

One Step Ahead support for young people leaving institutional care in Czechia

SUMMARY

One Step Ahead supported 41 young people in Nechanice, who had grown up in institutional care, in their transition to independent life. The project addressed the high risk of social exclusion faced by young people by preparing them for employment, independent living and active participation in rural communities. Through counselling, training, mentoring, and close cooperation with municipalities, the initiative connected participants to job opportunities, housing options and local support networks.



CONTEXT

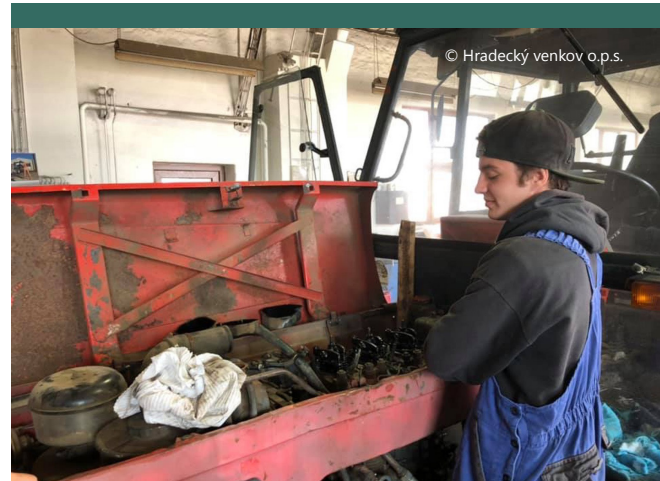
Rural areas in Czechia face challenges including limited access to social services, insufficient affordable housing and persistent poverty among vulnerable families. As a result, a significant number of children are placed in institutional care. Preventive and community-based services remain underdeveloped, increasing the risk of family separation. Young people leaving institutional care encounter further barriers, especially in transitioning to independent living.

The **One Step Ahead project provided a comprehensive support system for 41 care leavers.**



OBJECTIVES

- > Support young people in rural Czechia in their transition from institutional care to independent living;
- > Strengthen their life skills, including financial literacy, household management and navigating public services;
- > Improve their access to education, employment opportunities and stable housing;
- > Promote social inclusion and integration into local communities;
- > Address rural labour shortages and depopulation by connecting youth to local opportunities;
- > Increase visibility of young people's ideas and strengthen partnerships with local authorities to build skills, tackle local issues and create a lasting community impact.



Themes: Social inclusion, youth, education and training

Country: Czechia

Organisation: Hradecký venkov o.p.s., Local Action Group

Start & end date: 02/2018 - 08/2019

Budget: EUR 60 258

Funding sources:

> European funds under the implementation of the Community-Led Local Development Strategy

> National Operational Programme for Employment (European Social Fund)

Website: <https://www.hradeckyvenkov.cz/aktivita-a-projekty/ukoncene-projekty/o-krok-napred/>

Contact: Eva Kalenská, mas@hradeckyvenkov.cz, +420 737 919 152



ACTIVITIES, KEY ACTORS, AND TIMELINE

The project was implemented in Nechanice over approximately 18 months through a **structured, participatory approach**. Key actors included the Local Action Group Hradecký venkov (project management and coordination), the Nechanice children's home, local municipalities (community support and provision of accommodation), local businesses and employers (mentoring and internships), community workers (counselling and facilitation of activities), and expert volunteers (training and workshops). The primary beneficiaries were young people leaving institutional care, while **the wider rural community benefited** from greater social inclusion, workforce development, and engagement with local stakeholders.

During the preparatory phase, Hradecký venkov worked with staff from the children's home and community partners to assess participants' needs, build trust and design the project framework. On this basis, **participants co-designed their learning paths and practical experiences**, covering employment readiness, financial literacy, housing and personal development.

The next stage involved thematic workshops, internships, mentoring, residential stays and individual counselling, **linking participants directly with local employers, municipalities and social networks**. Housing support, practical exercises and summer camps reinforced independent living skills.

The final phase included the development of mentoring manuals and handbooks for municipalities and employers, consolidating knowledge for future replication. This participatory approach strengthened local capacity, combined social support with practical experiences, and fostered sustainable community engagement, **preparing young people for independent life while addressing rural social and labour challenges**.



RESULTS

- > **Practical skills for 41 participants** in employment, financial management, housing and personal development.
- > Improved **readiness for the labour market**, including CV preparation, job interviews and understanding employment contracts.
- > **Increased confidence** in navigating administrative processes and public services.
- > Strengthened **social networks and connections** within their communities.
- > Greater **autonomy and preparedness** for independent living.
- > Young people **connected with local employers**, supporting local workforce needs.
- > Strengthened **cooperation** between municipalities, social institutions and businesses.
- > Promoted **social inclusion and community cohesion** by integrating care leavers into local life.
- > Demonstrated the value of **community-led, integrated support** as a model for other rural areas.



SUCCESS FACTORS/LESSONS LEARNT

- > Strong **collaboration between local stakeholders** (municipalities, employers and social institutions) was an important success factor.
- > **Building trust with participants** and providing hands-on, practical experiences combined with counselling was key.
- > Support should be **tailored to the real needs of young people**.
- > Long-term monitoring is challenging.



Funded by
the European Union



info@rural-pact.eu



www.ruralpact.rural-vision.europa.eu/index_en