2018, WWO was recognized by professional communities as one of the leading organizations in the field of early childhood development and training, and this resulted in establishing a key partnership with the Tulip Foundation related to the piloting of the Sure Start Centers in Bulgaria. As a result of the support, 4 centers in the country started working with WWO’s Element of Play®.

The adaptation of WWO programs and their integration into the practices of the organization's partners was the focus of Lois Haymann's upgrading training in April. Thirty five specialists from the Toy Library network shared successes and challenges in their ‘Element of Play’ practice and expanded their knowledge and skills to work with parents. Investing in the development of professionals in 2018 has also led to an increase in the number of programs and children they work with. Thanks to the work of 104 specialists from 28 partner organizations, WWO programs reached 1792 children throughout the year.

TARGET GROUPS

During 2018 WWO Bulgaria's programs reached **1 792 children** and their families from different vulnerable groups in **33 locations** throughout the country. Throughout the period, **104 specialists** from **28 partner organizations** worked tirelessly with the support of WWO Bulgaria to meet the needs of the following target groups:

- ✓ Children from vulnerable communities
- ✓ Children in residential-care institutions
- ✓ Children in kindergarten
- ✓ Children with disabilities
- ✓ Refugee children
- ✓ Children in a hospital environment



INTERVENTIONS AND IMPACT

CHILDREN FROM VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES

Children from vulnerable communities comprise still the largest group of children that WWO Bulgaria serves. A total of **665 children** in this target group were reached by the organization in 2018 within the scope of **11 partner programs and projects** throughout the country. WWO Bulgaria serves children from vulnerable communities through partnerships with social services, such as Family Counseling Centers, Centers for Community Support and Community Centers. The locations where the programs are provided are very diverse, which allows us to reach out to a large number of children in the respective settlements. Three pilot Sure Start Centers in Varna, Targovishte and Stara Zagora became part of the Element of Play® providers in 2018.



Community Center Davidovo



Family Counseling Center Novi Pazar



Community Center Plovdiv

Partner Feedback:

“Thanks to the details and the bright colors of the toys, the children are satisfied and very happy. Toys attract children's attention and develop their imagination and psychomotor skills”.

Teacher, kindergarten in Shumen region

“The toys in Toy Library being so practical and functional, fit very well into the work of our center both as a key tool for developing children's abilities, and as an auxiliary - in other sessions and consultations.”

Psychologist, FCC Shumen

“What I like about this place is that apart from studying children here are enjoying themselves. My child keeps talking about coming here and wanting to come.”

Parent of a child from the village of Davidovo

Library on the Road: Toys and Music in Motion in the Targovishte region

Library on the Road started 4 years ago to support the children and their parents in Davidovo village in their inclusion in the Bulgarian educational system. The new Toy Library and Reading Corner created by WWO in the local community center became the focal point of the social activities for children in the village. The weekly sessions with the play specialist are not only time for fun for the children, they encourage children to learn and prepare them for starting kindergarten and school. The observations of the specialist on their individual development shows that children demonstrate progress in:

- Improving their Bulgarian language skills and preferring it to their mother tongue;
- Following rules and instructions from the adults;
- Feeling more confident in their own abilities and the willingness to try new things;
- Being more cooperative in their communication with peers;
- Expressing strong interest in reading at the library and at home;

Compared to the previous year, mothers/ carers follow more strictly the arrangements for regular group attendance and are more sensitive to their children's play and the progress they have in mastering different cognitive and social skills.



Group play sessions



Specialists support parents and listen to their needs



The renovated children's corner in the community center



Improved parent-child interaction

CHILDREN FROM RESIDENTIAL-CARE INSTITUTIONS

WVO Bulgaria's programs reached **316** children in **4** residential-care institutions. Residential-care institutions are still in a process of transition to becoming centers for specialized services for children with disabilities. While a small number of children still receive full-time residential care in the institutions, others only use the new services they offer. WVO Bulgaria's programs support the specialists in their work with families in the daily services provided by residential institutions using the Element of Play® programs. The Residential Care Institution in Burgas implements the programs very actively and constantly improves them according to the needs of the children they serve.



Group play session in the RCI in Burgas



Individual play session in the RCI in Burgas

Parent Feedback:

“I am very happy with the opportunity for each parent to borrow free of charge educational toys and use them at home with the professional guidance of the specialists in the institution. Parents' training on Element of Play® has an incredible effect on children's progress.”

“At the institution we and our children received a lot of love and care, we learned how to play together, to talk with them all the time, to tell them stories, to encourage them to learn through experience and develop the various skills they'll need in life through play.”

“We are thankful for the training, the wonderful toys from the Toy library and for your attention to how we use them at home. Thank you for the advice and support!”

CHILDREN IN KINDERGARTENS

In 2018, 111 children in 4 kindergartens (KG Pchelitsa in Targovishte, KG in the village of Vardun, 11th KG in Targovishte, 62nd KG in Sofia) had the opportunity to participate in the Element of Play® activities with their teachers and WWO Bulgaria’s play specialists. The play sessions provided many of the children with an opportunity to develop their cognitive and social skills and to adapt more to an educational environment and children group settings.

After the two-year work of an external play specialist in the KG ‘Pchelitsa’ Targovishte and trainings, the team of the kindergarten successfully work independently with the Toy Library and the Storytelling programs.

Another kindergarten which witnessed a big transformation as a result of WWO Bulgaria’s partnership was the kindergarten in the village of Vardun, a small village with predominantly Roma population, which is located near Targovishte. The team of the kindergarten joined WWO Bulgaria’s programs in the beginning of 2018. Besides the poor knowledge of Bulgarian language of the children, the environment in the kindergarten was limited in terms of stimulating toys and commitment of parents to the education of their children.

At the end of the year, as a result of the Toy Library sessions, the play specialist and the teachers observed that children have enriched their vocabulary in Bulgarian, improved their ability to communicate with adults and peers, and the regularly attending children developed their cognitive skills. In order to involve parents in understanding child development and learning and early identification of developmental delays, an initial child development screening was carried out, as well as demonstration sessions of the programs and an awareness-raising meeting for child development and learning.



Kindergarten in Vardun



Kindergarten in Vardun

Partner Feedback:

“You managed to make them listen to the story, they are usually noisy and hard to concentrate.”

A teacher from the village of Vardun

“It was very interesting. I hadn’t participated in such meetings before but would gladly participate again.”

A parent from the village of Vardun after a storytelling demonstration and parents’ group meeting

CHILDREN IN KINDERGARTENS

Two major WWO projects with children in kindergarten were a showcase for the work of the organization in 2018.

Project “Play and Art”

Between March and June 2018 the ‘Play and Art’ partnership project took place at №62 kindergarten „Zornitsa“ in Sofia. WWO was approached by the Director of the kindergarten through the National Network for Children to provide play sessions for Roma children. The teachers took part in the Element of Play® training led by WWO US-based Speech and Language Pathologist Lois Kam Heymann and were supervised by the Bulgarian team. Specialists from the three partner organizations worked with 50 children three times a week who participated in the Toy Library, Music in Motion and Storytelling programs. The KG teachers received Element of Play® training from WWO.

Alongside the good results, the project had its challenges with regard to the insufficient staff readiness for the practical implementation of programs based on play and art as well the low sensitivity of the parents to the issues of child development and learning.



The evaluation at the end of the project demonstrated that WWO programs:

- are highly beneficial for bi-lingual children
- are highly beneficial for children who still do not speak Bulgarian at pre-school age.
- are also innovative
- provide a play-based set of teaching methods to the staff.

CHILDREN IN KINDERGARTENS

Project “Play for Achievement”

The ‘Play for Achievement’ project commencing in February 2017 in the ‘Zvanche’ KG in Targovishte was successfully completed in June 2018. The project managed to reach children, teachers and parents, thus creating favorable conditions for change in each of the groups and in the educational environment in the kindergarten as a whole.

Teachers participated in an induction session and in on-going trainings and supervision. Their active participation in the trainings and sessions with children within the project resulted in acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills for running the programs.

The overall number of sessions with children with learning difficulties during the project was **130** group play sessions and **104** individual play sessions.

Parents, too, took part in the child development screening, in the individual meetings with the play specialists and the group seminars for child development. All participants in the seminars were willing to continue increasing their parental skills.

The results are very encouraging and children like and participate eagerly in the Toy Library and Storytelling programs.



Progress is observed in all children in the following areas:

- **In the 5 early childhood development domains**
- **Better adaptation in group settings, including recognizing rules and respecting boundaries**
- **Language and cognitive development, acquiring new words and concepts necessary for the children’s meaningful participation in social activities.**

CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

WWO Bulgaria worked with **6** partners who support children with disabilities and their families. This resulted in reaching **130** children thanks to the hard work of **26** specialists.

One of WWO Bulgaria's longest-standing partners, Karin Dom Foundation, developed successful practices using and integrating the Element of Play® activities in their everyday work. WWO programs complement and enrich the therapeutic methods and approaches to work with children with disabilities. Children from other regions of the country who visit Karin Dom for one-week intensive therapy in the center and attend the Toys library in their free time are also included. Parents are a very important factor in working together. In addition to parental support groups, they get individual counseling on how to play with the child and borrowing toys from the library to use at home.

Another partner organization with very creative and motivated staff is the Specialized Center for Social and Educational Support for children with disabilities in Pleven. The teachers there are creative and resourceful and have successfully integrated Element of Play® in their therapeutic practice. One example of the successful integration of toys and musical instruments was their Christmas play in which they involved all the children in an Oscar-deserving performance.



Music in Motion with the children of Karin Dom



Music in Motion with the children of Karin Dom

Partner Feedback:

“We’ll use again the toys in our Christmas performance this year. Children prepared very diligently, with great enthusiasm and emotion.”

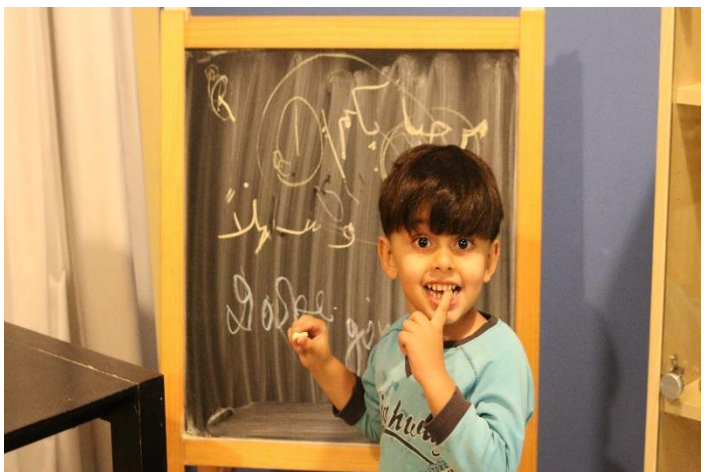
A teacher from the Center in Pleven

“My child is much more concentrated. She focuses her attention for longer periods of time and completes what she has started doing. She follows rules. Communicates with ease. There is progress in her speech development.”

A parent of a child attending Winnie the Pooh center in Rousse

REFUGEE CHILDREN

In 2018 WWO Bulgaria upgraded its work with children from refugee families. The positive outcomes in 2017 encouraged us to apply for additional funding and two grants made it possible to implement 2 further projects – **Growing by Playing** and **My Lifestory Book** with the financial support of the International Women’s Club and the Bulgarian Fund for Women.



REFUGEE CHILDREN

Project “Growing by Playing”

WVO’s project is one of the 25 approved projects by the International Women's Club for 2018. It aims at supporting the development, integration and adaptation of refugee children in the Bulgarian educational system (nurseries, kindergartens and schools) by providing play activities for children whose families have refugee or humanitarian status in Bulgaria.

The activities focus on weekly Toy Library play sessions with children coming from families with refugee or humanitarian status who are about to start kindergarten or school. The integration element of the project involves 5 Bulgarian families with children between 3 and 7 years old, who also take part in the play sessions, thus encouraging the communication between the refugee children and their Bulgarian peers. Play, being a universal language gives enormous opportunities for enhancing children's cognitive, linguistic and social skills and supports parents in recognizing their children's needs in the integration process.

New activities were included in the project to facilitate the smooth integration of the children and their mothers. There was a special event at the Bread House in May to celebrate Bulgarian and Arabic traditions in bread kneading.



REFUGEE CHILDREN

Project “Growing by Playing”

In August, WWO and Family Zone Association joined efforts in a new initiative where the play sessions were led outdoors for the first time. The group went on a picnic in the park and in the Vitosha mountain to meet with children from Bulgarian families and their mothers. Together children enjoyed exploring routes, building houses and sports games in the park and in the mountain. For most of the refugee children this was the first time of being close to nature while in Bulgaria, which brought them many smiles, unforgettable experiences and started new friendships.

At the end of the year, the community event gathered refugee and Bulgarian families to get to know each other, to talk about their children and cook and share delicious food. The initiative attracted a group of young volunteers from the National Professional High School "M. Lomonosov". They are members of the Youth Media in their school and not only played with the children, but also took great pictures at the meeting.

This is another WWO project for children and parents seeking peace and safety in our country, and at this informal meeting we realized how much children had grown up, some of them already going to school, others in kindergarten and speaking Bulgarian better. For most of them, the journey to learning the Bulgarian language started with the Element of Play® program, each element of which supports child development and adaptation.



REFUGEE CHILDREN

Project “My Lifestory Book”

Having worked with refugee children and their families for two years revealed to us many cultural features impacting the lifestyle of these families. Mothers are the primary carers for the children until they start school and are busy full time with the domestic chores. For that reason we decided to direct our activities towards supporting the mothers to impact the whole family. Our ideas to empower the mothers resulted in getting a grant from the Bulgarian Fund for Women. After assessing the needs of the women, we provided for them a practical course in Bulgarian and Element of Play® sessions for the children at the same time. The Bulgarian language course, involving 12 women, took place in a learning and real-life environment, thus enabling participants to practice what they learned, to exercise social skills for communication and to get the necessary information on topics of interest. Thanks to this approach women felt encouraged to communicate with different people and in different situations. The course culminated with the elaboration of a Lifestory Book by each participant, which, in addition to practicing writing, allowed them to integrate their past experiences with their present and future plans in the context of two different cultures.



CHILDREN IN HOSPITALS

In 2018, WWO continued to provide support to children at the Targovishte Hospital and the biggest emergency medical center in Bulgaria Pirogov. We also started a new toy library at the Rousse University Hospital. This resulted in **reaching 550 children treated in the three hospitals**. The project's programs are among the few good practices in the country that are **changing the environment in the children's units** in these hospitals and **creating conditions for faster recovery of the children** by allowing them to participate in play-based activities.

Multi-Profile Hospital for Active Treatment – Rousse

The Rousse Hospital is one of the largest in the Northeast region. More than 2500 children from the region receive healthcare annually in the children's ward, with a full-time psychologist and a Toy Library activity room. The specialist responsible for the Toy Library is a psychologist with practical experience in implementing the program who runs sessions with children on a daily basis.



Parent Feedback

"Isn't it possible for children to stay all day in the playroom?"

"He's been asking about you since morning and when you'd come and play together."

"Children here have the opportunity to have fun and forget that they are in hospital."

CHILDREN IN HOSPITALS

University Multi-profile Hospital for Active Treatment and Emergency Medicine (UMHALSM) "Pirogov" – Sofia

In 2018 we continued our work in the Children's Clinic of Surgery at the University Multi-profile Hospital for Active Treatment and Emergency Medicine UMHALSM "Pirogov", where **three play rooms** were set up in 2017. A WWO team member runs play sessions with children in the abdominal surgery department weekly. **51 sessions** were held during the period, involving approximately **220 children and their parents**.

Meetings and entertainment in the playrooms make the stay in the hospital much more bearable, and the opportunity for children to communicate and get to know the world through play helps them to recover faster. Feedback from the parents about the play rooms is very positive.



Parent Feedback

"It is wonderful here! I have been with my children in different hospitals, but I haven't seen such a place ... kids can play, laugh ... to be distracted from the medical interventions. A place that loads you with lots of energy."

"It's a great idea to have such a room for kids because they need to play all the time. We did not expect to see something like this here."

"Can I take a picture of her playing, and being happy here? This is how she'll remember the hospital with something good, not just the surgery?"

CHILDREN IN HOSPITALS

Multi-profile Hospital for Active Treatment - Targovishte

Our work in the children's ward of the Targovishte hospital, where the first WWO Toy Library in a hospital setting in the country was opened by WWO in 2016 continues for the second year. Nearly 50 sessions were held in the hospital, involving approximately 200 children and their parents.

The role of the play specialist in the hospital besides working with children is also to advise parents on the importance of early childhood development, to encourage them to spend more time playing and reading with children. The hospital team and parents share that the hospital is a pleasant place having the play room, and the treatment and medical interventions are not so severely experienced by the children. During our meetings with the children in the hospital we are convinced that play is one of the most important companions in their development.



Partner Feedback:

"It's so much fun here. Children are playing and laughing even when they are sick! Very nice!"

Parent

"It's great having this room in the hospital. Mothers already know about it and ask about it!"

Nurse

CAPACITY-BUILDING

INTRODUCTORY TRAINING ELEMENT OF PLAY



We are a network! A network of people who love play, people with wide smiles and open minds. Because, as our charismatic trainer Lois says, without an open mindset, one cannot reach the children.

We gathered three times in one year – **36** social workers, pedagogues, speech therapists, psychologists, linguists from **16 partner organizations** - each with their unique experience, knowledge, insights and understanding of child development. At the end of the third training day, we were sure to leave as play specialists. Because play is one of those universal languages that unite, bring together and develop children and adults and learning becomes fun. And when fun is dressed in solid theories, in-depth research, worldwide work practices, it becomes an undisputed basis for work.

During three days of April 2018, we shared experiences, talked about the significance of developing good listening skills, about our new "Learning together" program, the magic triangle "Toy Library", "Story Telling/ Story Boarding", "Music in Motion", making it possible to reach out to each individual child, reflected on the Theory of Mind, and discussed how to write an exciting human interest history that moves and shakes. All this is united by the theme of the training "Flexibility and Adaptability" of the WWO programs. Besides being a network, we are rich in diversity - of children and families, professionals, locations, services and the way to work successfully is by adapting the lessons learned to the specifics of our work.

For the team at the Worldwide Orphans Foundation, the meetings with our partners and friends from all over the country enrich us and inspire us for the next steps.

CAPACITY-BUILDING

ONGOING TRAINING AND SUPPORT OF PARTNERS



Music in Motion Training for Caritas Sofia



Support to the HESED Foundation Team

Music in Motion Training for Caritas Sofia Volunteers

Worldwide Orphans Foundation Bulgaria was happy to respond to the invitation of Caritas Sofia to train 17 young and enthusiastic specialists from the Registration and Reception Centers working with refugees in the 'Ovcha Kupel', 'Voenna Rampa' and 'Vrajdebna' neighborhoods in Sofia, as well as in the towns of Harmanli and Lyubimets. They were trained in the 'Music in Motion' program, which is part of the WWO concept "Element of Play" stimulating early childhood development and the positive interaction between children and adults through music. The structured activities with music, musical instruments and creative movements provide an opportunity to children with refugee status to reflect on and process their negative experiences and to enhance their communication and learning skills in an accessible and entertaining way. For the participants in the training, the 'Music in Motion' program is a practical tool to build on their experience in direct work with children through art and an inspiration for future work on WWO programs.

Support to the Health and Social Development (HESED) Foundation team

Between February and May the team of Health and Social Development Foundation working in the MIR Center received practical support and supervision by a representative of the WWO team. Milena Marinova introduced the specialists working with children from the Roma community aged 3-4 to the practical work on the EOP programs. The provided support ensured compliance with the standards of implementation of the programs and their successful integration into the work of the Center. The constructive partnership between the two organizations on a practical level has led not only to the implementation of programs in all groups with children but also to building the capacity of motivated specialists.

CAPACITY-BUILDING

SURE START WITH ELEMENT OF PLAY

In July 2018 WWO started the preparation for a partnership project with the Tulip Foundation, which manages the pilot implementation of the Sure Start Centers in 4 locations in Bulgaria. The program covers two main areas - promoting the social and emotional development, protecting children's health and improving skills and abilities, and supporting the family and the community. It relies on cross-sectoral cooperation and is implemented through local initiatives aimed at equal opportunities for children from 0 to 5 years of age. The partnership is related to the provision of introductory and upgrading training and supervision in the process of launching the programs on the ground. In July 2018 the WWO team conducted an introductory training for 10 team members of the Sure Start Centers in Varna, Targovishte and Stara Zagora prior to the actual launch of the centers.



STUDY VISIT OF DUTCH STUDENTS

In April 2018, a group of 25 'child and education studies' students from the Netherlands connected to the study association Comenius from the University of Amsterdam visited WWO programs as part of their annual non study- and study-related activities abroad. During the visit the students were able to see the EOP programs in Sofia. They took part in the toy library demonstration sessions, interacted with the children, played and sang together. In the end each student gave a small gift to children and bought art materials to leave at the Centre.



CAPACITY-BUILDING

REGIONAL CONFERENCE “PLAY IN SUPPORT OF HOSPITAL CARE FOR CHILDREN”

The regional conference on "Play in Support of Hospital Care for Children", initiated by WWO in partnership with the Targovishte Hospital and the NGO Club took place in February. It was attended by 45 representatives of the Municipality of Targovishte, the Center for Maternal and Child Health in Shumen, the University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Rousse, the University Hospital "Pirogov" in Sofia, doctors and nurses, representatives of the social assistance system and non-governmental organizations from Targovishte and the region.

The conference presented the experience of the Targovishte Hospital, where the first WWO Toy Library in a hospital setting, set up with the support of WWO in the pediatric ward, is located. WWO Country Director Rositsa Bogalinska-Petrova presented the role of play in hospital care for children and specific techniques for working with children. The play specialist Tsvetelina Ganeva told the history of the WWO Toy Library play room and its development over the years, its important role in the life of the children who are admitted for hospital treatment.

Keynote speakers of the conference were two experts in the field of early childhood developments, Dr. Vesela Banova and Dr. Lyubomir Zhupunov from "Children and Space" Association who presented a review of world practices for organization of the care and space for children in need of treatment and for the specific psychological needs of children when they are in a new environment or in a vulnerable position.

WWO Bulgaria's experience in setting up Toy Libraries in the Rousse Hospital and Pirogov Hospital was also presented. A mother's testimony about her child's experience in the Targovishte Hospital was among the most impactful presentations for the participants. She shared that, although her son has many toys at home, the Toy Library was far more engaging for him than anything else. He had been hospitalized before and this was the first time he did not want to leave the hospital.

Such a conference was held for the first time in the region. It presented a good practice in the care of children in hospital environment and the important role of play in child development. The topics for discussion triggered the participants to talk and think about different approaches to childcare.



CAPACITY-BUILDING

ISSA COUNCIL MEETING



WWO Bulgaria Country Director, Rossi Petrova, took part in the ISSA Dialogue, Sharing and Learning on Quality workshop and annual ISSA Council Meeting, taking place in Zagreb, Croatia from 25–27 October 2018.

The Dialogue, Sharing and Learning on Quality workshop was meant to provide all ISSA members a platform for dialogue and exchanges and for in-depth member-driven learning across countries. The meeting also aimed at creating collectively a 'map' of the ISSA Network's Work on Quality, articulating a 'competent system'-ic approach while incorporating different strategies, resources and tools. The map considered all resources that had been created in the network and the expertise that exists in the network, thus contributing to a shared systemic understanding of ISSA's approach to quality and of the wealth of resources that can be accessed and used. The meeting brought together ISSA members who are interested in sharing and learning about experiences and achievements in working on quality improvement and maintenance in early childhood systems and primary school system, by using various approaches, strategies and resources to contribute to partial or systemic sustainable changes.

WWO Bulgaria's participation in the workshop is a step forward towards the preparation of the organization in implementing a project introducing the European Quality Framework in several kindergartens in the country in 2019.

PARTNER NETWORK EXPANSION

WWO Bulgaria's partner network grew by 5 new partner organizations:

- **University Multi-activity Hospital for Active Treatment 'Kanev' - Rousse**
- **Zonitsa Kindergarten - Sofia**
- **Tulip Foundation - Sofia**
- **Samaritans Association - Stara Zagora**
- **Sauchastie Association - Varna**

CAPACITY-BUILDING

INTERNATIONAL VISITS



Wilson Ervin's visit



CK Swett's visit

Wilson Ervin

Wilson Ervin, WWO Board member, came on a short visit to WWO Bulgaria programs on April 25, 2018. He met the BG team, learnt about the programs, locations and working model. He visited two of the 27 WWO BG Toy Libraries located in Sofia's biggest Roma community where WWO develops a successful partnership model with a local organization to support pre-school age children from low-income, disadvantaged backgrounds to learn through play and have equal start with their Bulgarian-speaking peers.

Wilson observed a Storytelling session with 4-year old children, their teacher being one of WWO EOP training participants only a few of weeks before the visit. Pete the Cat, the story they heard and saw, is an example of how to develop children's listening, cognitive, communicative and social skills through one of our programs – Storytelling and Storyboarding. Tailored to help children meet the developmental milestones in a fun way, the programs are a way out of the vicious cycle of early dropout from school – unemployment - poverty because they provide the opportunity for children to learn Bulgarian, develop confidence, socialize and start school on an equal basis.

CK Swett

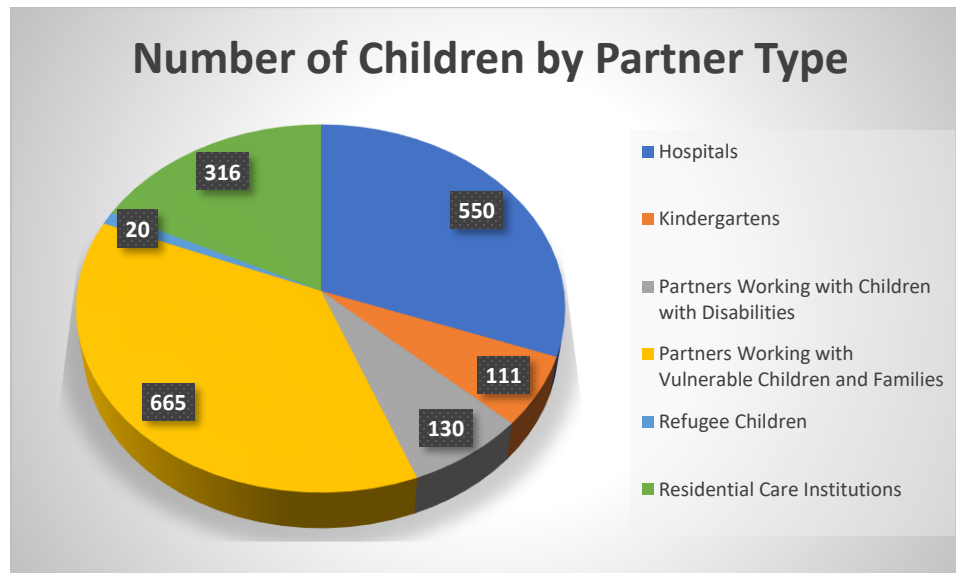
CK Swett, a California native and Duke University graduate, began his career in the auction world in 2006, and has worked at Christie's, Phillips, and Heritage during the intervening nine years. His fundraising efforts since 2010 have yielded more than \$50 million across nearly 400 auctions that support everything from school children in Malawi and veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan to public schools in Manhattan.

CK Swett is the auctioneer for the WWO Annual Gala and a great supporter of the organization. He visited Bulgaria in July and spent 3 days with the WWO team visiting all Sofia-based projects of the organization – a Roma kindergarten, Center for working with children and families in the Roma neighborhood, and a refugee center. He easily interacted with the children and professionals and quickly made friends. Being able to see the vulnerable children he raises money for was eye-opening for him.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Number of Children Served

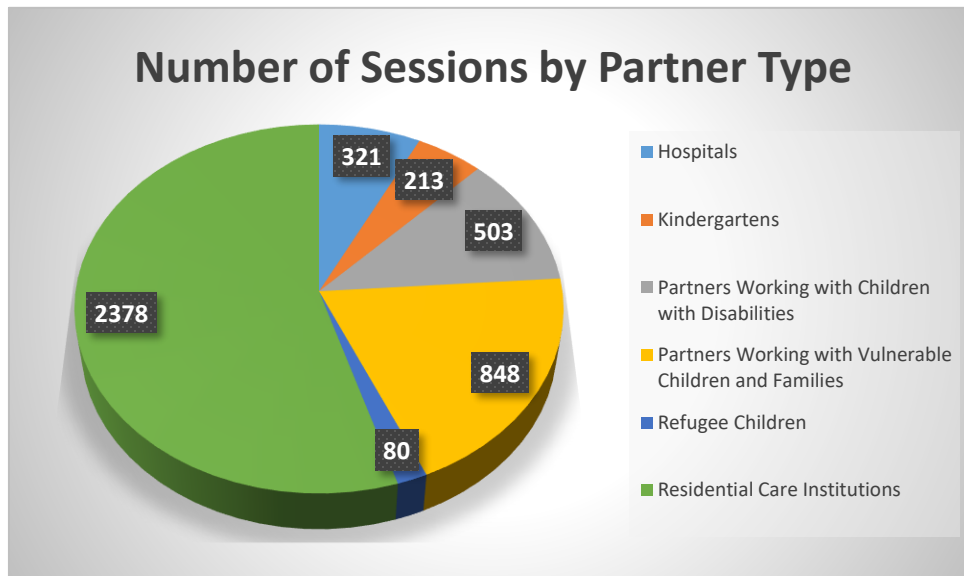
Despite budget reductions, 2018 saw a **16% increase** in the number of children reached by WWO Bulgaria compared to the previous year. WWO Bulgaria's partner network expanded to **33 sites** which served a total of **1792 children in 20 different locations** throughout the country.



Partner Type	Number of	
	Sites	Number of Children Served
Hospitals	3	550
Kindergartens	4	111
Partners Working with Children with Disabilities	6	130
Partners Working with Vulnerable Children and Families	15	665
Refugee Children	1	20
Residential Care Institutions	4	316
Grand Total	33	1792

Partners Working with Vulnerable Children and Families comprise the largest number of WWO Bulgaria's total partners and serve the largest number of children (**37%**) reached by the Foundation's programs. The second largest partner type are Residential Care Institutions which still use WWO Bulgaria's programs in their work with children and families. Even though most of these children receive day care services in the Residential Care Institutions, the majority of them live with their families. WWO Bulgaria's programs are offered to the families and supplement the work of the specialists working in the institutions.

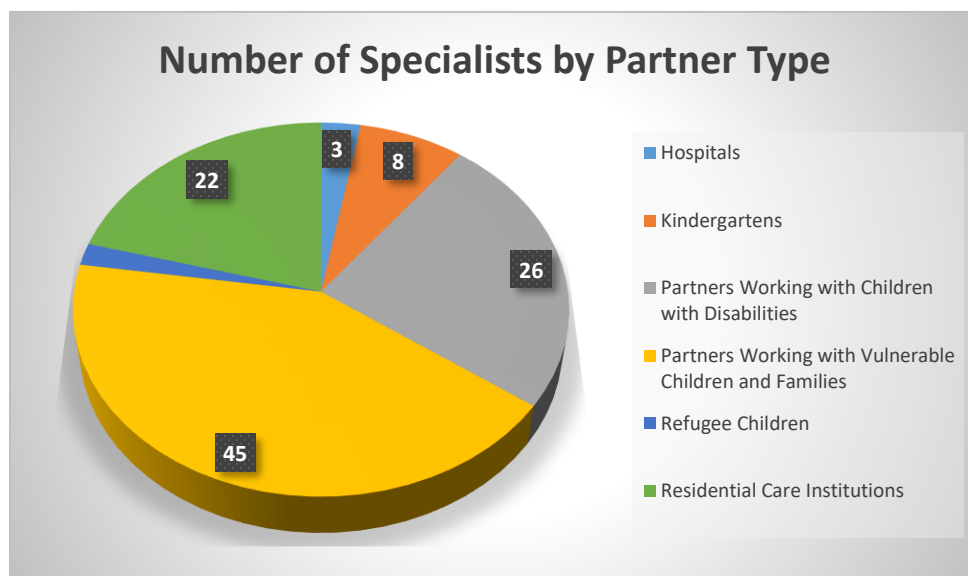
The number of children impacted by Element of Play™ in hospitals has also grown with the addition of 1 new hospital in our partner network – the University Hospital in Ruse. The number of children in kindergartens has also increased. The focus of the work there has been to empower the staff and build their capacity to conduct Element of Play™ activities independently thereby providing sustainability to the successful projects carried out there.



A total of **4343 individual and group play sessions** were conducted with the children throughout 2018.

Number of Specialists Engaged

A total of 104 specialists in the partner organizations conducted Element of Play™ sessions with the children and were impacted by WWO Bulgaria’s programs and capacity-building activities.



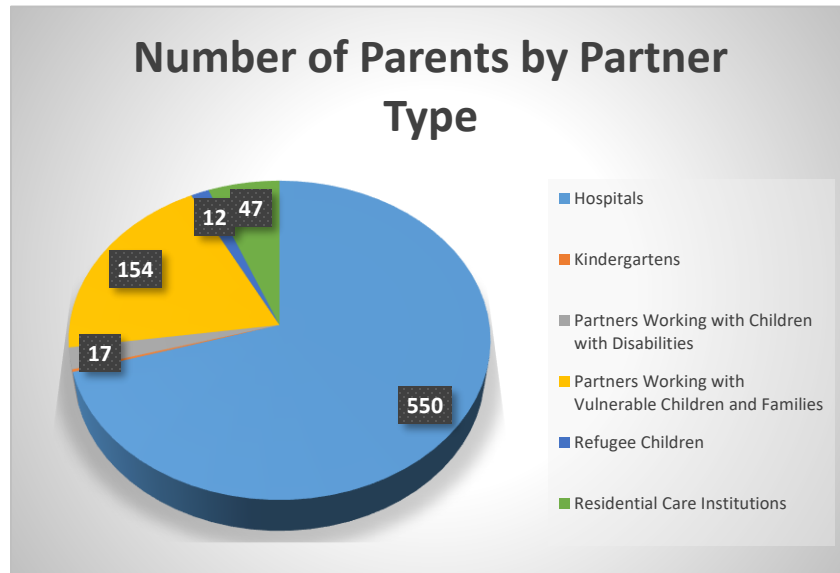
About 45% of the specialists trained and working with WWO Bulgaria’s programs come from Residential Care Institutions. Two major reasons contribute to this trend - the long history of trainings and capacity-building

programs provided by WWO Bulgaria to staff in Residential Care Institutions as well as the continued work of the institutions despite the process of deinstitutionalization.

An interesting trend is the increased involvement of staff from partners working with children with disabilities who use Element of Play™ in their work. This trend demonstrates the successful integration of the programs in the partners and the staff readiness to use them in their work with children with disabilities.

Number of Parents Served

In addition to serving children, WWO Bulgaria strives to support the community and build the capacity of parents to develop their children’s potential through play-based activities. A total of **780 parents** were reached in 2018.



Even though the largest number of parents were reached in hospitals, their focus there is on their children’s recovery process so their involvement in WWO Bulgaria’s programs is usually short-term. More long-term benefits for parent-child interaction are observed in parents working more consistently with WWO Bulgaria’s programs. Partners working with vulnerable children engage the children’s parents and provide them with opportunities to build their parenting skills in the long-term.



MONITORING AND EVALUATION

“Play for Achievement” Project Evaluation

An evaluation of the impact of WWO Bulgaria’s programs on child development was conducted in partnership with the NGO Club and Kindergarten Zvanche in Targovishte between January 2017 and September 2018. The project called “Play for Achievement” monitored the development of the children included in the project to assess WWO Bulgaria’s effects.

Project Scope

- 35 children (Test Group and Control Group)
- 3 Child Development Screenings – screenings were conducted every 6 months on the test and the control group
- The Developmental Profiles III screening tool was filled out by the parents on by a trained specialist. The tool is standardized on a nationally representative sample of Bulgarian children and provides norm-based results.

Project Results

1. Increased scores in all child development domains for all children in the test group.
2. Children with Average scores improved in their development and moved to the Above Average category over the observation period.
3. Children with scores Below Average improved as a result of individual and group work and achieved average results in their overall development at the end of the project.
4. All children in the test group demonstrate progress in their abilities to adapt in a group environment and follow rules thanks to the group play sessions.
5. Expanded vocabulary and mastery of new concepts required for the successful adaptation to new environments.
6. Kindergarten staff gained new skills to help them carry out systematic and goal-directed work with the children in order to support their development in each domain.

The results of the “Play for Achievement” project provide evidence that the practical application of Element of Play™ programs in group and individual work sessions *stimulate child development* in each one of the five developmental domains.



KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- **3 Projects** - 'Play for Achievement', 'Play and Art' and 'My Lifestory Book' were successfully finalized with an evaluation and sustainability plan in place;
- **2 new kindergartens** became part of the Elements of Play™ network;
- Encouraging mid-term outcomes for the refugee children participating in the 'Growing by Playing' project;
- Further developing the TL network as a result of which 35 specialists participated in the advanced training;
- **38 new and external for the TL network members** received induction training;
- Supported the development of the Sure Start pilot practices in Bulgaria by providing 2 EOP trainings;
- **4 new partners** – Rouse hospital, Zornitsa kindergarten in Sofia, Samaritans Association and Sauchastie Association;

ADVOCACY WORK

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT ALLIANCE

WVO Bulgaria is one of the 40 non-governmental organizations, educational institutions, and pElement of Play®le who established the Alliance for Early Childhood Development. The Alliance aims at mobilizing the efforts of its members and partners for securing a meaningful environment for developing the potential of every child at an early age. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization are partners of the Alliance.

The early years – from birth to starting school are crucial for the mental and physical health, the behavior, the life-long learning and the whole well-being of the person. The growing understanding on a world level of the importance of this period for building the identity and its social and economic realization, gradually put the investments in the early years into the spotlight of the public policies in many countries. In recent years, these questions also found a reflection in the civil discussions in Bulgaria related to the care for the young children and their families.

To achieve its mission for the best start in the life of every child in Bulgaria, the Alliance will work for the affirmation of the early childhood development as a political and civic priority. It will concentrate on the strengthening of the national systems in the field of healthcare, social protection and education for encouraging early childhood development. It will realize activities for spreading experience and knowledge among professionals and parents, advocacy for policies which ensure full rights for development as well as for creating

supportive social environment and attitudes towards the rights and well-being of the youngest members of our society.

WVO's participation in the Alliance is an opportunity not only to contribute with its expertise in the activities of the Alliance but also to promote its programs and projects among professionals.

CHILDHOOD WITHOUT VIOLENCE COALITION

In 2018, WVO Bulgaria became part of the informal coalition that works to prevent violence against children by developing a platform involving non-governmental organizations, academics, business and media. Over the next few years, the efforts of the coalition will be directed at supporting the development of effective and integrated policies and practices for prevention and zero tolerance to violence against children, as well as changing the understanding of the parents and specialists about violence. The goal of coalition is to change the attitudes of the society towards violence. The main approach we have chosen is to help and support parents and professionals working with children. We plan to do advocate work with institutions to change legislation and ensure sustainable measures to protect children from violence.

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND LEADERSHIP MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

WVO Bulgaria was one of the 6 organisations selected for the National Network for Children's mentorship program in organisational development and leadership. The program aims to support the organisations participating in the National Network for Children (NNC) in a systematic and sustainable way. It will help them set and achieve individual goals for organisational growth and leadership.

In the very first edition of the program NNC will provide a mentor for each of the six organisations who will actively help them plan and assess their organisational growth for up to eighteen months. During the first general meeting, which took place on October 18th-19th, the participants had the opportunity to choose a mentor and to discuss with them the main tools they will be using to assess and manage development as well as to plan the next steps together.

Within 18 months the organization will go through a process of detailed evaluation and planning with the active support of the mentor. As a result of the implementation of the project, it is expected to improve both the strategic development of the organization and its day-to-day operation.



Early Childhood Development Alliance



Organizational Development and Mentorship Program

PLANS FOR 2019

CAPACITY BUILDING

Regional Conference "Play for Achievement" – the conference will present and promote the results of the Play for Achievement Project in Targovishte Municipality. As a result of the conference, new partnerships with other kindergartens are expected to be launched, as well as a discussion with the local education authorities on the provision of resources for the implementation of programs in educational institutions in Targovishte.

NEW PARTNERSHIP PROJECTS

"Quality Start for Equal Education" project will be launched in January with the financial support of the Trust for Social Achievement. It aims at developing the resources of local NGOs and kindergartens to implement the European Quality Framework (EQF) for early child development and learning. The main project activities are a master EQF training for trainers, local EQF trainings in 8 kindergartens in country, and follow-up to activate the establishment and improvement of local practices based on the Framework.

A TSA funded project "Alternative Educational Services for Children from Small Settlements in Targovishte Municipality" in partnership with the NGO Club. The aim of the project is to provide access to alternative services for early childhood development and education of children from the small settlements in Targovishte municipality. The project starts with a snapshot of the resources in the community and the attitudes of the stakeholders towards setting up play rooms in the community centers of the small settlements. The other activities include developing and implementing an advocacy strategy to attract stakeholders, preparing for practice implementation and measuring the effect of the work based of the WWO model.

EXPANDING THE PROGRAMS

Our cooperation with the Health and Social Development Foundation in Sofia not only showed excellent results, but also led to the idea of developing the partnership by expanding the program in Kyustendil. In 2019, the education service in one of the largest Roma communities in the country is expected to work on WWO programs.

The plans of the organization are to reach the most vulnerable refugee children and their families by locating its work in the Refugee Reception Centers in Sofia. This will be a partnership project with Caritas Bulgaria to ensure the preparation of the children to start KG/ school by integrating of the Element of Play into their everyday activities in the center.

IMPROVING PROGRAMS' MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Our work so far has shown the need for improvement the monitoring and evaluation of the programs. A system of monitoring with the involvement of specialists and parents will be launched in 2019, leading to improved practices and child development outcomes.

CASE STUDIES

Center for Social Educational Support, Pleven

K., 7 years old, came to the Center with multiple diagnoses (ADHD, development deficits) which scared his parents and the teachers in his school. In the beginning K. could not stand still and did not show interest in anything. Any attempt to communicate with him was difficult. The boy yelled loudly, refused to speak and rejected any children's or adults' efforts to interact with him.

The only thing that K. showed interest in were the toys in the Toy Library. The vehicles were the first toy that made him stand still and helped him to calm down. The toolkit also intrigued him, and he started gradually letting us into his world. The next step was a letter puzzle which we started to use to teach him the alphabet. K. started spelling words and we found out that he recognizes words that he had learned from TV. This was a particularly exciting moment for his mother. She cried when she saw the boy's progress. Up until that moment she did not know and did not believe that he could understand and write words like other children. Now the boy spells words and tries to make sentences. He sings songs which brought the joy back into his parents' lives and encouraged the staff working with K.

Targovishte Hospital

The five-year-old A. is the youngest of three girls in a family living happily in a village next to Targovishte until the moment when they heard the scary diagnosis – brain tumor which affects the little girl's speech and movement and results in seizures. The child went through a multitude of medical exams which confirmed the diagnosis and led to a planned surgery.

The stay at the Targovishte hospital was another challenge for the girl and her mom who tried to reduce the stress caused by yet another hospital treatment to her child. When A. first walked into the play room she was scared and cuddled up to her mother who also seemed upset and stressed. Still shocked by her child's diagnosis, the mother sat with the girl on the floor, tears flowing from her eyes...

The benefits of play on child recovery are proven and our play room in the Targovishte hospital helps tens of children each week overcome the stress of the hospital stay and find solace and positive experiences during stressful times. The children are not the only ones who need support in those times, however. Their parents who are facing their worst nightmares oftentimes also need assistance. So was the case with A.'s mother. She appeared devastated from her child's diagnosis and she needed to speak to someone and find solace and emergency assistance for her soul after receiving the bad news.

The girl's visits to the play room alleviated her hospital stay and made it more bearable and closer to her home environment. Her mother had the opportunity to talk about her fears and prepare herself for the hard battles to come. The woman recognized the benefits of sharing her problems and wished to continue seeing us after her child's surgery for individual play sessions while she could share her problems with qualified specialists.

