

Program of Adaptation Assistance in Foster Families and Particular Features of Its Implementation

Venera G. Zakirova

Kazan (Volga region) Federal University, RUSSIA

Guzel I. Gaysina

Bashkir State Pedagogical University named after M.Akmulla, RUSSIA

Asia Zhumabaeva

Kazakh National Pedagogical University named after Abay, KAZAKHSTAN

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Relevance of the problem stated in the article, conditioned by the fact that the successful adaptation of orphans in a foster family requires specialized knowledge and skills, as well as the need of professional support. Therefore, this article aims at substantiation of the effectiveness of the developed pilot program psycho-pedagogical support of adaptation of orphans in a foster family. The leading method of this problem's study is the experimental method aimed to identify the problems of the adopted children and to test the program of professional support of their adaptation. The authors present the program of the orphans' adaptation support, which includes diagnostic, projective, correctional, rehabilitative, recovery and consulting parts. This program is aimed both at providing psychological and educational assistance to adopted children and foster parents, and the achievement of successful adaptation of orphans to new conditions in a foster family.

Keywords: orphans, foster family, case-method, projective work, adaptation in a foster family, parent-child relationship

INTRODUCTION

The relevance of research

Current national policies of various countries towards orphans is characterized by a sustainable trend of placing children for care in a foster family and the development of family forms of orphans' placement. Currently in the Russian Federation there are about 800 thousand orphans and children left without parental care. From the total number of orphans on January 1, 2014 545 thousand children (68%) are brought up in families, and the rest more than 260 thousand (32%) are educated in state institutions for orphans.

Correspondence: Guzel Insharovna Gaysina,
Bashkir State Pedagogical University named after M.Akmulla, October Revolution
Street, 3a, Ufa 450000, RUSSIA
E-mail: nicomni9@yandex.ru
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Foster family is able not only to replace the lost blood family for the adopted children, but also to form new attachments (Olifirenko, 2003; Gaysina, 2013; Bowlby, 1951). However, the process of creation and successful development of the foster family is controversial and difficult for both the child and foster parents. At the same time the placement of children in the family is not always painless. There are frequent cases of runaways of adopted children from their new families, return to the orphanage, acute parent-child conflicts. This is also explained by the unwillingness of the foster parents to accept a new family member. On the other hand, a significant proportion of the former pupils of orphanages are characterized by social and psychological disadaptation. The lack of timely developed socialization skills (Oslon, 2006; Prihozan, 2007; Tolstih, 2007; Spitz, 1952; Ainsworth, 1962; Laugmeier, Matejcek, 1984) is the main reason for this problem.

The development of new forms of care for orphans in the family has revealed the problem with the undeveloped effective diagnostic and rehabilitative programs. They help not only to study the atmosphere of a foster family, but also to understand the mechanisms of foster children entry and social integration to life in a new family. The criteria of a successful adaptation of members in a foster family are not defined. The problem of foster parents availability to perform educational functions remains poorly understood. Conditions of effective professional support for children and families that have adopted orphans are insufficiently developed (Rogov, 2002; Shipisina, 2007; Wegar, 2000).

Successful adaptation of orphans in a foster family requires specialized knowledge and skills, as well as professional support (Shahmanova, 2005; Semya, 2004). However, the solution of this problem is a complicated task due to insufficient level of formation of specific parental competences and fostering culture of citizens wishing to take an orphan for foster care and a small number of specialists supporting the foster families (Gaysina, 2015).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research methods

The research is based on leading theoretical and methodological ideas of cultural, socio-educational, personality and activity-oriented approaches.

During our research the following diagnostic methods were used: analysis, comparison, testing, questionnaires, interview and included observation.

On the forming stage of the research we used case-method, psychological problems solution, creative tasks, training, correctional and educational activities and games with the foster parents and children, discussions, individual interviews, providing emotional support, joint leisure activities, individual and group consultation, therapeutic class with professionals (Abdrafikova & Konopatskaya, 2014; Sadykova, 2014).

In the course of correctional and developmental work with children and teenagers traditional gaming and training techniques, art therapy have been used. Besides such new techniques as a technique of active listening, self-regulation technique, technique of positive visualization have been also used.

All forms and methods of correctional-development and rehabilitative help to foster children were aimed at achieving a set goal - the promotion of effective adaptation of the adopted child to the living conditions in a substitute family and harmonization of parent-child relationship.

Experimental research base

Experimental research work was carried out in Bashkir State Pedagogical University named after M. Akmulla (Ufa, Bashkortostan Republic, Russia), summer camp on the Black Sea (Gelenjic, Russia), Bashkir State Pedagogical University's recreation centre "Zaryanka" (Ufa).

Stages of research

The research was conducted in three stages:

- 1) diagnostic stage – diagnostics of the nature of parent-child relationships in families of the target group; diagnostics of the level of communication skills and empathy of children; detection of the degree of awareness of the parental roles by foster parents; detection of difficulties and problems in foster care, in building communication with adopted children.
- 2) basic (forming) stage - the development and implementation of the program to support the adaptation of foster children to the new conditions in the foster families; detection of the conditions of its effective implementation.
- 3) final stage – the implemented program was considered and the obtained results were analyzed; guidelines to foster parents and professionals working with adoptive families were also prepared.

RESULTS

The structure and content of the program

Developed pilot program aimed at supporting orphans in their process of adaptation in foster family included: diagnostic part (diagnosis of nature of the adaptation process in foster care); projecting part (planning and development of a variety of rehabilitative, developmental, correctional and recovery programs, forms and methods of working with foster children and parents); corrective-developing part (correction of parent-child relationships in a troubled foster care, developing a sense of attachment to the new parents); rehabilitative part (recovery of mental and physical health, social competences of orphans); advisory part (individual and group consulting of adoptive parents); information and methodical part (preparation and publication of literature on the problem of research).

Stages of the program

Implementation of the program assumed the following stages of experimental work:

- diagnostics of the adaptation process nature, difficulties in the orphans upbringing, personal and interpersonal problems of foster children and difficulties of their adaptation to new conditions. Levels of psychological and pedagogical knowledge and skills of foster parents needed for the successful education of foster children and their positive adaptation in the family were identified at this stage;
- experimental verification of the effectiveness of various forms and methods of correctional and developmental, rehabilitative and consulting work with foster children and parents

The ascertaining stage

Diagnostics of the nature of child-parent relationships in foster families (36 families); levels of communication skills and empathy of adopted children (40 children); degree of awareness of parental role by the foster parents; difficulties and problems in fostering the adopted children and communication with them was carried out on this stage. Procedures for questioning and testing parents and children, observation, individual and group conversations were conducted within diagnostic activity.

Diagnostic methods and techniques allowed to reveal the problems in the upbringing of children. For example, in questionnaires parents indicated such disturbing features as indifference, deceit, unmotivated aggression, offishness and secrecy. There have been cases of theft in the house, open disobedience and conflict. 70% of foster parents indicated that they are in need of professional help of psychologist, medic, jurist. A high level of anxiety (75,6%) of children was revealed with the help of diagnostic methods. Diagnostics of interpersonal relations (34 children) showed an aggressive and competitive position in 16 children (50%), the tendency to obey, refusal of responsibility in 25 children (78,1%). Results of the study have showed that children cannot establish friendly relations with others.

Foster parents indicated the following problems in the diagnostic interviews: indifferent attitude of some officials to solving urgent issues of foster families life; negative attitude towards orphans by their classmates; teachers' indifference to the problems of foster families and children; depression after the biological parent (s) death that cannot be handled; inadequate behavior of children to their foster parents and etc. Since the majority of adopted children have come to adolescence, the process of their adaptation in foster families became complicated. The signs of overlaying contradictions of adolescence and personality characteristics of orphanhood were fixed.

Most of the problems in the parent-child relationship, as shown by the results of a survey and interviews with parents, are associated with the effects of deprivation and maintenance of children in orphanage institutions. Parents noted stable situational signs of aggression, disobedience, negativism and excitability in adopted children. Many children have a difficult life experience of living in asocial families. They had relieved scenes of physical or sexual violence in their previous families that left a hard trace in their memory, consciousness and psyche. The foster mothers and grandmothers confirmed the fact that they could not bring up such children without professional help and support. The difficulties of the adaptation process require individual correctional-developmental and rehabilitative work with both foster children and foster parents in the majority of foster families. The results of the diagnostics have led to the conclusion that the process of adaptation is in need of professional support by the specialists in foster care.

Forming stage

On this stage of research work the program of supporting the orphans' adaptation in foster families was worked out and practically experienced. This complex program includes projective, correctional, rehabilitative, recovery and consulting parts. Forming research work was being carried out during one year.

Content of the supporting program of orphans' adaptation in foster families

Projective work included the planning the activities of the authors group, the experiment implementers and the studied sample. The following pilot activities

have been planned: diagnostic seminars for the foster families; correction and rehabilitation trainings for the adopted children and foster families, legal seminar; recreation of the adopted children on the sea; offsite seminar for foster families; intermediate seminar for foster families; health improving activities for the children in sanatorium; charity actions; sports programs; talk with the guardianship expert and psychologist; final session for the foster families (Gafurov, 2014; Galimov, Makhanko & Kashapov, 2013).

Correctional work was aimed at: a) reduction of tension in family relations; b) development of social competence; c) reduction of depressive and aggressive behavior of teenagers; d) development of sense of attachment to foster parents. Correctional work included: developing exercises, trainings and games with children and parents; art therapy; active listening technique; technique of self-regulation; technique of positive visualization; educational talks on the problems of orphans' fostering and trust relationship with the teenagers strengthening (at request of 19 foster parents); summer holidays of orphans at sea organization.

Rehabilitative work was aimed at orphans' physical and mental health, lost skills and human attachments recovery. It included forms and methods of person-oriented work with adopted children and foster parents. They are: individual talk; psychological assistance and emotional care; trainings; art-therapy; united leisure activities of adopted children and foster parents; individual and group advice.

Recovery work was aimed at the orphans' health, physical strength and nervous system strengthening and disease prevention. It has included summer holidays on the Black sea organization, medical improving procedures in sanatorium. All medical procedures were conducted in accordance with the medical indications and particular qualities of health.

The consulting work during the experimental program has included regular individual and group advice of foster parents on various psychological, medical, pedagogical and legal issues.

Experimental verification of the maintenance program

Monitoring the nature of the adaptation process in foster families has been lasting throughout the research work. In a year in order to determine the resulting effect of the program of the orphans' adaptation in the foster families we have diagnosed the following: the existent character of parent-child relationship; the levels of the adopted children anxiety and attachment; the levels of special knowledge and competences of the foster parents in the field of orphans' education. The diagnostic results indicate that the adaptation process in the foster families is going in accordance with the regularities of the adaptation period.

Positive results of 9 families (25,0 %) have been marked. In these families all problems of adaptation were solved. The adopted children have successfully integrated into foster families. Their sense of attachment to parents has become stronger. The diagnosis of emotional state and family relations in 16 families (44,4 %) with the help of the individual conversations, participant observation and projective techniques proves the positive changes in «adopted children – foster parents (relatives)» relationship.

Foster parents have noted such positive changes in children as «our children speak openly with us about their feelings and thoughts», «they share with us their future plans willingly», «our children have become more kind and more sociable», «they have become more independent», «the sense of attachment to our home has appeared», «our children appreciate their family now» etc.

21 families (58,3%) have been able to establish trust and warm relationship with adopted children, to solve the problems connected with their negative behavior. At the same time the problems of unmotivated aggression, stubbornness

and indifference in 10 families (27,7%), where the teenagers are brought up, have not been still solved. For these reason these families require further individual expert help.

The knowledge about the particular features of orphan's fostering in 11 foster families (30, 5%) has grown from low to medium level, from medium to high level - 17 parents (47,2%), 8 parents (22,2%) have stayed at a medium level of knowledge. These results prove the fact of a prolonged influence of the maternal deprivation on a child's psyche.

A small number of difficulties are observed in families where children of 5-10 years old are fostered. Age features of these children are not conflictogenic. In the other hand the process of fostering and communication with the teen-age children (11-14 years old) in foster families is much more difficult. As noted by foster parents they are not able to cope with such consequences of deprivation as lack of independence, responsibility, offishness, lying, unmotivated aggression.

On the whole, the results of the final diagnostics indicate effectiveness of the adopted children and foster parents maintenance program.

DISCUSSIONS

Orphanhood as a social problem is analyzed by G. V. Semya (2004), R. Johnson & K. D. Browne (2006), G. Mulheir (2007), M. O. Dubrovskaya, V. K. Zaretsky, A. B. Holmogorova (2002). Psychology of orphans is revealed in scientific works, made by V. N. Oslon (2006), A. M. Prihozan (2007), N. N. Tolstih (2007), L. M. Shipicina (2005), M. I. Lisina (1986). The research works made by V. N. Oslon (2006), G. V. Semya (2004), G. I. Gaysina (2013), K. Wegar (2000) are devoted to family placement of orphans. The problem of maternal deprivation is analysed by J. Bowlby (1951), R. A. Spitz (1952), M. D. Ainsworth (1962), J. Laugmeier, Z. Matejcek (1984).

Nevertheless, support and maintenance of the orphans adaptation process in foster families are not deeply studied in the theory and practice of pedagogy and psychology.

CONCLUSION

It was proved that the implemented program of the adopted children and foster families maintenance which includes diagnostic, projecting, corrective and developmental, rehabilitating and consulting parts allows to harmonize the parents-child relationship, to foster a sense of attachment to parents and to overcome the difficulties of orphan's adaptation.

In practice the research results may be useful for the specialists, working in the childhood social protection system when they develop the programs and projects of the professional maintenance the foster families. The research materials will help the specialists of establishments of the guardianship in planning their work with foster families. The university professors can use these results in professional training of future social workers and psychologists too.

Taking into account the results of our research work, the directions for further researches in this problem field can be highlighted: special competences of teenage children formation; the development of the professional competence of the specialist support foster families; the development of correctional programs for the adopted children with the deviant behavior; prevention of the child cruel treatment in the foster families.

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