Collaboration of Parents and Educators in Cases of Children Placed in Residential Care Homes – Parental Perspective

The paradigm of residential child care, providing education and care outside the family, is changing worldwide. The emphasis is shifting from a narrow child-focused approach to a more child-and-family centered one (Milligan in Stevens, 2006). Proponents of family-focused models view professionals as instruments of families, and they promote interventions that are individualized, flexible, and responsive, and support and strengthen family functioning (Geurt, Knorth, and Noom, 2012). Several Slovenian studies (Kranjčan, 2006; Mikša, 2013; Rapuš Pavel, Kobolt, 2008) draw attention to the difficulties of maintaining collaborative partnership with parents that is based on trust and contact. They point out to the systemic and situational barriers as well as professional barriers, faced by the staff (ibid.) In Slovenia, the aspect of collaborative partnership has not yet been highlighted and examined from the viewpoint of parents. Sinclair and Gibbs (1998, in Kendrick, 2008) established that any family can have difficulties when approaching collaboration with an institution, where the child/young person will reside (or already resides in), since the connotation of residential care is one of parental failure and potential power of the professionals. This is why the attitude and approach to work by care professionals is so important. Collaboration with the family is important throughout the child’s stay in care outside the family in order to enable the child to have days outside the residential home (Geurts, Boddy, Noom and Knorth, 2012). Collaboration with the family requires recognition of the needs and an activation of all participants, since the main objective of placing a child/young adult in care is to reintegrate him or her back with the family (Grupper, Jaffe, 2007, Geurts at all, 2012).

We introduce the findings of a qualitative research study that included 35 parents with children in different residential care homes throughout Slovenia. The aim of the study was to analyze and evaluate the experiences and needs of parents that could contribute to a better collaboration with the educators. We carried out personal semi-structured interviews, which were analyzed by using the content analysis method (Vogrinč, 2008). The consolidated findings show that the parents emphasized as important for good collaboration the following: communication and dialogue (listening, educators using
every-day language that parents can understand, respectful attitude, not blaming them for the child’s problems, etc.), being informed, included and accepted as an important part of the team. The results also reveal differences in the level of satisfaction and the need for better collaboration according to the socio-economic status of parents.