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***Review of foster care research
and projects in Croatia***

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Key issues

- **Overview** of research and action projects in last decade – **what we know, what we did, what we establish in Croatia in the fields of FC**
- **Future** plans- projects and initiatives – **what we want to know, what we want to do, where do we see ourselves in next decade**

Facts about Croatia



- **Population:** 4.437.460
- **Children as proportion of Total Population 20%**
- **Capital:** Zagreb (779.145 inhabitants - the administrative, cultural, academic and communication centre of the country)
- **Language:** Croatian
- Among the total number of children in care 54% are placed in foster families and 46% live in children's homes.

FOSTER CARE RESEARCHS AND PROJECTS IN CROATIA:

- ***"Opportunities to improve care for children in children's homes and foster families" (1999. - 2003.)***
- ***"Professional support to foster parents and professionals in Centre for social welfare Vrbovec "(2002. - 2004.)***
- ***"Training of experts, professionals and foster parents in the area of foster care in the Republic of Croatia" (2003-2006)***
- ***"Every child needs a family" (2005- ...)***
- ***"Upgrading of Quality of Foster Family Care for Children in Republic of Croatia – Education of County Foster Care Support Teams" (2006. do 2007.)***
- ***"Specialized foster care for children with disabilities" (2006 do 2008)***
- ***"Supporting specialized foster care for youngest children" (2007. i 2008.)***
- ***"Prevention of Separation and Early Interventions in Families at Risk" (2006.-2007.)***
- ***"Supervision of foster parents" (2006-2008)***
- ***Research "Foster care in Croatia" (2007-2008)***
- ***"For quality foster care" (2008-2011)***
- ***Research "Foster care models in Europe" (2011.)***
- ***Qualitative study "Foster Care from Child Perspective" (2011.-2012.)***

"Opportunities to improve care for children in children's homes and foster families" (1999. - 2003.)

- special attention is paid to foster families - The study included 79 foster families that placed 112 children, 263 children living in children's homes, 112 children living in foster families and 200 children living with their own families.
- Used complex survey that examined: self-image, depression, behavioral problems and feelings of children, the level of perceived stress in everyday life, coping strategies and social support
- conducted half-structured interviews with 22 experts, members of team for marriage and family at social welfare centres - regarding the procedure of removing children from the family

Main goal:

- to identify the psychosocial needs of children separated from their families and placed in residential care or foster families, and create the empirical evidence of possible ways to improve care for children in care.

Professional support to foster parents and professionals in Centre for social welfare Vrbovec

- Centre for Social Policy Initiatives implemented i Centre for Social Welfare Vrbovec (2002. do 2004.)

Main goal of the project:

- to provide professional support to foster parents and professionals in Centre for Social Welfare Vrbovec .
- data collected through a structured questionnaire on a sample of foster parents in Vrbovec gave assessment of the state of foster care, needs of children in care and foster parents and used for planning and implementing activities in collaboration with the Centre for Social Welfare and Caritas

Training of experts, professionals and foster parents in the area of foster care in the Republic of Croatia (2003.-2006.)

- Centre for Social Policy Initiatives implemented the three-year project of training of experts, professionals and foster parents in Croatia. The project was implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, the University of Zagreb, and the University of Göteborg.
- Swedish experts and professionals from the University of Göteborg, local social services in Lärjendolen and 2 private agencies for the professional support to foster parents shared their knowledge and experience in Swedish model of foster care, and contributed to the adaptation of Swedish good practice to the Croatian conditions and the existing practice.
- The goal of the project was the establishment of new quality and the new model of foster care in Croatia.

The results of the project activities

- 15 experts educated in the area of foster care (and received the certificates from the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and Centre for Social Policy Initiatives)
- 150 educated professionals from social services in Croatia
- 50 educated foster parents
- created and printed 2 manuals Foster care: care of children outside their family - Manual for education of professionals (2005) and Manual for education of foster parents (2006)
- questionnaire for the selection of foster parents

“Every child needs a family”

- The project of improving family-based care for children without appropriate parental care- UNICEF - It was expected that the campaign will increase number of families interested in fostering children and raise sufficient funds to develop support to foster families for:
 - establishing Regional Support Centres for foster care and development of specialised foster care for the youngest children (0-3 years), and for children with disabilities.
 - education and support to social welfare professionals, aiming to build their capacities in working and empowering biological families in order to prevent separation of children from their families.

Main goal: *The number of children in institutions and the number of young children entering institutions will be decreased*

1. Awareness raising campaign (2005)
2. Pilot project “Info telephone” (2005)
 - 6 weeks of implementation- >400 phone calls –identified at least 110 interested future foster parents have been
3. Conferences on foster care

“Upgrading of Quality of Foster Family Care for Children in Republic of Croatia – Education of County Foster Care Support Teams”

- Centre for Social Policy Initiatives (NGO), Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, UNICEF (2006. - 2007.)

Activity: Establishing support teams

- 7 County Foster Care Support Teams were established by the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare in 8 Croatian counties
- Each support team is composed of social welfare professionals, representatives of each existing social welfare centre and children’s home in a particular county.
- Some of the activities of the county teams were following: organizing meetings with foster parents and foster children, organizing local campaigns to motivate new foster parents, establishing a foster care phone-line etc.

Specialized foster care for children with disabilities (2006.- 2008.)

- Association for Promotion of Inclusion and UNICEF
- Establishment of mobile support teams for foster care givers who cared for children with disabilities in 6 Croatian counties
- recruitment and education of new foster families, and promotion of foster care for children with disabilities through the production of a short documentary on fostering children with disabilities
- Mobile teams were at their disposal seven days a week, 24 hours a day and offered aid to 39 families who offer care to 61 children with disabilities

Supporting specialized foster care for youngest children (2007. i 2008.)

- UNICEF
- Promotion of foster care for children with disabilities, **23 children with disabilities** were removed from institutions and placed into foster care with new families
- Families was supported through the infant-equipment purchased directly by UNICEF office. Additional support was provided through the activities of the county foster-care support teams, especially through the continuous psychosocial support.
- County teams was also focused on motivation and education of new foster parents, and selection of families who are potential foster parents to infants, having in mind all specifics of fostering children age 0-3.

Prevention of Separation and Early Interventions in Families at Risk (2006.-2007.)

- Faculty of Law, Department of Social Work, UNICEF
Activity: Developing a training model for social work professionals and community workers in one region of Croatia
- to offer additional education and support to social welfare professionals working with families at risk, in order to prevent separation of children from the family or to provide conditions for child's return to the family, by strengthening and supporting capacities of biological family.
- Project was implemented in 4 locations in Slavonia region: Osijek, Našice, Vinkovci and Virovitica, in cooperation with local centers for social welfare and children's homes.
- Following activities were organized: Needs assessment, Initial regional seminar in Osijek, two working seminars, supervision meetings for social welfare professionals working with risk families, working group for creating family assessment instruments, Baby Fitness pilot cycles, handbook.
- Published UNICEF publication: The right of the child to live in family - Professional help for families with children and monitoring of parental care as process of support for successful parenting

Supervision of foster parents (2006-2008)

- Two-year project with the purpose of upgrading the professional support to foster parents in the Croatia
- The project has been implemented in cooperation with the University of Göteborg and Croatian Ministry of Health and Social Welfare
- The main part of the project is two-year education in the field of supervision of foster parents. The participants of the education were professionals from local social services, university and CISP
- Content of education: theoretical and practical topics in the field of this specific form of support to foster parents, leading group supervisions of foster parents, participate in the supervision of their own work, and write and present final essay.
- 30 professionals = educated in FC supervision and more than 150 foster parents in 14 Croatian counties, involved in supervision groups

Research “Foster care in Croatia”

- UNICEF Office for Croatia, Faculty of Law, Department for Social Work, research agency Puls (2007.-2008.)
- First quantitative research on the sample of foster parents in Croatia

General goal:

- to gain insight into the foster home placement situation with an emphasis on foster parents’ psycho-socio-economic characteristics and their correlation with the fostering experience.

Sample:

- represented foster parents from all Croatian regions as well as all foster care categories (N=303 foster parents).
- Published UNICEF publication: Foster Care for Children in Croatia, Analysis of the State of Art and Recommendation of Policy Development (Žižak, 2010.)

For quality foster care (2008-2011)

- Forum for quality foster care of children
- NGO- forum of foster parents associations
- MATRA project (Netherland), ICDI

- Education of foster parents, rasing capacity of foster parents associations
- National conferences for foster parents
- Educational material

Research “Foster care models in Europe”

- a qualitative survey of foster care models was designed within the framework of the "Joint Efforts towards the Realisation of Children's Rights in Croatia" project (2011.) - Forum for quality foster care of children

General goal:

- to gain insight into legislation and practices concerning foster care, to identify the existing foster care practices in those countries and obtain their recommendations for improving foster care practices.

Sample:

- received 14 completed questionnaires from 12 different countries, : Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands, Scotland, France, Poland, Hungary, Austria, Italy, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia.
- the project also entails working visits, regional discussions, youth work and an international conference.

Foster Care from Child Perspective

Qualitative study – listening the voice of children/ beneficiaries

General goal:

- Introduction and understanding of foster child 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.

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

Resume

- Substantial number and forms of project – growth of knowledge and experiences in practise and in science
- Both quantitative and qualitative research
- National and international networks and cooperation
- Good background for the future

Current critical issues

- Uneven development of foster care (Dalmatia, Istria- very small interest for fostering)
- Insufficient number of foster families for specific groups of children (dissability, behaviour problems, ethnical minorities – Roma children especially)
- Need for development of treatment foster care (children with EBD, children with special needs)
- Insufficient cooperation between social welfare centres in the area of foster care
- Absence of national data base on foster families and their capacities for placements

Research areas that needs to be addressed

- Experiences and life-course of children/youth after foster-care placement
- Placement disruptions in foster care
- Reasons for foster parents leaving foster care
- Birth families of foster children
- Experiences of reunification of foster children *with* their families
- Children with EBD in foster care: facts, experiences, challenges
- Children with disabilities in foster care: facts, experiences, challenges
- The Matching Process - is it and how used to place foster children with licensed foster parents
- The care placements evaluation
- Evaluation of foster parents education

About future...shortly

- PRACTISE: specialized (treatment) foster care
- RESEARCH: Cooperation within international group of researchers (led by prof. Claire Cameron) in research project “Foster care in Europe”

HVALA NA PAŽNJI 😊