

NEWSLETTER



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FORM

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Therapeutic foster care for
unaccompanied minors and
their foster families



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1. EDITORIAL

WHERE ARE WE IN THE PROJECT?

By project coordinator *Katja Fournier*, Odisee University of Applied Sciences

The *fall* is often described as a season where we should reflect on where we stand, how we got here and where we want to go. This reflection strongly asks why we do what we do.

The FORM-project is not just a professional project. It is a project that is strongly motivated by a profound sense of human dignity and the promotion the wellbeing of children who have experienced things that no child, or even human being, should experience.

A project where partners from *Belgium, Cyprus, Germany* and *Italy* came together to see how could we enhance foster care to therapeutic care for unaccompanied minor who suffer from complex trauma's.

A project where the child is in the centre and the aim is to support and reinforce the adults (foster care workers) in their life on how to hold them and how to increase their well-being and their capacity to connect. The testimony of *Luigi* in this newsletter will show how much this project and the everyday practices of foster families and foster care workers are "*born from the heart*".

Fall is also the end of the harvest time where you sum up the results of your actions.

Patrick Meurs will describe a bit further in this newsletter what the main points of the *training module* that is being developed are. A model that is based on extensive research, professional expertise and practice.

Together with the *guidance document* that also is being developed we hope that, at the end of the project, we will have strong tools and knowledge to support foster care workers in all countries and settings. Our interim report of the first 18 months of the project has been validated, a sign that our progress is seen and recognised.

Fall is also a season prone to cosy family time. But what does it mean to have family time for unaccompanied minor who left everything behind and have lost a sense of what a reliable family could be?

The *training module* and the *guidance document* being developed will help foster care workers to support the unaccompanied children and their families to connect and re-connect, to build bridges and understanding so that hopefully for them *fall*, one day, also becomes a cosy family time.

Fall is also the sign that the end of the year (and the arrival of a new year) is approaching. For 2024 we will be looking at testing the content in *pilot cases*, disseminating the results and the tools and looking at *policy recommendation* on how to implement more structurally therapeutic foster care for unaccompanied minors.

Anyone, any organisation who would like to know more, or collaborate is more than welcome to contact us.

I wish you all a lovely read and a cosy fall season.

Kinds regards,
Katja- for all the FORM partners

2.FOCUS ON THE TRAINING COURSE CONTENTS

By Corinna Poholski M.A. and Professor Dr. Patrick Meurs, University of Kassel

UPDATING THE TRAINING MODEL OF THE FORM-PROJECT

In our *training programme* for foster care workers as part of the European FORM project, we focus on finding ways to provide training and professional guidance to *foster care workers of unaccompanied refugee minors*.

After presenting the theoretical basis with the guidance model during the partner meeting in Rome (March 2023), we derived a *practical handbook version* from it in cooperation with the five partner organizations of the FORM project. This training model as well as the *guidance model* can be used by the foster care workers of the partner organizations *Pleegzorg Oost-Vlaanderen (Belgium)*, *“Hope For Children” - CRC Policy Center (Cyprus)* and *Salesiani per il Sociale (Italy)* in their practice and during the upcoming pilot phase of the project.

The *practical training* model provides the *10-point programme* according to the theoretical framework of the counselling model. Each of the ten points includes a summary of the theoretical basis, definitions of psychodynamic concepts and several practical tools, such as toolkit elements (for family interventions and for the helpers themselves), self-reflection exercises, case analysis tools and a networking approach. Before entering into the main contents of the training, the training model clarifies the following premises of the training programme as essential steps to be expected by the recipients of the training programme: defining the foster care workers as the target group of the training; clarifying the basic preconditions to be institutionalised by the authorities of the foster care) organisations; explaining how to use the delivered contents; and recommending the creation/re-structuring of a network as a framing element for the actual work of the foster care workers in the field.

As a starting point for the *10-point programme*, the first three points of the training model serve as a basis for foster carers to guide foster families with UAMs on how to create a *safe environment of trusting relationships* for children and young people – by recognising the specificities of complex trauma and its psychodynamics within foster families (*point 1*), by finding ways of self- and affect regulation (*point 2*), by recognising and naming the emotional rollercoaster of the child or young person and by establishing new attachment relationships (*point 3*).

In the following points, mentalising and self-reflection (*point 4*) and symbolizing and re-establishing the self by means of a narrative (*point 5*), foster care workers are offered techniques to guide foster families/parents in helping their children and young people to *process mentalising and reflecting on their losses* as well as the overwhelming and/or traumatic experiences they have faced before, during and after flight.

The other four points focus more on the practical field and shed light on *the obstacles and difficulties that may arise within the dynamics of foster care*, as foster parents and workers will eventually come into contact with hidden expressions of relational losses and dysregulation (*point 6*) as well as biopsychosocial cycles (*point 7*) in which the child is or may be trapped. It is about recognising hidden expressions and latent signs of loss, abandonment and trauma and finding space or creating opportunities to understand the ongoing dynamics. Through this process it will be possible for the caring environment of the foster child to maintain a holding stance in moments of crisis. While adolescents try to separate themselves from their parental figures, foster parents will benefit from specific guidance, while acknowledging the specific developmental tasks of their unaccompanied minor refugee of finding identity and autonomy (*point 8*) in the context of exile and the challenges that arise when a child's developmental process is influenced by the experience of flight or even hindered by a traumatic event (*point 9*).

In a circular way, the *10th point* of this programme will highlight the *work within a network* as a basic element where a reflective attitude and the acknowledgement of emotions will be beneficial to build capacities within the work in this specific field. In particular, this last point will provide a basis to help foster care workers to navigate through challenging moments and work with each individual case.

PREPARING FOR THE PILOT PHASE OF THE TRAINING PROGRAMME

After finalising the main contents of the training model (in an advanced second version), the model was send back to/shared with the four other partner organisations in preparation for the upcoming partner meeting in Cyprus (November 2023). During this meeting the training model will be discussed in more detail. We will also have the opportunity to schedule a live intervision as a common space for more in-depth case discussion and to test the 10-point programme. This will be an opportunity for partners to provide further feedback to be incorporated into the training model (as well as the counselling model).

In addition to the pilot phase, regular online meetings (every 4-8 weeks) and the possibility to schedule an online intervision will help to reflect on ongoing processes. At the same time, we will continuously adapt both the *training model* and the *guidance model* in relation to the partners' experiences in their field of practice.



Professor Dr. Patrick Meurs, University of Kassel

3. ON THE SPOTLIGHT:

3RD TRANSNATIONAL PARTNER MEETING -SALESIANI PER IL SOCIALE-

FORM training for experts and professionals in the fostercare for Unaccompanied Minors Refugees, Rome - 6, 7, 8 March 2023 .

The training and co-development session on the guidance model on the care for UMR in foster families and the training on that model took place from 6 to 8 March 2023 in Rome hosted by project partner *Salesiani per il Sociale APS*.

The meeting has been coordinated by the Odisee University of Applied Sciences, *Katja Fournier* and saw the participation of all partners including the University of Kassel, Pleegzorg Oost -Vlaanderen, Hope for Children CRC Policy Center and ENSA European Network of Social Authorities.

The primary target group of this meeting have been experienced foster care workers (and especially with experience in working with UMR), supervisors and managers of foster care workers; it also involved as secondary target group: foster families, scientific experts and policy representatives.



The floor to partners from Salesiani per il Social APS and Borgo Ragazzi don Bosco:

“During the March meeting, with the Foster and Solidarity Family Movement of Borgo Ragazzi don Bosco, we welcomed 20 practitioners from the European project FORM - to the national headquarters to develop specific training on foster care for unaccompanied foreign minors.

I here am pleased to share words from *Simona*, social worker at Borgo Ragazzi Don Bosco:

“It was very nice to be able to share and learn from the different ways of working on foster care with UMR according to the countries. Listening to *Dr. Meurs*, a psychoanalyst and lecturer at the University of Kassel, speaking about trauma has been most interesting,

I found myself there because that is what we experience concretely with the children. Foster care is a path that gives a lot but is also made of hardships, being able to share the difficulties was important. In the exchange with professionals from other parts of Europe, we felt a lot of interest and appreciation for our ways of welcoming Unaccompanied Foreign Minors, it was nice to share and to be able to make our model known”

The Salesiani per il Sociale would like to thank:

- Roma Capitale in the person of *Piero Caputo*, through his facts and concreteness he was able to restore the importance and value of networking
- *Ilaria and Luigi*, foster parents of the Fostering and Solidarity Families Movement for the gift of their testimony of care and all the project partners Odisee Campus Schaarbeek , University of Kassel, Germany, Pleegzorg Oost-Vlaanderen, Hope For Children CRC Policy Center , ENSA - European Network of Social Authorities.

In and beyond, the FORM project continues to join efforts on behalf of lone children and families who open their doors to foster care and family solidarity.

I also enclose a testimonial from one of the parents we involved who wished to leave us something in writing.



Meeting at Borgo Ragazzi don Bosco

STORIES AND TESTIMONIES: VISIT TO BORGO RAGAZZI DON BOSCO - FOSTER FAMILIES

BORN FROM THE HEART

I am Luigi and this is the story of my wife Alida and me which started in 1994, when after a long preparation we travelled to Colombia to adopt a beautiful little girl, named *Marlen*. We stayed in Bogota with her for about a month, and then returned together to Italy, crowning a long-cherished dream: to be parents and to give to Marlen all the love and support we could. Everything proceeded well in our family, with just some challenges related to school, where Marlen didn't have excellent results, but where she enjoyed to share her happiness and generosity.

Our life was joyful and peaceful, however a dramatic surprise arrived: after turning 18, *Marlen* was diagnosed with SLE (Systemic lupus erythematosus), a serious disease of the immune system.

A long battle began, with many therapies and struggles. *Marlen* fought like a heroine, but her small body could no longer resist: her heart gave out on October 16, 2010, after giving us the big gift of achieving the socio-psycho-pedagogical matura diploma from the hospital.

From that moment on life turned gloomy, with many struggles, even in our relation as a couple. After a few years of suffering, we felt that we were at a crossroads: continuing to plunge into the darkness of depression or try to give meaning to so much pain.

We started to think that we could do something to help those in need, and by a series of coincidences in 2013, we came to know the *Borgo Ragazzi don Bosco*.

We attended a meeting and a training course they organized about foster care. The course ended in March and unexpectedly, at the end of June, we were offered to meet Dissan, a Muslim seventeen-year-old boy from Bangladesh.

We were full of fear and not really supported by our relatives and friends, however we decided to start this adventure with enthusiasm and hope.

The relationship with Dissan was natural and cheerful. He heard from his family in Bangladesh by phone, but at the same time he felt part of our family, surrounded with love.

Currently Dissan, after graduating brilliantly in computer engineering, is now attending the first year of a master's degree, always with our support.

We have now undertaken another experience as supportive family of Marko, a Coptic Christian boy from Egypt, who arrived in Italy when he was fourteen, after a long journey through the Balkan route. Now, after turning eighteen and after various work experiences and training courses, he has been hired with an apprenticeship contract by a construction company.

He is growing up independently, we respect and support his choices and interests.

We always emphasize how important the support we received has been. We believe in the importance of training and support, in order never to feel alone and to be able to solve the challenges we could meet during children growth.

The solidarity network Foster and Supportive Families Movement, that include foster families, families waiting for foster care and professionals, has been extremely positive: together we take advantage of others' experiences and we look for solutions together when we are in need.

I think of our life as a puzzle, built with care and patience which surprisingly fell into a thousand pieces.

Slowly, with patience, hope, and of course also pain, we rebuilt it. Some pieces are still out of place, since our beloved child will never come back, however the whole picture is clearly visible.

We are believers and so we are convinced that our story is providential: the presence of Marlen, Dissan and Marko, each of them with their own peculiarities, were guided from above and didn't come by chance.

Luigi



3rd FORM transnational partner meeting - Rome 6, 7, 8 March 2023

4. EU AND PARTNERS NEWS:

4TH TRANSNATIONAL PARTNER MEETING -HOPE FOR CHILDREN - CRC POLICY CENTER- 14-15 November 2023



This meeting will be hosted by HOPE for children - CRC Policy Center and will be held in Nicosia, Cyprus on the 14,15 November 2023.

It will be coordinated by the Odisee University of Applied Sciences from Belgium.

The objective will be to learn about Foster Care services of HOPE for Children.

The university of Kassel (Germany) will present the training model on therapeutic foster care for minors with a refugee background.

An in depth discussion will take place on how it can be used in case work and in the pilots in Belgium (PLEEGZORG OOST-VLAANDEREN) in Italy (Salesiani per il Sociale), in Cyprus Hope for children CRC Policy Center.

This will be an opportunity for a field visit in a shelter for Unaccompanied minors and a visit to a Children's house.

An exchange will take place on the work to be done on policies and field recommendations for future sustainable improvements on the situation of the target group.



OTHER RELEVANT SYNERGIES AND MEETINGS

- **EUROPEAN PROJECT "FAMILY BASED CARE FOR CHILDREN IN MIGRATION"**

The project, funded by the AMIF program, aims at supporting the improvement and expansion of alternative family-based care system for unaccompanied migrant children.

Partnership: Italy, Greece, Spain, Malta and Cyprus (*Hope for Children*)

Duration: 01/10/2020 – 30/09/2022

Policy Brief on Unaccompanied Minors and Foster Care System in Cyprus:
<https://uncrcpc.org.cy/article/policy-brief-unaccompanied-minors-and-foster-care-system-cyprus>

- **FORM PROJECT ON THE AGENDA OF TWO ENSA STAKEHOLDERS HIGH LEVEL INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS:**

27, 28, 29 JUNE 2023 - BRUSSELS FLEMISH AGENCY OPGROEIEN

This ENSA meeting has been hosted and coordinated by the Flemish agency Opgroei, jointly with the Veneto Region, the working groups ENSA Youth child and Family, the Youth Care Platform and the ENSEL Social Emotional Learning network.

It was supported by the Veneto Region, the Conseil Départemental du Val De Marne, the city of Rotterdam, the Odisee University of Applied Sciences, ISRAA Treviso, the Conference of INGOS of the Council of Europe, Committee on environment and Health Crisis and the ENSEL Network on Social and Emotional learning, the Social Cooperative of Cyclades Altera Vita, with contributions from the PANDA project.

Stakeholders from Belgium, Poland, Italy, Austria, the Netherlands and the UK joined. The meeting was attended by Public and Private Authorities, Civil Society Organisations, Universities, Professionals and representatives of target groups. The programme included interprofessional collaboration, informal support and social cohesion in caring neighbourhoods.

4,15,16 NOVEMBER 2022 - 2022 ENSA GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN VENICE

During this general Assembly of the network coordinated by the Veneto Region, supported by Flanders (Agency Growing up), the City of Rotterdam, the Conseil Départemental du Val de Marne, the City of Rotterdam, the Youth Care Pla, a specific day was dedicated to the FORM project.

It has been furthermore the occasion to make synergies with the N.E.x.T TO YOU (Network for the Empowerment, the social and labour inclusion of Trafficked minors and young adults) Project, funded by the AMIF programme.

EU AND INTERNATIONAL POLICIES HEADLINES -BETTER INVESTMENT FOR CHILDREN IN EUROPE-

European Child Guarantee

As a support to the implementation of the *European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan*

<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1428&langId=en#:~:text=The%20objective%20of%20the%20European,free%20healthcare>

The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child

The Commission monitor its implementation and report on the progress at the *Annual European Forum on the rights of the child*

https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/rights-child/eu-strategy-rights-child-and-european-child-guarantee_en

Next European elections will be held on 6-9 June 2024.

How will the needs of UMR in the present context be taken into account?

COUNCIL OF EUROPE - Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022 - 2027)

Fourth in a series of Strategies in the framework of the *Programme "Building a Europe for and with Children"*, operating since 2006

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/strategy-for-the-rights-of-the-child>

UNICEF Report: "Progress on Children's Well-being: Centring child rights in the 2030 Agenda - For every child, a sustainable future"

The Report, published in September 2023, seeks to accelerate progress on child-related SDGs and achieve meaningful and sustained results by 2030 and beyond.

<https://data.unicef.org/resources/sdg-report-2023/#:~:text=20%2C569%2C737-,Progress%20on%20Children's%20Well%2Dbeing%3A%20Centring%20child,rights%20in%20the%202030%20Agenda&text=Every%20child%20counts.,reach%20those%20furthest%20behind%20first.>

Interested to learn more about the project?

Visit our website at: <https://form.ensa-network.eu/>

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The FORM project partnership calls for action for the need to offer therapeutic “healing and development oriented” care for UMR youngsters and their foster families. Join our efforts to bring together knowledge and experiences. Soon available FORM training model for foster families.

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