

## Mentoring as an individual form of preparing orphans for independent living in Ukraine

Mentoring jako indywidualna forma przygotowania sierot do samodzielnego życia na Ukrainie

Iuliia Udovenko<sup>1</sup> ABCDEF <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6672-7355>, Tetiana Melnychuk<sup>2</sup> BCDEF

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5205-9958>, Julia Gorbaniuk<sup>3</sup> BCDEF, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7732-7819>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Social Rehabilitation and Social Pedagogy Faculty of Psychology in the  
Taras Shevchenko National University Kiev, Ukraine

<sup>2</sup>Laboratory of Organizational and Social Psychology, G.S. Kostyuk Institute of Psychology,  
the National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine

<sup>3</sup> Department of Emotions and Motivation Psychology Institute of Psychology,  
the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin

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### Abstract

**Objective:** The purpose of the study is to analyze and define the content, specifics, and procedures of social and psychological work with citizens who have expressed a desire to become mentors for orphans.

**Introduction:** In Ukraine, there are more than 750 foundations of institutional care and upbringing of children, in which approximately 106,000 children live. Only 8% among them have the status of orphans and children deprived of parental care; the other 92% have parents, but due to some difficult life circumstances of parents or presence of special needs or disability in children, they cannot live or be brought up in the family. It means that 92% of children without the status of orphans or children deprived of parental care cannot be adopted or placed for living and upbringing to other forms of family placement (guardianship/care, foster family, family-type orphanage). Along with this, out of 8% of orphan children and children deprived of parental care, there are no opportunities to be accommodated in any family forms of upbringing the following children: teenagers and youngsters, brothers and sisters from families with many children, and children with disabilities. In such children, close emotional relationships with meaningful, constant adults, which is a vital necessity for their psycho-emotional development and well-being, have been lost or were not formed at all. Accordingly, the introduction of mentoring for orphans and children deprived of parental care who live in relevant institutions is motivated by the necessity to satisfy the need of every child in emotional support, assistance and protection by a significant, authoritative person, and friend.

**Methods:** The study uses an experience which was gained during the realization of the project as the author-developer of the methodology of socio-psychological work with citizens and children concerning preparations for mentoring and training for both coordinators and mentors of the Mentoring Program in cooperation with specialists of the "One Hope" non-governmental organization; in the role of educator for the preparation of coordinators for the Mentoring Program implementation, as well as in the role of expert during the implementation of Mentoring Program by the community organization "One Hope" during the 2009-2016 period [1]. Also, authors participated in developing of the mentors preparing program over orphans and children deprived of parental care in order to receive approval at the state level.

**Results:** Mentoring for orphans and children deprived of parental care residing in institutions has been implemented in Ukraine since 2009 by the "One Hope" ("Oдна Надія") public organization in cooperation with the Kyiv City Children's Service and the Kyiv City Center of Social Services for Families, Children and Young People. The project "One Hope" was launched in the city of Kyiv and the Kyiv region during 2009-2016. Since 2016, mentoring as an individual form of support and assistance for a child living in a residential institution has been introduced in Ukraine at the state level.

**Conclusions:** If an orphan child or a child deprived of parental care is unable to live and being brought up in a family, then the mentor's role in the life of this child is of paramount importance. This is due to the fact that such a form of individual support through mentoring will facilitate the preparation of every orphan child for independent living in the future.

*Keywords:* orphans and children, deprived of parental care; mentoring; mentors; training for mentoring

## Abstrakt

**Cel:** Celem pracy jest analiza i wskazanie specyfiki i procedur pracy społecznej i psychologicznej z obywatelami, którzy wyrazili wolę zostania mentorami dla dzieci sierot.

**Wprowadzenie:** Na Ukrainie istnieje ponad 750 fundacji instytucjonalnej opieki i wychowania dzieci, w których mieszka około 106 000 dzieci. Tylko 8% spośród nich ma status sierot i dzieci pozbawionych opieki rodzicielskiej; pozostałe 92% ma rodziców, ale ze względu na trudne warunki życiowe rodziców, szczególne potrzeby lub niepełnosprawność rodziców, dzieci nie mogą przebywać ani wychowywać się w rodzinie. Oznacza to, że 92% dzieci bez statusu sierot lub dzieci pozbawionych opieki rodzicielskiej nie może być adoptowanych ani umieszczonych do zamieszkania i wychowania w innych formach osadzenia w rodzinie (wsparcie/opieka, rodzina zastępcza, rodzinny dom dziecka). Oprócz tego, w sytuacji 8% osieroconych dzieci i pozbawionych opieki rodzicielskiej, nie ma możliwości umieszczenia ich w jakichkolwiek rodzinnych formach wychowania, dotyczy to następujących kategorii dzieci: młodzież i nastolatki, bracia i siostry z rodzin wielodzietnych, dzieci niepełnosprawne. W tych kategoriach dzieci, bliskie relacje emocjonalne ze znaczącymi, stałymi osobami dorosłymi, które są niezbędną koniecznością dla ich rozwoju emocjonalnego i dobrego samopoczucia, zostały całkowicie utracone lub w ogóle nie powstały. W związku z tym wprowadzenie mentoringu dla sierot i dzieci pozbawionych opieki rodzicielskiej, przebywających w odpowiednich placówkach, motywowane jest koniecznością zaspokojenia potrzeby każdego dziecka w zakresie wsparcia emocjonalnego, pomocy i ochrony przez znaczącą, autorytatywną osobę i przyjaciela.

**Metody:** W opracowaniu wykorzystano doświadczenie zdobyte podczas realizacji projektu jako „autor-twórca” metodologii pracy społeczno-psychologicznej z klientami i dziećmi w zakresie przygotowań do mentoringu i szkoleń zarówno dla koordynatorów, jak i mentorów Programu Mentoringowego we współpracy ze specjalistami organizacji pozarządowej „Jedna nadzieja”; w roli edukatorów w przygotowaniu koordynatorów do realizacji Programu Mentoringowego, a także w roli ekspertskiej podczas realizacji Programu Mentoringowego przez organizację społeczną „Jedna Nadzieja” w latach 2009-2016. Autorzy uczestniczyli także w opracowywaniu założeń teoretycznych Programu dla sierot i dzieci pozbawionych opieki rodzicielskiej, w celu uzyskania akceptacji na szczeblu państwowym.

**Wyniki:** Mentoring dla sierot i dzieci pozbawionych opieki rodzicielskiej przebywających w placówkach realizowany jest na Ukrainie od 2009 roku przez organizację „Jedna Nadzieja” („Odn Nadia”) we współpracy ze Służbą Dzieciom Miasta Kijowa i Centrum Pomocy Społecznej Miasta Kijowa Rodziny, dzieci i młodzież. Projekt „Jedna nadzieja” został uruchomiony w Kijowie i obwodzie kijowskim w latach 2009-2016. Od 2016 r. Na Ukrainie na szczeblu państwowym wprowadzono mentoring jako indywidualną formę wsparcia i pomocy dla dziecka przebywającego w placówce opiekuńczo-wychowawczej.

**Wnioski:** Jeśli sierota lub dziecko pozbawione opieki rodzicielskiej nie jest w stanie żyć i wychowywać się w rodzinie, to rola mentora w życiu tego dziecka ma ogromne znaczenie. Wynika to z faktu, że taka forma indywidualnego wsparcia poprzez mentoring ułatwia przygotowanie każdego osieroconego dziecka do samodzielnego życia w przyszłości.

*Słowa kluczowe:* sieroty i dzieci pozbawione opieki rodzicielskiej; mentoring; mentorzy; szkolenie w zakresie mentoringu

## Introduction

Among the unfavorable conditions for the formation of attachment and emotional development of a child in orphanages, there are inevitable instability and a large number of social environments, as well as the absence of a key figure who takes care of the child, accompanies it throughout life, ensures a sense of stability, reliability, and security. All these lead to the deterioration in the child's natural aspiration for the affinity and love. However, the ability to feel love and affection is a fundamental characteristic of adequate development, which is often called as a criterion for mental health evaluation [1,2].

International and Ukrainian experience has shown that the system of institutional care and upbringing of

children has a negative impact on the mental development of children, their socialization as a whole, as well as for their families and society in general; also, it is expensive for the state. Particularly negative are the consequences of such care and upbringing for children under the age of three, because they demonstrate the significant delay in physical and psycho-emotional development [3]. The long-term stay of a child outside the family leads to the destruction of the child's emotional ties with the parents. Children grow up unprepared for independent living and do not have the necessary social skills and habits.

Thus, according to a study conducted in 2016 by the Ukrainian Institute of Social Studies named after O. Yaremenko on the order of the Ministry of Social

Policy of Ukraine, within the framework of the project "Modernization of the system of social support for the Ukrainian population," it has been proved that upbringing in foster families and family-type orphanages, unlike usual orphanage, allows orphans to gain social experience and develop their social and everyday skills. The results of the study show that young foster children who due to some difficult living conditions were removed from their biological families and are brought up in adoptive families and family-type orphanages, do not display self-confidence, have difficulties with entering new social roles and spaces, their social integration is problematic, it is difficult for them, or they cannot accurately establish a long-term relationship with the social environment, they have a low level of social adaptation, feel their own inferiority, and have significant fears of the future. Moreover, according to foster parents, there is a widespread situation when orphans show the unwillingness to leave the foster families and stay without their support [4].

Under conditions when parents are deprived of parental rights and the child does not receive the opportunity to be placed in family forms of upbringing and has to live in the institution for orphans and children deprived of parental care, collective conditions of institutional upbringing and care are unfavorable to such child's development. Among the main factors which hinder the process of full development and socialization of orphan children and children deprived of parental care in conditions of collective education, scientists identify the inadequacy of communication with adults due to the large number of children in the group, orientation of the staff on the daily physical care, frequent change of personnel and transfer of children from group to group, strict regulation of children's lives and activities of the staff. As a result, orphans appeared not to be ready for real life beyond the walls of the orphanage; they do not know the basic rules of organizing and arranging their lives: how to cook, earn money, make purchases, and so on. However, the most substantial problem is that they remain extremely lonely because there is no person near them whom they could trust or ask for advice and help. While staying without support, housing, work, and the necessary life skills, having an unformed sense of attachment, a somewhat distorted understanding of family values, teens often find themselves in a situation of family hardship, have difficulties in finding work and housing, cannot defend their own rights [5,6, 7].

Thus, there is an actual and urgent need in finding an alternative form of interaction that would enable orphans and children deprived of parental care living in institutions to have a significant, authoritative person who would contribute to the preparation of each child

for independent life. In such a way, the idea to develop mentoring as an alternative form of assistance for orphans has appeared in Ukraine.

### **Mentoring as an individual form of support for children living in an institution for orphans and children deprived of parental care, and the other institution for children**

When preparing orphaned children living in institutions to the independent life, the main thing is to solve their psychological difficulties, which lie in the habit of living in a closed environment, inability to integrate into the open space and form new contacts with people. In life and professional self-determination, foster children who were brought up in the institutions face significant difficulties due to the lack of experience in solving life problems that other children receive in the families while observing how their parents act in similar situations [8 ]. Along with this, most of the alumni of orphanage institutions have the following features which complicate their independent lives: lack of experience in social contacts with people at work, in the service and healthcare sectors; difficulties in communication; lack of the formed need and ability to work; dependency, misunderstanding of the material side of life, and property relations; insufficient development of an individual characterized by a low level of consciousness, low self-activity; the lack of moral immunity to the conditions of the environment from which they originate; a specific subculture of a low level; deteriorated health [9, 10].

At the international level, it is believed that mentoring involves not only career guidance and support, but also personal, psychological, and social aspects. According to Parsloe, Wray, Merriam, Treston, Cook,, the absence of parental care leads to a variety of psychosocial disorders, such as chronic fear and anxiety, deteriorated interpersonal relationships, aggression, and other social disorders [11]. As stated by Merriam [12], mentoring is the interaction between the elderly and the younger in a trusted, loving relationship. According to Parsloe and Wray [13], the goal of a mentor is leaning towards an interchange of wisdom, support, learning or guidance for the purpose of personal, spiritual, career or life growth. Treston and Cook define mentoring as the 'relationship in which the mentor provides support, advice, feedback and guidance' to the protégé based on the traditional mentoring model of the apprentice learning from a master [10].

The project "An Impact Study of Big Brothers Big Sisters" found that "older brothers or sisters, becoming a friend to children in need of support, inspire children's passions and encourage them to succeed in life. To do this, it is necessary to support mentors, children, and families throughout their lives" [14].

When speaking about Ukraine, here, the concepts "mentoring" and "mentor" concerning the orphaned children who live in the institutions, for the first time were defined on the state level by the Law of Ukraine of 09.08.2016 № 1504-VIII "On ensuring organizational and legal conditions of social protection of orphans and children deprived of parental care". Mentoring is a voluntary, unpaid activity of a mentor for providing a child living in an institution for orphans and children deprived of parental care, another institution for children, individual support and assistance, especially in preparation for independent living. The mentor is an adult capable person who carries out activity on providing a child living in an institution for orphans and children deprived of parental care, another institution for children, individual support and assistance, especially in preparation for the independent living [15].

In such a way, mentoring is a process when one person offers help, support, or personal piece of advice for education, development of another person, who, in this case, is an orphan child. The purpose and tasks of mentoring are formulated in the Regulation on mentoring, which was approved by the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated July 4, 2017 No. 465 [16].

Thus, the primary purpose of mentoring is to prepare a child, who lives in the institution, for independent living by developing his or her physical, spiritual, and intellectual potential, confidence in his or her own forces, and the formation of cultural and moral values.

The main aims of mentoring include:

- identification and development of the child's abilities, promotion of the realization of the child's interests in professional self-determination;
- providing a child with available information about his or her rights and responsibilities;
- the formation of practical skills in the child, aimed at adapting to independent life, in particular, for solving household problems, managing personal property and funds, obtaining educational, social, medical, administrative, and other services;
- familiarizing the child with the characteristics of social communication and overcoming difficult life situations;
- promotion of the child's formation as a responsible and successful person;
- formation of the healthy lifestyle habits in the child.

In such a way, the leading role of mentor in the life of orphan lies in satisfaction of the child's needs to be significant for the other person through the mutual care, responsibility, which will help the child to deprive the feeling of being isolated and unnecessary; the help to the child to feel an individual personality, to restore the child's sense of self-worth and dignity; to provide an atmosphere

of benevolence, protection, support in interaction with the child, in the formation of trusting relationships with the child; transferring of the knowledge, experience, and constructive models of behavior to the child; stimulating the individual development of the child, and his or her motivation for a successful life, the ability to make right choice; giving the child the opportunity to gain experience in building family relationships with the temporary stay of the child in the mentor's family (experience in the organization of family mode of life: the schedule of the day, economy, rest, drawing up a family budget, etc.), forming an idea of a family model and examples of "parents - children," "husband - wife," "children - children," etc. relationships; the formation of a child's skills in the process of self-service, in the conduct of household, and working activities.

### **The nature and specifics of socio-psychological work with citizens who have expressed a desire to become mentors for orphans**

According to the results of the theoretical analysis of the needs of orphan children living in institutions, the specifics of their socialization, the peculiarities of preparation for independent living and with the aim of approving the Mentoring Program in the city of Kyiv and the Kyiv region in cooperation with the specialists of the Mentoring Project "One Hope" (2009 - 2016) it was developed the methodology of socio-psychological work with both the citizens who expressed their desire to become mentors and with orphan children residing in institutions regarding their preparation for participation in the Mentoring Program (Table 1).

Let us characterize the methodology of socio-psychological work in preparation for mentoring, according to different directions [17, 18, 19]. The direction "*Preparing orphans and children deprived of parental care for participation in the mentoring program*" expected the following *stages of socio-psychological work*:

1. *Acquaintance with the staff of the institution.* The main tasks: 1) to represent the Mentoring Program; 2) to offer to sign a cooperation agreement with a specific institution regarding the implementation of the Mentoring Program.
2. *Establishment of the contact with children.* On the territory of the institutions, where orphans and children deprived of parental care live, is provided the presentation of the Mentoring Program aiming to explain children the idea of mentoring and reveal among them those who will express the desire to have a mentor. After this, the child is provided with the "Foster child questionnaire" which should confirm the child's desire to participate in the program.
3. *The evaluation of the children's needs and their social*

Table 1. The methodology of socio-psychological work in preparation for mentoring

<b>Preparation of orphans and children deprived of parental care for participation in the Mentoring Program</b>	<b>Work with citizens who have expressed a desire to become mentors</b>
<i>Acquaintance with the staff of the institution and children</i>	<i>Conducting an information campaign on community involvement in mentoring (presentation of the "One Hope" Mentoring project)</i>
<i>Establishment of the contact with children</i>	<i>Initial contact with citizens by phone</i>
<i>An assessment of the needs of children and their social environment (using the following tools: eco-maps, a genogram, Chronicle of my life, Letter to the child)</i>	<i>Information meeting with citizens who want to become mentors</i>
<i>Individual planning of work with children</i>	<i>The first psychological consultation</i>
	<i>Family visit: social worker / social educator, psychologist</i>
	<i>Educational training</i>
	<i>Additional psychological counseling</i>
	<i>The conclusion about the socio-psychological readiness of citizens to be mentors</i>
<i>Mutual selection of the child and the candidates</i>	
<i>Socio-psychological support of the child and mentors</i>	

environment. At this stage, it is foreseen the initial assessment of the needs of children and their social environment in order to further provide the process of mutual selection of children and mentors.

4. *Planning* is the main component of the provision of specific child support, which consists of the development and implementation of an individual plan and identifies steps to achieve the goals.

The direction "Socio-psychological work with the citizens who expressed the desire to become mentors" included the following stages of work.

1. *Conducting an information campaign on community involvement in mentoring (Presentation of the Mentoring Project "One Hope")*. It is important to constantly provide a specially organized advertising campaign in order to popularize the idea of mentoring and the search for potential mentors for interaction with orphans and children deprived of parental care.
2. *The first contact with citizens via the telephone*. The realization of an advertising campaign increases the number of people who are interested in the Mentoring Program or want to become mentors for children.
3. *Information meeting with citizens who have a desire to become mentors*. Citizens who have called and have expressed a desire to continue contacts are invited to the information meeting.
4. *The first psychological consultation*. The purpose

of psychological counseling is to determine the readiness of citizens to be mentors, to analyze the strengths and weaknesses that may be, respectively, a resource or barrier to mentoring.

5. *Visit of the Program's specialists to the family*. The aim of the visit of the Program's specialists to the family is to get acquainted with the candidates in the conditions of their family, the definition of the psychological climate in the family, the nature of the relationship between family members and the specification of the attitude of family members to the desire of becoming a mentor. The family visit is carried out by a team of specialists (for example, a social worker and a psychologist or two social workers / social educators).
6. *Educational training "Education of mentors for orphans and children deprived of parental care"*. The objectives of training course: 1) to look through the system of orphans' protection in Ukraine; 2) to form in the participants of the training the idea about the transferring process in the life of the child; 3) to identify the role of mentor in the life of an orphan child; 4) to analyze the peculiarities of cooperation between the mentor and orphan child; 5) to determine the mentor's resources in cooperation with the orphan child; 6) to represent the Mentoring Program for orphaned children.
7. *Additional psychological counseling*. During the additional psychological counseling, it is necessary to continue the disclosure of the motives, values,

expectations of citizens regarding the interaction with orphans, and also help citizens evaluate their resources and risks for both children and themselves, as well as to make informed decisions about the readiness to become mentors.

8. *The conclusion of socio-psychological readiness of citizens to be mentors.* After the counseling, the commission prepares the conclusion on the socio-psychological readiness of candidates to become mentors.
9. *The mutual selection of the child and candidates for mentors.* As a result of the positive decision made on the readiness of citizens to become mentors, mutual selection of the child and mentor is carried out. During the process of mutual recruitment it is important to analyze the following key components of the needs assessment of a child, such as the history of the child's development, its cultural characteristics, strengths and needs, the impact of possible violence in the past on the child's mental development, the impact of deprivation and the "hospitalization" syndrome on the mental child development, necessary support needed by the child. Then, under the guidance of the Program Coordinator, acquaintance and establishing a contact between the mentor and the child is carried out.
10. *Socio-psychological support of the child and mentor.* The purpose of the socio-psychological support is to monitor the interaction of the mentor with the child and provide timely assistance by the coordinator or other specialists (according to the specific needs and requests).

The functions of the centers of social services for family, children, and youth on this issue are the following: spreading the information about mentoring and provision of the consultations regarding mentoring to interested persons in oral or written form; provision of the selection of appropriate candidates for mentors; collaboration with institutions for distribution of mentoring information among facility staff, children, and their parents; assistance in establishing (shaping) of mentoring relationships; support of mentors and children who need socio-psychological support.

## Conclusions

During 2009 - 2016, within the framework of the implementation of the Mentoring Project by the organization "One Hope," 1456 people in Ukraine became mentors and significant friends for children from the institutions. As a result of the practical activities of the project's experts, mentors help children to feel themselves as individuals, identify the interests and abilities of the

child, choose a profession, form moral values, learn to make choices, solve everyday problems, and communicate with people [One Hope]. According to the results of the approbation of the Mentoring Program from 2017, the decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine adopted on July 4, 2017, No. 465 "Some issues of exercising mentoring over a child" regulates the mechanism for organizing and conducting mentoring over children living in the institutions. It was approved at the state level that the organization of mentoring is carried out by the center of social services for the family, children, and youth at the place of residence of the child [20].

The experience of implementing the Mentoring Program convinces that the opportunity to communicate with the mentor, as well as to receive at the weekends or during the holidays at least temporary experience of living in the family, helps the teenager to form in his or her mind not the role of the orphan, but the status of a full-fledged person who is able to analyze and solve life challenges. Such an experience of socialization helps teenagers form ideas about different social roles and their content, traditions, customs, etiquette in the family, and facilitates in improving the success and activity of children in various activities.

Skills and knowledge of a more experienced person for an orphan child can be essential when choosing successful life paths for school graduation and admission to another educational establishment, finding a job, managing his or her personal life, etc. The effective mentoring helps the child to find him- or herself in society.

## Conflict of interest

The authors have declared no conflict of interest.

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#### Corresponding author

Julia Gorbaniuk  
Department of Emotions and Motivation Psychology  
Institute of Psychology, the John Paul II Catholic  
University of Lublin  
[julia.gorbaniuk@kul.lublin.pl](mailto:julia.gorbaniuk@kul.lublin.pl)

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