



Child in Mind

Final Summary and Evaluation
of the family **BYPLAY**® Project

CHILD IN MIND

Final Summary and Evaluation of the “FAMILY BY PLAY” Project
 (“Development of the “Family by Play” method for use with children
 in vulnerable families”)

January 2017 – June 2020

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	4
What was the source of inspiration for us and how did we manage to get support for our project	4
Support provided by THE VELUX FOUNDATIONS	5
ABOUT THE BROCHURE	6
ACTIVITY No 1.....	6
About the new method called “Family by Play”	6
Teaching aids for social workers.....	13
Final international conference “Child in Mind”	15
ACTIVITY No 2.....	16
The idea of a Therapeutic Educational Program TEP	16
TEPs in Prague, Ostrava and Hradec Králové.....	19
A “Preschool” story	21
TEP – three-year experience	24
ACTIVITY No 3.....	26
Scientific research:	29
Movies	30
ACTIVITY No 4.....	30
Development of the “Center for complex care for families with children at risk of neglect”	31
CONCLUSIONS	34
Benefits of the project reaped by HoSt.....	34
Benefits of the project reaped by CEKAS	36

INTRODUCTION

What was the source of inspiration for us and how did we manage to get support for our project

When working with vulnerable children and families in the field, the HoSt's social workers started to realise that they lack broadly applicable tools for work and communication with the youngest children. The first opportunity to fill this gap we got through the project supported under Norway Grants, in the framework of which we proposed a new method called "Playing with Stories", invented by HoSt and CEKAS workers. At the beginning we assumed that the method would closely focus on getting the "opinion" of young children and on their involvement in decision making processes that affect them. In 2016, the project came to its end. The method was still in its infancy, but it seemed that it worked well in practice. It just needed further development and testing. At that time, it occurred to us to present our newly emerging method to the representatives of THE VELUX FOUNDATIONS, the Danish private foundations, which helped us implement an extremely successful project "Professional voluntary work with children and families at risk in the Czech Republic". We provided them with a project fiche that would appropriately follow up on the volunteering project and we were invited to further elaborate it into a detailed application and to submit it to the foundation for evaluation. Included in the application were also other ideas on how to diversify approaches to work with vulnerable children. We could not wait to hear how things will turn out. We were convinced that our ideas were great and we knew that this source of funding might be the only one accessible. Thus, we were really excited when the management of THE VELUX FOUNDATIONS recommended our project for financing. Our dream came true: now we can fully focus on the development of our method, provide scientific evidence as its basis and use it in practice in a professional manner. The outputs and results of our project surpass our expectations. They are described in more detail in the brochure.

Support provided by THE VELUX FOUNDATIONS

THE VELUX FOUNDATIONS
VILLUM FONDEN ∞ VELUX FONDEN

Thanks to our previous projects supported by the Foundations we knew that the support to be provided is unprecedented.

We were granted extremely generous amount of funds for all the activities that must be performed in order to achieve what we planned. This, naturally, resulted in top quality project results which could have never been achieved with funds usually available.

Apart from that, we were also offered extraordinary professional and human support by the representatives of the VELUX Foundations. An independent consultant was assigned to us who paid us regular visits several times a year and who witnessed our work on the spot. He had a deep insight in the project, he was able to carry us through whenever problems emerged and to seek optimal solutions. Encouraging were also the visits of other employees of the VELUX Foundations, among others the head of the international program who managed to find some time for us and gave us advice also during the project implementation. We highly valued the trust prevailing between our project team and the Foundations staff: we could talk to them openly and with no worries about any difficulties that might arise or changes that have to be done, and they were always willing to help us. That was strongly motivating and encouraging and it has boosted our efforts exerted during the work on project activities.

Therefore, we would like to seize this opportunity and express our thanks to all the staff of THE VELUX FOUNDATIONS for providing us with an opportunity to implement our project, and particularly to Christian Holtet, our consultant, and Jens Jørgen Pedersen, the Head of the International Program who accompanied us on our project journey.



ABOUT THE BROCHURE

The brochure is elaborated along the objectives, expected outputs and results of the project defined in the project application. The text was divided into 4 main sections covering individual activities. In these sections, project objectives and main project outputs, both planned and achieved, are described.

ACTIVITY No 1

Development of the new practical method by means of play in families with children AT RISK of neglect as a part of complex care

About the new method called “Family by Play”

The main objective of this activity was to finalise, test, validate and put into practice a new method for work with vulnerable families called “Family by Play”.

The “Family by Play” method is an interactive method focused on building the relationship between the parent and the child. It is based on intuitive, non-directive guiding of the parent and the child through a play which they play together. The



Family by play

trained worker motivates and stimulates the parent to play and spend time with the child, accompanies the parent, shows the parent what to do, gives explanations etc. in line with the specific methodology. Our aim is that both the parent and the child enjoy the play, feel happy about it and share a nice experience, any blocks are removed and mutual family interactions and relationships are fostered. The play takes place directly in the natural family setting – where the family is currently at home. Play is an intimate part of the family’s communication. Thus, the use of this method is conditional on establishing close contacts with the family. The method is fairly practical, low-threshold and effective and it can also be applied by a trained layman such as the HoSt volunteers.

The primary objective of the method is the effort to uncover the hidden potential of the family – i.e. its strengths. We seek to help the family not only improve its weaknesses, but also foster and develop its strengths. We intend that the family alone finds the sort of assistance that will suit it.

We decided to use this type of work with family because communication through toys is easier. Children often do not understand the words, but while playing they relax and can better express what they need. On top of that, we wanted to get a standardised tool – the same for every family – that will enable uniform evaluation and analysis. Namely, also if the child is not attracted to the toys. For the purpose of our work, it is essential to see whether, in the allocated time (approximately 60 minutes), the family is able to dedicate time exclusively to the child and to pay full attention to him/her.

Secondary objectives of the method

- 1| To improve family atmosphere: to induce relaxation and a pleasant experience in the family, fun for all.
- 2| To improve family relationships: to learn how to tune in to each other. Giving space to each other. Taking turns in activities.
- 3| Teaching objectives: development of speech skills in children (improving vocabulary), age-appropriate learning of the child (names of animals and their sounds, colours etc.), developing the child’s fine and gross motor skills.

4| The parent is getting to know better himself/herself as well as his/her child/children: What do I enjoy and what makes me happy? What am I good at? What can I teach my child? How do I feel when I am playing? What do I feel when my child is playing?

5| Integration of play experience of parents in other everyday situations: tuning in to the child, guiding the children, using the playfulness as another educational strategy, discovering common interests, creating nice common experiences/memories.

Apart from the objective to restore the ability to play in parents, other just as important goals are the following:

- Education of parents – why does the child need to play, what are the conditions the child needs to play, what toys are suitable in certain development stages, etc.
- Parents tuned in to play with the child.
- Helping the parents enjoy or take interest in observing their child during play.
- Coping with stress and tension, ability to sit down, be quiet, let the child play in peace.
- To learn how to support the child, how to praise him/her.
- To watch one's own child with pleasure.
- To see in one's child a person who deserves attention and respect.
- Offer for the future, when perhaps the family situation calms down, to play with the child.
- To become a role model for parents – as to how to communicate and set boundaries without violence or inadequate aggression
- To create atmosphere for other common play activities:
 - tactile - tickling, caressing, stroking, lolling around, doing exercises...
 - verbal – joking, laughing, telling a story, imitating, making sounds...
 - common activities – helping with cooking, hanging laundr ...
- An important goal is to turn the parent's attention to his own child, putting spotlight on the child: judging from our experience gained in practice, in families going through crisis the child is perceived more as a burden, or as a reason to exert stronger efforts to deal with livelihood issues, but the child is rarely the centre of attention and his/her needs, other than physiological, are not considered important.

Play activity

Therapeutic aspect: we teach through play, we look for a child in the parents in order to create a platform for becoming closer to each other, for better understanding between children and parents. Namely at the beginning with the child in the presence of the parent and later, if appropriate, with gradual involvement of the parent in play.



Application of the method

The method should help us address the situations when we are not sure whether the existing support for the family is adequate, or whether the child suffers a lot even though we believe that the parent tries hard and verbalises his/her positive feelings to the child.

The method is commonly applied by the worker who comes with bag with creative blanket and toys to the family's home. The worker plays together with the family. Based on his/her observation – of both the parent and the child – she/he will decide about the best way of helping the family. Whether to continue playing or focus more on parents (e.g. individual, pair, family therapy) or on the child (e.g. Montessori approach), or on mutual parent-child interaction (e.g. VHT), etc. The parents are naturally present when these methods are used, nonetheless the main actor is the child.

Our clients are specific since they themselves have lots of problems and they often use the space provided by the field social work and volunteering mainly to satisfy their own needs at the expense of the needs of their children who are often times sidelined. This method could help us in cases when it is necessary to shift the attention gently, but clearly to children and to increase their value in the family and also in our activities focus the attention on the child and his/her needs, incorporate play in the family time schedule, stress the importance of the play in the child's world.

Application of the method in practice

Thanks to the method serious things happening in the family may be revealed, for



Workers with bags with creative blankets and toys

which you have to be prepared (violence, cruelty, abuse, etc.). It is important to have a procedure in place to deal with such situations.

Since play is an important part of the development of child's personality and co-creates relationships in the family, solid theoretical grounds are necessary for the application of this method. It is impossible to work with family without any preparation. The preparation and actual work are fairly time-consuming. The time demandingness of the application of this method is a contraindication to the use of this method by the authorities for social and legal protection of children. They do not avail of required and necessary time to work with a single family – possibility of repeated longer visits during which rather than addressing everyday family business the time is spent by playing with the child – which is necessary to capture the family atmosphere.

The method focuses on families with environment lacking stimuli and emotions. Families in which parents do not know how to tune in to the child's needs. Families which have so much to worry about (money, housing, partner relationships) that they have no time to spend with children and to play with them. The method can be used also for work with families who serve their children as foster parents and must tune into each other or, on the contrary, with parents whose child is getting back home from a foster family. There are so many possibilities. Simply, everywhere where there is no pleasure arising from the mutual contacts between the child and the parent.

Specifics of the most common target group

The target group for the application of this method are first and foremost the parents who either do not know how to play with children due to their long-lasting personal limitations, or do not want to play with their children since they are overburdened (with stress, crisis situation, depression, etc.) In general, their capacity to play is low, often they feel insecure and do not know how to play with children. They do not pay adequate attention to the interests and needs of the child. Commonly they are incapable of setting boundaries properly, often they are too strict or, on the very contrary, they set no boundaries vis-vis children, their behaviour lacks consistency.

There are many reasons behind the aforementioned specifics. In our work we most often encounter crisis family situations or situations that become chronic, associated with the absence of basic certainties such as housing, money, food. Where parents are consistently under stress, their capacity to play spontaneously and their ability to tune in to the play decreases. Very often prevailing in the families is the transgenerational lack of experience with playing in their childhood, absence of educational tools, erasing boundaries between the position of the child and the parent, or on the contrary, a gap between children and parents, and also personal characteristics such as lower intelligence, depressive moods, immaturity. The ability of parents to tune in to the child naturally decreases as a result of additional crises and stress situations in the life of the family such as divorce, death, domestic violence or dependence.

Children brought up by such parents show certain specific features also during the play. They have short attention span, they lack the ability to play for a longer period of time, they get distracted, they have difficulty to concentrate, they have no boundaries with adults, they are chaotic, rapidly moving from one activity to the next. They often have no place of their own and no specific time dedicated to play (toys, a spot of their own, their own things, time to go to the playground, to draw, etc.), they are under-stimulated.

The mutual relationships between the children and the parents are then defined by the absence of time spent together and dedicated to play and tuning in to each other. There are no happy moments and experiences generating positive feelings, fun, safe physical contact, family intimacy and happiness. The children and parents have no experience of having a good time together.

Evaluation/indicators

In the framework of the project a method was created, tried and tested in practice and validated by research. The development of the “Family by Play” method has become a milestone for the everyday practice of HoSt in directing the field work and approach to clients (but also to volunteers). The method opened the door to a brand-new perspective of work with family. HoSt has always tended to render less formal assistance and preferably partnership approach to clients (mainly in volunteering). The “Family by Play” method introduced new possibilities of work with family, new topics in family. Closeness, sharing, joy, playfulness, etc. For many families it means strong enrichment, while for many other families also painful moments since this closeness is absent in these families. Thanks to the opportunities offered by this project we were able to develop at the same time also other forms of professional support to families such as therapy, child therapy so that, if needed by the family or children, their suffering can be addressed in an entirely different way.

Our organisation also benefitted from the method. The method significantly contributed to the professionalism of volunteers. It provided them with a tool which they can use to support parents and their children in an enjoyable, intuitive and interactive way on their journey to one another. Good collaboration and cooperation within the team has been reconfirmed as well as good and strong relationships, which we can rely on. Last but not least, the cooperation with the CEKAS team was great once again.

Main outputs and indicators:

- “Family by Play” – method for work with families through play in Czech and English
- Textile bag with an interactive blanket and toys;
- Trademark for the “Rodina hrou” and “Family by Play” brand name

rodinaHRU®

familyBYPLAY®

- Prepared courses:
 - Special training on the “Family by Play” method for HoSt’s social workers
 - Special training on the “Family by Play” method for HoSt’s volunteers
 - Special training on the “Family by Play” method for external interested parties in the Czech Republic
 - Special training on the “Family by Play” method in English for interested parties from abroad

Number of social workers and volunteers trained in the “Family by Play” method: 49 persons.

Number of families visited by social workers and volunteers using the “Family by Play” method: 92 families with 193 children.

Number of interactive blankets with toys for all HoSt’s branches and training courses: 18 sets.

Teaching aids for social workers

Another objective was to update the already developed teaching aids that help communicate with the vulnerable child and the family and can be used by social workers. There was a high demand for them among social workers from authorities for social and legal protection of children and non-profit organisations.

In the course of 2018 and 2019 the following teaching aids were updated:

1| “Four crisis situations through the eyes of a child - a manual for staff of the authorities for social and legal protection of children” (The manual for staff of the authorities for social and legal protection of children which deals with 4 challenging life situations that can be experienced by a child in the family. The manual focuses on preschool children. Topics: Mental disorder of the parent. Drug or alcohol dependence of the parent. Divorce, separation of parents. Taking the child away from the family. The manual is written from the child’s perspective. It seeks to help the worker understand the child’s feelings and establish more intimate contacts with the child, become their assistant in coping with these situations, and also motivate the child to be able to appropriately defend their, not to be afraid to talk about their suffering and to express their opinion.)

2| “Four crisis situations through the eyes of a child - a guide for staff of the authorities for social and legal protection of children” (The guide complements the manual as



a supporting and complementary material thereto. The guide accompanies the worker, explains and details these topics and difficult situations from the social and therapeutic perspective, and focuses mainly on children's emotions. Also included are instructions how to start a conversation with the child.)

3) "Picture cards" (19 picture cards serve as a teaching aid for the worker of the authorities for social and legal protection of children in conversation with a child. To communicate information or stories is sometimes easier with the use of pictures. Pictures can help the worker in asking the child questions. The cards are not used for diagnostic purposes, they help establish a contact between the child and the worker.)

Evaluation/indicators

200 copies of each aid were printed and handed over to field workers on the occasion of seminars organised by our Centre and held in Ostrava, Brno, Hradec Králové and Říčany u Prahy in 2019. Large part of aids was given to social workers at the seminars, others were distributed through the HoSt's branches in regions. The remaining aids are available to the HoSt's branches staff for their own work and for promotional purposes.



International conference

ACTIVITY No 2

Montessori preschool as continuation of Montessori approach tradition and its application in the work with vulnerable families where there is a potential risk of child neglect

The main objective of this activity was to develop and validate the new approach to work with children and parents in the form of Therapeutic Educational Program TEP – “Preschool by Play” (planned for a total of 90 children).

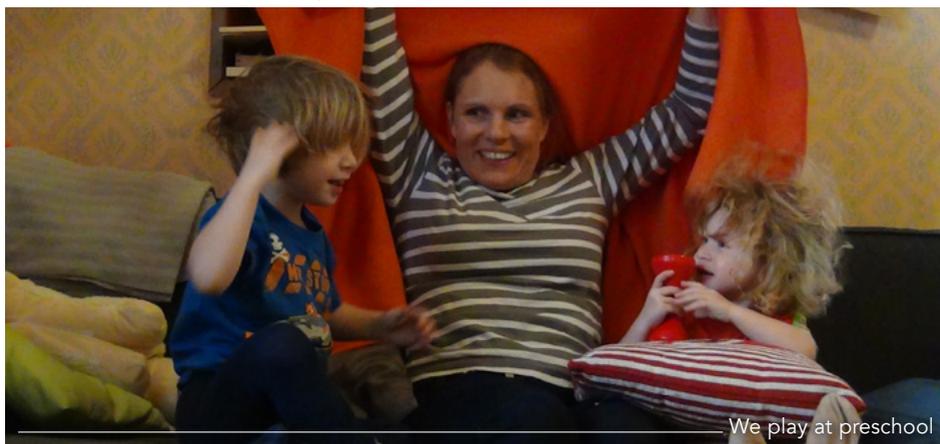
The idea of a Therapeutic Educational Program TEP, also called “Preschool by Play”, came up in the HoSt non-profit organisation with the view to support families in challenging life situations. The program built on many years of experience gained by the HoSt’s staff and volunteers in field work.

The field workers and volunteers visit the families and consistently struggle with the issue of trying to balance the support provided to parents and children. The environment of socially disadvantaged families has its specifics – one of them is often almost extreme mental load on the mother (or parents). The social worker or volunteer cooperating with the family is exposed to pressure of acute needs and feelings and frequently the support to parents makes adequate and balanced support to children in the family impossible. The social system guaranteed by the state tends to provide support to parents. Work with the adult, a fully-formed human being, is of a long-term nature and the results are uncertain, often frustrating for staff of the organisations and often leading to a burnout. That is why the HoSt organisation set



Music activities at preschool

itself a goal to provide a comprehensive support to the family, focused on the child in the family, but having an effect also on parents. When considering how to get closer to children and how to communicate with them, the best way seemed to be the play as the means of communication typical of and commonly used by children. In disadvantaged families, the children very often do not play at all – instead they spend time by in a passive manner by watching TV or at the computer or they are from their early age subject to unhealthy stimulation by computer games. Our adult clients often could not play in their childhood or had nobody to play with them, most of them have never been experienced a situation when the parents would play with them or encourage them to play. In families with which HoSt cooperates, toys are often absent or on the contrary overabundant and there is a mess and chaos, thus the toys cannot really be used by children. The repetitive experience gained during several years of observations and also a great many discussions gave us an idea to visit the families with sophisticated, specifically developed and selected toys and to purposefully engage in playing in the presence of parents – the method “Family by Play”. Then, based on further considerations and in response to inclusion-related problems faced in the Czech education system, a need arose for more intensive and better structured program in which children and their parents would systematically prepare for entering the mainstream nursery school and subsequently the primary school. TEP – Therapeutic Educational Program for Children and Their Parents came into being. We support children in their overall development and their parents in their parental competencies and relationships with their children. We prepare children for entering the mainstream nursery school, we provide the parents with opportunities to meet, establish relationships, and exchange opinions. The approach was devised by Marta Linková, the therapist.



We play at preschool

The target group of TEP is a family in which the child experiences certain difficulties or serious changes that can affect the child's development. The difficulties may concern the parents (disease, disability, untreated dependence, domestic violence, parents from children's homes, underage parents) as well as children (disabled children, children in foster care, adopted children, extremely sensitive children). The clients are women from shelters, long-term unemployed, families facing livelihood issues, families belonging to minorities, immigrant families, foster families.

The TEP program is primarily designed for children at the age prior to the entry into nursery school – starting with 2-year olds. Since children are accompanied by their parents to the preschool it is obvious that if they have any younger siblings they also participate in the program.

Preschool is a space where we try, together with parents, to fill deficiencies or solve problems in upbringing, development as well as education. Important for us is to engage the parents in activities with their children. At the preschool, the parent has an opportunity to get to know various educational methods, to learn to understand and observe the child. For such a complex work with young children we decided to apply the Montessori educational system which was primarily intended for children from disadvantaged background.

We provide a program with a fixed structure – regular and repeated structure gives children the feeling of safety and peace. Regular elements provide a solid foundation for new elements of the program, to which the child should learn to respond flexibly and with interest. The tension between something regularly repeating, unexpected and new forms the basis for a stimulating environment.

The program works with the elements of the Montessori approach (according to Maria Montessori) which rests on the main developmental needs of children, stresses the guidance to independence and autonomy, active engagement in life around them, natural learning of rules of the world and nature. It responds to natural and inborn curiosity of the child, the need to learn and explore. The Montessori system, contrary to other educational systems, puts an emphasis on each child's individuality and also on self-discipline and self-control as a precondition for functioning in human society.

The program also uses therapeutic elements. Most of the therapeutic elements in the preschool are related to the program structure and setting. We seek to create a safe and peaceful environment with fixed boundaries. The therapeutic function is also fulfilled by repeating the same unchanged things in the program, in which both the parents and children know exactly what to expect and what will follow. Fixed boundaries mean that everyone knows the rules applicable in the preschools and the consequence of their violation. An important therapeutic element is silence, or meditation music. Also, sensory activities, singing and playing together, doing relaxation exercises and art activities constitute therapeutic elements of the program. Therapeutic role is also played by tidiness which we try to achieve together. Majority of clients that come to us live constantly under stress, with the feeling of unpredictability, constant uncertainty and changes, which is why the predictable, forthcoming and warm environment is comforting and healing for them.

TEP in Prague

The first Therapeutic Educational Program was launched at the HoSt's branch in Prague in March 2017. Support granted from THE VELUX FOUNDATIONS gave us the opportunity to implement the TEP under perfect conditions. We could rent suitable premises, to equip the premises with nice furniture, but also with aids and toys required by this method. We could afford to hire necessary staff for the period of



project implementation – a therapist/professional sponsor, a head of the TEP and an assistant. The staff was offered regular supervisions by external experts, assistance of a speech therapist or a music therapist for children, from whom the TEP employees learned a lot. The employees also had the opportunity to undergo a training focused on the Montessori method.

TEPs in Ostrava and Hradec Králové

The Therapeutic Educational Program and its visible encouraging results impressed also the staff of HoSt in Ostrava and Hradec Králové. They managed to get support from local sponsors to build their preschools. The TEPs in Ostrava and Hradec Králové would not exist without the support of THE VELUX FOUNDATIONS. The Prague TEP provided the “TEP methodology”, professional supervision by the Prague professional sponsor in the form of her visits on the spot and Skype and telephone communication. The TEP in Ostrava started to work in February and the TEP in Hradec Králové in October 2019.



A “Preschool” story – ŠÁRKA

(Marta Linková, head therapist, TEP)

When Šárka came to the “Preschool” for the first time, she looked frightened and insecure. She did not feel like going to the “Preschool” and was scared. When we wanted to welcome her, she quickly hid behind her granny and clearly showed no interest in getting closer. The same situation repeated during the next few months. Anything which resembled the infant care centre in any way caused a strong response of Šárka – teachers, young children, unexpected changes, any member of staff coming unexpectedly closer to her. Her granny had to always be around and Šárka often hid behind her, when someone came close unexpectedly. Arrivals to and departures from the preschool were difficult for Šárka – each change evoked a memory in her of separation from her mum and of 4 months which she had to spend in the infant care centre before her granny was awarded custody. After the first meeting in the preschool, when we saw how difficult it was for Šárka to end anything, to say goodbye or to experience a change, we suggested that she takes the “preschool” plush toy mole home. Šárka accepted the offer and ever since the mole has become her inseparable companion, Šárka’s second self and a connection between the preschool and her home.

The mole helps her in any situation that she finds difficult to cope with. When Šárka is supposed to leave the preschool, it is the plushy mole who is heading towards the door first, while Šárka is slowly getting dressed and correspondingly the mole is also slowly moving to the door (she moves him bit by bit) until the mole finally crosses the threshold of the preschool, moves a bit further to the stairs, and then Šárka can rush forward – the mole made her ready for the trip and helped her overcome her fear.

The mole has also become a connection between the staff and Šárka – whenever we wanted Šárka to do something, we first approached the mole who was supposed to inform her about it. The mole joined Šárka during her meals, watched her when she was doing something, she has never left him back at home. She often dressed the mole up for the visit in the preschool – the mole was her alter ego – the animal which is mostly hidden, but sometimes peeps out. This way also Šárka gradually started to peep out. The first weeks in the preschool she spent by doing puzzle – she would spend the whole hour before the snack and after the snack

again by doing puzzle. If the puzzle was not there, she asked her granny to get it. Šárka obviously needed to get her shattered world piece by piece together into a whole which makes sense and where everything fits in. After doing puzzle, Šárka repeatedly played with animals in the sandpit, she did the same thing over and over again: she buried them in the sand and then kept discovering them. Most likely she also wanted to be discovered, and this play also symbolised what had happened to her – disappearance of the person closest to her – her mum, and her current “discovery”, when her mum already in better health started to gradually get closer to her daughter (note: qualified interpretation of the therapist).

She had a little book with her, which she requested once after having repeatedly heard someone reading it to the other children present in the preschool. It was about a little rabbit whose mummy lost him – and every time when the little rabbit called his mummy and cried, Šárka covered the mouth of her granny with her little hand. It was too hard for her, but at the same time she felt she needed to relive it, to process it and to leave it behind in order to be able to move on.

Step by step Šárka started to establish a relationship with children and teachers, to draw attention to herself by doing funny things. The jokes helped her also to keep a safe distance. When we greeted one another in a circle and everyone was supposed to say their name – Šárka introduced herself as “Helma” (“Helmet”) – just like in case of the mole character the “helmet” allowed her to hide and protect herself. Gradually, in the course of a few months, “Helma” changed into “Šelma”, which offered us another piece of Šárka. So far in the form of a single letter, while the rest remained under the “helmet” until the day when we heard Šárka’s whole real name. The number of jokes and funny things kept growing, it was “inside out” communication. Often, we heard something ridiculous or nonsensical which was also some sort of a way how to prevent us from getting too close. Then the moment came when Šárka started to roll the ball with one of us, alone and without her granny. On the same day we saw her laughing heartily for the first time, when together with other children we kept throwing foam cubes into the air and the mole joined them flying. Šárka began expressing herself also in other ways, occasionally she shouted aloud and got scared by what she had done. Some other time she even started misbehaving. We were thrilled that she was on her way to her separation! At that time her granny told us that in the park the mole started sitting away – further and further and further.... from granny. Hu-

rrah! Šárka is making up for the delay in her development. Here comes the period of child defiance! In the meantime, the visits to her mum became more regular. Now, for a few weeks already, Šárka has been looking more often into our eyes and talking to us with no need to be helped by the mole or her granny. She lets us, completely at ease, come close to her and she still likes jokes and fun. Her granny can move away at least a bit and Šárka clearly enjoys also the relationship with other children and adults.

Due to adverse circumstances, Šárka at the most sensitive age for the child – 8 to 12 months – lost not only her strong relationship with her mother, and thus also the feeling of safety and confidence in people and the world. That is why Šárka burst into tears because of fear when someone said that the cleaning lady was coming. All strange ladies, who appear unexpectedly, remind her of the loss of her mother and of the infant care centre. For the sake of healthy development of her personality Šárka needs to regain confidence in people and to feel safe. Thanks to her granny, who takes excellent care of her three-year-old granddaughter, who needs special care and her constant presence, she gradually learns in the “Preschool” how to enjoy the relationship with other people and children, and with increasing curiosity starts to peep out at the world. Therefore, in the “Preschool” we try to secure the best, but also natural conditions for her. We try to warn Šárka of any expected change and to tell her everything in advance. Even though some situations are clearly hard for Šárka (many new children with parents in the preschool, later arrival of one of us), with her granny’s help we strive to assist Šárka in coping with the situation to the best of her abilities and thus make her stronger and better prepared for her future life. At the beginning Šárka was mainly as an observer in the preschool, while now she very actively and happily engages in all group activities: she likes to frolic with children, she likes to sing, she likes to create things, but she likes the best any funny situations with other children – e.g. cutting coloured straws which then fly around and hit the children and adults nearby.

For us the story of Šárka is a story of inner strength of a child who wants to overcome the trauma and deprivation to which she was exposed during her life. We are glad that our preschool is able to create external conditions in which this inner strength can mobilise.

(Interpretations by Marta Linková, the qualified head therapist, were used in the case study.)

TEP – three-year experience (Marta Linková, head therapist, TEP)

I believe that crucial for the evaluation of the TEP project is the assessment of effectiveness or practical benefits for clients. Throughout the period of three years, it became obvious that the program is most beneficial for those who attend the preschool regularly for the period of at least six months. In our target group, however, this appeared to be the biggest challenge – to attract clients who would keep coming to us over a longer period of time. Even though the program is designed as a “low-threshold”, for many of our clients it is an insurmountable obstacle to follow the regular schedule and to assume responsibility for a long-term commitment. The participation in the program requires the efforts to overcome scruples associated with spending time at a place where “everyone can see each other” and where (not only) children, as the time goes, start behaving spontaneously – often causing problems.

Another big challenge was the program publicity which was to inform the clients well ahead about what to expect from the program and what assistance they can receive from us. With respect to publicity, face-to-face meetings and visits to various organisations were considered very useful, nonetheless due to a large amount of organisations and a huge offer in the City of Prague this type of publicity is insufficient. It would be helpful to extend the program to cover the whole week – the early discontinuation of the visits to the TEP was often caused by changes in the family – the mother found a job or had to go to work for financial reasons. Since our program offers only a single day a week without parents and only in the morning, the possibility to come to us is very limited. It would certainly help if the TEP could be run as a whole-week program with a broader offer for children without parents, or perhaps also as an afternoon program which would allow the family to choose the most fitting time to attend. Thus the program would be a considerable support, not a complication for the family life, and account would also be taken of the limited possibilities of vulnerable families.

It has become evident that in the future the TEP will face difficulties with regard to its financing which depends on the number of clients attending the program. Since the program is primarily intended for children who are still unfit to attend a collective establishment without parents, the TEP has proven highly beneficial also when there are only a few children in the preschool or when only one or two families come to

the preschool for some time. In such a case a more personalised approach can be applied, when we gradually become closer with the family and achieve a better therapeutic effect. In consequence thereof, the operation of the preschool is financially demanding, and in the Czech Republic it is very difficult to get sponsors and no support can be expected from the state or local self-governing bodies.

As concerns the actual content of the program, gradually we started to appreciate the Montessori method, namely not only the educational aids and toys, but also the spatial arrangements and, last but not least, the ideological and theoretical background of the Montessori approach to children and their education.

In retrospect we can say that the TEP is an opportunity for families that would for various reasons be unwilling to undergo therapy. Also, closer cooperation with authorities and non-profit organisations has proven to be of major benefit.

We also learned how much we benefitted from closer cooperation with other organisations. We repeatedly witnessed that thanks to mutual communication the assistance to clients was more effective.

Essential for the TEP is the well-coordinated staff using a uniform approach. We do consider a mistake that in the first two years we underrated the significance of regular common supervisions.

Incorporation of the new “Family by Play” method in the TEP

Also, pilot testing of the “Family by Play” method took place in the preschool. The employees of the preschool repeatedly tried to combine both the approaches. Nonetheless, children only rarely chose to play with the toys and the interactive blanket. They examined the toys, took them out and put them back again, but were not inspired by them to engage in a longer lasting activity. Therefore,



we have come to the conclusion that the “Family by Play” method is not useful for the TEP. It is fit for entirely different circumstances – when the child at his/her home, in a familiar environment, gets to know the new toy in the presence of family members and a social worker, and this situation should inspire the child to engage in relationship-building activities – playing with parents or a social worker or a volunteer. The TEP, on the contrary, focuses mainly on guiding children to independent activities leading to the acquisition of new knowledge and skills. At home, where everything is familiar and safe, the child feels relaxed, while in the preschool the child is mobilised and exposed to a strange environment and many new and changing stimuli, moreover in a collective setting.

An essential output of the work in the Prague TEP is the “Methodology of the TEP – Therapeutic Educational Program”, followed by the staff of all HoSt’s preschools.

In all three branches the TEPs take place 2 to 3 times a week, always for 6 hours, according to the availability of staff of the branch.

During the project implementation, a total of 79 children and 70 parents came to all 3 TEPs. Initially we thought that one child with a parent would participate in the program for no more than 6 months. It turned out, however, that the child (or the parent) needs much more time to achieve the required progress. Hence, account shall be taken of the fact that some mothers with children participate in the program for many months, sometimes even more than a year.

ACTIVITY No 3

Scientific research: cooperation with university departments – Charles University in Prague

Why has been research included in the project

It was Christian Holtet, our consultant, who inspired us to include the scientific aspects and cooperation with universities in the project. It was an excellent idea, which was later elaborated on, and quantitative and qualitative research was done around our newly developed method. This way the quality and credibility of our “Family by Play” method was enhanced.

Research – a study performed by students served at the initial stage of the project as a starting point that would help identify the place where the method should be applied in the work with family. Gradually, during the training of new staff and volunteers, more and more theoretical considerations were added which later enriched the training of new workers on this method. They served as a framework for the application of this method of play in social work. The research is supplemented by findings from neurobiology, polyvagal theory, developmental psychology and attachment theory. The research was conducted by teachers (PhDr. Kateřina Šámalová, PhD. and PhDr. Olga Havránková) and students (Michaela Kralertová, Zuzana Vomočilová, Martin Zeman) from the Department of Social Work of the Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague. The practical research was extremely important to validate the method's efficiency in practice. Some findings have been confirmatory (i.e. confirmed our original hypotheses), some other were surprising and new. Important, in our opinion, was the use of evaluation questionnaires carefully completed after each visit to the family. This evaluation form was not only a relevant part of the research and data collection, but also a structure acting as a guide during the meeting in the family focused on play. The HoSt's social workers and volunteers continuously visited the families – to complete questionnaires/forms. These were later under the supervision of teachers (prof. PhDr. RNDr. Marie Vágnerová, CSc. and doc. Pavlína Janošová, Ph.D.) digitised by students (Mi-



Students

loš David, Michaela Zeithamová, Kateřina Čunátová, Eva Závůrková, Kateřina Herzogová, Tereza Rálišová) from the Department of Pedagogy of the Hussite Theological Faculty, Charles University in Prague.

As a part of cooperation with universities, meetings with both the departments took place, particularly at the commencement of the project. At these meetings the participants discussed what they will do together. The meetings with the Department of Pedagogy of the Hussite Theological Faculty, Charles University in Prague dedicated to the method and work with family aimed to give the students a deeper understanding of our work with family and our motivation to develop the method so that they get a better idea of what they are working on. The questionnaires were sent to the students approximately every 3 months. The actual number of questionnaires depended on the possibilities to use the method in families in the period concerned. At first, we have to get to know the family, or to help stabilise the situation in the family, only then we can come to them to play.

Evaluation/indicators

The cooperation with an academic team has raised a plethora of interesting and thought-provoking questions regarding our work. Those of us working in HoSt are practitioners. We work with people in the field, we do not study them, at least not at the academic level. We know their life, from the first-hand experience. The research gives us an opportunity to look at our work through data and statistics, to verify the effectiveness of our work. Unfortunately, due to our limited capacities and professional focus we cannot implement such an extensive research alone. Hence, we had approached experts from the academic community who helped us create materials for the evaluation of effects of our work – a family observation record sheet. Subsequently, they processed and evaluated the collected data. The interim reports from the research gave us information on the progress achieved in work with family. The interim reports also constituted an important source of information to be used as a basis for modifications of the method and subsequent training of workers and volunteers. We got an overall idea of the effects of play in the family. In general, the cooperation was interesting and inspiring, hopefully also for the students.

Extremely helpful in conducting the research and processing the data was Karel Hnilica, the scholar who elaborated a highly professional, clear and well-structured output of the entire research.

The main output of the project is the “RESEARCH STUDY ON THE “FAMILY BY PLAY” METHOD

Below you will find an excerpt from the study – **Main findings.**

In this research we sought to identify factors having effect on how often, how long and how passionately the mothers in families involved in our program play with their children.

It has come out that one of the key factors is the inner predisposition of the mother. It was operationalized through an item in the questionnaire ascertaining whether and how often the mother plays with her children at home. We assume that the answer to this question reflects the habit (the mother is in the habit of playing with children), the attitude (the mother has a certain – positive or negative – attitude to playing with children), and also the internalized social norm (the mother considers correct and important to play with her children). It is a variable which would deserve further research.

It has been proven that this predisposition is related – both at the “input” and “output” side – to multiple factors. In agreement with our expectations they include the experience gained in the original family: the mothers with whom their parents used to play tend to play with their own children more than the mothers with whom their parents did not play. This transgenerational transfer is fairly powerful; in some families it is obviously a vicious circle. Nonetheless, it turns out that some mothers, with whom their parents did not play, break this vicious circle and play with their children, thus create more favourable conditions for their growth than they enjoyed themselves.

On the other hand, though, the fact that the mother’s parents used to play with her is not a guarantee that she will play with her children. E.g. the number of children and financial situation of the family comes into play. Because of that the mother is tired and busy with other duties and has no time to play with her children.

The mother’s predisposition to play with children at the “output” side determines whether the play takes place at all, and if so, for how long. It also has an effect on how long it takes the mother to get engaged in the play and whether she enjoys it. Apart from that it most likely also determines whether the mother is in the habit of creating conditions to be able to play with her children and not to be disturbed by visitors, telephone calls, etc.

Whether the play takes place at all and for how long is influenced also by other variables. One of them being e.g. the mother's health status. Irrespective of the mother's attitude to playing with her children and irrespective of whether she considers the play with her children important, if she feels unwell she does not play with her children often. Similarly, the play is influenced also by the number of children: mothers rather play with children if only one child or two children are present at home at that moment than when more children are present.

Thus, our results also indicate that gentle intervention of social workers can initiate a change in family interactions and can lead to a change in the mother's attitude to play.

Movies

In the framework of the project, THE VELUX FOUNDATIONS supported also the production of two movies. Both movies were made by Veronika Korčáková, a documentary filmmaker. There are two versions, namely a Czech version and a version with English subtitles.

The first movie is a short 4-minute spot featuring the HoSt's work with family, activities of CEKAS, their cooperation, and the new "Rodina hrou/Family by Play" method. It is used above all for educational and fundraising activities of the Centre for Professional Work with Vulnerable Families (Centrum profesionální práce s ohroženou rodinou), for presentation of the project and presentation of the activities of HoSt and CEKAS at seminars and conferences.

The second movie is a 28-minute time-lapse documentary on work with family – a sociological study on the "Rodina hrou/Family by play" method. It has a poetic and fitting title, namely "Křehké kouzlo hry/ The Brittle Miracle of Play". The movie depicted stories of three families from different towns. The central motif is spending time with children and playing. Little by little life stories of the families unfold, we can witness their transformation over the given period of time until the final denouement...sometimes with happy ending, some other time with not so happy ending.

Evaluation/indicators

Both movies have already been shown at many events for the public and also for students who come to our Centre for an excursion or an internship. In spring 2019, the short movie was presented to 120 participants in seminars held in Ostrava, Brno, Hradec Králové and Říčany u Prahy.

“The Brittle Miracle of Play” was premiered in December 2019 at the “Child in Mind” international conference and was seen by 120 participants from 8 countries (Denmark, Australia, Japan, Romania, Netherlands, United Kingdom, Malta and Czech Republic).

The movie will become a component part of trainings of staff on the “Family by Play” method.

Seminars on innovation programs for work with family

For the first half of 2020, a total of 5 seminars on innovation methods in work with vulnerable family were scheduled. Due to COVID-19 pandemic they had to be cancelled and thanks to the understanding of THE VELUX FOUNDATIONS representatives they will be held only after the end of the project in autumn 2020.

ACTIVITY No 4

Development of the „CENTER for complex care for families with children at risk of neglect” as a basis for volunteering ad professional work, study and scientific activities facilitating

How did the idea of establishing the Centre come up

When we were drafting the project application and defining individual activities, we realised that during the project implementation outputs will be produced in multiple fields: in the field of education; in the field of services – running the “TEP-Preschool by Play”; platform for cooperation with academic workplaces - research, place for internships and work placements of students; relevant methods for work with families; in the field of fundraising activities for future financing of project outputs. We got an idea that we could set up a Centre which would provide an umbrella for all these outputs, translate them into practice and engage in fundraising.

Evaluation

Now, at the end of the project, we are ready to provide the Centre with the following activities:

1| In the field of education

- Special training on the “Family by Play” method for HoSt’s social workers (in Czech and English)
- Special training on the “Family by Play” method for HoSt’s volunteers (in Czech and English))
- Special training on the “Family by Play” method for external interested parties in the Czech Republic
- Teaching aids for social workers: “Four crisis situations through the eyes of a child - a manual for staff of the authorities for social and legal protection of children”, “Four crisis situations through the eyes of a child - a guide for staff of the authorities for social and legal protection of children”, and “Picture playing cards”(19 picture cards serve as a teaching aid for workers in a conversation with the child).
- In April 2020, on behalf of the CEKAS organisation we submitted an application to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs for accreditation of 3 courses on quality management for workers in social services that will be offered to social service providers.

2| In the field of cooperation with research workplaces and universities

We provide excursions and internships to students interested in the HoSt’s services, including the TEP. The Centre is getting ready to become one of the model workplaces



View from the garden

offering work placements to students under the new project financed by THE VELUX FOUNDATIONS. If we manage to get funds for a community centre (see below), we will engage in the development and implementation of the program also students from universities and tertiary vocational schools specialising in social work.

3| In the field of services: operation of the TEP – therapeutic educational program. We have sought to obtain funds to finance the TEP after the end of the project. For the next 3.5 years the TEP will be run at our Centre, which will also serve as a workplace for student excursions and work placements.

4| Relevant methods for work with families

Development of a new method for child therapy applied in Prague, Hradec Králové and Ostrava branches, together with the TEP.

The method can be used also in other services offered by HoSt to families, e.g. for assisted contacts. Thanks to play we get closer to the families. The families are more willing to tell us what they need and we try to respond to their needs.

5| In the field of fundraising

In the course of the project, the project staff of HoSt and CEKAS prepared and submitted lots of applications for financing the activities of the HoSt and CEKAS organisations, namely to both private entities and state authorities – which were mostly successful. They will pursue this activity also in the future.

Before the end of the project, when we were looking for ways how to finance the Centre in the future, the idea of adding a “community centre” arose, namely a community centre for the following target groups: (i) families with children in unfavourable social situation, including families with a single parent and (ii) children and youth from families in unfavourable social situation.

If we manage to get any support, activities focused on leisure time, education and public awareness of the aforementioned target groups will be added to the existing activities financed from the project.

The implementation of our Centre’s plans was impeded by COVID-19 pandemic in the first half of 2020, when restrictions on gatherings were introduced. We planned to hold 6 seminars, various training courses and student internships and work placements were pre-negotiated. Sadly, everything had to be cancelled and postponed to a later period after the end of the project.

CONCLUSIONS

Benefits of the project reaped by HoSt

The project has provided HoSt with an effective tool to help families, designed both for professional workers and laymen/volunteers.



Thanks to the method we managed to provide support to more than ninety families.

3 pillars of preventive work with families have been created:

Pillar 1: “Family by Play” method” – focused on assistance to families that for some reason cannot and do not want to go “anywhere”. It suits them to stay in their safe home environment, which is why the method is very fitting to renew relationships in the family.

Pillar 2: Low-threshold therapeutic educational program designed for parents who are more autonomous and capable of regular participation in the program.

Pillar 3: (a) Ways of support following up on the “Family by Play” method and “TEP-Preschool by Play” – child therapy and individual therapy – when parents and children consciously work on the development of their personality, and (b) ways of support that use the method and the TEP as an important addition to “tougher” work in the field of social and legal protection of children – assisted contacts, social work in the field.

Thanks to this project we could intensify work with families across all the services offered by HoSt. Thanks to the seminars and the conference held by our Centre, we managed to increase the awareness of our activities and to enthuse lots of colleagues also from other fields of work.

Benefits of the project reaped by CEKAS

CEKAS, z.ú. organisation focuses on drawing up and subsequent implementation of projects, primarily in field of social work and education. One of the cardinal principles we stick to is that we manage only those projects in which we have been involved ever since the beginning – from the idea, through drawing up of the project and its submission up to the selection of external staff and experts. It is only under these conditions that we embark on the management of large projects.

Thanks to the “Rodina hrou/Family by Play” project, in which our team was involved, we have gained more valuable experience from the cooperation with HoSt, our expert partner. We got a deeper insight in work with vulnerable children and families which we can later put to good use when drawing up and preparing other projects in this field. Despite the fact that we have been collaborating with the HoSt organisation for more than 5 years, we still have a lot



The CEKAS team

to learn from its workers and volunteers: invigorating team spirit, unselfishness, willingness to get engaged in brand new things, fair approach. Apart from their competence and professionalism, these are the reasons why we enjoy so much implementing projects with them.

THE VELUX FOUNDATIONS
VILLUM FONDEN ✕ VELLUX FONDEN

Another benefit is the cooperation with THE VELUX FOUNDATIONS staff referred to at the beginning. Not always are we lucky enough to implement a project in the atmosphere of trust and support. In case of “Velux” projects, it is the added value which taught us a lot – among other things, we do not have to be afraid to admit having problems since the problems are faced in any work, and they address them willingly and with understanding. Another bonus is the minimum red tape which allows us to fully concentrate on practical and quality management of activities. An irreplaceable role is played by regular visits of THE VELUX FOUNDATIONS representatives, who zero in on particular outputs and can see them in practice, discuss them with us, seek solutions openly, talk the necessary changes over. We appreciate these personal and friendly contacts very much.

Compiled by: Irena Tomešová, Alžběta Candia Muñoz, graphic design: Eva Petruželková, June 2020

The brochure was produced under the project Development of the “FAMILY BY PLAY” method – method for use with children in vulnerable families, supported by the Danish private foundations - THE VELUX FOUNDATIONS, 2017 - 2020.

The project was implemented by the teams of HoSt Home-Start CR (Kateřina Brožková, Alžběta Candia Muñoz, Marta Linková, Martina Přečková, Lenka Ráčková, Vlasta Spilková, Kateřina Vápenková, Petra Vonášková, Magda Žabenská) and CEKAS, z.ú. (Helena Chleborádová, Zora Fídlarová, Irena Tomešová, Alena Valečková, Martina Zahradníková).

