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## INTRODUCTION

### *General overview*

“Foster Care – Standards and Practice Guidelines” is a book about direct practice in *the foster care program*, carried out either by the Public Child Protection Services (SPPC) – within the Family Protection Services - or by a Private Authorized Organization (OPA).

The final version of this set of basic principles and practice guidelines was accomplished through the efforts of a *workgroup*. The activity of this workgroup focused on principles and specific issues concerning the minimal practice standards, during the workshops and sub-workgroups organized for this purpose. The first document was elaborated with the participation of professionals in this field, working on various levels: local administration, Child Protection Department, PVOs etc.

This material defines certain concepts and problems about the specific purposes, objectives and procedures of foster care.

The book has six chapters with the following contents:

Chapter (I) contains the definition of foster care, the objectives and practice guidelines that represent the activity basis for professionals in this field.

Chapter (II) is about the promotional campaigns dedicated to inform, educate and involve the community into child protection actions.

Chapter (III) contains the selection criteria for professional maternal assistants, stages of selection and evaluation, the accreditation proposal as a professional maternal assistant and the accreditation process. Appendix: a sample curriculum of the initial training program for professional maternal assistants.

Chapter (IV) contains aspects about children (client) identification, the matching process, follow-up, supervision and closing stages of foster care, special foster care, foster care with “difficulties”, periodic evaluation of professional maternal assistants and their activities.

Chapter (V) is dedicated to the social worker in foster care and includes the functions, activities and competences of social workers, social workers training and supervision, supervisor competences, training of professional maternal assistant trainers.

Chapter (VI) – Appendix, contains samples of the Placement contract, Evaluation request for accreditation as a professional maternal assistant, Curriculum Vitae and Job Description for professional maternal assistants. It also includes the participants list, references, definition of concepts and the abbreviation list.

### *History*

This work was completed with the USAID financial help, through the workshops organized by World Learning Transit Program and facilitated by a group of specialists in this field: Nina Tolstobrach, Director – Child Protection Department; Liliana Momeu, Governmental Expert, Child Protection Department; Adrian Guth, Child Welfare Expert, The World Bank; Tatiana Goldner, Director, Holt Romania; Cerasela Porumb, Program Manager, “For Our Children” Organization; Sorina Oanță, Child Welfare Consultant, World Learning /Transit Program.

The book was elaborated in two stages, between **May – August 1999**, as follows:

- (1) Two seminars organized by World Learning Transit Program – with the USAID financial support – on professional standards of foster care. These seminars focused on discussions and sharing experiences between specialists from all over the country, working in both public and private sectors in child welfare. The purpose of the seminars was to create a set of common practice procedures designed to improve foster care programs and to increase their efficiency.

The seminars gathered professionals from various decisional and professional levels: Child Protection Department, Local/County Councils, (Child Protection Public Services), non-governmental organizations, The World Bank, professional maternal assistants.

(A complete list of participants is available in Chapter VI – Appendix.)

The result of these two seminars was an initial document on *standards and practice guidelines in foster care*.

- (2) In the second stage, the facilitators group revised the initial document (elaborated by the participants to the seminars), drawing a final form of this document. The final form was achieved through a work meeting of the facilitators group and the few other meetings necessary, organized by World Learning and with USAID financial support.

This is the first book on professional standards ever written in Romania, by Romanian professionals. It is based upon the expertise of child welfare professionals - working at governmental and non-governmental levels, in various programs all over the country - as well as on specialized Romanian and foreign literature.

The final version of this book also includes the recommendations that followed the presentation of the material during three regional conferences - organized by World Learning, with USAID financial support - in Zalău, Suceava and Bucharest, during October – November 1999. The participants to these conferences were also delegates from local authorities involved in child welfare, The Child Protection Department, non-governmental organizations and professional maternal assistants.

We would like to thank to all the participants involved in completing this book and we hope it will contribute to improve the quality of foster care programs.

The coordinators



## **Foster care**

### **Chapter I: Definition, objectives, practice guidelines**

## Chapter I: Definition, objectives, practice guidelines

### 1. Definition

Foster care is a family-type child protection procedure taken into the child's best interest, which provides care within a family – other than the natural one – by a person especially selected and trained for this purpose.

This is a temporary (time restricted), time-scheduled family-type care, part of the services offered by Public Child Protection Services (SPPC) or Private Authorized Organizations (OPA). It provides a family-like environment for the child, while exploring the identification of a permanent family (either reintegration in the natural family or an adoptive family).

This definition includes the following concepts:

- Temporary family care is *time-scheduled/time-framed*.
- Temporary family care is *time restricted*. This is a temporary service provided for the child and his/her family. The timeframe is settled according to the particularities of each case. The finality of care must be a secure, permanent environment for the child.
- The main resource is *the professional maternal assistant*, who provides care in his/her own family for a child, which is not his/her relative (up to the 4<sup>th</sup> degree).
- Temporary family care involves *working in a team* with all professionals within the services network.

### 2. Objectives

- To recruit and develop a professional maternal assistants network, as a primary resource for placement of children in need of protection.
- To offer a variety of services for the child, natural family, adoptive family, professional maternal assistants, in order to ensure the quality of care.
- To facilitate the implementation of the most adequate permanency plan for the child.

### 3. Practice guidelines

#### 3.1. Practice guidelines regarding the child



1. Each child is entitled to a permanent family, and when this is not possible, each child is entitled to a substitute family.
2. Foster care is a temporary solution.
3. Foster care is auxiliary to identification and implementation of a permanent solution for the child.
4. Foster care is carried out in the best interest of the child.
5. The child placed in foster care must be informed on all aspects concerning the placement and finality of foster care, according to his/her age/intellectual development or to his/her maturity level.
6. The child placed in foster care should be part of the decision-making process about his/her future and his/her opinion should be considered, according to his/her age/intellectual development or to his/her maturity level.
7. Individual permanency planning should be elaborated in respect of the child's identity, taking into consideration all the aspects about his/her cultural background, religion, ethnical background, family / community particularities. Elaboration of the individual permanency planning should take into consideration all specific needs of the child placed in foster care.
8. The child placed in foster care should receive non-discriminatory treatment from any of the natural children of the substitute family.
9. The private life of the child placed in foster care should be respected.
10. Within the existing possibilities, brothers/sisters should be placed to the same professional maternal assistant.
11. The child placed in foster care should receive counseling and support from the social worker in charge of the case.

### **3.2. Practice guidelines regarding the professional maternal assistant**

1. The professional maternal assistant is a partner in the multi – disciplinary team involved in foster care.
2. The professional maternal assistant participates to implementation and revision of individual permanency planning for the child placed in foster care.

3. Accreditation as a professional maternal assistant is the result of the selection and evaluation process, following a set of pre-established criteria (see Chapter III).
4. Training of professional maternal assistants is based upon a curriculum designed to provide proper instruction for the future professionals.
5. Family members of professional maternal assistants living in the same home should also participate to a training program in order to take a child into placement.
6. The professional maternal assistant should participate to a continuous training process.
7. The professional maternal assistant and his/her family must be aware of the entire foster care process and all the consequences involved.
8. The professional maternal assistants should receive all the relevant information on the personal history of the child placed in care and his/her family.
9. The professional maternal assistant and his/her family must safeguard confidentiality of information concerning the personal history and private life of the child placed in care.
10. The professional maternal assistant must choose to accept the child in placement being fully aware of the condition of the child and foster care.
11. The rights and obligations of professional maternal assistants must be described before the child is placed in foster care.
12. The professional maternal assistant and his/her family should receive counseling, support and supervision from the social worker that is the case-manager.
13. The professional maternal assistant and his/her family must cooperate with the natural and/or the adoptive family of the child in care, according to his/her individual permanency planning.
14. The professional maternal assistant and his/her family must cooperate with other professionals and any other important person for the child in care, according to his/her individual permanency planning.

15. Professional maternal assistants have priority to adopt the child, when the finality of individual permanency planning is adoption. Professional maternal assistants' adoption requests have no priority before the natural relatives of the child.
16. Frequent changes of the child's environment by repeated changes of professional maternal assistants must be avoided. Moving the child to a new environment should be always justified and should respect the best interest of the child.
17. Professional maternal assistants must follow the ethical code of their profession.
18. Professional maternal assistant must safeguard the children rights (see Chapter VI, Appendix, UN Convention on Children Rights).

### **3.3. Practice guidelines on the foster care process**

1. Foster care is not a separated service, but a part of the continuum of services for child protection.
2. Any child in need of protection can be placed foster care.
3. Foster care must offer a secure environment for the child.
4. Foster care is chosen according to an individual permanency planning for the child.
5. The individual permanency planning of the child should be revised at least every three months and/or any other time necessary.
6. Each case should be approached individually.
7. The beginning and closing stages of foster care must be gradual, without distressing any of the parts involved (child, natural family, maternal assistant, social worker)
8. Foster care follows a set of specific practice procedures.
9. After the child is placed in foster care, there must be only one social worker manager of the case.

### 3.4. Practice guidelines for social workers

1. The social worker acts in the best interest of the child.
2. The social worker works in partnership with all parts involved.
3. The social worker has a professional conduct, safeguards and respects the case confidentiality.
4. The social worker must provide relevant information about the child and his/her family to the professional maternal assistant.
5. The social worker must inform and prepare the child and professional maternal assistant on the beginning and closing stages of foster care.
6. The social worker must provide counseling and support to the child, professional maternal assistant, natural / adoptive family of the child.
7. The social worker must follow specific practice procedures.
8. The social worker must follow the professional ethical code.
9. The social worker must be permanently informed and up-to-date with his/her professional knowledge.
10. The number of active cases for a social worker is set according to the established standards of practice (see Chapter V).

### 3.5. General ethical principles for social workers

- *To respect the uniqueness and dignity of individuals*

Each individual is unique, has a value of his own and is entitled to moral consideration from the others.

- *To respect the right to self-achievement*

Each individual is entitled to self-achievement, if it does not prejudice other people's rights, and has the obligation to contribute by his/her own means to the welfare of society.

- *To respect the right to self-determination*

In his/her professional activities, the social worker respects the principle of self-determination and promotion of individual developmental possibilities.

- *To respect the principles of social justice*

In his/her professional activities, the social worker promotes social justice, providing free and equal access for all clients to services and information.

- *To respect the interests of clients*

The social worker works for the interest of the client. The social worker must have the necessary knowledge and skills to assist individuals, groups, communities and developing societies, and to solve conflicts that appear at various levels.

- *To respect the principle of nondiscrimination*

Social workers must provide assistance and quality services for all clients, without discriminating on gender, ethnical background, handicap, race, social status, sexual orientation, political or religious beliefs.

- *To respect the human rights*

In his/her professional activity, the social worker must respect the basic principles and human rights stipulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other national and international laws.

- *To respect private life and the principle of confidentiality*

Social workers must respect the private life of clients and the principle of confidentiality, to use any information on the clients in a responsible manner.

- *Cooperation with clients*

Social workers must cooperate with clients, in the best interest of the clients and respecting the rights of others. Clients are encouraged to participate, within the limits of their own possibilities, in all actions destined to solve their problems. They must be informed by the social worker about the risks and outcomes of their actions.

- *Teaching responsibility to clients*

Social workers engage clients into assuming responsibility for themselves and for the actions that affect their life.

- *To minimize restriction*

Social workers work with the clients' agreement, in partnership with the clients and avoid any restrictions as much as possible.

- *Non-violence*

Social workers do not support – directly or indirectly – groups and individuals that promote or practice violent actions (oppression, aggression, terrorism, etc.) against other individuals, groups or communities.

## **Foster care**

### **Chapter II: Identification and Recruitment of Professional Maternal Assistants**

## **Chapter II: Identification and Recruitment of Professional Maternal Assistants**

This objective is attained through media campaigns destined to educate and increase community concern in child welfare, to emphasize the role of professional maternal assistants within the child protection system. The purpose of these campaigns is:

1. to advertise the 'maternal assistant' profession at the community level
2. to draw public attention to child protection issues
3. to recruit potential professional maternal assistants

### **1. Instruments**

#### **1.1. Posters**

With an attractive design, posters can be placed in public spots, containing essential information about the maternal assistant profession and contact information (with the SPPC or OPA).

#### **1.2. Booklets**

Having appropriate design and contents, booklets can be placed in most various places (including the mail), contain more information than the posters and can be kept by the interested ones. Booklets should be specialized and adapted to the targeted public.

#### **1.3. Media**

##### *1.3.1. National and local press*

This is one of the major publicity channels. Through interviews, articles, media communicates about the maternal assistant profession will be answered questions such as: who? what? when? where? why ?

A list of contact persons in the press is also necessary.

##### *1.3.2. Radio and TV Stations*

With a large impact on the public, radio and TV shows can have many forms:

- interviews
- information bulletins
- round tables
- live interactive shows

- advertising videos
- documentaries
- press conferences

#### **1.4. Information services**

##### *1.4.1. Information hotline*

Through the phone, solicitants can get additional information from the SPPC/OPA staff.

##### *1.4.2. PR office*

The information contained by posters or booklets cannot have the expected effect without a permanent information service for the public, which should preferably be at the location of the SPPC/OPA. The informer must know very well the foster care program and must have training or communicational skills (patience, sharp observation, kindness). One or two of the foster care social workers can be also prepared for this position.

##### *1.4.3. The information bulletin*

Through this instrument, the public and professionals are informed about the activities of SPPC/OPA, including those on professional maternal assistants. It can be periodically mailed to the media, authorities, institutions etc.

#### **1.5. Public events**

##### *1.5.1. Conferences and symposiums*

They are held for a selected public, especially to those who might become directly involved in collaboration with foster care.

##### *1.5.2. Special events/performances*

Shows and performances offer the opportunity to draw participants' attention to child protection issues, by the message of the event and by giving poster, booklets, information bulletins etc.

#### **1.6. Cooperation with community leaders**

##### *1.6.1. Cooperation with formal leaders*

Local public authorities – mayor, local councils – are able to give support and assistance in identification, training and evaluation of a professional maternal assistants network. An effective collaboration with the specialized public services – under the authority of local councils – and with child protection professionals is also possible.



### 1.6.2. *Cooperation with informal leaders*

Identification or recruitment from certain ethnical communities (gypsies, etc) can be facilitated by collaborating with the leaders of these communities. Contacting the spiritual leaders (from the church) might be a real support in identification/recruitment of potential professional maternal assistants.

### 1.6.3. *The family/territorial medical doctors network*

#### **1.7.1. Personal contacts**

SPPC or OPA staff, as well as any other persons involved in the child protection system may become resource-persons in identification and recruitment of potential maternal assistants. Maternal assistants can also be resource-persons in identification of potential maternal assistants.

## **2. The message**

Regardless the instrument used, the message should be:

- concise
- clear, avoiding too many specialized terms
- actual
- attractive
- easy to understand (taking into consideration the educational level of the target group)
- express a definite point of view about this type of placement
- contain information on:
  - the maternal assistant profession
  - training and evaluation process for professional maternal assistants
  - clients
  - legal framework
  - types of placements
  - role and tasks of the maternal assistant
  - available financial support
  - contact information (with the SPPC/OPA) for the interested

### **Working on a logo for foster care**

A suggestive logo is an important presentation element and an effective scheme to become the symbol of this program. The logo must be printed on every material and presented on every event.

A special coupon can also be sent with the booklets. It can be filled in by the interested and sent to the SPPC/OPA.

All advertising activities are designed for the recruitment of potential maternal assistants. Applicants can write, call or address directly to SPPC/OPA and should receive initial information about the maternal assistant profession and the accrediting procedures.

The solicitants should be registered in a record book/folder, containing their names, addresses and telephone numbers.

## **Foster care**

### **Chapter III: Selection and evaluation of professional maternal assistants**

## Chapter III: Selection and evaluation of professional maternal assistants

### 3.1. Selection criteria for professional maternal assistants

The selection process must follow at least the following aspects:

3.1.1. *Applicants must have full capacity to act.*

3.1.2. *Housing*

Applicants must have a safe place to live (rented or owned – proving documents are necessary). The house must be clean, with a separate room for children, separate beds for each child, sanitary facilities, a secure environment for the health and welfare of the child.

3.1.3. *Health*

Applicants must have a good health condition, with no medical afflictions that might affect their quality as a professional maternal assistant. Complete medical documents/bulletins - stating that neither the applicant nor any co-inhabitants have any diseases that might endanger the integrity of the child - are necessary.

3.1.4. *Parental abilities*

Applicants must show educational and caring skills, patience, understanding, altruism, affectivity, flexibility, empathy with the child's needs, availability to play.

3.1.5. *Moral conduct*

Maternal assistants can only be persons who have a positive nature, good relationships within the community and without any definitive penal convictions for an intentional crime.

3.1.5. *To understand the difference between foster care and adoption*

Applicants must clearly understand this difference. People who want to adopt a child will be reoriented to adoption services.

3.1.7. *To accept and understand cooperation with the natural family of the child.*

3.1.8. *To accept and understand cooperation with SPPC/OPA*

3.1.9. *Non-discriminative attitude*

Potential maternal assistants should have a non-discriminative attitude towards persons with special needs or ethnical minorities.

3.1.10. *The ability to work under stress or in special situations (such as emergency placement)*

3.1.11. *To understand the temporary condition of foster care*

3.1.12. *Previous experience*

The experience of care with natural or other children, elders, ill or handicapped persons is an advantage, but not a criterion.

3.1.13. *The attitude of other family members of the professional maternal assistant towards having a child in placement.*

**The following are not eligible as professional maternal assistants:**

- Persons with a definitive penal conviction (given by a definitive court order) for an intentional crime. This criterion is also applicable for the family members living in the same home with the applicant.
- Parents that lost their parental rights or whose children were declared legally abandoned through a definitive court order.
- Persons that have children – relatives up to the 4<sup>th</sup> degree – in placement or adoption. The history of each case is estimated according to the specific situations.
- Persons with any medical afflictions that might have an effect on the maternal assistant profession.
- Persons with history of alcohol or drug addictions or any other pre-delinquent behavior.

If an application is turned down for any of the reasons above, the applicant will receive a written motivated answer.

**3.2. Stages of selection**

The applicant addresses to:

- Child Protection Public Services (SPPC) or
- Private Authorized Organization (OPA)

Regardless the recruitment procedures, all applicants will go through the same selection and evaluation process.

Applicants will be invited to an individual or group discussion with the social worker (considering the number of applicants).

An individual meeting is preferred – when possible - due to a personal approach on the discussion.

A group meeting is more ensuring for the applicants (through mutual support) and is time effective.

In case a couple wants to apply, it is necessary for both partners to participate at the first meeting.

The purpose of this first meeting is to inform the applicant about:

- the maternal assistant profession
- legal accrediting procedures, legal framework
- incompatibility situations
- categories of beneficiaries (clients)
- the relation with the natural family
- collaboration with SPPC / OPA
- practice principles and procedures
- rights and responsibilities of parts
- financial aspects

During these meetings, the applicants will receive the **evaluation request** (see Chapter VI - Appendix) and information materials. Applicants will have the possibility to ask questions.

### ***Filling in the application***

An application deadline will be specified.

The application package will also include:

- a Curriculum Vitae of the applicant
- data about the applicant's family (children, parents, other relevant relatives)
- data about applicant's wealth (income, household, etc.)
- information about the children that may be taken in placement (gender, age, special needs, religion, ethnical background, etc.)
- the ability to collaborate with the natural/adoptive family, eventual restrains and reasons
- the ability to collaborate with SPPC/OPA, eventual restrains and reasons

- information about reference persons/families (name, address, telephone number – at least two of them)
- motivation for applying as a professional maternal assistant

Applicants will submit the complete application forms to SPPC/OPA and will endorse all the necessary documents requested by the actual legislation (see Government Decision 117/1998: certified copies of their civil and education documents, a complete medical certificate, criminal record certificate for the applicant and other co-inhabitants, legal residence documents)

Application requests will be solved within 90 days from registration.

The SPPC officer in charge of applications should verify the identity of the applicant and if the application was fully completed and has all the requested documents. To confirm the control on the application package and supplementary documents, the officer will sign on the application form.

- ***Initial visit***

Applicants will be visited at their domicile by the social worker in charge of the case.

For a couple of applicants, both partners, as well as the other members of the family living in the same home must be present during this visit. The purpose of the initial visit is to verify the living conditions of applicants and the statements made in the application.

Applicants will be encouraged to ask questions about the maternal assistant profession and to bring up all the arguments they feel useful in support of their application.

- ***Recommendations and references***

The social worker will contact separately the families/persons specified by the applicant as reference persons.

At the end of each selection stage, certain applicants may be turned down.

- ***Training for professional maternal assistants***

The training process is a part of the evaluation process of professional maternal assistants. Persons taking children in placement will follow a specialized training program.

Selected applicants will follow a mandatory training program of at least 60 hours (theory and practice), carried out in groups of maximum 12 participants.

The initial training program should focus on:

- legal framework of child protection
- child development
- child identity
- aspects of care for healthy or sick children
- HIV/AIDS infection
- developing children self-esteem
- attachment theory
- children with behavioral disorders
- separation and loss effects
- child welfare system
- child socialization and institutionalization
- child abuse and neglect
- teamwork and team activity planning
- social workers role
- maternal assistants role
- role and importance of natural parents and background information (including information about the ethnical/race identity)
- attitudes towards race, religion, gender and handicap
- the impact of taking a child in care
- any other necessary/useful information

(See the curriculum sample in chapter VI – Appendix)

• ***Evaluation of professional maternal assistants***

The evaluation process will continue during the training program, through a series of at least six visits at the applicant's domicile, for gathering information. These visits include meetings with all the family members and co-inhabitants, as well as individual discussions with each person.

The evaluation process may also include interviews with other professionals and any other useful supplementary investigation required by the evaluator.

The social worker will fill in a report after each visit.

If during the training and evaluation period the applicant shows certain inappropriate conducts that might endanger the welfare of the child placed in care, these conducts will be recorded and may become grounds for the application refusal.



Evaluation results are the objective of the psychosocial investigation report, concerning the abilities of the applicant to become a professional maternal assistant.

The report, application and required documents will be presented to the jurisdictional Child Protection Commission (from the residential area of the applicant), within 90 days since the application was registered.

### 3.3. The accreditation proposal

At the end of the training and evaluation process, the social worker manager of the case will present *the applicant folder* and a *motivated proposal for the approval/refusal of the application as a professional maternal assistant* before the Child Protection Commission.

**The complete folder** must include (according to Government Decision 217 / 1998, art. 3, paragraph 3):

- The evaluation request
- Certified copies of the civil status documents of the applicant
- A brief presentation of the co-inhabitants (name, surname, date of birth, family relationship with the applicant)
- Medical certificate from the territorial clinic with a complete medical evaluation of the applicant and co-inhabitants
- Criminal record certification of the applicant and co-inhabitants
- A legal residence document (certified copies of the property/lease contract, a legal statement of the property-owner stating the applicant's right to use his/her property on an undetermined period of time) or a certified copy of a legal sub-lease agreement.
- Psychosocial investigation report
- The proposal for accreditation/refusal as a professional maternal assistant

**The accreditation proposal** as a professional maternal assistant includes (according to Government Decision 217/1998):

- The highest number of children that can be taken in placement
- Age group and gender of those children
- Special foster care abilities

### 3.4. Accreditation of professional maternal assistants

The accreditation decision belongs to the jurisdictional Child Protection Commission. It is based upon *the folder of the applicant* and *the social worker's proposal of approval/refusal of the application*. Whenever necessary, the Commission may require other hearings or any supplementary information.

The accreditation as a professional maternal assistant has a three-year validity.

The accreditation includes personal data of the professional maternal assistant, the period for which it is valid, the responsible SPPC/OPA that will supervise the activity of the professional maternal assistant, the maximum number of children that can be taken simultaneously in placement, age group and gender of these children, as well as the special foster care abilities of the professional maternal assistant.

The approval/refusal decision will be recorded accordingly to the existing legal procedures and will be communicated to the applicant in writing within 5 days (according to Government Decision 217 / 1998).

Since the Child Protection Commission has approved the application, the professional maternal assistants become part of the staff of SPPC/OPA and should start their activities as soon as possible.

The accreditation may be renewed, suspended or withdrawn by the Child Protection Commission, consequent to a motivated proposal from the SPPC/OPA that supervises the activity of the professional maternal assistant.

## **Foster care**

### **Chapter IV: The placement process**

## Chapter IV: The placement process

### 1. Children identification

The target group of foster care beneficiaries is the category of “children in need of protection”. Actual legislation – Emergency Order 26/1998, art. 1, paragraph 1, and Law 108/1998, - stipulates that a child is in need of protection whenever “his/her physical or moral integrity is endangered”.

According to these principles and without making any discrimination based on gender, ethnical background, race or religion, the following **categories of beneficiaries** are identified:

- Children coming from families where parents either have not the knowledge or possibility to assume responsibility of childcare, or exert the parental rights in an abusive manner, or seriously neglect their parental responsibilities;
- Children in residential care;
- Children abandoned in sanitary institutions, regardless their legal status;
- Children with special needs;
- Children in any other situation that might require placement in foster care.

During the identification process, the following aspects are essential:

- For children coming from families that - through financial support can and are willing to keep the children within the family, and if staying in this family is in the best interest of the child - the choice of another protection method, preventing the separation of the child from his/her family, is recommended;
- Recommendation of foster care must be subsequent to any other attempts of support – by a SPPC/NGO<sup>1</sup> - for the natural family (including the extended family) to keep the child;
- Solving the legal situation of the child must be a consequence of the individual permanency planning and not an eligibility criterion for placing the child in foster care;
- The individual permanency planning is mandatory since the child in need of protection has been identified.

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<sup>1</sup> Various services (such as legal, medical or material assistance) - offered by non-governmental organisations at a community level, and not only the ones provided by OPA - were considered.

## 2. The matching process

The matching process represents the identification and training of a substitutive family (a professional maternal assistant accredited by a SPPC/OPA) that corresponds to the specific needs of the child about to be placed in foster care.

The minimum necessary steps of matching are:

*2.1. Theoretical matching* - includes the following criteria regarding the child, his/her natural family and the professional maternal assistant:

- criteria regarding the child: age, temper, interests, nationality, race, religion, relations with other children, special needs;
- criteria regarding the biological family: age, temper, occupation, skills/abilities, interests, educational level, nationality, race, religion;
- criteria regarding the professional maternal assistant: age, temper, occupation, skills/abilities, interests, educational level, nationality, race, religion, attitude towards other cultures, legal status, professional competences, preferences about the children, availability, residence (the distance from the biological family), other children in the family.

Theoretical matching is carried out by at least two professionals: the social worker/reference person of the child and the social worker involved in foster care.

*2.2. Information and preparation of all parts involved*

This stage consists of:

- informing the child – accordingly to his/her intellectual development/ maturity level
- informing the biological family (and/or the important persons for the child) – respecting the child's best interests;
- Informing the professional maternal assistant – the social worker will provide all necessary information, if relevant for the situation of the child.

The responsibility to inform the child and the natural family belongs to the social worker working with the child. The responsibility to inform the maternal assistant belongs to the foster care social worker.

### 2.3. *Accommodating the child with the maternal assistant*

The number of necessary visits may vary from one case to another and is conditioned by the accommodation tempo of the child.

This stage involves three gradual phases:

- The first meeting between the child and the professional maternal assistant; this meeting will take place in a safe environment for the child;
- A meeting on a neutral environment;
- The visit at the professional maternal assistant's home.

The only exception from these three phases is the emergency placement. In effect, emergency placement does not allow going through all the three phases and its purpose is to provide immediate protection when the safety of the child is seriously endangered.

The supervision of visits is carried out by the two social workers, together or separately. The purpose of visit supervision is to establish whether it is appropriate to continue the accommodation process, in accordance with the positive/negative evolution of the relationship (between the child - and his/her natural family, when necessary - and the professional maternal assistant).

Involving all the family members and co-habitants of the professional maternal assistant is necessary and obligatory even since the beginning of accommodation and throughout all its phases.

Major difficulties that may appear during accommodation and the impossibility to solve them lead to the closure of the matching process and the search for a new substitutive family for the child.

### 2.4. *The placement decision*

- Recommendation of placement in foster care is a consequence of a positive evolution in the accommodation process;
- In this stage the opinion of both the child (taking into account his/her developmental level) and the professional maternal assistant must be considered;
- The case presentation (before the jurisdictional Child Protection Commission) is done by the two social workers involved. The placement proposal is recommended by the social worker of the child;

- The final decision belongs to the jurisdictional Child Protection Commission;
- The placement decision is made namely to the professional maternal assistant;
- Following up the evolution of foster care is an obligation of the SPPC, regardless if the professional maternal assistant has been employed by a SPPC or OPA.

### 2.5. *Moving the child into the foster home*

Right after the placement decision is issued by the CPC, a placement contract will be signed, between the professional maternal assistant and the employer. The placement contract should be drawn according to the actual legislation (Government Decision 217 / 1998, art.10, paragraph 1,2 and 3) and will include all the required elements, as follows:

- A contract is signed for each child taken in placement, with the written agreement of the professional maternal assistant's spouse (if any). The Child Protection Commission that decided the placement will be notified.
- The contract includes the following elements:
  - Information about the child: identity, religion, ethnical origin, family, Social and medical situation and special needs of the child;
  - The reasons for placing the child in foster care;
  - Implementation plan and objectives of placement;
  - Contact procedures between the child and his/her natural family (if there are no restrictions on this matter) and family reintegration strategies for the child in placement;
  - Techniques of preparation of the child for integration in an adoptive family;
  - Activity supervision for the professional maternal assistant and periodic evaluation of the situation of the child;
  - Specific rights and obligations of the parts.

The placement contract between the professional maternal assistant and the employer is signed before the actual transit of the child in foster home, but only after the Child Protection Commission has issued the placement decision.

Through the placement decision, the case responsibility is transferred to the foster care social worker.

The child will take his/her personal belongings to the foster home.

### 3. Follow-up/supervision of foster care

Follow-up/supervision of foster care is carried out according to the placement contract mentioned above and to the individual permanency planning.

#### 3.1. Individual permanency planning

The individual permanency planning is a complex instrument that establishes the purpose and finality of placement in foster care, follows and guides the whole child welfare activity (in evolution), respecting the best interest of the child.

The first individual permanency plan is drawn before moving the child into the foster home and is periodically revised: every three months or as often as necessary.

Elaboration of the individual permanency plan should engage all the persons involved: the social worker, the professional maternal assistant, the child (taking into consideration his/her age and developmental level), natural family and/or adoptive family (when necessary and if this is in the best interest of the child). The social worker manager of the case will consult any other person that might reveal important information concerning the situation of the child.

The minimal elements of individual permanency planning are:

- *Child development*
  - a general overview on the progress/regression in the evolution of the child, including his/her physical, intellectual, emotional and behavioral development;
  - any particular concerns about the development of the child;
  - necessary measures/objectives on child development
- *Health condition of the child*
  - actual health condition;
  - evolution in the health condition from one plan to another;
  - the medical intervention program;
  - considerations upon the most recent medical investigations;
  - necessary medical treatments/interventions;
  - immunity vaccinations.

*Child education* (according to his/her age)



- progress / regressions at school/kindergarten/home;
- problems/reasons of concern;
- necessary measures/objectives on child education
- *Contacts with the natural family (only in the best interest of the child)*
  - evolution in the relationship between the child and his/her family
  - other persons the child should be in contact with;
  - necessary measures/objectives on the relation with the natural family.
- *The activity of the social worker manager of the case*
  - Activities with the child, natural/adoptive family, any other resource persons, professional maternal assistant ;
  - Planning for all activities and actions destined to solve the case
  - Revisions and periodic evaluations on all aspects involved in the individual permanency planning
- *The success of placement in foster care*
  - the manner in which foster care fulfils the needs of the child;
  - progress in the evolution of foster care in relation with the permanent final solution proposed in the individual permanency planning;
  - eventual problems/reasons of concern;
  - proposed measures/objectives
- *Responsibility planning*
  - current planning concerning the child;
  - responsibilities of parts involved
  - deadlines
- *The finality and revision of the plan are settled according to the evolution of the case, taking into consideration the best interest of the child*

### 3.2. *Follow-up visits*

Follow-up visits are the responsibility of the social worker manager of the case. The visits of the social worker – announced or not – at the professional maternal assistant’s home should be at least one per week in the first month of placement and at least two per month afterwards.

#### **4. Closure of foster care**

The closure of foster care placement may result from the individual permanency planning or from other reasons. In both situations, closure of foster care placement is accomplished through a revocation/substitution decision from the same Child Protection Commission that issued the placement decision.

Just like the accommodation process, retrieving the child from foster care should be a gradual process, going through the same stages of the accommodation process mentioned above. In emergency situations, when the gradual process is no longer possible, the most secure solution for the child will be chosen.

#### **5. Foster care placement with “difficulties”**

In accordance with the severity of the problem/difficulty, the social worker will inform his superiors. As a result, a new protection measure will be taken, going as far as the emergency retrieval of the child from placement and/or revoking the professional maternal assistant accreditation.

It is essential that such conflict situations should be described and discussed during the training process. It is also important to specify the possible sanctions a professional maternal assistant might receive and the appealing procedures that might be used.

#### **5. Periodic evaluation of the professional maternal assistant and his/her activity**

Periodic evaluation is the responsibility of the social worker and his supervisor and is carried out at least annually.

## **Foster care**

### **Chapter V: The social worker in family protection services**

## Chapter V: The social worker in family protection services

### 1. *Functions, activities and competences regarding the process of placement in foster care*

The social worker in family protection services is responsible of all the activities regarding preparation, support and follow-up of the child placement to a family/person (to a relative up to the 4<sup>th</sup> degree, to a non-related family or to a professional maternal assistant). The social worker in family protection services is also responsible to identify a permanent solution for the child - either reintegration in his/her natural family or adoption.

Due to the nature of his attributions, the social worker in family protection services collaborates with the child and family protection services provided by the SPPC/OPA.

This chapter is dedicated to the functions, activities and competences of social workers involved in the process of placement in foster care.

In order to perform his functions, activities and competences in various stages of the foster care placement, the social worker collaborates with the following specialized services provided by the public local authorities/OPA:

- Parents counseling and support center
- Family reintegration support center
- The service of assistance for free expression of children rights
- Residential care services
- The assistance and support center for psychological rehabilitation of children with psychosocial disorders
- Other services.

The main function categories for social workers in the process of placement in foster care are focused on:

- Activities involved in working with the professional maternal assistant and his/her family
- Activities involved in working with the child;
- Activities involved in working with the natural/adoptive family
- Being an employee of the family protection services within a SPPC/OPA

In general, all these function categories are carried out by communication, counseling, training/information, supervision.

In order to perform these functions, the social worker has the following current activities:

- Identification of potential professional maternal assistants using the communication channels promoted by the SPPC/OPA
- Recruitment of potential professional maternal assistants, providing professional information to the applicants
- Supporting the applicant to fill in the complete applicant folder according to the actual legislation (see chapter III)
- Information visits at the professional maternal assistant's home (gathering information from the professional maternal assistant, family members, any other relevant person). The information concerns the ability of the applicant to become a professional maternal assistant, interpersonal relationships between the members of the family, wealth condition, etc. in order to elaborate the evaluation report
- Discussions with the reference persons pointed out by the applicant in order to complete the information about the applicant
- Prepares and supports the participation of the future professional maternal assistant to the training program in order to facilitate the accumulation of theoretical knowledge and practical skills necessary for practicing this profession
- Finishes (with other professionals if necessary) the applicant evaluation, draws the psycho-social evaluation report and elaborates the motivated proposal for approval/refusal of the application before the Child Protection Commission
- Assists and supports the professional maternal assistant through the preparation and accommodation process with the child
- Provides counseling for the professional maternal assistant, in collaboration with the specialists of the family protection services and specialized services destined to this purpose, in order to deal with possible difficult situations
- Gathers all information regarding the child from his/her social worker and uses these information in the elaboration of the individual permanency planning
- Prepares the professional maternal assistant for the implementation of the child's individual permanency planning, underlines the temporary condition of foster care placement and the necessity to permanently adjust the individual permanency planning to the needs of the child
- Revises the individual permanency planning together with other professionals, every three months or whenever necessary
- Follows up the development and integration of the child into the professional maternal assistant's family
- Prepares – together with other professionals – the accommodation visits of the child in the foster home and the actual placement (moving) of the child in the professional maternal assistant's family
- Prepares the child and the professional maternal assistant for the final stages of foster care and for child integration/reintegration in his/her natural/adoptive family, or any other possible situation.

- Prepares the contents of the **placement contract** to be signed by the professional maternal assistant and his/her spouse, at the beginning of the placement process
- Works with the child and the professional maternal assistant to maintain contact with the natural family, extended family, residential institution of origin, and – if case – with the adoptive family.
- Supervises and evaluates (at least once per year) the activity of the professional maternal assistant
- Provides preparation, counseling and support for the natural family of the child in collaboration with specialized services, in order to deal with crisis situations and reintegrate the child
- Participates to the permanent training session of the professional maternal assistant
- Gives information – only on request from his superiors – about:
  - The activity of the professional maternal assistant that are under his/her supervision
  - The evolution of children placed in foster care
  - The evolution of actions with the natural/adoptive family of the child
- Participates to specialized or permanent training courses organized by the employer

Social worker activity is always carried out in a team. The head of the department organizes the current activity by distributing various attributions to social workers, in accordance with their competences and ensuring continuity and collaboration in case management.

To perform the activities mentioned above, the social worker must have theoretical knowledge and practical skills (competences) achieved through specialized training or professional experience:

- To know and respect children rights and protection measures for children in need of protection;
- To acknowledge, understand and apply the reform principles in the child protection system
- To be familiar with methods, procedures and practice standards on placement in foster care
- To be able to inform correctly and in due time about any modifications in his/her activity with the professional maternal assistant, the child in placement, natural and adoptive family;
- To have verbal and non-verbal communication abilities at both individual and community level, in various ethnical and cultural circumstances
- To participate at specialized or professional training programs organized by the employer
- To have a clear and concise expression manner;
- To use an adequate language in verbal and written communication;

- To be able to encourage community participation in solving the problems of its members;
- To be able to involve clients in the elaboration and development of crisis management individual plans;
- To know the correct needs and resource assessment methods of individuals, groups and communities in order to elaborate an appropriate crisis management plan;
- To be able to identify and coordinate activities and services in order to make specific case interventions effective and to avoid accumulation of efforts;
- Teamwork abilities;
- To show professional integrity and to help the client adjust his/her own behavior;
- To respect professional confidentiality and ethics;
- To know the specialized information sources that may be used.

## 2. Training for social workers in foster care

### 2.1. Initial training requirements

Initial training for social workers in foster care placement may be one of the following:

- Graduate studies (long-term studies):
  - B.A. in social work or other social sciences
  - Postgraduate studies (M.A., PhD) in social sciences
- Graduate studies (short-term studies):
  - Graduate studies (no degree) of a two or 3-year college in social sciences
- Undergraduate studies:
  - Undergraduate professional schools or short-term courses in social work
- Initial training for social workers (organized by the employer) on foster care placement

### 2.2. Specialized training for social workers

SPSPC/OPA must organize a *specialized training program for social workers*, which should be completed BEFORE the beginning of their professional activities within the family protection services.

Specialized training prepares the social workers and develops theoretical and practical skills for the professional activities necessary in the process of foster care placement.

*The team of trainers* may include experienced social workers, experienced professional maternal assistants, consultants and specialists working inside or outside the SPSPC/OPA, with experience in training programs.

*The curriculum* (contents) and *length* of the specialized training program are settled according to the participants and employer needs.

Regardless the initial training of participants, the curriculum for the specialized training program should include:

- A presentation of the employer (organizational chart, staff structure);
- A presentation of the family protection services and/or of the process of placement in foster care: goal, objectives, principles
- Family protection service regulations and policy, internal regulations on authority, safeguarding confidentiality etc.
- The rights and responsibilities of the employer and staff, the staff policies;
- A brief description of the services provided by the employer and the categories of beneficiaries;
- The relation of the family protection service with other child protection services;
- Legal and administrative framework;
- The reform in child protection;
- Knowledge and skills necessary for a practitioner in order to provide effective services; practice instruments and techniques in social work;
- The role of the social worker in the team of professionals working in family protection service and in foster care
- The nature of work in a multi-cultural, inter-ethnic environment and the importance of participation to training programs destined to develop professional competences in these matters;
- Values and ethical principles in social work.

### 2.3. *Permanent training program for social workers*

SPSPC/OPA should encourage the development of a permanent training program for social workers in family protection services.

The purpose of a permanent training program is a continuous professional development and improvement of theoretical and practical competences in the field.

Permanent training is a planned process.

*Permanent training objectives:*

- To improve the competence level of social workers;



- To prepare social workers for increased responsibility and for the supervisor/trainer role
- To prepare social workers for specialized professional positions (family intensive social work, services for persons with special needs etc.)
- To permanently revise the information in the field and to adjust interventions according to modifications that may occur.

### **3. Supervision of social workers in foster care**

The SPSPC/OPA that organizes and provides foster care placements must also provide an effective supervision system for social workers and their activities.

#### *Definition of supervision*

Supervision is a process destined to improve the efficiency of social work activities in foster care and has three major functions: training, control/coordination and support.

#### *Training function*

Supervision is a process through which the supervisor – the person with professional competences required for this position – assumes responsibility for the training, assistance and constant orientation of social workers under his/her supervision.

Through this function a constant professional development and training for social workers is achieved. Permanent training is carried out according to the specific needs of training and development for each supervised social worker. It includes the elaboration of an individualized permanent training plan for social workers, which is developed and permanently revised by the supervisor, together with the social worker.

*The individual training plan must include:*

- *Individual training:* is planned by the supervisor together with each social worker, during supervision sessions and focused on specific topics of interest for the social worker
- *Participation of social workers to workshops, conferences and courses* in order to develop their abilities and skills; courses or workshops may be selected according to the training needs found by the supervisor (together with the social worker or not) or described by the social worker;
- *Self-training:* through supervisor recommendations of specialized literature (books, studies, research etc.)

### *Control/coordination function*

The supervisor role includes elements of activity coordination/control on various levels:

- Coordination/control of social workers activities with clients or case supervision
- Coordination/control of social worker activity in foster care
- Coordination/control of social workers activities within the community (relations with other organizations, institutions, services, community members etc.)

The supervisor must set up the maximum number of cases per social worker. This quantum should increase gradually. The maximum number of active cases must be set according to certain criteria and must be up to 15 - 18 active cases.

The criteria to determine the optimal number of active cases managed by a social worker are:

- The complexity of the cases (poor families, families with multiple problems etc.)
- The competence level of the social worker (knowledge, skills, experience)
- The access to other services and resources necessary for each active case;
- Other organizations or institutions providing services to the same case;
- Delegated responsibilities and the period of time required for the documentation/instrumentation of each case, including the legal actions;
- The size of the clients' residence area and the time taken to travel within this area;
- The time spent for other activities (work sessions, training sessions, financial or administrative reports etc.)

### *Supportive function*

The supportive function offers emotional support and assistance to the social worker in various difficult situations that may occur (discouragement, failure, clients with multiple problems or with special needs, violation of client rights, interpersonal conflicts etc.). The supervisor provides counseling for the social worker any time necessary, in order to cope with difficult situations and to solve the difficulties of case management.

### *Supervisor competences*

The supervisor role for social workers in foster care is usually performed by the head of department/program coordinator (manager, etc) from the SPPC/OPA.

Supervisors must have the following competences:

- To offer professional support for the social worker;
- To enhance professional recognition of social workers
- To make sure that professional standards are applied in social work practice
- To provide individual and group professional training for social workers

The optimal number of social workers supervised by a competent person is between 10 and 12 and is settled according to the training and experience level of both parts.

During supervision sessions, the supervisor and the social worker work on the following issues:

- Mutual information exchange followed by the supervisor's feedback on the social worker accomplishments;
- Discussions focused on improving the practical skills of social workers

As a result, supervision sessions are good opportunities to learn and improve the knowledge and abilities of both the supervisor and the social worker.

*Supervision categories:*

- Formal supervision – is planned and carried out in a formal context;
- Informal supervision – spontaneous, carried out during daily activities (according to the situation);
- Individual supervision – carried out individually with each social worker
- Group supervision – carried out by the supervisor within the social workers team

#### **4. Training of trainers**

The trainer role cannot be performed by every social worker involved as a practitioner in the foster care program. There may be situations in which exceptional practitioners, with a vast experience do not have the required skills in order to become effective trainers.

*T.O.T. curriculum*

The social worker involved in professional maternal assistants training should follow a specific T.O.T. program that includes:

- A specialized training course for social workers in foster care (see Chapter V paragraph 2.1)

- A T.O.T. course for the preparation of professional maternal assistants; participants will achieve adult training skills and also the specific theoretical and practical knowledge about foster care placement;
- The initial training program for professional maternal assistant – optional

The T.O.T. curriculum must be approved by the jurisdictional Child Protection Commission.