

*HANDBOOK  
FOR  
CARELEAVERS*

## Document information

Project: OUTogether - Promoting Children's Autonomy on Alternative Care

Agreement: 785760-OUTogether-REC-RCHI-PROF-AG-2017

Deliverable: 101

Title: Handbook for care leavers

Lead partner for deliverable: Sirius – centre for psychological counselling, education and research

Revision: 1 version

Author(s): Association Play

Contributor(s): Young people that have left alternative care, care leavers

Dissemination level: International, public

Graphic designer: Ivan Lasić

## CONTENT:

Instead of preface ●

Employment ●

Money management ●

Housing ●

Education ●

Health ●

Practical skills ●

Social network ●

Various ●

Contact us ●



This document was funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020). The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of OUTogether project and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Commission.



Stajališta iznesena u ovoj publikaciji isključiva su odgovornost Siriusa – Centra za psihološko savjetovanje, edukaciju i istraživanje i ne odražavaju nužno stajalište Ureda za udruge Vlade Republike Hrvatske.

Coordinator:



Partners:



Funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020).



*INSTEAD OF  
PREFACE*

# I. O. F.

*Hello stranger!*

*I believe you don't know me. That you never heard of me as I did not about you. I believe we may never have the opportunity to sit down one day and talk about it as adults. And the topic is painful. As there were moments in our lives that were painful. Moments where we had no one to share our suffering with. Or we were simply too wounded to put our thoughts and feelings on paper. Because, although they were just words, we were very much going through them.*

*But, stranger, if I told you that I wanted to tell you in this letter that you rejoice in all these painful moments, do not laugh and wave your hand. Because we also have reasons to be happy. And we have reason to laugh out loud and give a warm hug. To give love that our own parents, relatives and friends sometimes did not know how to provide. They didn't know how.*

*This is the way I want to tell you my story. It's not fairytale. I can't tell you it has a happy ending because who really knows what direction his life will turn?*

*I have not lived with my parents since I was 5 years old. I don't want to give you reasons, I believe you can guess what they are. I can only tell you that they were not good parents. That they did not know their "function" and did not bother to know how to perform it. I turned 15 when I was first fostered. When I first walked into someone else's house, I slept on someone else's bed and had my own room that I didn't have to share with a couple of other girls. If I told you it was weird, I'd be lying to you. It was inexplicable. It was so that not all the adjectives of the world could explain the feelings that lingered in me.*

*But I would also lie to you if I said that everything was always gloomy and sad. I have seen and learned how a family can live harmoniously and peacefully. I learned how to build confidence. I learned what it means to respect myself and the rest of the household. I learned what it means to*

*respect myself and the rest of the household. I learned what it means to stand behind my word, to be responsible. I learned to be a friend. I learned to love. They showed me how important my opinion was. I learned but also experienced how everything in life happens for a reason. And that takes me through life.*

*Because, four years later, here I am. I study at the Faculty of Law. I typed what I always wanted. I am independent, responsible, and I can confidently tell you today that I would not be here if those painful moments we talked about at the beginning did not happen. They simply define and shape you into the person you want to be one day. When I was leaving foster care, I was left alone. They didn't call. They didn't ask how I was. They didn't care if I needed anything. They didn't care if I tolerated moving to another city. This is my story and I sincerely hope it was just one of those rare instances in which the "child" was left alone. My advice to you is to fight. Because we are the kind of people who will have to fight for their rights. And to everyone else they belong so easily. Don't let it hurt because they don't call. They think they did their job, which they eventually are. You can't blame them. We knew, however nice we were, that the day would come when we had to pack our suitcases and start our lives from scratch. I know it will hurt, but I believe in you. You have the strength to endure what even adults cannot overcome. You know what I can say to my friends when they ask me how I managed to get over it?*

*Somehow today I look at it like we are being chosen. That we are the ones who will one day have their own children and give them love that has not been given to us, and we will still know how to provide it. A million times more and more powerful. So, do you understand your purpose in this world? You are the change. Your decisions can have a big effect on what comes next. So choose wisely. And follow your dreams. Pray for the people who have caused you pain, learn to forgive, but most of all, I want you to step up through your life with your head raised.*

*Because stranger, you never know when we'll meet.*

<http://www.EMPLOYMENT.hr>



# Ž. K.

---

Dear readers,

my name is Ž and I recently moved from one job to another. When I say recently, it was two weeks ago. I worked at a private company, which does not always mean that the employer will fully respect my labor rights. Moreover, he will try to remain silent as he can - to make every situation good for him personally. This is simply the reality of our times and we must bear in mind that not everyone is like this and that there are private individuals who respect all the rights of their workers.

However, because of the few who do not respect, we need to know our labor rights ourselves so that we can exercise them. We need to know this regardless of any employer, because this is about us and we need to be informed about everything in our lives. No one will fight for us except ourselves alone and that requires verified information.

As I moved from one employer to another, I had left some vacation days. Of course, I asked the Croatian Employment Service where they told me that I was not entitled to a year's leave because I had not completed the entire notice period of one month, but only two weeks.

Specifically, the notice period is calculated as follows:

- if you give extraordinary notice then there is no notice period
- if you have worked for less than a year then you have to work two weeks notice
- if you worked for one year then one month
- a month and two weeks if you worked two years
- two months if you worked 5 years
- two months and two weeks if you have worked for 10 years
- three months if you have worked for 20 years.

Of course, it is important that you read your employment contract and see what it says there. If you have an employment policy or collective agreement, also read and study them and see if it says anything about your notice period. The law is defined, however, if it says otherwise in any of these documents then it applies to you. Nothing further wrote in my case and the law applied to me. However, a new employer would not wait me that long and I agreed

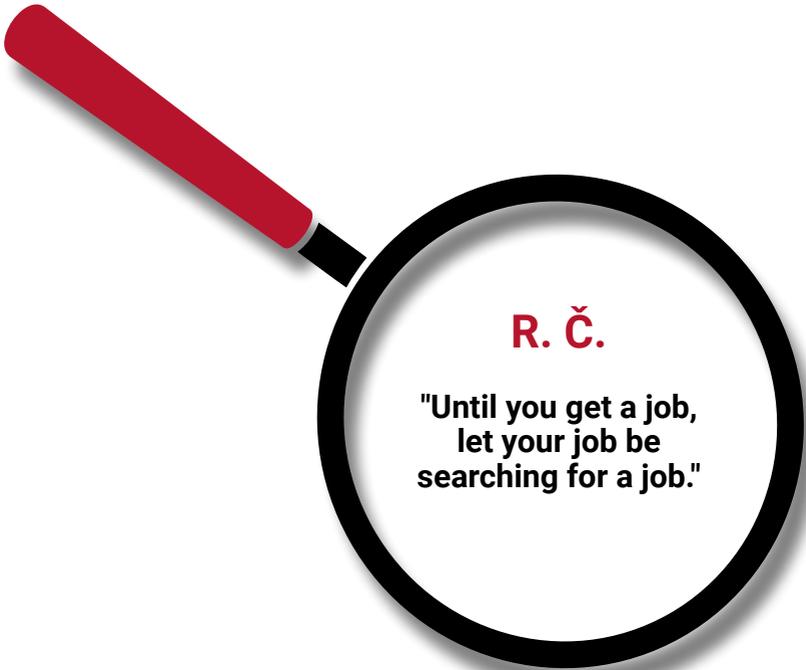
to work two weeks and that's it.

Now it was only a matter of vacation. The information I received from Croatian Employment Service was strange so I had to check it elsewhere. I called another office of that service and they told me that vacation days are counted partially because I didn't work all year.

Since I worked 8 months and am entitled to 24 days of vacation, they calculated that I was entitled to a third of those 24, which is 16 days of annual leave. Since I was on the vacation 12 days before I quit, I have 4 days left per year that I cannot use and which my employer has to pay me. This information was confirmed to me by the labor inspectorate, which I called, which you can call if you have any questions about labor rights. They are not only for reporting employers, but also for informing us about our rights and more. Don't be afraid to call them. They are there to share the information we need.

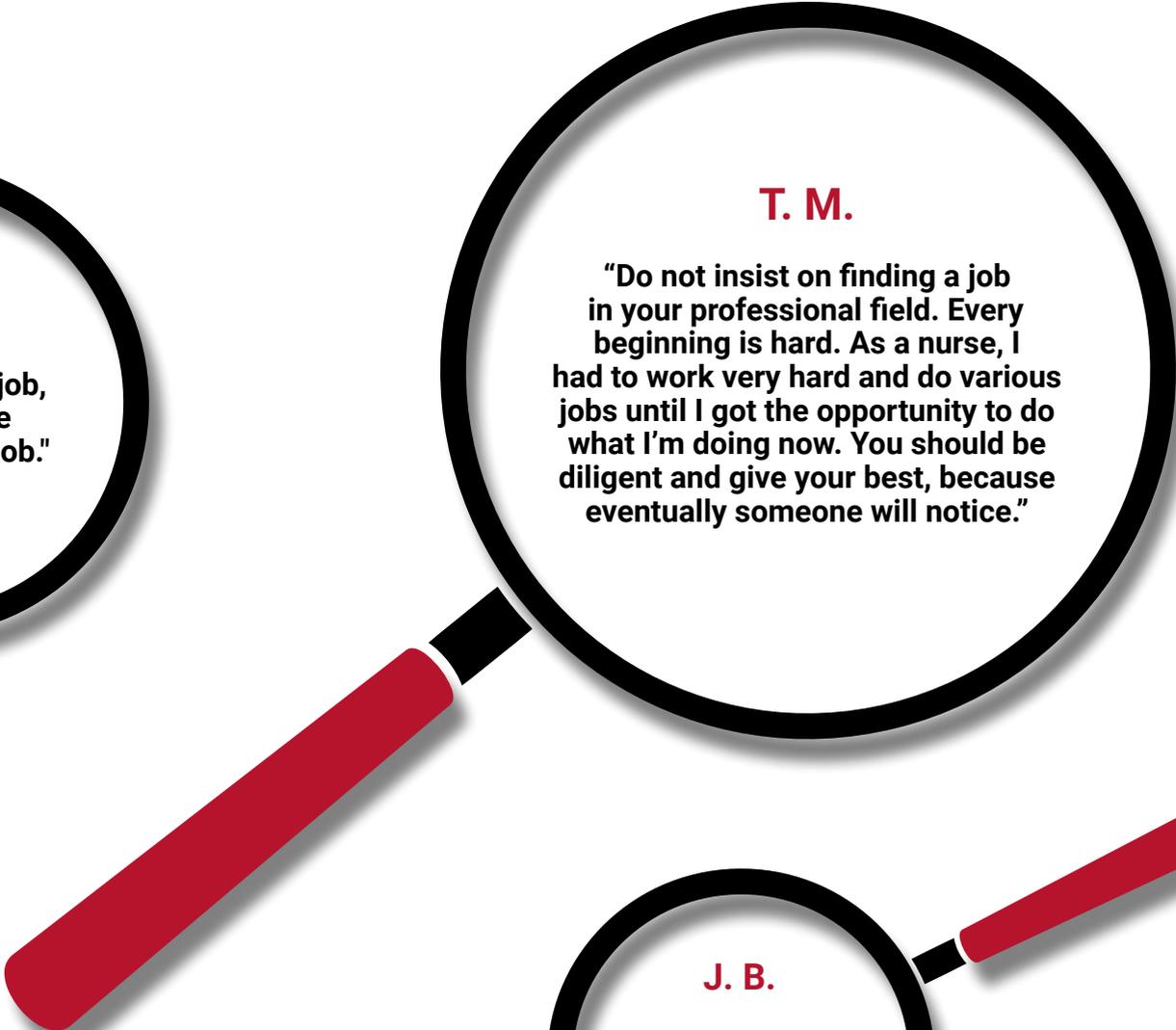
My message to all of you is that you work and fight for life, we all have to take care of ourselves and very often we need help with that. Sometimes smaller, sometimes bigger. Ask for it. It's not a shame, you're not less worthy because of it. Because today you will ask for help, learn new things, and tomorrow you will give that help to someone else. It is important that you find the right information, fight for yourself, and exercise all the rights you possess





**R. Č.**

"Until you get a job,  
let your job be  
searching for a job."



**T. M.**

"Do not insist on finding a job  
in your professional field. Every  
beginning is hard. As a nurse, I  
had to work very hard and do various  
jobs until I got the opportunity to do  
what I'm doing now. You should be  
diligent and give your best, because  
eventually someone will notice."



**J. H.**

"Do not wait for  
Employment Bureau to  
find you job because  
you will wait quite  
long."



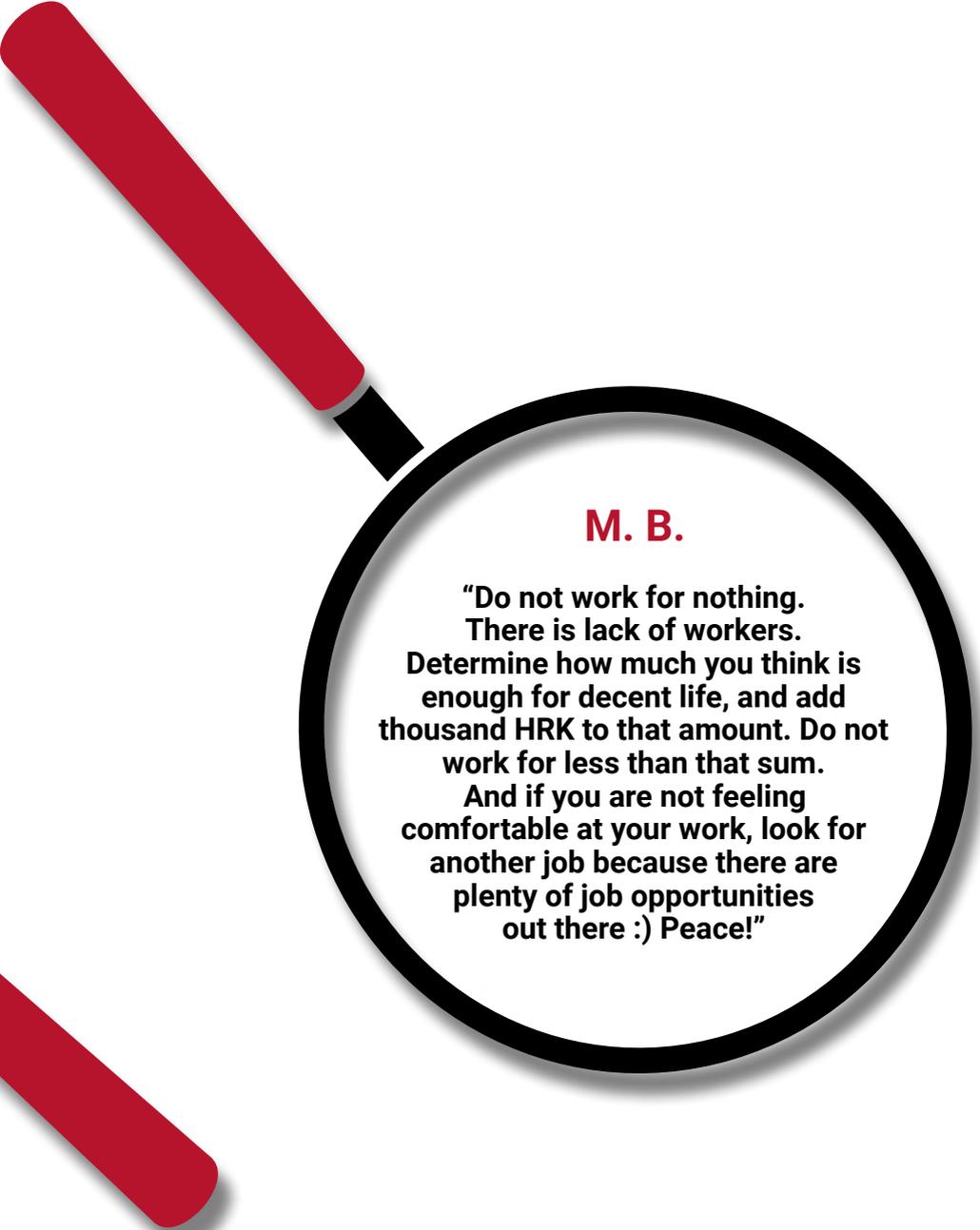
**J. B.**

"Immediately  
look for a job and  
get a job."



**M. K.**

**“Looking for a job is not difficult, but it is difficult to get it and keep it. Because we as human beings have a need to move forward and to move towards a better and higher level. At the beginning, I found a job at a school, later I searched for work through websites such as: posao.hr, jooble, bika.net and similar sites.”**



**M. B.**

**“Do not work for nothing. There is lack of workers. Determine how much you think is enough for decent life, and add thousand HRK to that amount. Do not work for less than that sum. And if you are not feeling comfortable at your work, look for another job because there are plenty of job opportunities out there :) Peace!”**



*FINANCES*

**M. K.**

"I could write a lot here... The general salary situation is awful. Although we have below average wages we are forced to survive with it. Unfortunately that is why we borrow from banks in the form of minus, loans and entering into even bigger debts. Each of us wants to live normally and financially adequately which is not possible with these salaries, so here we are again - we go back to the point from the previous sentence and then we spin in a circle. In principle, I find it the hardest with finances. Basically, what happens is, if you give money for one thing, you don't have for another. And money is a basic resource for life.

**Watch out what you're signing. Have a good financial plan, and avoid borrowing money.**

**Try staying within your limits."**

**R. Č.**

**"First, pay all the bills, then distribute the balance until the next paycheck.**

**Before grocery shopping, browse through the catalogs of the stores, and see where it is most profitable to go shopping.  
Good luck!!"**

### S. G. F.

“Buy groceries on sale. But first, secure your financial life outside of the foster care facility. Also, less eating out at the restaurants. Try preparing your meals at home. Don’t buy lunch in stores because there won’t always be a promotion. Also, avoid taxi rides and expensive goods.

**Sale, sale only saleeee!!!”**

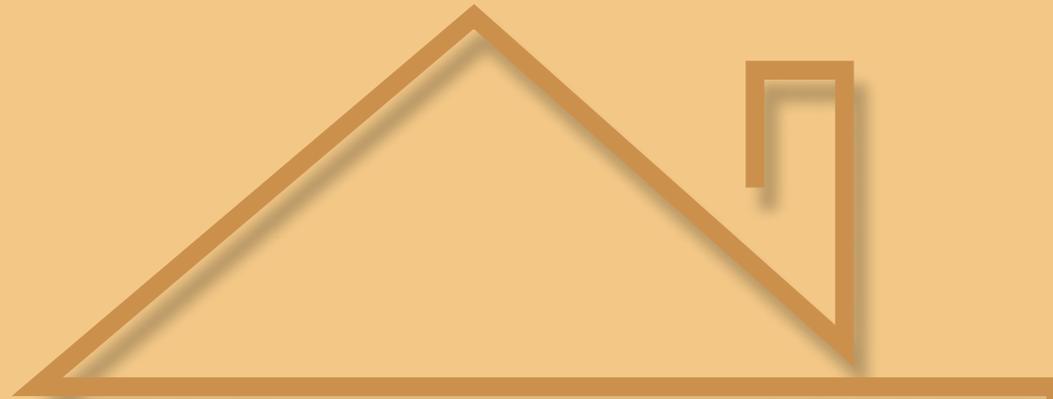
### T. G.

“This question can be answered in two ways (as in my case): do young people find employment immediately after leaving school or continue their education. If this is the first case: try to find a job with which you would live decent life and could save some money. If you continue with education, explore ways of financing (scholarships, etc.).

**One thing is for sure: no one can take away education from us and going through life is easier with it. :)”**

### T. M.

“Plan every purchase, just list items you need from the store and you will avoid buying unnecessary things. And make plans to distribute funds and watch out for promotions and sales, as well as always have a fund for black days, if you are able to save money.”



HOUSING

# M. K.

---

Looking for an apartment was more difficult for me, because of course, all of us would like to live in as much adequate space as possible and to be able to have a normal connection with tram lines and that everything is as close as it can be, such as a shop, post office, health center...

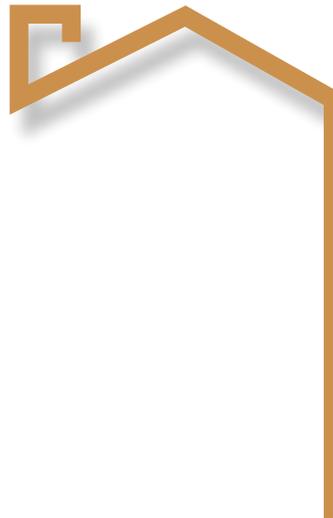
I went to websites such as: Rental apartments, Real estate, Njuškalo. Today the problem is finding an apartment at an adequate price because our salaries are below average and I had to adjust to my financial capabilities.

I came across inadequate apartments at an above average price or a down payment of one rent + rent had to be made in advance, which meant that at that time I needed about 6000 HRK + some money to transport things.

So I suggest that if you have the opportunity to live with a roommate, you should do it because it is very difficult to live alone with a minimum wage. You should also pay attention to things after you enter the

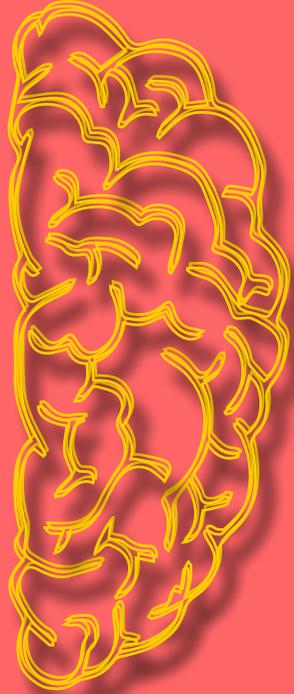
apartment because that's where the problems start. Each of us wants freedom and comfort, and not to be restricted. Every landlord has a home order and asks to be respected where the problem occurs.

Such as not introducing animals to the apartment, respecting peace and quiet for a certain period, not making noise and doing parties after 10pm. Which already limits me and takes away my comfort and freedom. That's my biggest problem and that's what bothers me the most.



**"I was adopted while I was 4 years old. And I lived with them until I was 19 years old. After that I lived in rented apartment, but before that I had to find a job so I could pay for rent and reconcile that with my financial capabilities. Considering that I am writing in circumstances where I had time to pack my things, I will give context. You should rather ask yourself what about those who were immediately thrown out into the street and had nowhere to go?"**

*EDUCATION*



# N. M.

---

If there are young people graduating from high school who want to study, I advise them to apply for student dormitories. Dorms are not expensive, and kids who are coming out of some kind of social care (foster homes, foster families, etc.)

have direct enrolment. Also, everyone who enrolls in college is legally entitled to financial assistance in the amount of 2000 HRK from a Social welfare centre as a support for studying. Also, there is a state scholarship that they can also get if they enrolled in college.

Life after foster care is not so intimidating if you are being realistic about it and ready to prepare for it.

For example, I prepared to leave by checking all the scholarships I could apply for, the dormitories I could live in.

In 95% of cases, scholarships are given to those who have been included in some kind of social care. Room in dorms are provided for everyone from any kind of care.

For future students I have an advice: do well in school and get good grades so you can enrol anything you want, there will be no worries later.

For those who are not planning to attend college, I recommend to ask their professors if they know any employer looking for workers (most often they know employers who need work force – just like in doing practice).

Fear does not exist if you are determined and have the will to live. :)

## S. G. F.

**“Also those who go to college can be employed through student services and have a great advantage for future. Eat mostly with the help of student ID, because you can eat good stuff for good price. :)”**



*HEALTH*

**M. S.**

**“First of all, detach yourself from an environment where you feel neglected, uneasy, and tempted. Then avoid jobs that cause too much stress and job limitations. Spend time with those you love, be more eager to learn, get creative and share your ideas. To feel brave, live healthy! :)”**

**M. K.**

**“Each neighborhood has its own nearby health center, that is, a primary or preventative health facility, which includes a dental and gynecological practice. In my opinion, it is best to have all at one place, e.g. everything in the health center closest to the home.”**



*PRACTICAL  
SKILLS*

# K. L.

---

## COOKING

Single people need to buy as little groceries as they can because very often something spoils. Learn basics at foster care facility. For example, once I cooked a pot of rice. Just for myself, by accident. I used to come up with a recipe but I quit because they wrote a variety of foods and spices so lunch would cost me more than at a restaurant. Probably it was a commercial for Podravka, so they've put everything to the recipe. I made the mistake of not looking for another similar recipe or substitute for some foods.

It is not necessary to have everything in the store, to spend money for nonsense.

Anyone in distress over time should cook something for 2-3 days; sarma, beans, or freezing food that can be frozen and not wasted.

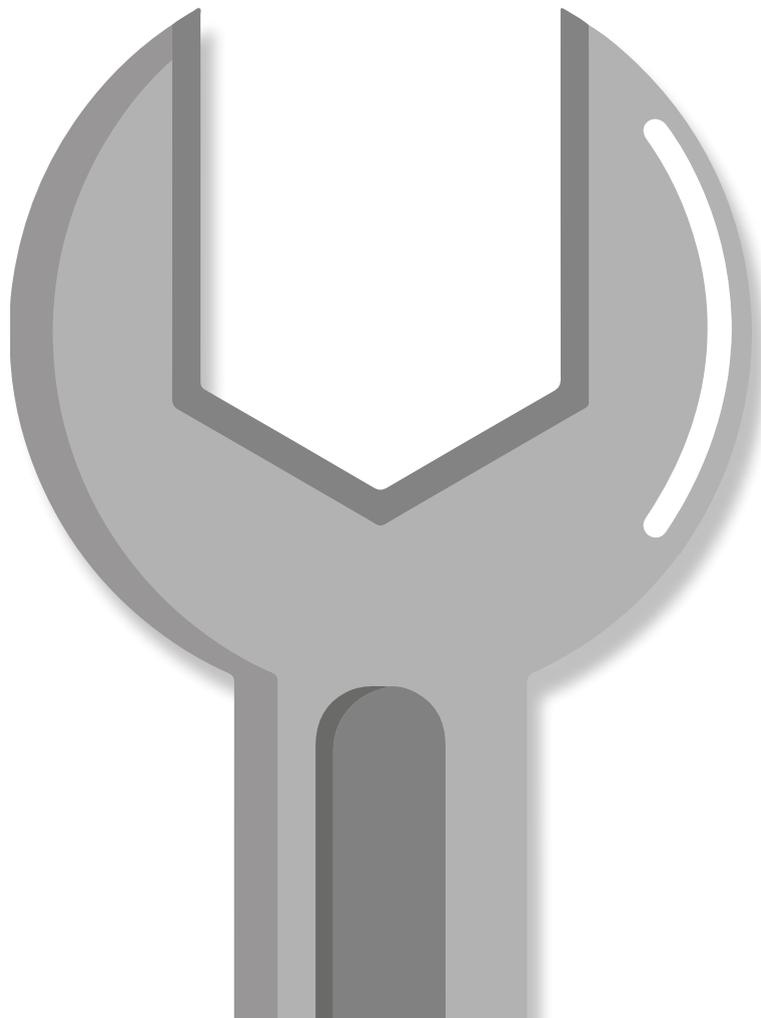
Almost never my fridge is without bacon. It can be cooked, baked and put into sandwich. I don't have to think too much

about what to buy or what to cook.

More importantly, it will not spoil like meat when it has been in the refrigerator for few days. Also, you don't have to wait for it to defrost – compared to meat. Bacon fits anything!

More important - always make a grocery shopping list. Because promotions at the stores encourage us to buy irrelevant groceries and then we have to think about what else to eat and buy something else for a particular meal. In the end, you need to overeat, so that more food does not go to waste, and most of the time exactly that happens.





**M. K.**

**“After all we have been through, we also acquire practical skills such as getting to know various people from whom we can get advice, help, or get closer to them and nurture friendly relationships. We can develop social skills, spending time together in all sorts of situations with highs and lows. We learn how to save and integrate these into life situations and apply them to specific situations.”**



# R. Č.

Everyone can hardly wait for their 18th birthday, and I have been crying because I was becoming an adult. I cried because I didn't want to "grow up", even though I had been "grown up" for a very long time, I just didn't realize it then.

I cried because I didn't know where to go after foster home? How to start? Who to contact if something goes wrong?

I graduated high school, enrolled in college and waited over the summer. It is easy to find a job as a waiter in the summer in Zagreb, as most waiters go for the season. While I was working, my friends were having fun going out, but when you get your paycheck, nothing else matters.

I had a lot of support from my friends, they were the reason I succeeded, because if I "fell" they would "lift me up". 13 years ago there was no Facebook or social media, and if you ask social service for advice they wouldn't help because you are 18 and no longer their problem.

It was at that moment that

I found out about our small, wonderful Association. They are here to help with advice, to guide us if we need anything. They are really there for us, and will comb through the whole google if needed, just to find the answer to the question you asked them. I can't tell you anyone else who can advise you, because getting out of the home is scary on its own, especially if you have nowhere to go. It's scary even if you have a place to go, and you know what awaits you when you get "home".

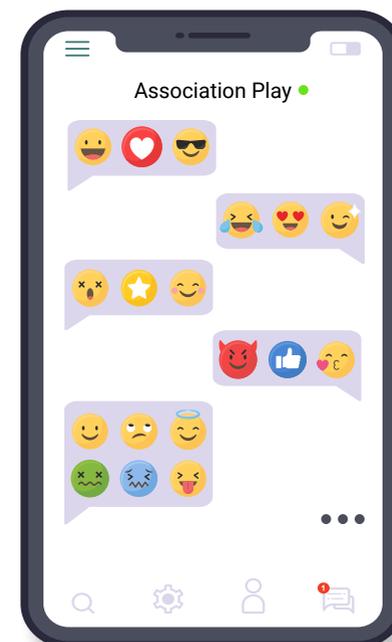
We, the foster kids, are pretty strong at first, but below we are as vulnerable as everyone else. Beware and fight, because life brings problems, but it also brings happy moments. It's not constantly ugly or pretty. Finally the sun comes up.

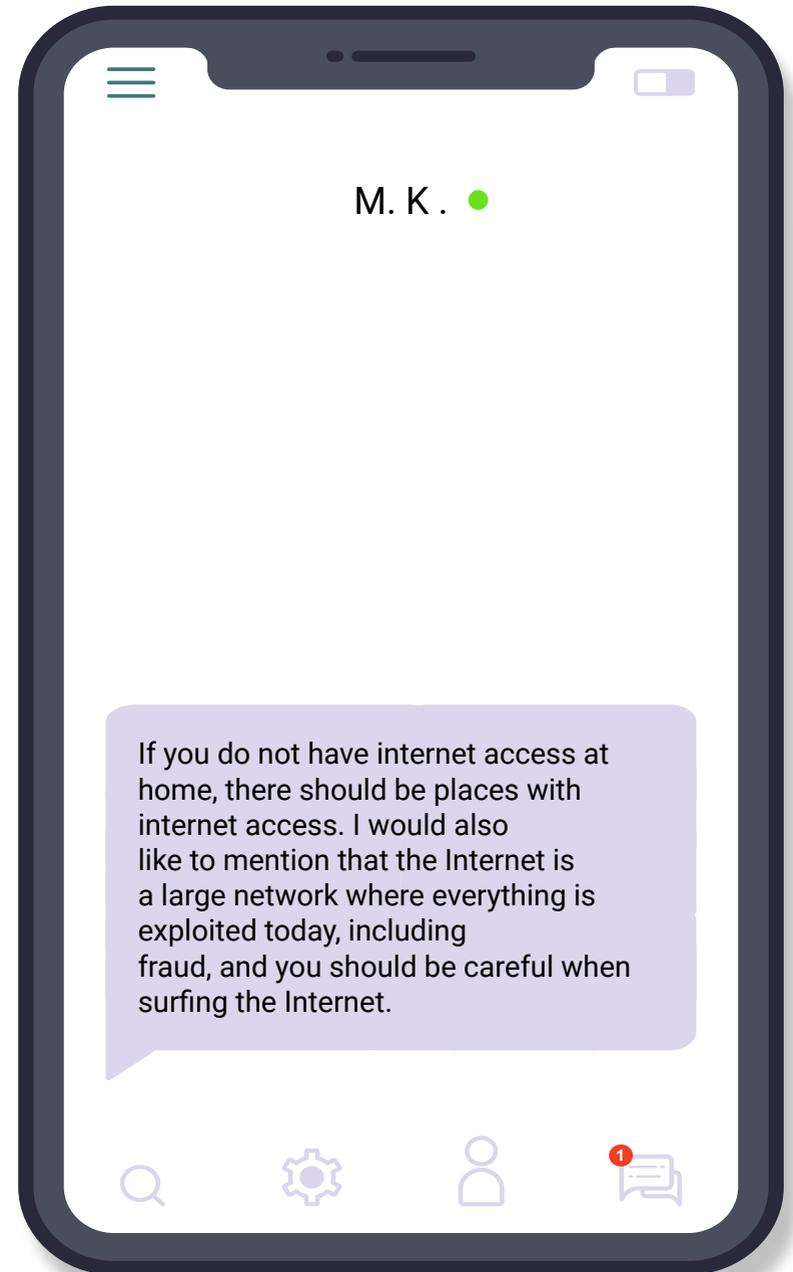
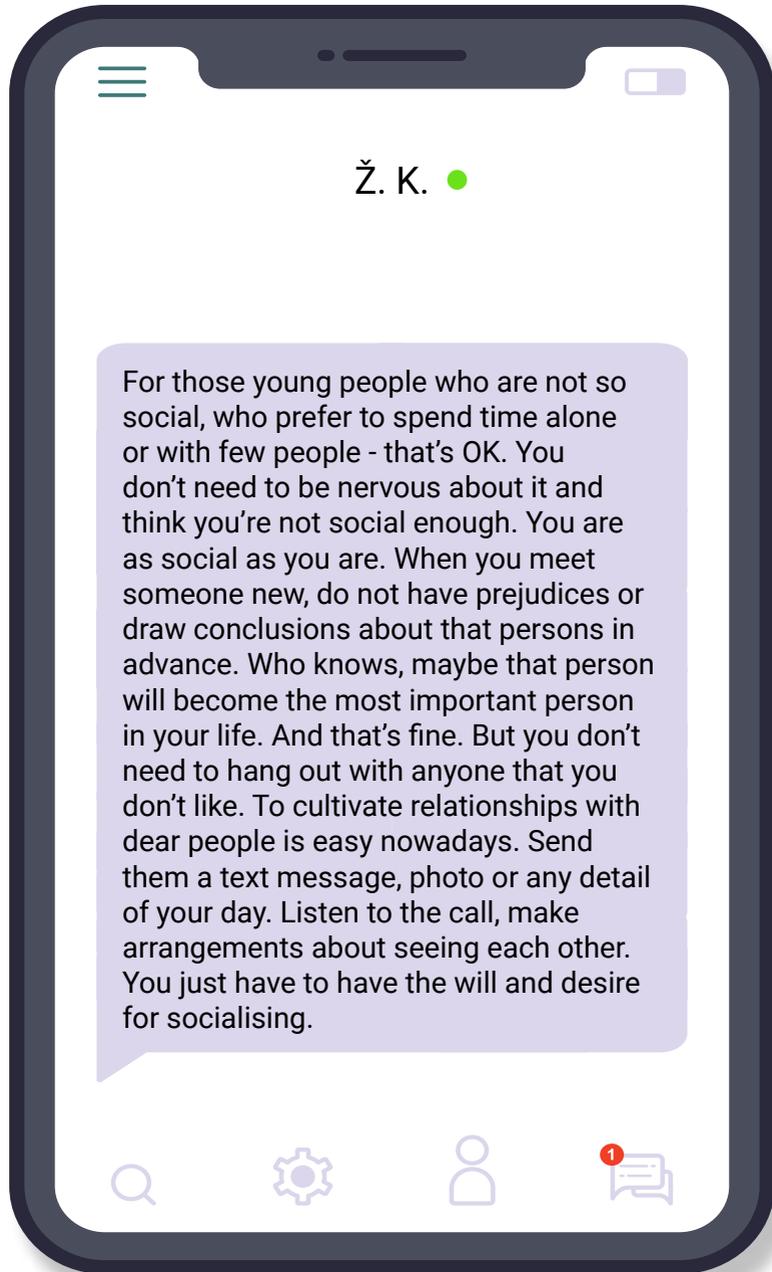
Likewise, job advice can also be given to you by employees at Employment Bureau, because if your employer hires you, it may receive a subsidy for your salary from the city.

Good luck from the bottom of my heart and don't give up. If you can, put aside some money each month. Watch where the promotions are, so buy products on sale. I used to buy spaghetti, cooking cream and cheese, and make pasta with cheese a couple of days in a row, because for the second I didn't have any.

It is also important for you to find good friends, not someone who will manipulate you. Someone who will understand you. And the most important thing, you do not have to be ashamed of being in the foster home because it is NOT your fault. By the circumstances, we ended up in foster home, and in some ways it is even better that I ended up there because it saved me.

For all that I have been through, I am who I am today, and I am grateful for that. Don't live in the past, live for today, because what it was, it was and it can't be changed anymore. Only a positive attitude and four magic words (sorry, thank you, please and you're welcome) are opening the door.







## LIFE MESSAGE.

As far as we know, man is the most developed being and has consciousness, and this is where we differ from other living forms.

It is normal for a man to strive for better and to develop to a higher level. Unfortunately, life sometimes prevents us from doing so, and it is difficult to reconcile it all.

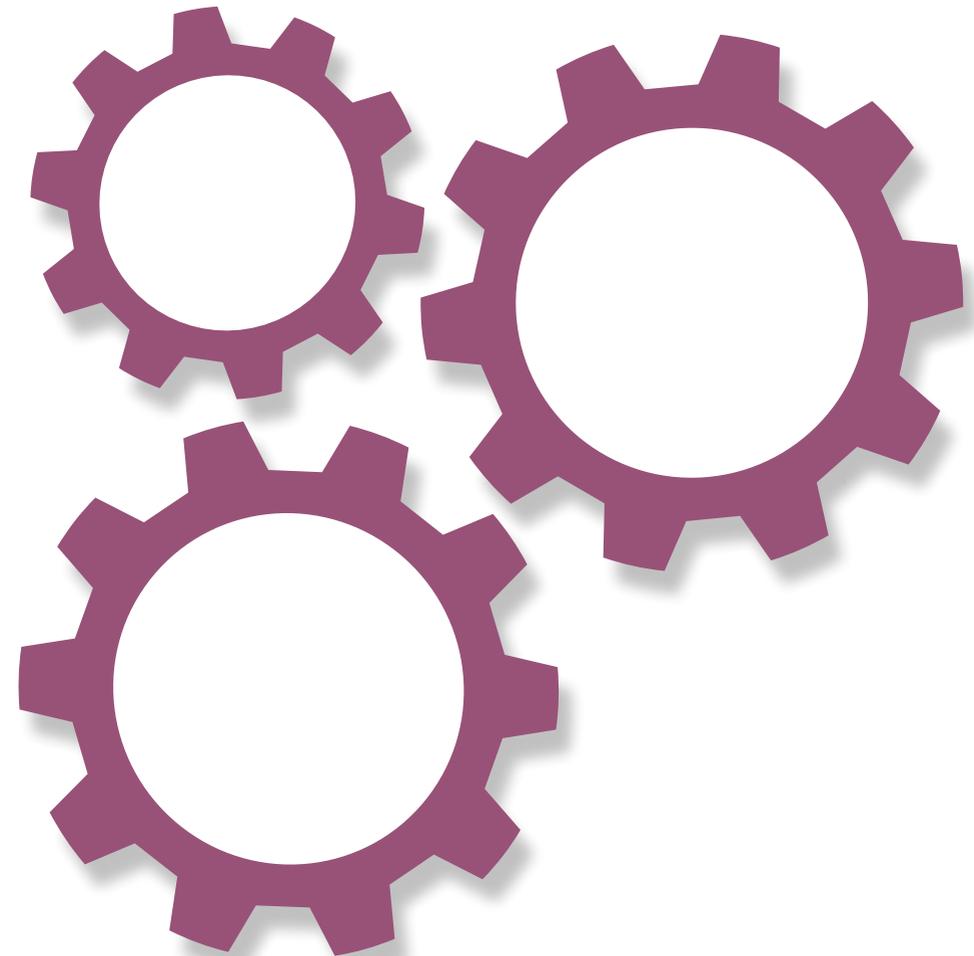
But each of us is an individual, and we need to create our own little cosmos universe, where there will always be a way to strike a balance between everything. Every human being is striving for freedom, but our system or life puts limits that are not suitable for everyone, so we need to work a lot on ourselves.

Of course, it is very difficult to take time for yourself to reconcile everything, but you need to make an internal organization.

The word life itself is a big word and it has great meaning that we face every day and every moment.

Basically, life is a great struggle for survival. However, despite this, one has to be persistent and accomplish what we have set out in life.

This is often changed, but you should not give up, because what I have stated is that every one of us is individual who needs to have its own universe and in this chaos one must find order.



When you were leaving your home or foster family, what would you wish you had known then?

**T. Ž.**

**“For example, when I got out of the system, I wish I knew there were associations you could turn to for a chat, for help, or for some information.”**

**K. L.**

**“To cook. :)”**

**J. P.**

**“I wish they had brought us more to life (paying bills, cooking, saving), because we didn't have to worry about food, goods, bills, cleaning supplies, etc., which is actually part of our daily lives now.”**

What advice would you give to a young person leaving their foster home soon? What is most important when going out?

**D. T. Ć.**

**"Don't waste your money! If you know how to manage your finances no problem."**

**R. Ć.**

**"Don't fear <3  
Yes, the world is big and sometimes scary, but there's nothing you can't do." <3**

**S. G. F**

**"In pair is always easier. To survive in Croatia as a tenant without anyone's help is to win the lottery. Especially since jobs are very poorly paid today. And pray to God that you have money to pay to month rent/utilities and food no matter if you are buying on sale. Especially in the winter when heating kills the bills."**

## CONTACT US!

If you need any practical advice or help, feel free to come to association Play, Centre for youngsters from alternative care:

Mob. (SMS – WhatsApp – Viber): +385 95 522 3330

Facebook: Igrana Kontaktić

Address: Sveti Duh 55, Zagreb



Udruga „Igra“ za pružanje  
rehabilitacijsko-edukacijske i  
psiho-socio-pedagoške pomoći

or

Centre Sirius:

Mob: +385 91 2137 424

Tel: +385 1 6701 224

Address: Bužanova 10, Zagreb

**A huge thanks to all young  
care leavers who have  
invested their time and  
effort and contributed to the  
creation of this Handbook  
with their advice.**

