

## **FAMILY SUPPORT**

### **Problems**

People who we try to help are generally poor, socially passive, usually unemployed, without an education, professional qualifications and many life skills. Live in rundown-flats, do not work, do not pay rent, live on welfare, minor black market dealings, petty theft. They live hour by hour, running away from creditors, debt, they are evicted, addicted, sick. They live at odds with each other, often divorced, in conflict with their neighbours, with the local administration (council), services. They do not know their rights, they cannot defend themselves, feel bad, do not believe in their own arguments. They have bad experiences with people, do not trust others, they are often treated with contempt and scorn. They feel helpless with many problems, don't see any prospects for themselves so don't engage in the upbringing of their children.

These children are left to fend for themselves, grow up on the streets, among others similar to themselves and cope as best as they can. They have deep emotional problems, considerable developmental deficits, extremely poor cultural, civilization and intellectual heritage. Without a stable situation nor support of adults they live in constant stress fighting for survival. Lack of parental care and acceptance results in that they do not believe in themselves and feel worse than others. Conflicts, violence, manipulation and adult games teach children the game of mistrust. They do not go to the nursery where they could make up for educational, social and emotional deficits. When they do go to school they have a very poor vocabulary, cannot read, write or count. They do not understand many words used by teachers and their peers, many devices are unknown to them, they know little about the world. At school they are in contact with children from better-functioning families, which emphasizes their material, social and cultural poverty. Often children from the margin of society are discriminated against and neglected at school. They quickly notice that they have no chance at school and begin to avoid it. Lack of understanding, help and support at this time causes a sense of injustice in the child and a rapid subsidence in disruptive behavior. Many of them aged 10-15 end up in care and resocialization facilities, where after a few years they return as criminals and alcoholics, continuing the family tradition. The main reason for their degradation is the lack of self-esteem and self-efficacy, mistrust of others, the lack of any real prospects in life, lack of meaningful patterns of effective action, with numerous destructive patterns (passiveness, lying, addiction, violence, crime, etc.).

### **Help**

I help someone in something. I help someone only if I do what he wants. I'm not ready to help with everything. Only in what I consider to be authentic, real, to be effective and which does not affect my core values. I help in something only if I support something which someone is already doing. Even if clumsily. If I do what he wants, but he does not do that himself, then it does not help. This doing things for him corrupts. My help is to follow someone and selectively support his aspirations. What seems to me to be disingenuous and destructive I skip. I can evaluate so far as I can understand that someone I am helping from his point of view, as far as I can see the world through his eyes. This is the most difficult and not always successful. When I selectively support the effort of someone's actions attempting to understand his perspective then I do so without prejudice to his autonomy. He decides himself about his life and I will serve him only in matters which he cannot handle himself. When helping someone I feel that I understand them, and I'm on his side, then that person is usually willing to make use of my help. If not then he only resists and usually nothing emerges from this aid. Helping I try to not only follow them but also to help as little as is needed so that person may get on by themselves. Only then can I avoid doing things for him, thus weakening him and help him rebuild his confidence. Maybe sometimes you have to limit someone's sovereignty (for example, in defense of someone else) but then this is not help.

## **Social work**

Most families who I have tried to help are families from the margins of society. Often an excuse to initiate contacts with the family were the problems of their children in school. In making contact with them I never insisted on any preconditions. I declare unilateral assistance in caring for their children (e.g. in the youth club) and help in solving social issues. Such proposals are normally approved by the family, because they are safe and comply with their expectations. At this stage, I just try to help in what family members are interested in. If possible, I pay particular attention to make them solve social problems together and not do it for them. I avoid arbitrariness, assessing and instructing. I try to show them respect, kindness and tolerance, treating them as partners, to understand their situation, "from their perspective". I leave them plenty of space for their own evaluations and decisions about how to resolve other problems, even if they are not very effective. It is important they do as many things as possible their way and only have themselves to thank. The mere accompaniment and support of them while they are experiencing difficulty and want to give up, is very helpful to them. Above all else I try to ensure that they will not give up, that they will accept the fact that not many things are successful initially, that they should try again and learn from their mistakes. I discuss with them what they did well and what they did not so well. Together, we are looking for errors and possible solutions for the future. Sometimes we practice them in role plays. The most important thing is for them to be able to see that gradually we are making progress, that they are more and more successful, and they owe it above all to themselves. That a temporary failure is not just another humiliation but also educational.

Supporting family members I try to be honest, open and authentic. I do not do anything contrary to them or behind their backs. I do not try to manipulate them nor press anything. I can tell them what I think about something, but they always choose, because they bear all the consequences of what they do, I almost never do. I never declare too much. During this time, warily watching me they assess the conformity of what I say to what I'm doing and how I feel. They check and test me on numerous occasions. If I'm honest, if I prove myself in difficult cases, if I am not naive and cannot be used, I can gradually gain their trust and respect. It is my attitude to them, understanding, respect and partnership which also builds their self-esteem and self-respect. If I win their confidence, if they feel that I understand them, if they feel safe with me, they usually begin to talk about their problems.

If I have to deal with the addict, who is degraded and is ignored by the family, has no influence on anything, I take strenuous efforts to get through to them and to have good contact. This is difficult in the beginning. The person avoids contact because they have learnt from unpleasant experiences to expect the attack, pressure, be made to feel guilty, prejudice, etc. They are also the person who usually has the most difficult situation in the family and are the most motivated to change only they don't see any opportunities for themselves. If I can talk frankly with them, if only to convince them that I'm not against them, that I understand, most often they are willingly to accept assistance. Getting drunk and anesthetizing themselves, they are gradually killing themselves. Understanding and support restores their desire to live and hope to change their fate. As soon as they see a chance to make some changes in their relationship with their partner and position in the family they are ready to do a great deal. In families from the social margin in this situation are mostly men. If addiction has not gone too far, if there is no clear physical consequences, rehabilitation can usually be quite rapid. Often, such men have many strengths and potential. If he only has the desire to live again, he can without much difficulty find a job, take care of himself, gradually rebuild his reputation in the community. After rejection and much humiliation in his relationship, it is important for him to feel physically attractive. It is crucial for him to recover his self-confidence and his abilities and hope for the successful relationship with his partner.

## **Marital therapy**

The primary objective of family assistance, which resolves conflicts between themselves through mutual violence is for each of them to understand their motives and circumstances and the motives and circumstances of the partner. This enables one to look at the conduct of the partner in term of patterns of behaviour and expectations emerging from the home, and mutual reactions and resentment arising in the course of their relationship. This helps to reduce mutual distrust, the inclusion of a partner's reasoning, without suspecting premeditation and malice, and recognize and appreciate their own sins in the escalation of conflict and confrontation. It allows better mutual understanding in order to search and learn agreement.

In order for these aims to be realized the couple must be ready to meet a number of conditions. First, it is possible if both parties still want to solve their mutual problems. Second, they must agree on, even temporarily, a cease-fire and in particular physical confrontation. Third, they must be interested in finding the causes of problems and conflicts not only with a partner but also with themselves. Finally, they must be ready to change their behaviour towards their partner and search for compromise and agreement.

Especially difficult is working with couples from marginalized communities. Usually, they are overwhelmed by the dramatic social problems, often demanding interim radical action. Most are dependent on the help of various social services, which often interfere with their marital conflicts arbitrarily pushing their solutions (e.g. conditioning assistance on obtaining a divorce). People from the margins of society have deeply rooted patterns of behaviour of destructive and confrontational forms of conflict resolution in the family. They are generally very wary even to their relatives and ready for a ruthless struggle. They generally have very low self-awareness and willingness to change. If only because they do not believe in themselves and their abilities. Most are very afraid of weakness and humiliation. They do not have the habit of asking or apologizing. Do not expect anything good from others. Therefore, they believe that they will have only as much as they manage to snatch, extort, manipulate. Between the partners there are at times significant differences in the ability of expression, capability and position in society, in practical life skills, and finally in the position in the family. So long introduction and preparation is necessary to even begin the process of marital therapy. Their basic social problems must be first solved, their faith in themselves restored and their causative abilities, break their distrust of others and offset serious differences between their capabilities.

I work with families in the tradition of individual work oriented on the family. This approach is particularly useful in working with families from the social margins. This usually means working in teams of therapists, continued in the long term in the form of individual contacts with each family member (couples). Only after extensive preparation (a year or two) are contacts with couples attempted. The individual work phase serves to solve basic social problems of the family, without which it is impossible to work on emotional and family problems. It is also necessary to establish a closer contact in advance with each partner, and obtain their trust and confidence. Only then is it possible to study their own history, history of their relationship, interaction and motivation to change. Simultaneous work by the team with each of the partners enables on one hand knowledge and understanding of virtue and the point of view of each of them, on the other hand their interactions and it helps to find that what unites them. The condition to commence their joint work is to ensure in advance that each of them understands himself well and his functioning in this relationship and the functioning of the partner. Before this happens there can be no dialogue between them, much less agreement.

When partners resolve their major social problems and relatively stabilize their life situation, it is possible to start work on their relationship. At the beginning I meet with each family member individually analyzing their needs and problems with them. As a rule, each of them sees these things as the effects of the nature and conduct of their partner. During this time, I try to listen and understand each of them. This is a step for releasing resentments and grudges. When it peters out I usually suggest to look at his experience of the family of his origin. We analyze the relationship with their parents, learned patterns of behaviour and directives from home, the resulting ideas about love, partner, family, raising children, etc. Then we analyze the history of the relationship: the partner they are looking for, who they pretended to be, what they expected from a partner, how their partner let them down, how they reacted. What conflicts

arose between them, what methods of fighting they experienced and what they themselves used, what were the consequences, how they coped, what happened to their mutual feelings, what is their current relationship. Upon completion of this analysis of each of them, I propose a symmetrical analysis of a partner. What patterns of behaviour they brought from their home, what type of partner they were looking for, who they pretended to be, what they felt let down with, how they coped with domestic conflict, and how they now see their mutual relations. After that we discuss what each of them now expects from their partner and what they are prepared to do. Individual meetings with each partner are carried out until each of them understands both their own behaviour and the conduct of their partner. Not only knowledge and understanding both their history's are important but above all a deeper consciousness of their experiences and to become aware of what is really important for each of them in their relationship. Only after such individual preparations can joint marital or family sessions begin. These relate to what is difficult for them in their partner's, how they cope, what they expect from one another and for what they are ready and prepared for as regards each other. This allows us to confront their previous perceptions about the partner with what they really want and what they are going through. These sessions are also devoted to rebuilding the mutual bond of trust and understanding and to make mutual expectations more realistic. This is often the most important and hardest part of the process. Of course, working with every family is different and the steps presented are overly simplified, but its basic features are similar and apply not only to families from social margins.

The next natural step in working with a family is often the analysis of relationships and behaviour problems of children. To begin with it mainly concerns the discussion of issues with children, their behaviour, deficits and skills. Gradually the assistant transfers the attention of the ward towards emotional relationships with children in other words mutual feelings and expectations. This facilitates the adoption of a child's perspective, understanding their needs, problems and unfulfilled expectations. This allows parents to better identify with their children whose fate and history often resemble their own. The assistant avoids giving advice but rather raises questions and encourages the search for their own solutions regarding their children.

Only after arranging and solving problems in their relations will the relative peace follow and stability of emotional relations in the family. Only then there is the belief in their own ability and energy to supplement the education, skills, and finally take and maintain a permanent job. This is often accompanied by the willingness to acquire many of the specific skills needed to succeed in these plans and the period of increased social activity. This requires the formulation of another contract concerning both the scope and forms of assistance from the assistant and readiness for concrete action on the part of the ward. The assistant helps then to find opportunities to improve skills and jobs. Motivates and prepares the ward to search for, and to make his expectations more realistic but above all support him in overcoming difficulties and assist during crises and fluctuations of faith in their own strength.

Most of the assistant's contacts takes place in the homes of wards, because on their home ground they feel more confident. Meetings are held at least 2-3 times a week and usually last 1-2 hours. The family assistant has under his care 8-10 families at any one time. Socially excluded people require long-term, intensive help.