Methods of participation of children in the project
„Children's perspective on foster care"

6th International Foster Care Network Conference

Zagreb, 25. 09. 2012.

Content

1. Main characteristics of the project

2. Participation of the children

- process level

- outcome level

3. Feedback on the participatory research level

1. MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PROJECT

1. Main characteristics of the project

Type:
- qualitative
- participatory

Participatory research includes (De Koning and Martin, 1996):

> • the researcher and research community designing the research together

> • researchers designing the study and then collecting data with the help of the community

> • the community works closely with the assistance of a non-governmental organization

Participatory research is systematic inquiry, with the collaboration of those affected by the issue being studied, for the purposes of education and of taking action or effecting change (Mercer at all, 2008)

Recommendation 1864 (2009)
Promoting the participation by children in decisions affecting them

Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)2
of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the
Participation of children and young people under the age of 18

"participation" is about individuals and groups of individuals having the right, the means, the space, the opportunity and, where necessary, the support to freely express their views, to be heard and to contribute to decision making on matters affecting them, their views being given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity

Purpose:

- to develop new knowledge needed to improve the quality of foster care

Goal:

- understanding foster care from the foster child's perspective and from the perspective of biological children of foster parents, as well as the adults who were in a foster care earlier in life

Specific objectives:

- researching the experience and understanding of reasons for separation from the birth family and placement in foster care from the user perspective

- researching the *experience and perception of status of foster children*/adolescents

- researching the *experience and perception of status* of foster children of the group of children and adolescents *displaced from inadequate foster care and placed in a children's home*

- researching the experience and understanding of reasons for placement in foster care *from the perspective of birth children of foster parents*

- researching the experience and understanding of foster care from the perspective of adults with *experience of living in foster care as children.*

Methods
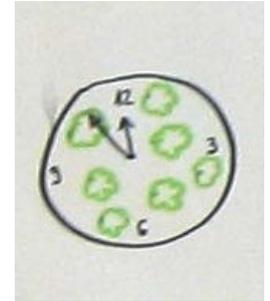
Participants:
1. 10 foster children (age: 10 to14)
2. 10 foster adolescents (age: 15 to 17)
3. 10 children/adolescents placed in children's homes after unsuccessful fostering
4. 10 biological children of foster parents (age:10 to17)
5. 10 adults with experiences of being in foster care during childhood

Method of data collecting – semi-structured interview

Methods of data processing – transcribing, participant reading and consent giving, reading and research team unifying on data processing, defining themes, qualitative analyses on two levels of interpretation in two phases
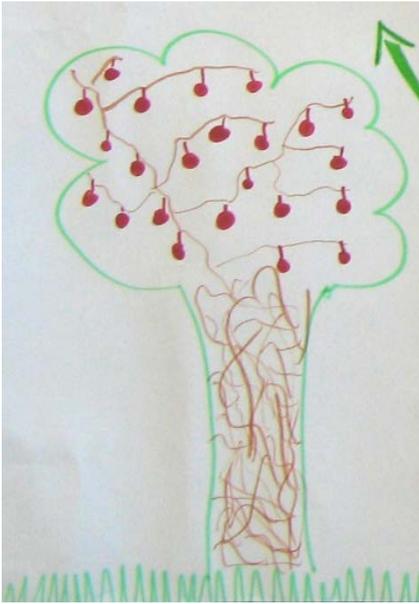
Key findings

The first level of interpretation

Foster care from the perspective of:

- foster children
- foster adolescents
- children/adolescents placed in children's homes after unsuccessful fostering
- birth children of foster parents
- adults with experiences of foster care during childhood

The second level of interpretation

Thematic analyses
1. Understanding reasons for separation from birth family
2. Understanding the foster care
3. Status of foster child
4. Characteristics of personal experiences
5. Participation in decision making
6. Family of birth from child perspective
7. Foster family from child perspective
8. Participants recommendations
9. Special themes

Conclusions (and some recommendations)

Findings confirm:

- ***that children are competent partners when it comes to their life experience***

(invite and engage children as consultants in the process of preparation of documents and strategies related to out-of-home child care; encourage the establishment of associations, forums and similar beneficiary organizations)

- ***the importance of informing children about all the key features of care available to them, as well as the importance of involving children as participants in the planning and decision making in all stages of care***

(develop guidelines and standards for communication between professionals and children; set guidelines and standards for self-empowerment of adolescents in out-of-family care)

- ***that children are satisfied with the form of care or placement that they are currently***

(new forms of out-of-home care and accommodation are needed)

- ***standards of the profession related to the quality of care (foster and out-of-home in general) were confirmed from the participants' perspective***

(active participation of the child and birth family; combine two or more forms of care or measures; jointly include siblings in decision making; humanize and individualize the

process of termination of care)
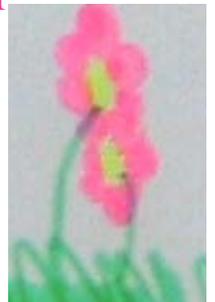
Conclusions (and some recommendations)

*children transformed their experiences into a number of very specific recommendations*

- the importance of the relationship between children and professionals
- the need for overcoming feelings of uncertainty and insecurity
- consideration of family circumstances and possible interventions, primarily from the perspective of the child and in the child's best interest
- the need for normalization of out-of-home care
- the need for greater inclusion and cohesion
- the need for reinforcing the children's confidence in foster care
- the need for starting a discussion about the relationship between foster care and adoption
- professional must be able to demonstrate essential human interest in the child and their life
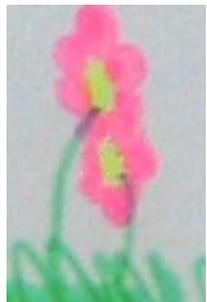
2. PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN
- PROCCESS LEVEL -

Planning and preparation
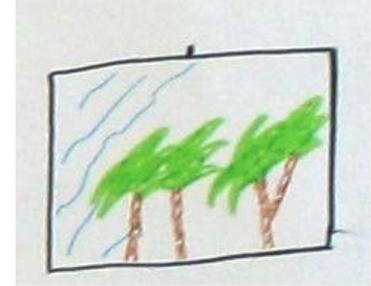
Ethical considerations

- Voluntary decision and consent to participate in research
- Physical and psychological safety of research participants
- Protection od privacy and confidentiality of given information
- Access to research results

The process of data collecting and processing

- Preparatory work for the interviews
- Implementation of interviews
- Interviews review and revision by participants

Child participation in the research

Stages of the research:	Participation:
1. planning, drafting the research	*Without participation*
2. conducting the research	*With participation*
3. data processing; draft of findings, conclusions and guidelines	*Without participation*
4. presentation of findings to participants	*With participation*
5. presentation of findings to the professional public	*With participation*

New knowledge gained through research implementation and reflection:

- experience of conducting research in a natural family environment
- experience of conducting interviews with different groups of participants
- dealing with difficult situations in interviews and distressing participants' life stories
- the importance of exploring and researching the user perspective
- awareness that this experience will assist the advancement of models of participatory work with children in terms of their greater involvement, empowerment, and more opportunities to acknowledge the user perspective
- possibility of creating a reference point (or media, such as a Facebook profile) that participants can contact if they need assistance and further information or if they wish to comment on something

2. PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN

- OUTCOME LEVEL -

Methods of participation

Stages of the research:	Methods of participation:	Who
2. Conducting the research	• obtaining information about the research and consenting for participation in research • giving consent for the interview • reviewing the interview • providing feedback and additional comments on the transcript of the interview	All participants
4. Presentation of findings to participants	• participation in workshops that presented the findings and conclusions • commenting on the findings and conclusions • giving consent for publication and further dissemination of the findings and conclusions • giving consent for the use of verbatim statements of participants (quotes) in the final version of the text	38% of the participants
5. Presentation of findings to the professional public	• active participation in promoting the publication based on the findings and conclusions of the research	Several participants

Data on participation in decision making

- Similarity between the groups of participants
- *Experience of nonparticipation* – lack of information, wrong information, waiting, being treated like an object, being persuaded by professionals
- *Specific position of biological children of foster parents* – informed, being asked for the opinion, involvement in family decision making process
- *Proactivity in self advocacy* – in relation to age and experience
- *Involvement in decision making process related to everyday functioning* – feeling of satisfaction and personal worth

Lessons learned

Participatory research with children is:

- process of researchers collaboration with children affected by the issue being studied
- process of new knowledge creation through multiple listening and reflecting
- individual, contextual and thematic phenomenon
- systemic inquiry that broaden researchers responsibility in new directions (language, quality of the context, relationship to data usage and dissemination)

3. Feedback on the participatory research level
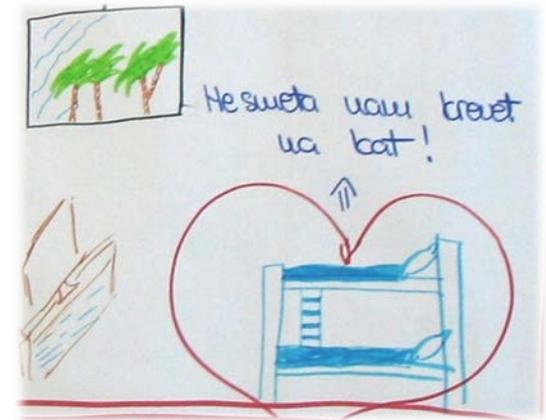
Elements of assessment of participatory research level:	Minimal	Partial	Substantial
Participants and the nature of their involvement (5)			🌸
Shaping the purpose and scope of the research (5)		🌸	
Research implementation and context (7)		🌸	
Nature of the research outcomes (8)		🌸	
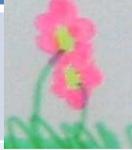
THANK
YOU