

Collaboration project between assistance service for families with children and centre of educational care in Decin (Czech Republic)



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The assistance service for families with children, held by the Charity Association Decin (a civic association), is a registered social-activating service for families with children and it has been working in Decin since 1997. The services are run in the households of families that want to change their life situation. Besides we also work with children who need help with their school preparation but their parents cannot help them for various reasons. Altogether 5 assistants, 5 volunteers and 12 part-time workers who help above all with school preparation work for about 25 families and 45 children.

In 2007 and 2008 the assistance service was running a project supported from the grant from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway in the framework of the financial mechanisms of EHP and the Norwegian financial mechanism, maintained by the Foundation of Development of Civil Society. One of its parts was developing and increasing collaboration with other local organizations in Decin which work with families. With the centre of educational care in Decin we established a very intensive cooperation. That is why we decided to develop this collaboration even further in the continuation of this project. In this way a new sort of service combining therapeutic work of the centre of educational care with the field work in families of the assistance service appeared. The basic idea is that the field work can help update and develop the impulses from the therapeutic appointments in the natural environment of families. That can intensify the therapeutic work and connect it better with the everyday reality of clients.

The typical client of this service is a family where behind educational problems of children there is a deficit in emotional aspects. The causes can be a complicated divorce of parents or the absence of one of them, a confused situation connected with frequent changes of spouses of the parents and moving or establishing of new families where half-siblings or step-siblings live together and sometimes some children may get neglected. So far we have worked in this way with 11 families.

If a family for which this way of work could be a suitable solution appears and the family agrees with collaboration we arrange an informative appointment. There we meet the family and trace the basic area for the future collaboration. Then an assistant starts to visit the family who works with them on the task set. They can also work on an order exceeding the frame of the originally set area of collaboration. At the same time the family attends the therapeutic programme of the centre of educational care. Once every two months the assistant meets the employee of the centre of educational care working with the family to discuss the progress achieved and outline the next steps. The family can also participate at that meeting but our experience is that it is usually complicated for them to arrange it or they lack the interest in such a negotiation. In such a case either the assistant or the centre employee informs them about the results of the negotiation.

Both the organizations agree that this way of work in families seems to be very efficient. The therapeutic work of the centre of educational care brings precious stimuli for the assistants in the field so they have a feeling that their work is better targeted and they can touch the roots

of the problem which the family is solving faster. Moreover, the clients are often really well motivated for the collaboration and they really want to change their situation. In some other cases the families collaborate with us rather to avoid troubles with authorities or interventions of the social and legal protection of children but their real interest in changes is not big. For the centre of educational care the work of the assistance service makes the therapeutic work more intense. Between individual appointments the clients have a chance to recall stimuli coming from the previous appointment and work on their incorporating in their everyday reality in collaboration with the assistant who is in direct and regular contact with that reality. Then it is more likely that those stimuli will really get incorporated in the family system. At the same time the assistance service also helps to solve problems for which there is not enough time in the centre of educational care.

As an example we would like to mention our almost two years' collaboration with Mrs. R. and her seven-year-old (now already nine-year-old) son Jack. At the beginning of our cooperation Mrs. R. was living with a man who was abusing her and she wanted to leave him. The biological father was not interested in Jack and he was paying the alimony irregularly so Mrs. R. depended economically on her spouse and that made her decision to leave him more complicated. Due to the confused environment and violence in the family Jack developed attention deficiency and stammer and even some psycho-somatic troubles appeared. That led to his first stay in the centre of educational care and cooperation with his mother. Later Mrs. R. left her spouse and spent a few weeks with her son in the asylum. She was not able to cope with the regime there so she solved her situation entering a relationship with another man and moving in his flat. The relationship failed soon and Mrs. R. solved the situation in a similar way again. Within one year Jack changed his address and school twice, which did not help his psychical condition very much. The collaboration with Mrs. R. was aimed at two basic areas: to help her keep Jack in the centre of her attention in spite of her own troubles and in this way to prevent deteriorating of his problems and to help her stabilize her life situation to protect Jack from other radical changes. In both the areas the support of the assistance service was very important because on the one hand Mrs. R. wanted to care about Jack properly but she had also a very unsystematic personality and tended to solve coming situations hastily without thinking about consequences. When there were only the therapeutic sessions once every three or four weeks her situation often changed so much in between two appointments that the results of the previous appointment were not relevant anymore and everything started from the beginning again. The more frequent visits of the assistance service helped to keep the continuity in the cooperation. Moreover, the assistant could also solve with Mrs. R. her housing situation and help her find her own rental flat so that she would not depend only on a man she meets.

Nowadays Mrs. R. is living in her own rented flat with a valid contract for eight months. The stabilization of the situation has calmed Jack down a lot. The stammer has almost disappeared and gradually it is possible to incorporate him in the school collective and education. We still work with Mrs. R. on particular situations connected with upbringing of Jack so that she can arrange a safe environment for him which her son needs for his healthy development but there has been considerable progress in this family.

Within the almost two years' cooperation between the centre of educational care and the assistance service in Decin this model combining the therapeutic and field work in families has proved to be very efficient and we hope we will be able to develop it also in the future and maybe even include other organizations in the region.

The author is working at the Charity Association Decin.

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