

Challenges for Practice in Residential Child and Youth Care in Portugal: An Overview of Four Projects Supported by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation

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"When we come out [of residential care], the world is no longer the same. The world changes every minute - if not second - and we were living inside an enclosed space although we have much gone out to school and so on; we never know what it really is to be outside. Neither our parents sometimes know how to deal with the problems, so how can we do with the negative factor of being away from the pure reality."

– Testimony of a girl placed at Casa do Canto, August 2013
(Pinheiro et al., 2015)

In Portugal, the number of children and youth for whom placement in residential care provides the ultimate guarantee of protection and promotion of rights remains extremely high. Regardless of the political discourse and the changes in the legislation advocating for the deinstitutionalization of children and youth at risk in recent years, the Portuguese care system is still strongly marked by long-term placements in welfare residential institutions, and over the past decade this trend



CYC-Online December 2017

ISSN 1605-7406

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has increased. The official available data shows that around 94 to 95% of the children and youths' placements in the last four years have been in some kind of residential care.

In a context of economic crisis and increasing lack of resources in the field of care, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation through the Gulbenkian Human Development Programme (PGDH) has chosen to contribute to the empowerment of residential care by supporting innovative actions in four residential children's and youth homes located in different districts of the country. The main objective was to contribute to a greater knowledge, evaluation, and discussion of residential intervention models and to provide better conditions for the implementation of four pilot-projects aiming to have a better efficacy and greater success in the national system. Transition to independent living, parental training and work with the families of youth in care, the fulfillment of the Rights of the Child in daily life, and the role of the institution as central resource in the youth social support network after leaving it were at the core of the supported projects.

The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation

Established in 1956 as a Portuguese foundation for the whole of humanity, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's (FCG) original purpose focused on fostering knowledge and raising the quality of life of persons throughout the fields of the arts, charity, science, and education. Bequeathed by the last will and testament of Calouste Sarkis Gulbenkian (<https://gulbenkian.pt/en/>), the foundation undertakes its activities structured around its headquarters in Lisbon (Portugal) and its delegations in Paris (France) and London (the United Kingdom).

The Youth in Residential Care Project

The Gulbenkian Human Development Programme (PGDH) is one of the operational units that contributes to the FCG mission through charity, and it has designed an intervention plan through 2018 based on the conviction that it is possible to construct an inclusive and people-friendly society, and that in order to



CYC-Online December 2017

ISSN 1605-7406

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fight inequalities and social injustice it is necessary to support organizations active in the social sector, so that they integrate with and speed up the process of development of a convergent economy.

These paths are forged by deepening knowledge and anticipating phenomena, promoting reflection and open debate, risking innovation and experimentation, mobilizing new public and private partnerships, working within networks, and above all leading through example, making use of our independence to strengthen our power to bring people together.

Since 2012, the PGDH has been developing a series of initiatives within the Youth in Residential Care Project aimed at children and young people placed in residential care in the Portuguese protection/welfare system. Four projects were supported in four residential Children's and Youth Homes of varying kinds located in different parts of the country (Figure 1). The overall funding from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation attributed to the four projects in the triennium 2012-2015 was around €650.000 euros.

The main goals of these four projects were to increase young people's autonomy and independence by preparing them for life after care and to enable young people who had been moved away from their families to develop their personal and social skills and their emotional self-regulation. To enable them to integrate fully into society and to sustain themselves after leaving the Home, young people were taught about and given training in daily activities through different programs in and outside residential care.

Four areas emerged as crucial in these projects – autonomy, working with the families, transitions/after residential care and institutional and organizational culture – and each one was structured with one or more starting questions/challenges to which the projects tried to give answers (Figure 2).



Figure 1

The Children and Youth's Homes and their projects

Oficina de São José, Arquidiocese de Braga	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 3 residential units (46 male, 6-18/21 years) and an Apartment for Autonomy (4 male)• Project: <i>"Autonomia – desenvolver e dinamizar processos de pré autonomia e autonomização de crianças e jovens do Lar de Infância e Juventude"</i>
Lar da Associação de Solidariedade Via Nova, Vila Real	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Residential unit (20 male, 6-18/21 years)• Project: <i>"O Trilho"</i>
Lar Nº. Srª de Fátima, Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Reguengos de Monsaraz	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1 residential unit + 1 residential unit for pre-autonomy (20 male, 20 female, phratries, 3-18/21 years)• Project: <i>"Aprender a Ser – projeto de promoção de autonomia para jovens em acolhimento residencial"</i>
Casa do Canto, "Crescer Ser" – APDFM, Ansião	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2 residential units (23 female, 12-18/21 years)• Project: <i>"Projet'Ar-te. Desafios para a mudança no sistema de acolhimento"</i>

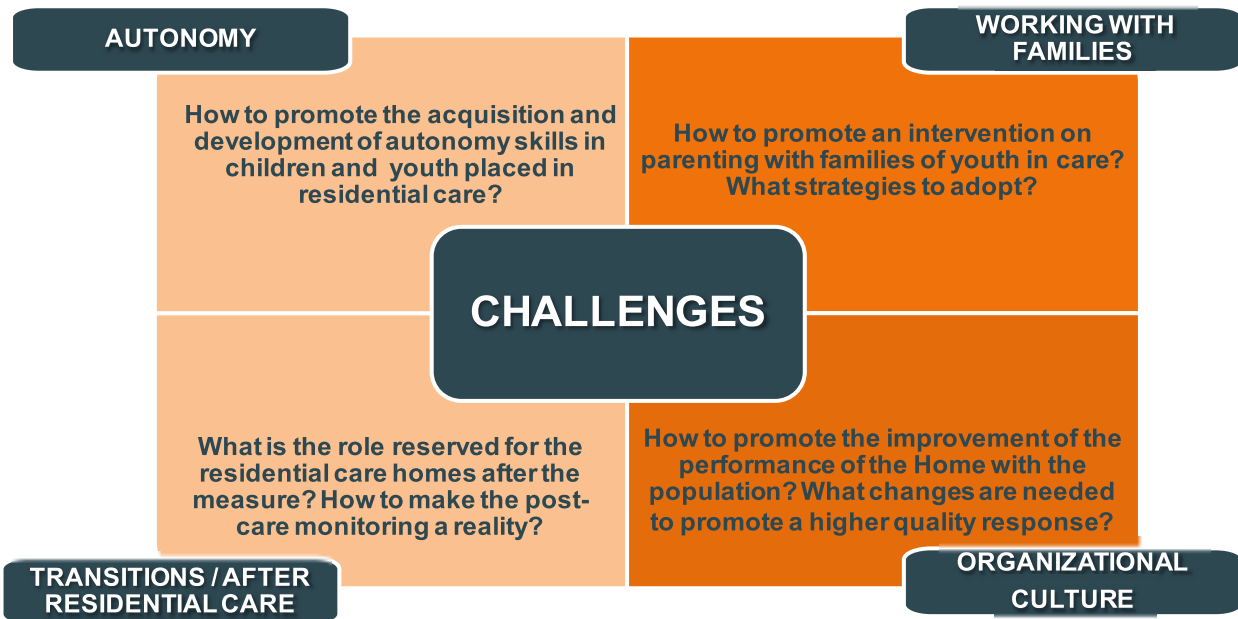
Each of the projects explored different methodologies. The option of the *Via Nova Association* (in Vila Real) was to work closely with the families to prepare them for the possible return of young family members after care and to developed educational and training with external entities programs facilitating the inclusion of the youth in school and labor market.



CYC-Online December 2017

ISSN 1605-7406

Figure 2
The project's starting challenges



The *Oficina de São José* (in Braga) began by adapting and validating the Umbrella Program to the Portuguese reality and to implementing a psychosocial program of pre-autonomy for the youngsters placed in residential care at the same it created an Apartment for Autonomy outside the care facilities, in the center of the city, for four older youth.

The *Casa do Canto* (in Ansião) psychosocial and socioeducational structured program was developed to promote the autonomy of the girls during and after residential care, organized according to a multilevel model articulating an emotional regulation program (Level I), a personal and social competencies program (Level II) and an innovative service: the Support and Accompaniment Follow-up Structure (Level III), which is a structure created to support and supervise the girls who voluntary want to maintain the relation and informal assistance from the Home after the residential care measure was concluded.



Figure 3

Youth preparing their own meals at the Apartment of Autonomy from the Oficina de São José (Costa et al., 2015)



Figure 4

Examples of the books with the life memories of each girl placed in Casa do Canto offered at the moment of leaving residential care (Pinheiro et al., 2015)



CYC-Online December 2017

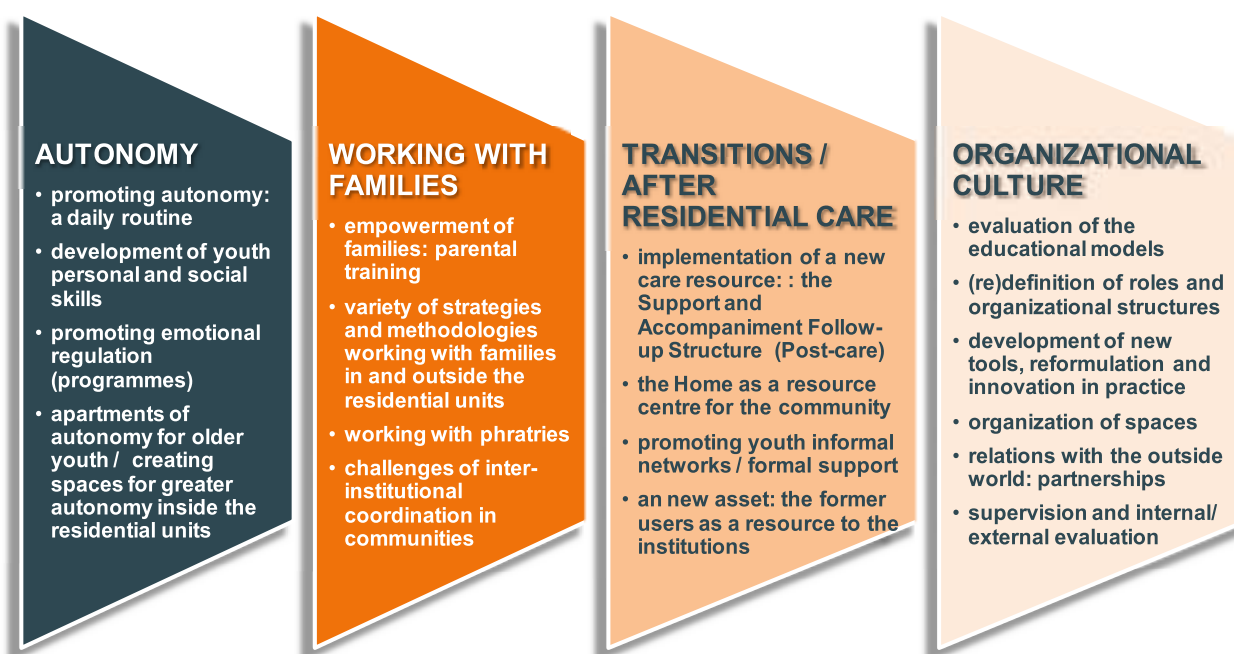
ISSN 1605-7406

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At *Lar de Nossa Senhora de Fátima* (in Reguengos de Monsaraz), the entire organizational culture was changed, with particular attention being paid to the training of human resources and the personalization of spaces with the children and youth in order to make the Home a more familiar and welcoming place. At the same time, a more independent wing was created that was separated from the main care facilities to support three older youth preparing to leave care.

Figure 5

Project's methodologies and main activities



The needs of the staff were also identified, and initiatives were developed to train the technical and educational teams to improve their skills and knowledge.

The Children and Youth Involved in the Projects

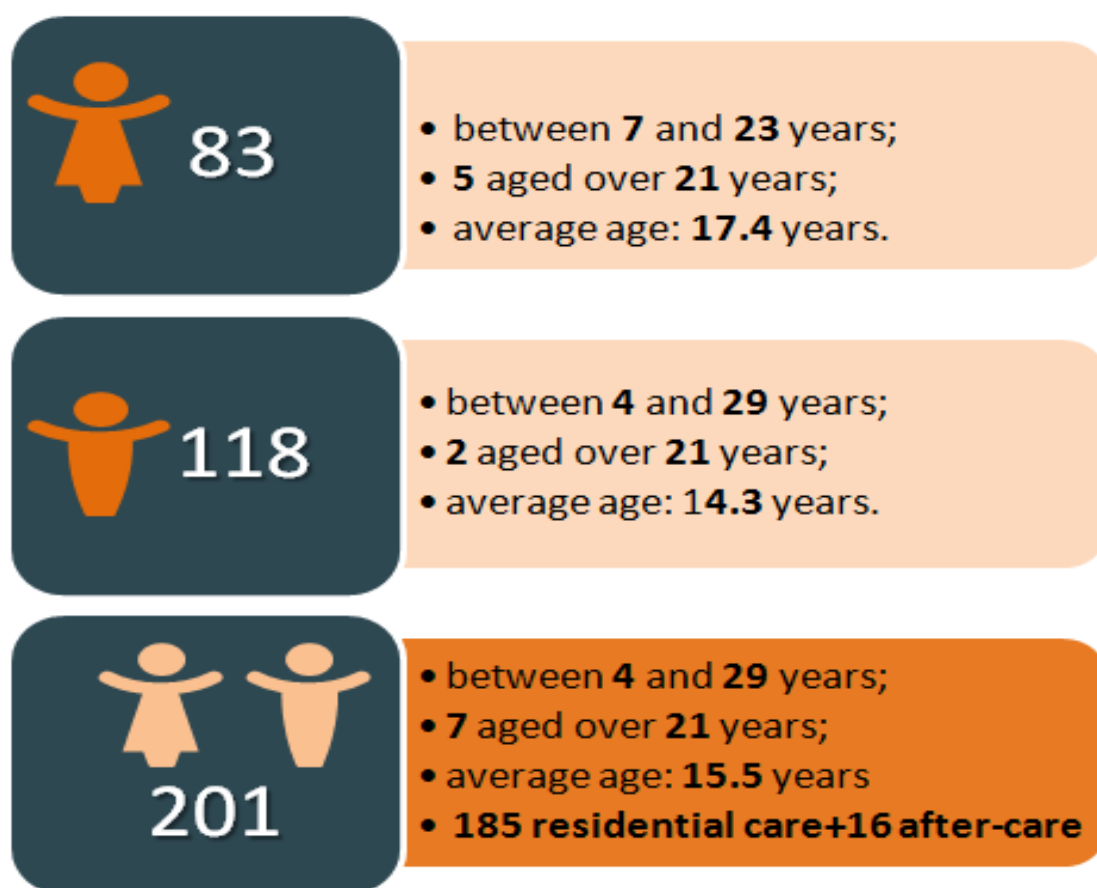
The four selected projects involved a total of 201 children and youth (Fig. 4), of whom 185 were placed under a judicial order in residential care while for the



remaining 16 the residential care measure had already ceased. Following the trend recorded at the national level in recent years, the majority are male (n = 118: 58.7%).

Figure 6

Children and youth involved in the projects by age and gender



The mean age of girls (17.4 years) was significantly higher than that of boys (14.3 years). The discussion of this indicator cannot be dissociated from the nature of the projects developed and has to take into account two facts: the participation of 16 older girls, whose residential care measure had already ceased at the time of participation in the *Casa do Canto* project; and the priority given to the female



gender for insertion in the ward of autonomy constituted in the *Lar de Nossa Senhora de Fátima*.

The definition of the life project of each child and youth placed in residential care is, accordingly to the Portuguese law, one of the main goals of the measure applied. The care intervention should guarantee by every possible means that each child and youth can be framed with reference figures in a safe environment capable of guaranteeing its development and autonomy. In the life projects identified the majority points to the maintenance and (re)construction of ties with the biological family through reunification to the nuclear family (46.4%) or integration into the extended family (14.8%). In 30.3% of this population the life project was based on the goal of autonomy – becoming independent. It is particularly relevant that about 13.4% of the total children and youth involved in the four projects have no family support.

In six cases, the existing perspective pointed to stay in residential care until the 18 years, while for four cases the adoption was part of the life project of life and, therefore, they were entrusted to the respective institution. It is worth noting that only one measure of civil ‘godfathering’ has been applied in the total of this population, in a trend that follows the prevailing orientation at a national level.

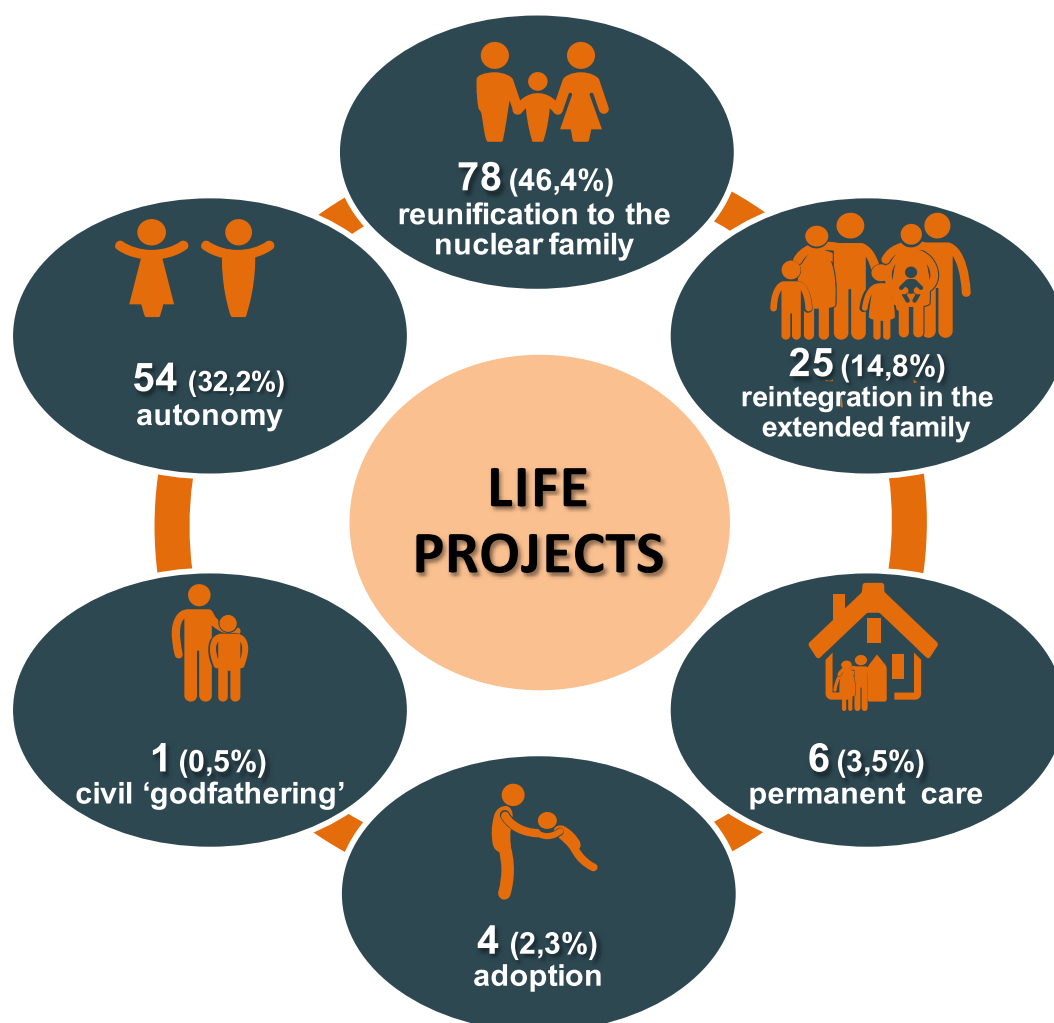
On the total of the 185 children and youth placed in residential care, 58.1% were under a Court Order, 35.7% were subject to a measure applied by the Local Children and Youth’s Protection Commissions, and 4.8% were entrusted to the guardianship of the institution's Director. Regarding the length of stay in residential care 20.5% were placed for a period less than 1 year, 42.7% from 1 to 3 years, and 36.8% for more than four years. It is relevant to note that 15 youth were placed in residential care for a period of time over 10 years.

Around 59.4% of the children and youth were identified with specific needs in the mental health field and 10.2% with other special health needs. A significant percentage (25.4%) has been diagnosed with intellectual and developmental difficulties.



Figure 7

Children and youth involved in the projects by life projects



Concerning the field of education, 85% of these children and youth attended school, most in regular basic education, with a higher representation of the middle school grades, and only 15 were attending alternative educational offers. On the other hand, 21 youth (12% of the total of population) were attending vocational training, 2 other youth were employed and 3 were without any working activity.

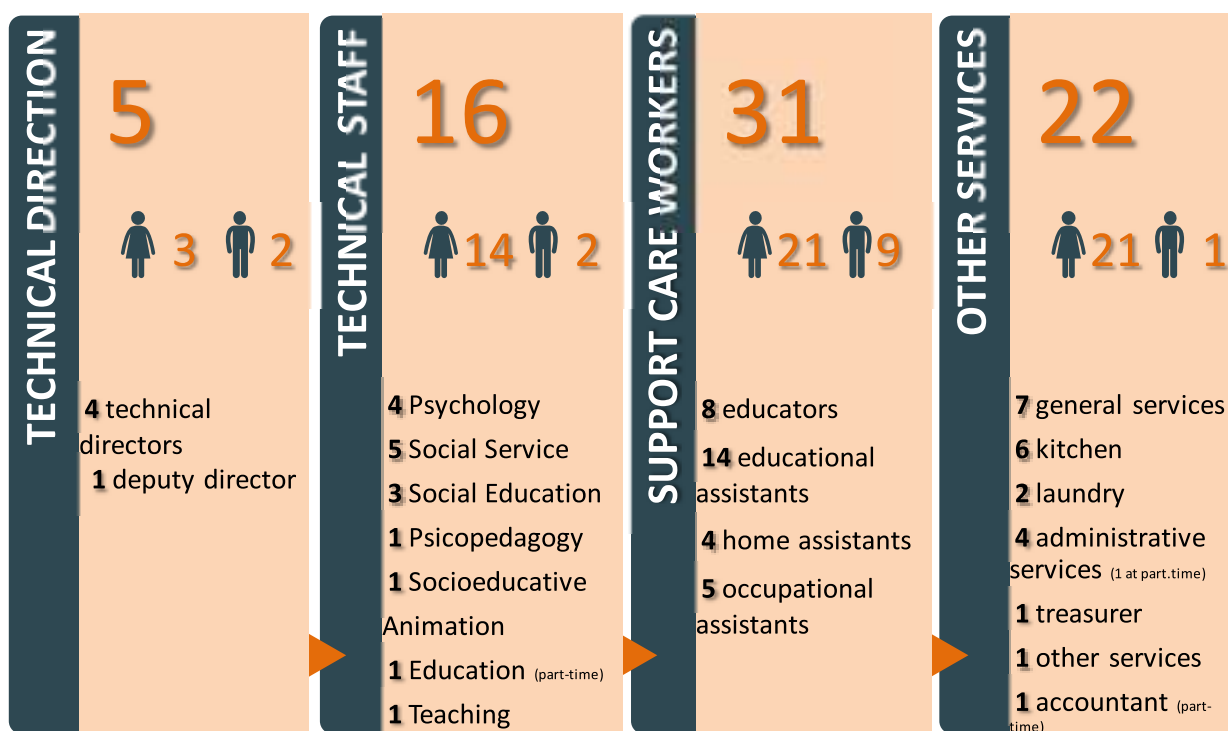


Staff and External Resources

These projects involved 74 specialists and managers and 70 external organizations that established local partnerships.

Figure 8

The staff of the institutions

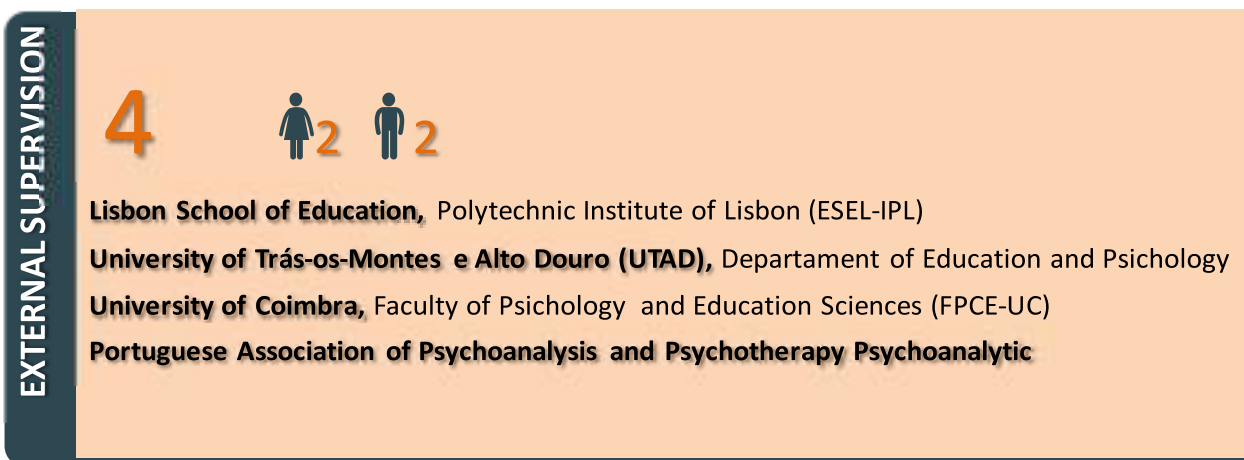


In parallel, and with the aim of training specialists and organizations, three meetings with specialists in the field, one international conference and six workshops were held over the three years of the projects (2012-2015). Five thematic brochures, coordinated by the technical supervision team from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation working on the projects, with contributions from the staff, specialists at the institutions and the supervisors, were also published and are available (in Portuguese) at the site of the FCG.



The scientific supervision and monitoring of these projects was carried out by researchers from the University of Coimbra, the University of Trás os Montes e Alto Douro, the Higher School of Education of the Polytechnic Institute of Lisbon and the Portuguese Association of Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy Psychoanalytic.

Figure 9
External supervision



A final publication that will examine the main results and recommendations arising from this trial is currently being prepared and is scheduled to be released in 2018.



Figure 10

Graffiti at the entrance of Oficina de São José: Our home... Tenderness... Liberty... Sympathy... Friendship... Love... Affection... Listening... Sharing... Trust...

Oficina de S. José (Costa et al., 2015)



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CYC-Online December 2017

ISSN 1605-7406

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