ATD
FOURTH WORLD

"VALUING CHILDREN, VALUING PARENTS"

Focus on family in the fight against child poverty in Europe

A European discussion paper prepared by the International Movement ATD Fourth World
with financial support from the European Commission

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A European discussion paper
prepared by the International Movement ATD Fourth World
July 2004

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to Combat Social Exclusion 2002–2006

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Valuing children, valuing parents: a tool for a European transnational exchange programme

Valuing children, valuing parents is a translation of the discussion paper *Précieux enfants, précieux parents* published in French in November 2003.

This discussion paper has been prepared within the framework of phase 1 of a transnational exchange programme supported by the European Commission, and funded by the Community Action Programme to Combat Social Exclusion 2002–2006 (see http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/soc-prot/soc-incl/index_en.htm).

The transnational exchange programme aims to:

- promote and support exchanges and mutual ties concerning European policies to fight poverty and social exclusion
- encourage cooperation and mutual learning between Member States.

Phase 1

Recognising the complexity of setting up effective and relevant exchange programmes, including transnational partnerships, the European Commission funded a nine-month preparatory phase to:

- take stock of existing knowledge
- identify partners and clarify issues and working methods to foster the development of a transnational and multisectoral partnership
- define objectives and develop proposals for a programme of further work.

ATD Fourth World's Phase 1 project represented an official partnership between national ATD Fourth World organisations in four countries – France (lead organisation), Belgium, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom – as well as Haus Neudorf (the East-West Forum for living together in Europe). Many organisations and individuals from numerous Member States also participated in this initial exchange (details in appendix 4).

Phase 2

ATD Fourth World in Europe will use this document as a tool for transnational exchanges and projects in the future. The European Commission has agreed to fund Phase 2 of the ATD Fourth World exchange programme in 2004 and 2005.

The *Valuing children, valuing parents* project welcomes new contacts. We would like to hear the thoughts and suggestions of anyone involved with the issues addressed here who wants to contribute or to highlight an opinion, a concern or an experience.

The website provides contact details and further information, including the full initial document and the supplements that will complement this paper: www.atd-fourthworld.org/europe/valuingchildren/index_vcvp.htm

The French version can be found at: www.atd-quartmonde.org/europe/precieuxenfants/index_pepp.htm

Contents

Foreword

This report is about children and parents living in poverty, especially those affected by the child protection system. Its key messages are that society needs to understand more about the lived experience of poverty, by listening to these children and parents; that family support policies should be seen as an integral part of anti-poverty strategies; and that innovative ways of working with these families should be found, to help develop their family relationships and aspirations.

The National Action Plans on Social Inclusion are intended, in part, to demonstrate how European Union Member States will 'preserve family solidarity in all its forms', as part of the broader drive against child poverty and social exclusion. *Valuing children, valuing parents* effectively suggests how this aim might be achieved.

In particular, it looks at child protection: the very real risk for some parents, especially those living in severe poverty, of having their children taken into care either temporarily or permanently. The reason often given is 'child neglect' – meaning inability to provide adequately for the children's needs. At a time when the policy focus is so often on the need to balance rights with more responsibilities, these parents' greatest dread is that their most important responsibility – bringing up their children – will be taken away from them. This is one of the many valuable perspectives parents with experience of poverty bring to such policy debates, as I know from personal contact with ATD Fourth World over many years.

The report describes the significance of parenthood to people living in long-term poverty. They can feel valued and relied on by someone for the first time. The birth of a baby brings hope. They are more connected to the rest of society, with a recognised role. But, crucially, they can simultaneously feel undermined in the ability to carry out their responsibilities to the full by the inadequacy of the material resources at their disposal.

And they may constantly be told by others how lacking in resources they are in a broader sense. This is 'overexposed parenting'. Contact with professionals all too often brings feelings of inferiority and isolation. One young mother graphically described to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Poverty in the UK what 'poverty' meant in her life:

> "… Having all the same dreams for the future that everyone else has, but no way on earth to make them come true … Having no choice of where we live, what school the kids go to, or what kind of job we get … Needing help – but being too scared of being judged an unfit mother to ask for it … Telling my whole life story over and over again, just to get what I'm entitled to … Having not one person to talk to who isn't paid to listen … Being told that I have nothing to offer my own child, and believing it – then."[1]

And yet the vast majority of parents try their hardest to shield their children from the full force of poverty, at a high cost to themselves. Parents try to help their children to 'fit in' and 'join in' – to be 'normal', like their peers, as children so much want to be.[2]

Valuing children, valuing parents shows how, far from having nothing to offer, parents living in persistent poverty often demonstrate the tenacity of family links and a sheer bloody-minded determination to keep going against all odds. Tess Ridge's research also shows how children try to protect their parents from poverty; this is

1 Participant at meeting of All Party Parliamentary Group on Poverty, 18 June 2002

2 Tess Ridge, *Childhood Poverty and Social Exclusion: From a child's perspective*, The Policy Press, 2002

not a one-way street. ATD Fourth World asks vital questions about how we can build on these positive responses to living in poverty by parents and children alike.

And, importantly, as the report says,

> "This is not a moralist approach promoting 'family values'. It recognises the way things are – the reality for people involved, and the aspirations expressed by adults and children."

It is almost 30 years now since I was a volunteer for ATD Fourth World. I remember vividly my struggle to understand the day-to-day realities of life for parents and children living in persistent poverty, learning both from the families themselves and from the ATD staff working alongside them. In particular, I learned that parenting *is* harder in a poor environment, especially when your self-esteem has been repeatedly battered and your powers of endurance sapped by living in long-term poverty; but – above all – I learned that parents living in long-term poverty have the same aspirations and values as other parents.

And if these parents are listened to, they can also explain how their attempts to protect their children from the full impact of poverty and defend them from other people's actions can backfire, and so cause the problems which often attract the attention of professionals. They may keep their children at home, instead of letting them go to school, if the children are being picked on and bullied because their poverty makes them seem different. Or they may flare up at teachers or other authority figures who seem all too ready to blame their children. And they may ask for various forms of practical help to alleviate their situation, and find themselves being referred to child protection services.

The report tells us what may happen next – and what this does to families. Parents in poverty may feel that when their children are taken away there is no obvious way to 'requalify' as caring parents. They may see their children being given, in terms of living standards and experiences, a life they cannot possibly give them themselves. And if children are placed some distance from home, their links with school, friends and local environment will be severed, and it may be too costly for their parents to visit them regularly.

Valuing children, valuing parents argues instead for a focus on 'family continuity'; for the importance of learning from families living in poverty, especially those with the greatest difficulties; and for ensuring that children in poverty have friends. The emphasis on friendship, and on culture and relaxation, makes ATD Fourth World's work much broader in scope than that of many other anti-poverty organisations. The report gives many examples of constructive ways of working with families to provide alternatives to children being taken into care – or, if this does happen, to ensure that it is with parents' cooperation.

One point emerging from these examples is the importance of families getting together with others who have similar experiences. This has long been a feature of ATD Fourth World's work, though not necessarily of traditional social work. Parents find out that they are not the only ones who have problems, and that there are things they can do to improve their situation. One of the key messages from this report is that when parents feel more in control of the processes to support them and keep their children safe, such processes will be more likely to succeed.

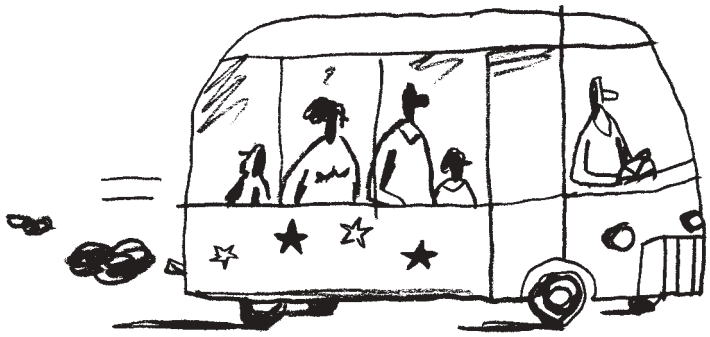
This report should be widely read by all those concerned about child poverty in the European Union and engaged in debating how to tackle it more effectively.

Fran Bennett
Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University of Oxford
July 2004

Introduction
a European exploration

“For us, the family is the most important thing. Without families, we can’t live, we can’t grow up. But families can’t live in homes or in communities without friendship. Without friendship, there is no life.”

From the Children’s Appeal
ATD Fourth World International Children’s Forum,
Geneva, 20 November 1999



Introduction: a European exploration

A European exploration

Valuing children, valuing parents is a response to the European Union's commitment to fight child poverty.

This discussion paper reviews issues by focusing on family life from different perspectives:

- **Part 1** Experiences of child poverty, emphasising the views of the children and parents who are most affected by poverty.
- **Part 2** The family as a vital resource in the fight against poverty and the need for it to receive appropriate support – focusing, in particular, on the experiences of children and parents who are living in poverty, especially those who are affected by child protection measures.
- **Part 3** Schemes and practical initiatives that support family life and parenting.

It takes account of the work of ATD Fourth World over the course of many years in nine countries in western Europe and (since 2001) in Poland, where teams from ATD Fourth World support and bring together parents and children who live in conditions of severe poverty and social exclusion in both rural and urban areas.

Numerous contacts and exchanges with academics, field workers and policy-makers in 10 project countries also contributed to the information and evidence on the issues and practices presented in this paper.[3]

The issues are therefore considered from a variety of viewpoints:

- findings within the field of social and political science: demographics, sociology, psychology and law
- the views of those with direct experience and practical knowledge of the issues: families, field workers and project leaders
- different levels: transnational, macro-social, micro-social and individual.

The intention is to stimulate debate and to set the agenda for further action; each major section therefore ends with a series of key points and issues for discussion.

A set of 11 separate texts will be available following the publication of this discussion paper (*see* Appendix 1). Each of these supplements sheds light on a different aspect of the themes explored in this project. Like this paper, the supplements are intended to stimulate discussion and ideas within the framework of future European exchanges organised by ATD Fourth World and its partners.

3 *Valuing children, valuing parents* project countries are Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Romania, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom

The framework: European Union child poverty targets

The European Union recognises that poverty and exclusion are a major concern. It has agreed:

- to coordinate efforts to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty by 2010 (Lisbon European Council, March 2000)
- to develop policies aimed at tackling poverty and social exclusion within the framework of common objectives (Nice European Council, December 2000), and to produce National Action Plans for Social Inclusion showing how the objectives are being reached by Member States
- a five-year Community Action Programme (2002–2006) in order to encourage cooperation between Member States in the fight against social exclusion (European Parliament and the Council).

We need to consider how issues related to children are integrated into this overall strategy. The objectives adopted at the Nice European Summit in December 2000, and reaffirmed in Copenhagen in 2002, clearly identified the issue of child poverty as a priority within the context of 'the most vulnerable groups' (*see* below). These objectives are constantly under review and will be fully revised in 2006.

Summary of objectives in the fight against poverty and social exclusion

1 To facilitate participation in employment and access by all to resources, rights, goods and services by:

- promoting access to stable and quality employment for the most vulnerable groups in society (pathways towards employment, childcare, opportunities for integration and employment provided by the social economy, prevention of the exclusion of people from the world of work)
- guaranteeing the resources necessary to live in accordance with human dignity
- providing access to decent housing, healthcare, education, justice, culture, sport and leisure.

2 To prevent the risks of exclusion by:

- ensuring access for all to new information and communication technologies
- preventing crises such as indebtedness, exclusion from school and becoming homeless
- preserving family solidarity.

3 To help the most vulnerable by:

- promoting the social integration of women and men at risk of facing persistent poverty
- eliminating social exclusion among children
- developing comprehensive actions in areas marked by exclusion.

4 To mobilise all relevant bodies by:

- promoting the participation and self-expression of people suffering exclusion
- including the fight against exclusion in mainstream policy
- mobilising public authorities at national, regional and local level
- adapting administrative and social services to the needs of people suffering exclusion
- promoting dialogue between all relevant bodies, public and private, notably the social partners, NGOs and social service providers
- encouraging the social responsibility and active engagement of all citizens in the fight against poverty and social exclusion
- fostering social responsibility in the business sector.

The first National Action Plans (2001–2003) tried to integrate child poverty into national priorities; the NGO Euronet produced an analysis of the plans from this perspective (*see* below). This discussion paper is another contribution to the debates aiming to look at the European Social Inclusion Strategy from a children's perspective.

Focus on children in the first National Action Plans for Social Inclusion (2001–2003)

United Kingdom Owing to the high level of child poverty in the UK, the action plan specifically tackles the challenge of child poverty. It demonstrates the impact of early disadvantage at every stage of the life cycle.

Sweden The action plan focuses on children, but has few living in poverty.

The Netherlands Recognises that the risk of poverty for its children is higher than the average.

Luxembourg There will be a study of one- and two-income families and lone-parent families, with a view to possible readjustment of relative benefit rates.

Portugal Highlights early leavers from education and the low level of qualifications relative to the EU average, but does not examine child poverty and social exclusion more comprehensively.

France Emphasises the importance of its family policies. The plan recognises that children under 15 living in poor households are one of the main groups vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion.

Greece Notes a lower risk of poverty amongst children than among the elderly, for example. This may be due to women choosing to postpone having children until they can afford it, but the plan also draws attention to the likely impact of changing family patterns on future support.

From *Including children? Developing a coherent approach to child poverty and social exclusion across Europe* (Euronet, 2002)

ATD Fourth World: fighting family and child poverty in Europe

ATD Fourth World works with families and individuals who experience long-term poverty. Its presence in 28 countries, across all continents, gives this organisation an international perspective on issues of poverty and human rights.

It was founded by Joseph Wresinski (1917–1988) in an emergency housing camp in Noisy-le-Grand, France, in 1957. He called on people from different backgrounds to work in partnership with people living in extreme poverty to promote a world in which the equal dignity of every human being is respected.

For over 45 years, ATD Fourth World has been carrying out programmes aimed at enabling people living in extreme poverty to:

- gain access to their fundamental rights
- have a voice in society
- have opportunities to contribute to the decision-making process on issues that directly affect them as well as on wider issues for society.

In urban or rural areas of 10 countries across Europe, ATD Fourth World projects bring parents and children living in poverty and exclusion together with families from all walks of life.[4] Members are also active in Portugal and in Italy and have links with grassroots organisations in central and eastern Europe.

ATD Fourth World, which does not have any specific religious or political affiliation, has developed into an international non-governmental organisation. It works with other NGOs and professional and political partners (on a local, national and international level) to seek out and fulfil the conditions needed for the very poorest to become active partners in the development of modern society. It has a consultative status to UN bodies (ECOSOC, UNICEF, UNESCO and ILO) and the Council of Europe.

The establishment of its delegation to the European Union has allowed ATD Fourth World to build relationships with various EU institutions. It is one of the founding members of the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), the principal NGO coalition which is active in the fight against poverty at an EU level, and contributes its expertise to the work of the Platform of European Social NGOs.

ATD Fourth World and child poverty

ATD Fourth World has been engaged with the problem of child poverty in rich countries for nearly 40 years. In 1979, the International Year of The Child, ATD Fourth World published *Children of our time: a policy for the next twenty years*, focusing on children living in severe poverty and exclusion in industrialised countries.[5] The paper identified three priorities:

- **representation of children living in poverty** – the right of all children to be listened to and respected
- **access to knowledge** – the right to education and training to ensure a full and active adulthood
- **guarantee of fundamental rights** – income, housing, healthcare, jobs and training, and family services to support the basic right to live and grow up in a family.

4 Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Switzerland and the UK

5 ATD Fourth World, *Children of our time: policies for children for the next 20 years*, Editions Science et Service, 1979, France

The challenges identified in the International Year of the Child 25 years ago still remain. Throughout Europe, ATD Fourth World meets parents living in severe poverty, who want the best for their children yet, at the same time, fear that they will not be allowed to be fully involved in their children's future.

A mother in Spain told the Respiro Familiar Project, 'When we were going through a very difficult time as a family, the solution they proposed was to take our children away – not to consider us, their parents.'

ATD Fourth World and the family

The report *Families and social exclusion in Europe*, which lists NGOs, describes ATD Fourth World as being dedicated to fighting exclusion on issues relating to family life.[6]

ATD Fourth World believes that approaches and measures centred on the family are paramount in the fight against poverty. However, it does not promote any particular model for the family.

Over the years, ATD Fourth World has led major research projects to understand the role of families in the eradication of extreme poverty. This European discussion paper is another step in that ongoing commitment.

While we are writing this report, various other ATD Fourth World projects are under way in Europe, which will contribute to the debate focusing on family in the fight against child poverty and exclusion. In France, for example, a research and training project on the family began in September 2002 and will run for two years. It involves around 15 working groups from all over France, made up of adults who have experience of poverty and exclusion and others who would like to consider these issues with them. They are all members of a family or parents.

6 P Fernandez de la Hoz, *Families and Social Exclusion in the EU*, European Observatory on the Social Situation, Demography and Family, OIF, Vienna, 2001

The birth of a family movement

When Joseph Wresinski arrived in the camp for the homeless in Noisy-le-Grand in 1956, he was immediately confronted by 265 families living in squalid huts made of fibrocement in the shape of igloos, where newborn babies died of dehydration in summer and pneumonia in winter.

The family groups living there were often seen as dysfunctional families: a third of the children had been taken away from their parents, 40% of couples were unmarried at a time when marriage was still the norm. In some families, a look at the birth certificates revealed that there were three or four surnames for six brothers and sisters. Nevertheless these families were resolute: many refused help from social services or charities which involved separation. If they hadn't refused, all the children could have been adopted or placed in children's homes.

Seeing these families, Joseph Wresinski recalled his experiences with his own family 30 years earlier in Angers, France. He had lived in similar conditions when he was a child, seeing his father humiliated by exclusion in the neighbourhood, his mother's pride hurt by local women, he and his brothers compelled to earn money from the age of five.

Francine de la Gorce, one of the first full-time ATD Fourth World core workers, said that one of the first things ATD Fourth World's founder said to her when she joined in 1960 was: 'Above all, parents want to be recognised as good parents'.

Joseph Wresinski perceived that family life is one of the major sources of human dignity and energy. He wanted to set up a family movement which would give children and their parents the means to achieve their aspirations. From his work with the families of the Noisy-le-Grand camp in 1956 until his death in 1988, Joseph Wresinski understood that in order to flourish, a family needs to receive recognition and to have access to a range of fundamental rights over the long term.

Nearly 50 years later, in an expanded Europe, the need remains.

The project's aims are to:

- discuss the issues surrounding the experiences of families living in poverty
- understand the aspirations of those who face the greatest obstacles to family life
- find ways to respond to these aspirations even in situations which can destroy the family identity
- train the various members of these groups.

The first findings from this work were presented in France in May 2004.

At a different level, in 2004, within the context of discussions marking the 10th anniversary of the International Year of the Family, ATD Fourth World has been commissioned by the United Nations Trust Fund on Family Activities to conduct a study on *How poverty separates parents and children: a challenge to human rights*.[7]

The study looks at the situation in six countries which are members of the UN (Burkina Faso, the United States, Guatemala, Haïti, the Philippines and the United Kingdom), and aims to analyse the different ways in which poverty weakens family groups and separates children from their parents.

A number of issues are investigated:

- migration (linked to the search for work, political and social instability, natural disasters)
- separation necessary for survival (the need for children to work, international adoption, access to health care)
- the absence of parents (early death from diseases such as AIDS, etc)
- emergency measures and child protection measures (separation due to emergency housing, placement in care).

This work also examines how different adults, members of the family or others who play a role in the child's welfare, can help to guarantee the child's right to grow up in a family environment.

Learning from families in long-term poverty

Every day, in extremely difficult situations, parents in poverty fight to retain their dignity. To manage this, they make use of the means and strategies still available to them. These means and strategies are often very limited and usually bring short-term benefits with such a minimal, even imperceptible, impact that it may appear that these families are doing nothing to change their situation. As a result, their efforts are often not understood by others and can even be turned against them.

But for ATD Fourth World, it is important to take the time to learn about the ways in which men and women deal with these situations. This is best illustrated through the project outlined on page 17. The parents' thoughts quoted, added to by many others gathered over the years from people affected by poverty, take us beyond the role of parents and family in bringing up children. Among other things, they touch on what the children in these families inherit from their parents. People affected by poverty develop ways of coping, which range from dealing with humiliating situations – like asking for charity – to a deep understanding of human relations (the need for roots, respect, dignity for all). If we are ready to listen and learn, parents living in poverty can help us to become aware of how this heritage of fighting poverty, fighting humiliation and fighting intolerable situations is passed on to children to equip them with the tools to overcome poverty.

7 Available in English at www.atd-fourthworld.org

An example of the work of ATD Fourth World: the Respiro Familiar Project, Madrid

For nearly 10 years, activists have been meeting and working with families in Madrid, particularly in the shanty towns known as *el Pozo del Huevo* and *las Barranquillas*, and in other deprived districts to the south of the city. The parents involved are, for the most part, people who have had to struggle against severe poverty every day throughout their lives.

From the start, the involvement of members of ATD Fourth World was rooted in the desire to help fathers and mothers give their children a better future. ATD Fourth World set up street libraries in a number of different areas. These libraries were a response to parents' requests: 'We don't want our children to have to go through what we've been through, we want them to go to school and learn!' They became social places revolving around books, allowing children to learn about other ways of life and the outside world. They stimulated interaction between children, who discovered what each of them was capable of. Over the course of the project, parents gradually came to support ATD Fourth World.

In the last few years the families' situation has changed a great deal. After two years of campaigning, they were rehoused in various different parts of Madrid. This was a time of great hope, even though it meant that the families had to face new problems and live with fears relating to their new environment.

The sense of community and the interaction with each other, which the families had before, seems to have temporarily disappeared; today they are more isolated. They have started talking about trying to hold on to these bonds, and sticking together in the struggle against poverty. This led the ATD Fourth World team to set up a project called Respiro Familiar – breathing space for the family. Activities include a monthly meeting for families who have been rehoused with other members of ATD Fourth World also taking part. The principal idea of these sessions is to give families some time when they can feel pride and happiness together – an experience that is very different from their daily lives. The parents discuss a topic that affects them all directly.

After working for many years in these areas, the ATD Fourth World team believes that these kinds of meetings fulfil a vital need for the families: everyone must be able to feel at ease, in an atmosphere of trust, in order for things to be discussed openly. A real dialogue is possible only because the parents know for certain that the members of ATD Fourth World are trying to help their sons and daughters, and that they respect the family's wishes to remain together in spite of the difficulties they face in bringing up children while living in extreme poverty.

During the first few months of 2003, the Respiro Familiar meetings focused on the theme of family. Each parent could express their beliefs, doubts, sense of fragility and hopes. The statements below were expressed in Madrid in 2003. Some of the thoughts expressed by parents at these meetings have also been reprinted later in this document.

Thoughts on family life

Mari Carmen 'Something good about my parents is that they taught us to respect the elderly, and now I teach my children the same, so that they grow up to be decent adults, so that they know the difference between right and wrong.'

Tere 'Our children must be proud of being gypsies. I'm proud of being a gypsy. We're not bad people, there are all sorts, like among the gadjos, some are good and some aren't.'

Consuelo 'You've got to know where you come from, know your roots and be proud of them. I always wanted my children to know that they were half-gypsy, and I spoke to them in gypsy so that they would learn it.'

Conchi 'I am proud of my parents. If they were hungry and they saw someone who hadn't eaten, they would give them whatever they could find at home. My parents, with all of us eight children, managed to teach us not knowledge, but values – how to behave. Parents must teach that to their children, otherwise they never become anyone.'

Alfredo 'Your father and mother can give you your upbringing. Poverty has nothing to do with what your parents should give you. I've taught my children what my parents weren't able to give me. I gave them the opportunities so that they had a choice. I hope they understand that their parents gave them what little they could.'

Manuela 'I do everything I can to make sure there's always food on the table for my children. Because when you're poor, one day you eat, the next you don't. You see your children and say to yourself, I have to put up with this but my children must not. If I've got to fight, I'll fight. Some days you are shattered, and you see your children's faces and that lifts you again. It's like the old saying, strength through unity.'

Angel F 'Selling scrap metal, some days you earn some money, some you don't, and your children have nothing to eat. With a regular job, your children

always have something to eat. For me it's important for my children to be able to look back and say 'Our father really battled for us, to get food for us, to put a roof over our heads. He worked himself to the bone. He was hungry and cold, but we never were.'

Gema 'I learnt a lot from my mother, how she battled to bring us up, and if we had nothing, she would go out and somehow sort something out. That's how I learnt to battle for my own children. My mother never gave up. I learnt respect, my mother told me to offer my seat in the bus if there was an elderly person. (…) I've lived on my own with my children for seven years now. One day I was suicidal but I got over it thanks to my children. Sometimes I felt lonely but I always had my children. They give you the strength to live. (…) I think that sometimes it's all too much, you're so exhausted. When the children want to eat and you've nothing to give them and they start to cry, your whole world collapses. Sometimes I've gone out with the children and found nothing, and I've just broken down and cried in the street, unable to get home. Sometimes you have courage, other times it deserts you.'

Manuela 'No-one else can give you what your parents give you. It's something else completely. When you have problems, who can you count on? On your family. My brother-in-law's child was at the hospital and my sister, who is no relation to him because it's my husband's brother, spent three days at the hospital. It's not money you give but your attention. We're all together. I went away with Cándido a couple of times and I left the children with my family. If there was ever a problem, they were there, thank goodness. If I have a problem, my children are the most important thing. Whatever happens, children should be with their mother, they should never be separated. For the children, it's important for them to grow up with their mother. Even if you have nothing, even if you don't have a house and you sleep in a van, your children should never be taken away, because children are the most precious things a mother has. When you take a mother's children away from her, she is done for.'

Valuing children, valuing parents: how the project was carried out

The project took place over nine months (15 November 2002 to 15 August 2003) and involved 10 project countries. ATD Fourth World groups in France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Spain and the United Kingdom, and the Haus Neudorf project in Germany, carried out exploratory work to gather together what we know about child poverty and, in particular, about families who, having lived in conditions of severe poverty and exclusion for generations, had experienced child protection interventions by social services. We also wanted to learn about research and activity in this area, including the situation in countries in which ATD Fourth World had little or no direct experience, such as Italy, Poland, Romania and Sweden.

Aims of the project

The project focused on the European Commission's objective of developing effective exchange programmes, including transnational partnerships. It aimed to:

- assess the current state of knowledge and note any developments relating to these issues
- identify appropriate partners for the development of work programmes which will set up exchanges and begin a long-term learning process
- clarify the objectives and possible conclusions to be submitted to the Commission and the Member States of the European Union relating to the development and evaluation of the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion.

Issues addressed by the project

The project concentrated on the ways in which child protection policies and the care system affect children, young people and families who live in poverty and social exclusion. It addressed three groups of questions:

1 **What does placing child poverty as a priority objective in fighting poverty and social exclusion mean for the European Union?**
- How is child poverty talked about and studied in different countries?
- What can the parents and children who are directly concerned teach us about these questions?

2 **How can the family be viewed as a safety net against child poverty?**
- What kind of security do children find within their family?
- In which ways are children a source of strength for their family?

3 **What support do families need to help them provide the best for their children?**
- Which laws, professional practices and community or civic initiatives have proved effective in supporting parents in difficulty?
- How can institutions and professionals work together with parents on shared projects?

How we worked on the project

The study was conducted in the spirit of encouraging European dialogue and drawing on contributions from people who are directly affected. Their personal experience of living in poverty, and of being deprived of their fundamental rights, provides a unique source of knowledge.

This contribution to the project from families came through ATD Fourth World teams:

- in countries directly involved in the project (Germany, Belgium, France, Luxembourg and the UK)
- in countries which were not direct partners in the project (Spain, The Netherlands, Poland, Switzerland).

The discussion paper also draws on numerous qualitative and participatory reports published throughout Europe in the past few years.

The preparation of this paper involved contacts and exchanges with people in the 10 project countries and beyond. New links were established with academics in Germany, France, Poland and Sweden; with field workers in Spain, Luxembourg, Romania and the UK; and with European networks based in Belgium, France and the Netherlands. The work was not solely concerned with investigating specific topics and pilot schemes, it also involved building alliances so that we could think about the issues and act together.

This networking enabled the project to draw on diverse sources for statistics and data, including the professional and scientific press and the internet, academic studies, national and international NGO reports relating to child poverty in the 10 partner countries.

The complexity of this work is indicated by the fact that for the whole duration of the project – over the course of months of contacts and discussions – we found it very difficult to come up with a standard questionnaire to be filled in by everyone we talked to. How can the same questionnaire be of any use when talking to a mother in her kitchen in London, meeting senior civil servants from the Ministry of the Family in their offices in Berlin, and discussing problems with the organiser of a family association in a district of Beauvais in France?

Supervised by the project coordinator, over 30 meetings were held involving people and organisations in Germany, Belgium, France, Luxembourg, Romania and the United Kingdom (*see* Appendix 4).

The main goal of *Valuing children, valuing parents* is to gather materials as a starting point for discussion and new initiatives. To stimulate debate, each main section of the discussion paper ends with some questions raised by the key issues that have been discussed.

With the enlargement of the European Union, new people and organisations will be involved with European initiatives to combat poverty affecting children and their families. A process of exchange and collaboration will make it possible to benefit from the experiences, values, old practices or innovative ideas from stakeholders in the new Member States. *Valuing children, valuing parents* will be a resource for these exchanges with eastern and central Europe.

We set out on page 22 some initial recommendations for the European strategy to fight poverty and social exclusion (officially referred to as the Social Inclusion Strategy). Parents, professionals, academics and activists must collaborate to identify the innovations that are needed so that the most disadvantaged families benefit from appropriate support services. These recommendations will therefore be discussed in the ongoing European exchange programme run by ATD Fourth World and in many other forums.

The *Valuing children, valuing parents* project welcomes feedback from readers of this discussion paper, as well as the thoughts and suggestions of anyone involved with these issues who would like to contribute or highlight an opinion, a concern or an experience.

Contributions, comments or questions can be addressed to:

valuingchildren@atd-fourthworld.org

or to:

International Movement ATD Fourth World – European Delegation
'Valuing children, valuing parents' project
107, avenue du Général Leclerc
95480 Pierrelaye
France

Recommendations for the European Union strategy for fighting poverty and social exclusion

To help readers find the discussion which is the basis for the following recommendations, there are cross-references to the relevant chapters of the discussion paper.

- **Involve children and their families in the research and evaluation of policies to combat child poverty**

  The success of policies and practices that combat child poverty is always compromised by the difficulty of enabling people in poverty to take a full and active role.

  We recommend that:

  – work is carried out to understand and promote the conditions required for constructive dialogue and cooperation between people in poverty and the other parties involved in the fight against poverty and social exclusion
  – projects and research should have qualitative and participatory dimensions
  – new indicators on poverty and social exclusion which relate specifically to children should be developed, in partnership with families
  – children and parents should help to build a better understanding about the most important features in the child's life during their childhood and for their future, and how to guarantee these features for all children.

  Part 1, The experience of poverty: listening to children and parents
  Part 2, all sections
  Part 3, Developing high quality services

- **Recognise that children play an active role and support them in doing this**

  Children can be a force for change and empowerment – both for their families and in their wider circle. They need friends for themselves, for their families, and for their own adult life.

  We recommend that:

  – greater recognition should be given to the role that children play within their family, at school and in the local community, in the fight against poverty and exclusion
  – measures should be taken to ensure that initiatives involving children reach those who are the most disadvantaged.

  Part 1, The experience of poverty: listening to children and parents
  Part 2, Families in poverty: the need for a broader perspective

- **Focus on the family as a network of social ties, emotional ties, skills and strengths**

  Families cannot live without friendship and support. We must look at the family in the context of its local environment and networks – the connections which the family unit makes and the connections which are denied to it.

  We recommend that:

  – conditions are identified in the community and in the home environment, which will support families and children and allow them to develop their skills and fulfil their potential
  – an exchange of information and ideas is developed between people involved with schemes that see the family group as a basic network which can be the springboard for individual and collective action
  – existing schemes which strengthen family and inter-family dynamics are used to inspire the future development of European strategies to combat poverty and exclusion, particularly in relation to children
  – the EU objective to promote 'action to preserve family solidarity in all its forms' is monitored and evaluated
  – measures taken in the pursuit of other strategic goals (jobs, financial resources) are monitored to ensure that they do not have negative effects on family life and on family projects which help children and parents to 'live and grow together'.

Part 2, New challenges for families; Families in poverty: the need for a broader perspective; Focusing on the family in the fight against child poverty: questions for the European strategy
Part 3, all sections

- **Understand the links between child protection policy and the strategy to fight poverty and exclusion**
  It is vital to gain a deeper understanding at the European level of the links between the strategy to fight poverty and exclusion, and child welfare and child protection policies.
  We recommend that:
  – research and statistical analysis is carried out to identify the number of children and families affected by child protection systems and the situation of these families, with particular focus on socio-economic aspects
  – long-term studies and research on the experiences of children and families who are affected by care orders from child protection services – particularly those living in poverty and exclusion – should assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of existing measures, and their outcomes for the children and parents concerned
  – child protection practices are evaluated for their impact on access to support and fundamental rights for some parents in poverty and exclusion
  – research is carried out at the European level to establish the impact of parents' fear of accessing support services in case this leads to unwanted intervention and even the possibility of their children being removed
  – these concerns are incorporated into Daphne, the European Union programme to prevent violence against children, young people and women.
  Part 1, Children in care: the impact of poverty
  Part 2, Child protection and family continuity; Involving parents in child protection: a challenge for the future
  Part 3, Being closer to children and parents: alternatives to separation; Supporting bonds between parents and children in care; Developing high quality services

- **Provide support for professionals in changing working approaches and practices**
  Evaluation of practices in line with objective 4b of the Social Inclusion Strategy ('adapting administrative and social services to the needs of people') should offer a better understanding of how policies and measures outlined in the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion are implemented and perceived, not only by the professionals, but also by the families who benefit from them.
  We recommend that:
  – new forms of training, support and supervision help those involved in educational and social intervention to develop a new way of perceiving and taking account of the family network
  – new ways of working in partnership with families in difficulty are developed that take into account their aspirations and abilities
  – parents affected by child protection measures, particularly the poorest, participate in the training of professionals working in social and educational support
  – high priority should be given to the search for alternatives to separating children and parents in situations of poverty and exclusion
  – budgetary decisions reflect the need to create a stimulating environment for professionals, with provision for innovation, experimentation and research.
  Part 2, Families in poverty: the need for a broader perspective; Focusing on the family in the fight against child poverty: questions for the European strategy; Involving parents in child protection: a challenge for the future
  Part 3, especially *Building foundations for new relationships; Developing high quality services*

part 1

European perspectives on child poverty

“There are no poor children … there are only children who need to sing, to live, to play, to laugh, to hope …”

Joseph Wresinski, Founder of ATD Fourth World

Part 1 **European perspectives on child poverty**

Action against child poverty in Europe

“Behind the statistics there are children. Happy and sad children. Freckled, fair, dark, big and small children. How are they affected by growing up in conditions of scant financial resources? … Poverty affects children’s everyday lives. It means not being able to take part in school trips or sports days because they don’t have the bus fare or the money to buy the necessary kit. Teenagers who cannot go out with their friends for a bite to eat or go to the cinema; younger children who are not invited to children’s parties because they cannot afford to reciprocate.”

Annika Åhnberg
President, Save the Children Sweden
Child Poverty in Sweden, 2002

Defining poverty and social exclusion

Defining poverty is a complex issue; we are aware of a number of different approaches. The most widely used relates to the level of resources (‘economic poverty’, understood in absolute or relative terms). Experts also talk about poverty in terms of living conditions, state benefit support, and a subjective state of poverty.

Through its work with people living in persistent and severe poverty over the last 40 years, ATD Fourth World has come – like them – to regard the way out of poverty as a process that requires:

- participation in society of people living in long-term poverty
- access to rights
- inclusion and positive relationships with, and recognition by, those around you and society at large
- the control someone has over the course of their own life and the way they live from day-to-day.

In 1987, Joseph Wresinski, founder of ATD Fourth World, submitted a definition of extreme poverty to the French Economic and Social Council. This definition was approved and later used by UN Special Rapporteur Leandro Despouy in his work on human rights and extreme poverty.[8]

> “The lack of basic security means the absence of one or more of the factors that enable individuals and families to assume basic responsibilities and to enjoy fundamental rights. Such a situation may vary in its extent; its consequences can vary in seriousness and may, to a greater or lesser extent, be irreversible. The lack of basic security leads to chronic poverty when it simultaneously affects several aspects of life, when it is prolonged and when it severely compromises people’s chances of regaining their rights and of assuming their responsibilities once again in the foreseeable future.”[9]

The idea of a cumulative process by which people become gradually more entrenched in insecurity, exclusion and severe poverty, was new in 1987. It contained a solution-focused vision calling for access to fundamental rights for the most excluded and a commitment by all parts of society to secure this.

Since the 1990s, Europe has started to come to terms with the notion of ‘social exclusion’, and there have been numerous attempts to define and analyse it. One example is the European project conducted by Home-Start

8 Leandro Despouy, *Final Report on human rights and extreme poverty*, E/CN.4/Sub.2/1996/13, www.unhchr.ch, United Nations, Geneva, 1996

9 Joseph Wresinski, *Chronic Poverty and Lack of Basic Security*, Economic and Social Council, France, 1987, available at www.atdfouthworld.org/intern/fondam/Wres_JO87en.pdf

International with the support of the European Commission, which resulted in the publication in 2002 of a report on *The social exclusion of families with young children*. This collaboration between partner organisations in Greece, Ireland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom recognised:

> "The multidimensionality of social exclusion and its association with stigma. (…) It is a process of accumulating disadvantage rather than a multi-faceted state, an obstruction of rights and opportunities, originating in external factors or subjective perceptions. Low participation in society (social, economic, cultural and political life), inadequate financial resources, feelings of isolation and powerlessness, and poor social support were identified as core elements [in the process of exclusion]."

The project studied the impact of different support initiatives on six aspects of social exclusion identified by the partner countries:

- the level of consumption of goods and services
- financial, material and cultural resources
- participation in economically productive activities
- social life and ties
- access to, and use of, public services
- subjective opinions on quality of life.

Several writers have chosen to approach the issues of poverty and exclusion in terms of the weakening and breaking down of social ties. The French sociologist Serge Paugam identifies the fundamental bonds which connect the individual to society:

- personal bonds
- social bonds
- citizenship bonds.[10]

In Paugam's view, this approach prompts a question about whether there are recognisable processes by which people lose their bonds with others one by one until they are left in a desperate situation.

One of the most interesting aspects of current efforts to understand poverty is the development of national and European projects that aim to establish a set of poverty indicators using a participatory approach.[11]

This discussion paper refers to all these ways of looking at poverty and exclusion. However, in Part 1 (especially in **The experience of poverty: listening to children and parents**, page 35) we argue that we must rethink both traditional and new concepts and their analytical methods. Above all, we need to complement an adult way of viewing poverty with the child's perspective if we are to move forward in the fight against child poverty.

In view of the complexity of attempting to define poverty and exclusion, who are we talking about in this paper? First and foremost we are talking about children, parents and families in a broad sense (siblings, grandparents, extended families, stepfamilies…).

By children, we generally mean minors under 18. This is a very diverse group with different needs, experiences, and sense of independence; it is important to differentiate between an infant, a pre-school toddler, a schoolchild, and a teenager in analysing studies and projects.

We have not chosen to focus on a 'target group' – such as families from minority ethnic groups, immigrant or Traveller families, lone-parent families, families affected by an adult's drug addiction, low income families, families with long-term dependence on minimal state benefits (income support, disability allowance). Nor do we specifically tackle the question of minors who are isolated for a variety of reasons (immigration, sexual exploitation, imprisonment of the parents, homelessness).

10 Serge Paugam et Mireille Clémençon, *Detresse et ruptures sociales*, Recueils et documents, No. 17, FNARS, Paris, France, 2002

11 For instance, Service de lutte contre la pauvreté, la précarité et l'exclusion sociale, Belgium, 2004. *Another approach to poverty indicators in Belgium*; a summary in English is available at www.luttepauvrete.be/publications/indicateurs/P4_summary.pdf

The families and individuals who participate in, and contribute to, ATD Fourth World projects in Europe have inspired this discussion paper. They are the people on the margins of society who ATD Fourth World teams are always trying to reach – those who have been the most isolated, sometimes for generations. They are often pained by their inability to nurture bonds that connect them to others, and accumulate a long-standing experience of insecurity and isolation. To use the terms of some authors, they undergo 'multidimensional' poverty and exclusion, or 'multicrisis' situations.

Child poverty: a European concern

Child poverty is a major concern in most of the countries within the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) because poor children experience a disproportionate share of deprivation, disadvantage, bad health and school outcomes, and because the consequences of poverty are especially dire for young children.

Since the early 1990s, the general trend in statistics quantifying the number of children living below a certain economic poverty threshold has varied – a general rise, or differing trends according to the country. Nevertheless, the general conclusion is clear: the likelihood of families, and therefore of children, in Europe being affected by poverty has risen over the last few decades.

Several explanations have been suggested:

- high rates of unemployment and a growing, unstable labour market based on temporary and low-paid jobs
- a growing diversity of family structures and an increasing number of lone parents
- a social system which no longer provides adequate support for parents in difficult economic circumstances.

In 1996, 21% of children under 18 years old in the European Union were living in low-income households (compared to 16% of adults). At that time, nearly 50% of children in Luxembourg, Ireland, and the United Kingdom were at risk of living in a low-income household.[12]

A number of studies show that children in the new Member States of the European Union have been significantly affected by an upsurge in poverty and widening inequality, despite the fact that in some countries they are protected by an inherited system of collective support and more equal incomes. According to Euronet's recent report, children and young people in these countries experience similar problems to their counterparts in western Europe, 'but on a greater scale'.[13]

These concerns about child poverty are being addressed through a variety of initiatives at European level.

- **European research on child poverty**

  The European Commission's first joint report on social inclusion confirms that the fight against poverty and social exclusion remains a priority for the European Union.[14] It recognises that 18% of the EU's population (over 60 million people) are threatened by poverty and around half of them live in conditions of long-term poverty. The young, the elderly, the unemployed, lone-parent families, and the children of these families, are at particular risk of falling into poverty.

  Following this report, among other initiatives, Petra Hölscher was commissioned to carry out European research on the specific subject of child poverty within the framework of the Community Action Programme. The following analysis is the starting point of her work:

12 Eurostat, *Income poverty*, Statistics in Focus, Theme 3, Luxembourg, 12/2000
13 Fran Bennett and Sandy Ruxton, *Including children? Developing a coherent approach to child poverty and social exclusion across Europe*, Euronet, Brussels, 2002
14 European Commission and Council, *Joint Report on Social Inclusion*, Brussels, 2001

In spite of the incidence of child poverty, there is still a lack of specific statistical data and particularly of information about the multidimensional nature of child poverty on a transnational level. Even on a regional or national level, statistical data are often hard to compare as they are often based on different definitions of poverty and social exclusion. There is a need for the development of common indicators to measure poverty on the European level.

Furthermore, definitions of poverty and social exclusion usually refer to adults. While poverty is measured relative to the nationally-adjusted median income, with the poverty line usually drawn at 50% or 60%, the concept of social exclusion requires a multidimensional approach, asking which indicators are barriers to full participation in society.

In general, children are regarded as poor if they live in a poor household, and they are seen as at risk of social exclusion if certain characteristics of their families (*eg* lone parent, immigrant background, low educational level) or themselves (*eg* a disability) put them at a disadvantage. Conceptualisations of poverty and social exclusion related to the specific situation of young people are rare.

Children growing up in low-income households are at risk. Economic poverty is often only one aspect of the deprivation that affects poor children more often than their better-off peers, limiting their development and their chances for participation. They also suffer from:

- health problems
- low educational achievement
- low self-esteem and wellbeing
- behavioural problems
- limited social contacts.

On the other hand, some young people are resilient; they manage their life successfully in spite of poverty and deprivation. Research on resilience shows that these children, though having to deal with the same range of problems, make use of more personal and/or social resources that enable them to cope with, and prevent, social exclusion. Identifying these supportive factors, could lead the way to the means of prevention and empowerment.

Extracts from the project design paper
Petra Hölscher, University of Dortmund, *A thematic study using transnational comparisons to analyse and identify what combination of policy responses are most successful in preventing and reducing high levels of child poverty* (commissioned by the European Commission, DG Employment and Social Affairs; final report available autumn 2004)

- **Convention on the Future of Europe**
  Before the Intergovernmental Conference in the second half of 2003, the text proposed by the Convention on the Future of Europe referred specifically to the protection of children's rights only under the section of the draft constitution devoted to internal and external interventions of the Union (article 3.3 and 3.4). NGOs and members of the convention deplored the fact that children were almost invisible in existing treaties. However, an objective to protect children's rights was added to the draft constitution, enabling children's issues to be considered at the level of European treaties. This is supported by a number of moves relating to children's rights.
- **A world fit for children: a call for action plans**
  Following the Global Summit for Children in 1999, and the special session of the United Nations dedicated to children in May 2002, collective action was proposed which involves all European Union countries and candidate countries:

  > We, the heads of state and governments, and state representatives participating in the Extraordinary Session for Children (…) are resolved to seize this unprecedented opportunity to change the world for children and those with them.

  The action plan *A world fit for children* was adopted with the aim of improving children's circumstances between now and 2012. It focuses on three priorities:
  - giving young children a good start in life
  - ensuring each child has access to a good education

- giving all children and young people the opportunity to participate fully in the development of society.

The first step of this plan was to require every country to draw up a National Action Plan for children by the end of 2003.

- **European NGOs and the fight against child poverty**

For several years, European NGOs have been focusing on the problems affecting children and on children's rights. For example, Euronet[15] and the European Forum for Child Welfare have been working at establishing more precise objectives and projects aimed at improving the future of all children. Their joint conference *Child poverty in Europe: our children, our poverty* in January 2002 presented findings of studies (many of which are referred to in this discussion paper) and called on the key players in the European Union to take more action to help children affected by poverty and exclusion.

In 2002, Euronet published *Including children? Developing a coherent approach to child poverty and social exclusion across Europe* with the support of the European Commission. This report (which we quote in this discussion paper) analyses data relating to child poverty and social exclusion across the EU. It also compares the way children have been affected by the different Member States' National Action Plans for Social Inclusion.

The European Forum for Child Welfare (EFCW), which consists of a number of NGOs dedicated to children, undertook a survey of the available information for the project *Eradicating child poverty: fact or fiction?* With support from the Directorate General for Employment and Social Affairs at the European Commission, between March 2001 and June 2002, this project coordinated information from five different Member States (Finland, Belgium, Ireland, Greece and the United Kingdom). (In 2004 most members of EFCW joined a new network called Eurochild which will continue to distribute former EFCW publications.)[16]

A number of other projects supported by the Commission within the framework of the Community Action Programme (*see* pages 3 and 12), address the problem of child poverty and the fight against social exclusion, by encouraging cross-border cooperation between the Member States.

In addition to the project of which this discussion paper forms part, projects concerned with transnational exchanges to encourage cooperation and reciprocal learning include *A lobby for children: approaches towards social inclusion of children in Europe*, the pilot schemes launched by the German organisation AWO (Arbeiterwolfahrt Verband),[17] and those focusing on the situation of families with young children run by Home-Start International (*see* pages 28 and 107).[18]

Child poverty: action at national level

We have used many different sources to put together an overview of national commitments to fight child poverty; a complete text will be available as Supplement 1 (*see* Appendix 1). In particular, this includes the reports regularly submitted by the signatories to the Convention of Children's Rights, which provide a primary resource on the situation of children in European countries. These, and the 'alternative' reports published by NGOs, can be accessed on the internet.[19]

15 www.euronet.org
16 www.eurochild.org
17 www.lobby-for-children.org
18 www.home-start-int.org
19 www.crin.org

Belgium In a rich country like Belgium, there are families who do not have the financial means they need and are entitled to, in order to bring up their children. In the wake of the Dutroux affair (concerning the abuse and kidnapping of children), the country is more engaged with children's issues in terms of children's rights. The OECD PISA survey (Programme for International Student Assessment) stimulated debate about the gap between 'good students' and 'less good students'. Belgium had one of the highest numbers of the latter group, mostly from disadvantaged, working-class backgrounds; their school performance was among the worst in Europe. Recent debates have focused on the problem of child poverty; the government has commissioned a report on child begging in relation to isolated immigrant children who lack stability in their lives.

France There are signs of a new approach to the issue of poverty and exclusion from the child's perspective. A conference *Child poverty in France* brought together researchers, experts in demographics, economists, sociologists, and people who work on the ground; 200 people attended a conference in January 2003 on *Preventing exclusion in childhood*. Although there are no references to the prevention of childhood exclusion in the Combat Exclusion Act 1998, there are several important signs of commitment: a right to daycare for all young children, increased support for parents, attention to particular periods of transition or vulnerability in childhood, an emphasis on cultural and artistic open-mindedness, and a transformation of professional practices towards a better working relationship with parents.

Germany The current economic situation has forced a much-needed debate about poverty. Reunified Germany is suffering from economic recession and rising unemployment. The Federal Republic has nevertheless been assessing the situation of children for many years. *Report on childhood and youth* focuses on the extent to which economic poverty affects children and families. At the beginning of 2002, the PISA survey compared education systems in 32 countries in all continents; it ranked Germany at the bottom of the table. This had an enormous impact, and triggered an immediate response aimed at tackling problems in the education system. It also raised awareness of child poverty in the context of education and school. Studies by the ISS (Institut für Sozialarbeit und Sozialpädagogik e.V.), which linked the issues of poverty and education, led to the European exchange programme *A lobby for children* (see www.lobby-for-children.org). This project calls on Germany, in particular, to take action to improve the future for children.

Italy Italy has one of the highest levels of child poverty. NGOs point out that, until recently, the only data available referred to the incidence of poverty among families with one or more children under 18. Tackling children's issues means first of all acknowledging a serious demographic crisis; the country is no longer maintaining its population. A great debate on the topic of 'family' is already under way. In 1997, the Italian government adopted a law that committed it to running a programme every two years devoted to children and teenagers (to protect the rights and development of children during their formative years) – the first time a plan of this kind was established with a firm timetable. A report tackling the issue of minors in Italy was produced by Chiara Saraceno in 2002 for the Italian 'Commission investigating social exclusion and the policies (1997–2001), which combat poverty and social exclusion'. The introduction of law 285/97 is a considerable step forward because it represents, for the first time in Italy, an approach to welfare which takes different aspects of children's lives into account.

Luxembourg The youngest age groups are proportionally the worst affected by economic poverty (18% of under 15 year olds live in low-income households).

Poland Of all the 23 countries in central and eastern Europe, Poland has the highest rate of relative child poverty, but one of the better records when absolute poverty is measured. The alternative report, published in 2002 by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, points out that poverty in Poland is growing, that half of all people affected by poverty are children and that a worrying gap is developing between urban and rural areas.

Romania At the time of the fall of Ceaucescu in 1989, reports on Romanian orphans were published all over the world and still exert a powerful influence over the way Romania is perceived. After 15 transitional years, and despite numerous efforts from within the country, Romania is having little success in improving this situation. *Chance for innocence – Review of progress for institutionalised children in Romania*, published by the government in 2002 reported that the number of people in poverty had risen from 4 to 7 million within a very short space of time. A decline in socio-economic conditions led to an increase in the percentage of children in economic poverty from around 25% in 1995 to nearly 43% in 2000; 80% of families with more than three children live in poverty and these families account for half of all Romanian children.

Spain 'Policies aimed at children are no longer centre-stage' according to research on *Child*

residential care in the Spanish social protection system, by Fernández del Valle and Ferrán Casas, published in 2001. Of all the EU countries, Spain has the lowest allocation of financial resources for newborn babies and the lowest cash benefits. However, these benefits are increasing fast following a review, and over 65% of family benefits in Spain are 'in kind' (child daycare, accommodation, goods and services etc). The 'Platform of child organisations' highlights a number of encouraging developments, such as the adoption of an action plan for children in 1996.

Sweden The issue of child poverty is considered against a background of considerable immigration. In 2001, Save the Children Sweden launched a campaign called 'Count on me'. The campaign ran for over a year and highlighted discrimination against children in Sweden. Linked to this campaign, the report *Child poverty in Sweden 2000* showed that around 296,000 children were living in conditions of economic poverty; 14,000 more than in 1991. The likelihood of being affected by poverty was four times greater for children of foreign extraction than for children from a Swedish background. This report uses a Swedish 'low income' indicator, according to which 18% of minors are in poverty. The use of standard European indicators (50% of average income) results in a figure which is four to five times lower.

United Kingdom The UK has one of the highest rates of child poverty among industrialised countries. In 1999, Prime Minister Tony Blair committed his government and country to eradicating child poverty within a generation (20 years). The Treasury has shown its commitment to this goal by proposing to halve child poverty by 2010. *Britain's poorest children*, commissioned by the NGO Save the Children and carried out by the Centre For Research in Social Policy at Loughborough University in 2003, underlines the extent and depth of poverty among children, and the clear link between low incomes, deprivation and social exclusion. End Child Poverty was set up in 2001 as a coalition of public, private and voluntary organisations to inform the public about the causes and effects of child poverty and to campaign to end child poverty by 2020.

Over and above national differences, this overview shows that there is a growing trend towards addressing issues of poverty and exclusion from the children's perspective. This trend is the result of a variety of factors:

- the rising status and role of children within our societies
- sustained work by those promoting children's rights
- the worsening socio-economic situation of many children and families
- action taken in some English-speaking countries, particularly the United Kingdom
- studies, information exchanges and national comparisons.

Taking these factors into account, we need to consider how children and parents can play an active role in achieving these commitments. Ways forward need to reflect the desires of parents living in poverty to do the best for their children and to remain key players in contributing to their children's future wellbeing.

Key points

- **Child poverty is a major concern in most EU countries.**
- **Discussions and research about poverty and social exclusion related to the specific situation of children and young people are developing.**
- **Over and above national differences, there is a growing trend at European and national level towards addressing the issues of poverty and exclusion from the child's perspective.**

Issues for discussion

- **What can we learn from European countries that develop specific strategies to eradicate child poverty?**
- **How do the actions and results arising from these strategies compare with countries that have less focused (more global) strategies?**
- **What means should be taken to ensure that the children and parents concerned have an active role in strategies and actions to fight child poverty?**

The experience of poverty: listening to children and parents

"They say what they think child poverty is and how to measure it, then they come to consult us. They should come to us first, we are the ones who have lived it… When you say children centred, we forget that if we really want to focus on the children, we need to focus on their parents too."

Parents' views
ATD Fourth World UK response to consultation on *Every child matters*

Growing up in poverty: children speak out

Many authors see an urgent need to find out how best to involve children in the process by which we deepen our understanding of what it is to be a child affected by poverty and exclusion. British researchers, who are already tackling this problem, agree that there is a shortage of qualitative data, and that we are still a long way from understanding what children think and feel about poverty. Tess Ridge states that listening to children would inevitably lead to a radical revision of the concepts of poverty and social exclusion: up to now these concepts have been used *by* adults *about* adults.[20] Public policies aimed at combating child poverty focus only on preparing children for adult life, in terms of work and citizenship; they fail to consider how children in situations of deprivation or exclusion interact with the children around them.

The Euronet report points out that the subjective experience of poverty and social exclusion of children under 16 is rarely considered, and even less attention is paid to the same questions regarding the very young. Studies have only recently begun to seek the views of children on poverty and social exclusion. There is, however, a growing trend towards participative projects at the national and local level all around Europe. Nevertheless, many of these projects were not designed with children who are in poverty and social exclusion in mind. *Including children* concluded that unless we make a concerted effort to include these children, they are likely to remain marginalised, even in the context of projects that encourage their participation.[21]

It has not been possible to carry out a specific survey of children's views, but we have drawn on work reported in a variety of publications. Several studies into childhood poverty using participatory approaches have been carried out in recent years. Six contributions from Germany, Greece, United Kingdom or Western Europe at large are set out below. Some other works can be found in Appendix 2 **Further reading**.

20 Tess Ridge, *Childhood poverty and social exclusion from a child's perspective*, Studies in poverty, inequality and social exclusion, The policy press, 2002

21 Fran Bennett and Sandy Ruxton, *Including children? Developing a coherent approach to child poverty and social exclusion across Europe*, Euronet, Brussels, 2002

Childhood poverty and social exclusion from a child's perspective

Childhood poverty and social exclusion from a child's perspective by Tess Ridge describes a qualitative survey of 40 children aged 10 to 17 in the UK, carried out in 1999 in the urban areas of Bath and Bristol, and in the rural area of Somerset. All the children were from families who had been on income support for more than six months, and half of the children came from lone-parent households.

Ridge interviewed children individually, focusing on aspects of daily life, such as pocket money, school, relationships with other children, family environment. She points out how a lack of independent economic resources, and the absence of accessible means of transport, determined numerous aspects of a child's daily life – school life, relationships with other children, access to leisure activities, earning money through work, and so on.

Asked what worried them, the children spoke of their concerns about success or failure at school, worries about their parents, about having no money, and about their fears for the future. Many children were acutely aware of their parents' economic situation, and tried to protect them – over half the 40 children interviewed said they 'would not ask their parents for something quite expensive'. Several older girls, in particular, were very protective of their parents, and were prepared to ration themselves and go without so that their parents were not worried by their demands. Lisa, aged 15, said, 'It's just impossible with four kids you know – if I get something then they will all want something, so it's not really fair'.

Some of the children explained how they sacrificed their own wants and needs. When saving up is not a realistic option (no pocket money or no work), their responses reveal a sense of futility. They say that they try to forget about the things they want, keep quiet about it, do not even bother to ask or try not to care about it.

In spite of this, in *Britain's poorest children: severe and persistent poverty and exclusion* (Save the Children UK, 2003), Adelman, Ashworth and Middelton showed that only 2–3% of young people aged between 10 and 14 who live in persistent poverty say they are 'dissatisfied' with their parents, compared to 5% for young people who are not affected by poverty.

In her conclusion, Ridge identified several key challenges:

- the need for a better understanding of the complex effect of poverty on the lives of children who are 'active social agents', and their role within their own family (defence and protection of parents; responses to, and reactions against, poverty)
- the need to transform the school environment, which is currently a place of failure and also of exclusion from the world of other children
- the vital role of relationships and friendships with other children in preventing the consequences of poverty; how to enable and encourage friendships and social networks between children by supporting the participation of children and young people in social activities
- the importance of investigating the clothing needs of children as a way of aiding their integration with other children.

How children cope with poverty

There have been several qualitative surveys in Germany in recent years, indicating the growing importance of the issue there.

Between 1997 and 1999, Antje Richter, who is concerned with the way in which children in small rural communities experience, and react to, poverty and deprivation, interviewed around 15 children aged between 6 and 11 years old.[1] She identified certain situations and events that can have a significant impact on children:

- limited contact with other children
- lack of space at home and family conflicts
- envy, jealousy and limited spending power compared to peers
- limited opportunities for social activities in the surrounding environment.

The children showed a wide range of responses to these situations: inventiveness, powerlessness, solidarity … Richter observed that the vast majority of children showed a deep understanding of, and loyalty to, their parents. Within the framework of her analysis, she identifies four categories of response:

- getting by alone, taking things on oneself, avoiding problems
- seeking out support and making contact with others, showing one's emotions
- dreaming and not acknowledging the reality
- letting oneself get into a bad state, over-eating
- taking it out on things and people who are around, externalising frustration.

She concludes that on the whole – and especially when very young – children have internal responses to these situations (such as, isolation, evasion, shame) that tend to avoid action. However, she notes that numerous psychological studies have shown that 'action' responses have less negative long-term effects in terms of behaviour and development.

You need to practically beg if you want to do anything: young people's experiences of poverty, a

study by Petra Hölscher was published in 2003.[2] After carrying out a quantitative survey of 750 adolescents aged between 12 and 16 in the Dortmund area, she conducted 15 qualitative interviews with boys and girls. She interpreted the data from these surveys from four angles:

- material deprivation
- family life
- school
- friendships and leisure.

One of her conclusions is that, although the wellbeing of the youngsters she interviewed depended on a number of factors, the principal factor was the quality of family life.

Children in Europe speaking out about children's rights

Set up in 1967 by ATD Fourth World, Tapori is an international children's movement and exchange programme (see www.tapori.org). It is founded on the conviction that the promotion of friendship between children is an effective response to severe poverty and exclusion affecting children and their families.

Tapori offers children from all socio-economic backgrounds opportunities to meet together and to get involved. A trusting relationship is established with, and between, the children over a long period:

- Tapori responds to children's need for friendships.
- By involving children from all backgrounds in the programme, it avoids stigmatising any groups.
- Children take an active role in dealing with problems and situations linked to poverty and exclusion.

In 2002, the General Assembly of the United Nations held an extraordinary session dedicated to children at which Tapori and ATD Fourth World presented their report *Tapori children defend the Convention on the Rights of the Child*. The report was compiled by interviewing children in their schools and homes, near rubbish tips, in shanty towns, in the streets of their towns, or in their village.

The numerous interviews, based on the experience of children involved with Tapori, revealed that many children feel humiliated by the conditions they experience, and are rejected at school for the same reason. Families living in severe poverty are faced with many obstacles which prevent children from fully benefiting from the right to a free education, from feeling comfortable at school and accepted by the other children, and from succeeding in their studies, including:

- humiliation resulting from difficult living conditions
- the lack of a stable family income, and therefore the need for children to contribute to the family finances
- the level of violence in some schools.

The following issues emerged from the interviews.

Getting to school

Dominic, from Portugal, lives with his parents and brothers in delapidated housing. He and the other eight children must walk several kilometres to the village school because the school bus does not stop on the unpaved road to pick them up.

Dominic says:

> "We like going to school, but sometimes, when it rains, we don't like going. It's a long way, and we have to take a muddy path to get there. When we get to school, all the children look at us because we get the floor dirty with our muddy boots. The teacher yells at us, saying we're the only ones who come to school like that. The other children have clean shoes because they live in the village where the road is paved. We don't even have water at our house... not even electricity to study in the evenings. Because of all of this, our mother sometimes keeps us home from school."

Dominic's parents do not think it is right that their children are humiliated because of the difficulties in their lives. They say, 'In winter, [our children] don't like to go to school. They are afraid. But they are braver than the other children in the village who live close to the school.'

Violence in the neighbourhood

Violence in their neighbourhood affects children's lives. Children see their older brothers or sisters using drugs; children who witness the effects of drug use on their streets are often the first to suffer its devastating effects. At the same time, they recognise that the drug dealers and users also need opportunities that will enable them to make different choices.

Sandra, from Spain, explains:

> "In my city, I know children who live in an area where there is a lot of drug dealing. It's a very poor neighbourhood, and people go there to take drugs. They do it in front of the children, and the children get scared. The children are also scared of being pricked by a needle, like the ones you find on the ground. Now the neighbourhood is very dangerous.
>
> I think that the drug dealers set themselves up in poor communities because poor people can't do anything about it. The neighbours are scared too, and gradually the drug dealers take over. I think that the drug dealers should be made to understand that they are hurting others. Then we can give them a job so they can support themselves and their families. And as for the addicts, I think we should give them treatment

that will work quickly, and that when a person wants to go through treatment, they should be treated as a person and not be mistreated. Then, everyone will have what they need, and drug dealing and drug abuse will stop."

Children in care

Children were interviewed who were placed in care because their families lacked the financial means and support to bring them up.

When Caroline was born, her parents were living in a very draughty cabin. She was often ill. This eventually led to a court order removing Caroline to admit her to hospital. Social services came to pick her up and took her to the hospital. Lydia and Mario, her parents, later learned that their daughter had been placed in a foster family, and for more than a year her location was kept secret from them.

Lydia and Mario were finally rehoused in a small house and the children's judge summoned the parents to ask them if they wanted to have Caroline back. To them, there was not a shadow of doubt: 'She is ours. We want her. Her brothers are waiting for her at home.' But their wishes were ignored. Never giving up, Lydia and Mario have been fighting for more than three years to regain custody of their daughter.

Recently, her older sister Hermia, aged 10, said:

"The people who have my sister always arrive late and leave us only a short time to see her. We would like to have her with us all the time. Our sister loves to play with us, and every time she has to leave she wants to stay with us."

Children who have been reunited with their families after a period in foster care testify to the suffering these separations cause. Eric, from France, explains:

"The most important thing for me is to have a mother and a father. Mothers hug you and comfort you when you're sad. Fathers try to talk to you. A foster family, even if they are nice, cannot replace your mother and father. I was separated from my mum, and it was hard. When she came to see me in the children's home, we would have a lot of fun together, but in the evening it was hard to leave my mother, and I would see her cry. When you go through that, it hurts, you feel ashamed. Some people said that we were separated because I was getting into trouble all the time. The other children in foster care were also told that. We have to do everything possible so that children can live with their parents. We love our parents and we want them to be happy."

Listening to children in Europe

An active role for children is central to the initiatives of Euronet and the European Forum for Child Welfare (EFCW). For instance, with the help of national NGOs, Euronet organised a delegation of children to the European Parliament, who contributed to the discussions on the Convention on the Future of Europe on 3 April 2003.

In 1999–2000, Euronet coordinated a project aimed at listening to the views of children, helping them to get involved in the decision-making process, and supporting their participation in society. The project was supported by the International Catholic Office For Children (Belgium and Italy), the French Council of Associations For Child Rights (France), Save The Children (UK), Focus on Children (Ireland) and Platform for Children's Organisations (Spain). Many of the children came from disadvantaged backgrounds. In each participating country, views were canvassed through group discussions, interviews and questionnaires. There was also a joint meeting involving children representing each of the countries.

Agenda 2000 for the children and young people of Europe, the publication which resulted from the project, included recommendations on education, social integration, media and the internet, health, citizenship and participation in society. Euronet identified a number of recurrent themes in the children's views:

- the stigma and shame associated with poverty
- poor quality of housing
- problems at school
- poor environment
- lack of employment
- high levels of violence and bullying
- concerns about drugs
- fears of racism and harassment
- discrimination
- missing out on material goods, leisure activities and holidays.

The National Organisation for Social Care in Greece carried out a survey of children between March 2001 and June 2002 as part of *Eradicating child poverty: fact or fiction?* – an EFCW project. Two groups of children from Thessalonika were interviewed about poverty and how satisfied they were with their lives. The children in group 1 lived at home with their families; children in group 2 had been placed in institutional care following child protection measures. The organisation concluded that even if it was difficult to draw definite conclusions, certain key points were immediately clear:

- The children in institutions were far more nostalgic, not only regarding their own families, but also regarding friends.
- The children in group 1 were more interested in aspects of life like a good education and travel, while those in group 2 were more attracted by material things such as pocket money, or having their own bedroom.

- The opinions of the children in group 1 were more similar to those of professionals and adults in general.
- Answering the question *What can the state do to help poor children?* both groups gave the same response: help families to keep their children.

1 Anje Richter, *Wie erleben und bewältigen Kinder Armut? Eine qualitative Studie über Unterversorgungslagen und ihre Bewältigung aus subjektiver Sicht con Grundschulkindern aus einer ländlichen Region*, Shaker Verlag, Aachen, Germany, 2000
2 Petra Hölscher, *Immer musst du hingehen und praktisch betteln: wie Jugendliche Armut erleben*, Campus, Germany, 2003

The picture that emerges is that:

- children are acutely aware of the situation their families are in
- they are often actively engaged in trying to help them escape from poverty
- they try to protect their parents
- they want their families to stay together and be supported
- when they are separated, they all suffer.

Children have a strong desire for friends. The consequences for children of having limited financial resources, and the material situation associated with this – where you live, access to transport – are profound in terms of relationships with others, opportunities for leisure activities and holidays, happiness at school, and self-esteem. Often, the educational system is not a positive, inclusive experience for children; on the contrary, they are stigmatised, they fail to build good relationships with others and they feel ashamed.

Another message from this review is that treating children as 'poor children' can prevent us from seeing them as children like any others. They feel that very strongly. Thinking in terms of poverty when talking to children can jeopardise the outcome of any work. One 16 year old in Britain said, 'I don't think you could find anyone who said they lived in poverty'.[22]

The Euronet report, *Including children*, notes that children tend not to define themselves as 'living in poverty', largely because of the sense of shame associated with this label. Generally speaking, children seem to think that poverty affects children in other countries – in Africa, for example – not in their own country, not themselves.

Rather than talking about the current reality of poverty, many children from low-income families simply cope with the circumstances they find themselves in. Their real feelings about their lives may be more clearly revealed by their reduced expectations for the present, and their low aspirations for the future.

It is important for organisations from different countries to exchange ideas about working practices and methodologies for including children and listening to them. Many authors talk about their methodological approach in terms of respecting children, building their confidence, giving them control over the material, and making sure that the children are not stigmatised by the issues discussed. Studies in the United Kingdom have demonstrated the advantages of talking to children in groups.

Participation of children should extend beyond listening to their views, to greater involvement of children in poverty and their families, in projects in which they take on active roles and work with others. The work of ATD Fourth World with the Tapori programme demonstrates some of the possibilities.

22 Carolyne Willow, *Bread is free: children and young people talk about poverty*, Children's Rights Alliance for England and Save The Children, UK, 2001

Parenting in poverty: adults speak out

For several years now, there has been a growing tendency in Europe to take adults' experiences of poverty into account in research, policy-making and action.

European Anti Poverty Network (EAPN) organises European meetings of people affected by poverty, with the support of the European Union.[23] New participation-based projects aim to define new indicators of poverty and exclusion with the help of the people concerned.

From input to influence provides an overview of research projects which involved the full participation of people who have direct experience of poverty.[24] One example is the research project *Le croisement des savoirs* (*Pooling knowledge on poverty*) conducted in France and Belgium between 1999 and 2001 (*see* page 65).[25]

Over the last 40 years, ATD Fourth World's efforts have contributed significantly to new approaches to adults' experiences of poverty, built on participation and partnership. However, our aim here is not to tackle the vast question of what we can learn about poverty from the adults who are affected by it; we are drawing on the work of ATD Fourth World to consider adults' views on childhood – their own childhood or the childhood of the children in their care.

Lack of money

In 2002, Susan Mayer conducted an extensive literature review on how parental income affects a child's welfare. She found that:

> "Parental income is positively correlated with virtually every dimension of child wellbeing that social scientists measure, and this is true in every country for which we have data. The children of rich parents are healthier, better behaved, happier and better educated during their childhood and wealthier when they have grown up than are children from poor families."[26]

Long-term poverty in childhood has greater effects than short spells of poverty; the longer a family remains in poverty, the harder it is for them to carry on paying for the goods and services which help children to develop. Lack of money also often has a long-term effect on child-parent relationships.

In 2003, families in Respiro Familiar Project, ATD Fourth World Spain, spoke of their experiences:

> "Poverty!… People don't know that there really are children who, at lunch and dinner, can't even have a glass of milk (…) Their mothers can't afford to buy them trainers or a tracksuit. They often want to buy their children a tracksuit because the children's classmates make fun of them and don't understand that some children can't afford that kind of thing."
>
> "People who have never wanted for anything can't understand. It is hard for poor mothers all the time. Every time a child asks her mother for, say, a fruit juice and she can't afford to give her one, it's another blow."
>
> "After I've paid the rent, there's nothing left. Halfway through the month I have nothing to spend. Tonight the little one came into my bedroom and said 'Granny, I'm hungry'. Little children should never go hungry. I said to him, 'Tomorrow I will cook the chicken', which we had got a few days before. But who knows what we'll do after tomorrow."

In 2000, a group of parents and young adults, ATD Fourth World Bordeaux, spoke of their experiences:

23 European Anti Poverty Network, *Citizenship and Participation*, Network News newsletter, No. 101, July 2003 and www.eapn.org

24 Fran Bennett with Moraene Roberts, *From input to influence: participatory approaches to research and inquiry into poverty*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2004

25 Groupe de recherche Quart Monde-Université, *Le croisement des savoirs: quand le Quart Monde et l'Université pensent ensemble*, EditionsQuart Monde et Editions de l'Atelier, Paris, France, 1999

26 Susan Mayer quoted by John Micklewright, 'Child Poverty in English Speaking Countries', in *Actes du colloque 'enfants pauvres en France*, Cerc, France, 2003

> “My daughter is going back to school and I will buy her a pencil case, a pencil and an exercise book, but if she needs a new pair of shoes, I won’t be able to afford them.”
>
> “The hardest thing is the way our children look at us sometimes. There are a lot of things the children would like to have, and they say ‘why can they have it and not me?’ This really hurts parents, but you can’t blame the children, they will understand when they’re older.”
>
> “Lack of money is a constant worry. There are so many things to worry about like bills to pay, the rent, the electricity, and when you are under supervision, you don’t have any freedom. You live in fear when your means of support disappear, especially the fear of having your children taken away from you. It’s a well-founded fear, too, because that has happened to a lot of people.”

School: opportunities lost

Professor Claude Pair aims to raise awareness among teachers in the education system of how children’s and adults’ lives are affected by poverty, and the extent to which parents are deeply affected by their children’s experiences at school. In *School and poverty*, he quotes the comments of parents:

> “Tell the teachers that our greatest desire is for our children to learn at school.”
>
> “There were too many problems at home and I couldn’t work there. I couldn’t think straight, and I couldn’t study.”
>
> “The worst thing for children is the way people look at them, and us as a family. They have feelings, they really resent the injustices, they hear what people say about them, and it affects them for life. At Aurore’s school, every time I sent in a note, the teacher said ‘Your mother can’t write, so I wonder how you will do!”[27]

ATD Fourth World UK interviewed 122 adults, teenagers and children from 39 families on their experiences of the education system, and how poverty had affected the children’s school life. *Education: opportunities lost*, the report of this survey, confirms that the children who have the most to gain from school are too often the ones who fail in it.[28] Parents and children talk about bullying, behavioural expectations that are often unrealistic for those living in poverty, the hidden costs of school, and the importance of good parent-teacher relationships for a child’s achievement at school.

Separating children and parents

The Fourth World University research project, *Pooling knowledge on poverty*, conducted in France and Belgium between 1999 and 2001, says that those who live in poverty know that it is not simply a question of coping with a difficult period which occurs suddenly – but rather an accumulation of difficulties which mount up from early childhood onwards. That’s what makes the experience of families living in poverty different from the difficulties experienced by families from other social backgrounds.

A wrecked childhood means a wrecked adult life; there will always be deep scars, doubts about one’s abilities and distrust of others.

When he was a baby, one man was placed with a foster family where he was treated as one of the family. But when he was nine, he was sent on a holiday camp and when he came back – without ever being told why – he was sent to live with a different family who made him work on their farm.

27 Claude Pair, *L’Ecole devant la grande pauvreté*, Editions Hachette, Paris, 1998

28 ATD Fourth World UK, *Education: opportunities lost – the education system as experienced by families living in poverty*, London, 2000

> "I'll never forget what I was put through from 9 to 13. They lied to me, my whole world collapsed. It was then that I thought I was finished. People didn't trust me when I was a child, so I lost my self-confidence."

A woman, thinking back to her earliest memories of being placed in care at the age of four, said:

> "Wherever I go to try to forget, I can't help thinking about it. They wanted to show me where I was born, where my parents fought to keep me. I went there once. I saw the house and I said I would never go back. It was too painful. My parents fought to keep me when 'they' came to take me away. My mother held me in her arms and cried 'No, don't take my child'. The further I get away from that place, the more I think about it. You never forget something like that."[29]

Shame and humiliation

Feelings of shame and of being stigmatised lie at the heart of children's experiences of poverty and social exclusion. The Euronet report *Including children* says that children use words like *sad*, *unhappy*, *embarrassed* and *ashamed* to describe their sense of being excluded.

More than poverty itself, it is the attitudes towards it that create feelings of shame. Sometimes a reaction to shame involves violence, sometimes escape: you hide, or become depressed. Shame causes more unhappiness than material poverty. In childhood, the way others look at you at school can crush you, shatter you, even come between a child and their parents, or brothers and sisters.

> "When I went to school, I wasn't allowed to hang my coat up next to the other coats in case they got lice. My peg was the last one. Out of shame, I was always the last to leave the corridor. Shame made me keep myself to myself, made me a loner."[30]

Awareness of this difference, and the inferiority linked to it, generates feelings of exclusion that can have all sorts of consequences: isolation, fear of others, a feeling of actually being what others see you as. These feelings are deeply embedded in the lives of those affected and are reinforced through a variety of direct and indirect factors. For example:

- ways of dressing that expose children who cannot afford to follow the latest fashion
- not having the money to buy the same things as others, and therefore not able to be part of their group and be like them
- the shame of seeing oneself, and being seen, as different because you lack what others possess
- parents who (sometimes very reasonably) have low aspirations for their children, or who blame their poverty on their offspring
- schools which devote less attention to children who are judged to be less deserving, or less likely to succeed
- collective society, which can marginalise poor areas and give whole streets or estates a bad name; these are then sidelined by public services and businesses because of their reputation.[31]

Children in poverty are confronted with a negative image of their own parents very early on. They are constantly torn between love for their parents and a sense of shame about the way other people look at them.

Based on many people's accounts of childhood experiences, the French psycho-sociologist Vincent de Gaulejac identifies the main effects of repeated feelings of shame:

29 Groupe de recherche Quart Monde-Université, *Le croisement des savoirs*, 1999
30 Ibid.
31 Fran Bennett and Sandy Ruxton, *Including children? Developing a coherent approach to child poverty and social exclusion across Europe*, Euronet, Brussels, 2002

- **Illegitimacy** – the child feels or hears the injunction 'you shouldn't be there' – at school, in the local area, at home or within their wider social circle.
- **Parental humiliation** – parents are the objects of shame (shame felt by the parents which, in turn, becomes shame felt by the child, and eventually the child becomes ashamed of their own parents).
- **Inferiority and the absence of respect** – social responses reinforce the psychological processes.
- **Rejection and traumatic humiliations by others** – physical or mental bullying.[32]

He identifies four groups of factors which, when they occur together, make poverty a humiliating experience:

- living conditions
- institutional standards and practices
- external assessment
- personal identity.

De Gaulejac draws his findings from group work with adults who have 'escaped' poverty and are looking back at their childhood. In this context, it is easier for them to speak about the deep feelings they may have experienced a long time ago. He notes that many interviewees refer to a complex range of humiliations, violence and internalised anger when they talk about their experiences of poverty in childhood.

In addition to the objective difficult living conditions, children experience external humiliations linked to their situation and their responses to the expectations of those around them (school and so on). A child will feel shame and hatred about their objective poverty, and will often develop feelings of anger and shame towards their parents, when they have no option but to regard them as responsible for their situation.

People who listen to children who are living in poverty now may be given a different message; fewer of them express dissatisfaction with their parents than young people who are not affected by poverty (*see* **Childhood poverty and social exclusion from a child's perspective**, page 36).

According to de Gaulejac, children experience a deep tension between the fundamental need to value their roots (parents) in order to value themselves and to develop self-esteem, and the fact that surrounding society may lead them to feel ashamed of their parents.

De Gaulejac notes that children's development is less severely affected if their parents are engaged in a constant battle against poverty, and are supported in their efforts, than if they seem resigned to it.

32 Vincent de Gaulejac, *Les sources de la honte*, Collection Sociologie Clinique, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1996

Key points

- **Listening to children may lead to a revision of the concepts of poverty and social exclusion.**
- **Children are usually acutely aware of the situation their families are in; they protect their parents and are often actively engaged in trying to help them escape from poverty.**
- **Relationships and friendships with other children play a vital role in preventing the consequences of poverty.**
- **Feelings of stigma and shame lie at the heart of children's experiences of poverty and social exclusion.**
- **Participatory initiatives directed to children living in poverty should extend beyond listening to their views, to actively involving them in projects and creating opportunities for them to form friendships with other children.**
- **Appropriate practice and methodologies for involving children in building knowledge about poverty and social exclusion need to be discussed and exchanged at European level.**

Issues for discussion

- **Should new common indicators for measuring child poverty be agreed across the European Union, using a participatory approach that includes children and parents?**
- **What conditions are needed for all children and their families – especially those who are living in extreme poverty–- to be included in participatory initiatives?**

Children in care: the impact of poverty

"What we have in common is that our children are in care."

Participant in *Parents, the main partners in their children's future*
Fourth World People's University, Brussels, June 2001

Children growing up in very poor circumstances are more likely to be taken into care than children from other backgrounds. Many studies of children taken into care by child protection services mention that children placed in care largely come from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. ATD Fourth World's daily experience of working with very poor families all over Europe, leads to the same conclusion.

One of the goals of this discussion paper is to contribute to European understanding of the link between poverty and child protection intervention.

The information we have collected relating to action against child poverty in Europe rarely pays any attention to children looked after by the child protection system. No comprehensive data is available for child protection measures and numbers in care across the European Union. Queries regarding statistics on this subject are redirected by Eurostat to Daphne, a community action programme to prevent all forms of violence against children, young people and women.[33] Numerous articles, national and international reports testify to the difficulty of gathering reliable comparable data on these issues at the national level and – even more so – at the European level. Trends towards the regionalisation, decentralisation and localisation of social policies and child protection in some countries increase the difficulty of collating data.

Although some sources have linked poverty with the situation of children placed in care, we have found very few references to this point in the reports and studies we have consulted on the topic of child poverty in western Europe. The recent report by the NGO Save the Children on the poorest children in the UK makes no mention of children who have been taken into care under child protection schemes.[34]

Some have identified children taken into care under child protection procedures as 'a vulnerable group'. The Euronet report makes a point to this effect:

> "There is considerable concern about the vulnerability of children in care and care-leavers in many countries; the UK, for example, is particularly concerned about their low educational achievement.[35] However, the data in the European Community Household Panel survey do not include the institutionalised population; this means that children in care who do not live in private households are omitted. Some organisations suggest monitoring the number of children who are taken into statutory care as a result of their parents' poverty. [Children in Austria said]: 'Children who have to go to a children's home are stigmatised. Nobody asks you what you want, nobody pays attention to your rights. [They] are discriminated against because they are considered to be less intelligent than average and so they're not encouraged to pursue higher education."

The difficulty in gathering comparative data for the European Union as a whole is confirmed by other studies in the field of social intervention.

33 *See* http://europa.eu.int/comm/justice_home/funding/daphne/funding_daphne_en.htm

34 Adelman, Ashworth and Middelton, *Britain's poorest children: severe and persistent poverty and exclusion*, Save the Children UK, London, 2003

35 For instance, The Who cares? Trust has been working for over 10 years to ensure better educational opportunities for children in care. *See* www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk

Child development and child wellbeing are major concerns in many OECD countries and are the subject of ongoing work at the OECD. (…)

It is in this context that we carried out a review of the research literature on child outcomes and of the different social policies that may affect them. (…)

Our main conclusions from this literature review is that knowledge-building is proceeding, in particular, with regard to child poverty and the policies that can reduce or eliminate this problem. (… But) large and important gaps in the research continue to exist, especially with regard to comparative studies of child welfare (child protection; foster care; adoption).

Brooks-Gunn, Kamerman, Neuman et Waldfogel, *Social Policies, Family Types and Child Outcomes in Selected OECD Countries*, OECD social, employment and migration working paper No. 6, Paris, France, May 2003

The link between poverty and child protection: an overview

The number of children and families separated by child protection measures is very different from the numbers affected by relative economic poverty.

- Between 1 and 3 children in 10 are threatened by economic poverty in EU countries.
- Family separations resulting from child protection measures affect between 1 and 4 children in every 200.

In the 10 countries we are focusing on:

- around 13 million children are affected by economic poverty (family income of less than 50% of the national average)
- around 600,000 children are separated from their natural parents through child protection measures.

This last group is not a subgroup of the first group (*see* Appendix 3 for details of the data).

Are a significant number of children being taken into care for reasons directly related to child poverty? We know that the link between poverty and intervention based on child protection measures is a complex one:

- children taken into care following child protection measures often come from poor families
- children in western Europe are not placed in care because of economic poverty.

A three-year project concerning families and care in Belgium, initiated by ATD Fourth World, found that parents living in poverty were convinced that poverty was definitely one of the causes of their children being placed in care. In the view of a large number of professionals, poverty is no longer a reason for taking children into care.

There are contradictory perceptions about what is meant by 'poverty' and 'care': How do you define 'poverty' when it is your long-term reality? What does a professional mean when they use this word?

Work is needed across Europe as a whole to explore how interventions and child protection measures are linked to a complex set of experiences, in which poverty is an important factor. This issue is made even more urgent by the worsening socio-economic situation in some of the European Union's founder countries (Germany, for example), and the entry into the EU of the new member countries where the impact of poverty on child protection intervention is more openly recognised. The text opposite gives a brief overview of the situation in the 10 project countries.

France Poverty is a long way down the list of causes (behind family conflict, school truancy, alcoholism and drug addiction, housing, etc). However, out of the 114 families studied, none had an income over 1500 Euros a month; the report, published in July 2000, stated that 'the importance of poverty as a factor cannot be denied'.[1] In June 2003, a new report affirms that 'poverty is often the backdrop to the lives of those affected by child protection schemes'.

French-speaking Belgium In one official report, poverty accounts for 8% of those taken into care. The principal causes of placement were absence of carers (16%), parents (37%), and children (20%). However, organisations that help parents affected by placements are often those fighting poverty. A director of Aide à la jeunesse notes that 'out of 140 families, that is to say about a fifth of the families on our books, only 19 households have work-related income, the rest rely on benefits and 19 families have no income (based on data from 1997).'[2]

Germany It is recognised that the link between financial difficulties and intervention by child protection services is strong, although there is insufficient understanding of the issues (11th Federal Report on children and youth, 2002).

Italy A report on children and adolescents placed with foster families, published in 2002 by the Istituto degli Innocenti in Florence, found that 'Poverty seems to remain the principal reason for the removal of a child from his family, along with the inability of the family to care for the child'. Economic reasons or serious housing problems relate to 51% of cases in which a child is placed with a foster family, and 31% of cases in which children were placed in the care of other members of the same family.

Luxembourg A study focusing on social workers' views of poverty notes that when the social workers talk about the children and families they work with, they mention poverty and exclusion in the context of family breakdown, suicide and placement in care.[3]

Poland An analysis of 864 Polish cases of placement in care, reveals that one or more of the following reasons are the most important: parental alcoholism 54%, parental negligence 55%, financial difficulties 32%, housing conditions 23%, 'unfit' parents 13%, abuse 12%.[4] The report's author, Maria Herczog, points out that 'it may be suspected that the true proportion of children placed in institutional care for financial reasons is even higher, since a number of documented causes of placement – such as family conflicts, neglect, alcoholism, health problem, and so on – in reality, reflect to a large degree a background of financial hardship.'

Romania In a government report published in 2002, poverty is described as a 'key factor' in the placement of children in institutions (particularly in relation to the abandonment of children).[5]

Spain The principal reasons for one or more children of a family being taken into care are: neglect (60%), abandonment (51%), emotional or physical abuse (41%), absence of responsible adults (37%), behavioural problems (11%), and sexual abuse (10%). However, organisations for the defence of children's rights stress the link between poverty and placement in practice.

Sweden In May 2003, the Swedish professor, Sven Hessle, wrote: 'General policy has so far been unable to compensate for poverty in the lower segments of the population; most of the high-risk children belong to the lowest class segments with lone-parent families as the most vulnerable type of household.'[6]

United Kingdom In 1989, children from poor backgrounds were 700 times more likely to be placed in care than the 'average' child.[7] *A better education for children in care*, recognised that 'children in care are some of the most vulnerable children in the country'.[8] Nevertheless, poverty is not mentioned. A recent report *Britain's poorest children: severe and persistent poverty and exclusion*, published by Save the Children UK, makes no specific reference to children placed in care. However the government's green paper on children's services, *Every child matters*, acknowledges that 'the protection of children cannot be separated from policies which aim to improve the lives of children overall.'[9] The recommendations correspond, to a large degree, with the government's efforts to reduce child poverty.

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2 Pauvreté, enfants, placement, Revue 'Journal du droit des jeunes', Belgium, 2000

3 *Regards sur la pauvreté au Grand-Duché du Luxembourg – Eléments de réflexion et de débat*, Les Cahiers Caritas No. 1, Luxembourg, 2002

4 Mária Herczog PhD., Eszter Neményi, Noémi Wells, *Routes and Reasons: Children Entering and Leaving Institutional Care in Six CEE/CIS Countries*, UNICEF Child Care Forum, 2000

5 Government of Romania, *Chance for innocence: review of progress for instutionalized children in Romania*, 2002

6 Sven Hessle, *Sweden Country Report*, prepared for the conference *Children and Residential Care. New Strategies for a New Millennium*, Stockholm, May 2003

7 Bebbington and Miles, 'The background of children who enter local authority care', *British Journal of Social Work*, 1989

8 Social Exclusion Unit, *A better education for children in care*, UK, 2003, www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk

9 Department for Education and Skills, Green paper *Every child matters*, UK, 2003, www.dfes.gov.uk/everychildmatters

Taking poverty into account: a challenge

The French academic Paul Durning says:

> "The burden of poverty is triggering debate. The fact that poverty in itself is not sufficient to merit socio-educational initiatives means that those who intervene play down its importance, and prefer to look at psychopathological aspects which the families themselves mention in their explanations of why they are subject to voluntary or compulsory intervention. (…) It is a question, then, of acquiring a deeper understanding of the links between socio-economic situations and psychopathological problems affecting families, particularly those in poverty. (…) The workers who intervene consider psychological and relational problems before questions of health, housing and income when they are trying to explain the educational shortcomings at the heart of the issue."[37]

The overview of the situation in Europe confirms that the link between poverty and intervention by child protection services is common to all Member States. Although a debate on the issue seems essential, it rarely takes place. This is partly a result of the way in which individuals see poverty. But the inability to talk about it also seems to be a collective phenomenon, developing gradually in western European countries while, at the same time, economic problems in the new member countries keep talk of this link very much alive.

Why is there this reluctance among practitioners and policy-makers when, for many parents, the link is blatantly obvious? We have identified some of the factors.

- **National and international law**

  One reason for the failure to acknowledge the link between poverty and taking children into care is that it would break the law. For instance, in Belgium a report can no longer cite poverty as one of the reasons for placement, because it is prohibited by the law.

  International agreements – including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Articles 8, 9, 18 and 27) and the European Convention of Human Rights – and national legislation affecting countries in the Union, prohibit or limit placement in care for reasons of poverty.

  The European Parliament passed a resolution in January 2003 concerning fundamental rights in the European Union, which states that:

  > "the placement of children in care solely due to causes of poverty represents a violation of fundamental rights; if placement in care cannot be avoided, it must, as far as possible, be considered a temporary solution, and the aim must be to return the child to the family; the conditions of the placement, whether with a foster family, in a home or with the ultimate aim of adoption, must respect all the rights of the family and the child in question; the parents, in particular, must be supported so that they can continue to exercise their responsibilities regarding the child, and maintain the emotional ties necessary for the development and wellbeing of the child."

  The general effect of these national and international commitments is largely positive. They set clear objectives. But, in practice, they can also have the opposite effect; in some countries this ruling prevents people examining how poverty features in the conditions that result in placement. Maria Herzcog explains that in Hungary, the 1997 law prohibiting the placement of children for financial reasons led to a surge in the number of placements due to 'unfit living conditions', which now accounts for 45% of all placements.[38]

37 Paul Durning, 'De la substitution à la formation parentale, émergence d'une approche socio-éducative de la parentalité', in Dominique Fablet (Ed.) *Les interventions socio-éducatives: Actualité de la recherche*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2002

38 *Children Deprived of Parental Care: Rights and Realities*, Report of the Budapest 2000 regional conference, Occasional Papers No. 1, UNICEF Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS) and the Baltic States, Geneva , 2001

- **Risk of stigmatisation**
  If poverty and placement in care are linked, parents living in poverty risk more humiliating labels: the abuse of children, the inability to bring up their children properly. How can you describe the link between fighting poverty and child protection measures without it becoming a link between poverty and abuse?
- **Social powerlessness**
  Poverty and inequality are seen as inevitable facts of life in our societies. It is more comfortable and practical to look at other aspects, often concerning individuals, which the social worker or therapist can tackle and is qualified to deal with.

  Linking poverty with placement calls into question the rationale behind the intervention of child protection workers, and their role as professionals concerned with helping people. Since the placement of children in care inevitably entails painful experiences and constraints (formal or otherwise), these measures must be seen to be completely legitimate – talking about poverty as a factor serves only to complicate the issue.
- **Lack of reliable information**
  There is little information about the socio-economic situation of those affected by child protection interventions. Without this, it is impossible to agree on a starting point from which to approach the problem.
- **Perceptions of poverty**
  Activists in the field who work with families in difficulty gain a certain understanding of the situation; administrators of public services probably develop a different understanding. And each family in a situation of poverty and exclusion has its own view, its own experience.

  Looking at these issues from such different perspectives, how can we arrive at meaningful exchanges – about individual cases and a more abstract consideration of the problem? A priority must be to find the ways and the time to enable everyone involved to explain their position, their working practices and their responsibilities. This type of approach has been tested by ATD Fourth World in the Franco-Belgian project *Pooling knowledge on anti-poverty practice* (*see* page 100).

Being aware of these barriers should help stakeholders to make a constructive contribution to the debate about the way forward.

Understanding the experience of children in poverty

Placement in care is usually seen as the ultimate child protection measure. In many cases, child-parent separation follows other measures aimed at protecting children and supporting the families concerned. The impact of this separation – in terms of protection, breaking ties, benefits and damage – differs according to whether the child is very young, an older child or a teenager. Experiences of separation are also very different when it is chosen by the family rather than forced on them (although voluntary separations are still in the minority).

Three children in France talked to Christine Abels about their experiences. In her report, *Children in care and the construction of historicity*, she notes that children who have been placed, displaced and replaced, do not really understand the reasons for the interventions which affect the course of their lives, or the things which happen to them over which they have no control.[39] They become isolated and feel devalued (*Am I worthy of being loved?*) and/or guilty (*It's all my fault*). She concludes that, 'Most of the time we don't know what children in care think about the separation from their families, about

39 Christine Abels, *Enfants placé et construction d'historicité*, Harmattan, Paris, 2000

being put in care, the extent to which they feel stigmatised – we don't know because, in fact, we never ask them.'

Studies in the UK have attempted to develop a qualitative assessment of the care system from a child's perspective. Ridge quotes from surveys in which children who have been placed in care by social services express their views. These were carried out in the 1990s, when abuse in institutions and the difficulties of leaving care became major issues within the field of social work.[40] In 2001, The Who Cares? Trust and the Social Exclusion Unit took joint action to assess and improve school performance of children in care. A survey called 'It's your future', carried out by *Who Cares? Magazine*, received replies from around 2,000 children in care; their views formed part of the analysis and recommendations in *A better education for children in care*, the report which exposed the inequalities of access to education that affect children taken into care by child protection services.[41]

A vast amount of information is available about issues relating to child protection practice, particularly in countries such as the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. Professionals and carers listen to the children in their charge in the course of their work. Nevertheless, little is known about children's views on the nature and outcomes of interventions that affect them, particularly in relation to their birth family and the impact of life in long-term poverty. Major work in these fields remains to be done.

40 Biehal, Clayden, Stein and Wade, *Moving on*, HMSO, London, 1995, and Butler and Willliamson, *Children speak: Children, trauma and social work*, Logman, Harlow, 1994

41 Social Exclusion Unit, *A better education for children in care*, 2003, www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk

Key points

- **Children in care largely come from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds; the link between poverty and intervention by child protection services is common to all the member states of the European Union.**
- **The link between poverty and intervention based on child protection measures is complex and is not subject to public critical scrutiny.**
- **More needs to be known about children's views on the nature, quality, impact and type of intervention that affects them, particularly in relation to families facing persistent poverty.**

Issues for discussion

- **What data should be collected at national and European level to inform discussion on the issue of poverty and child protection?**
- **What research is needed to help us understand the long-term impact of child protection measures on children from poor backgrounds and their families?**
- **How can we hold an open discussion about the link between life in poverty and child protection intervention?**
- **What kind of initiatives should be taken to develop closer coordination between child protection policy and the frameworks for combating poverty, at both national and European level?**

Focus on child poverty: new steps

Three main themes emerge as essential from our review of children's and adults' voices on childhood in poverty in Part 1:

- the importance of family life and the need to build self-esteem – individually and collectively for the family group
- the need for environments in which children can build friendships and participate in the world of childhood
- the challenge for the education system to make school a place of development, achievement and inclusion.

The review confirmed that some children who are affected by poverty experience exclusion from the normal world of children through:

- inequality of access to material goods, cultural resources and wellbeing (healthcare, leisure, sports)
- problems and failure in the education system, often dropping out of the school system (some children only know life outside the school system)
- the difficulty of having real friends, the lack of respect from other children
- an environment in which professional workers intervene in their lives in different ways from most children, often imposed rather than freely chosen by their parents
- humiliation at the individual, institutional and social level caused by:
  - general devaluation of parents and contempt of the community
  - living in degrading conditions
  - having very little money
  - failing to meet the standards set at school
  - difficult or violent relationships within the family.

The drive to address these issues and to combat child poverty is visible across Europe: national reports are published regularly; European stakeholders are discussing ways to improve the Social Inclusion Strategy focusing on the situation of children.

Until 2003, the European Union did not have any proper framework for looking at the problem with children in mind. Even indicators used to measure poverty in many countries were not geared to children. Of the 18 common indicators for measuring social inclusion that were agreed by the Member States at the European Council in Laeken (December 2001), only one – relating to the number of children who leave school without any qualifications – was initially linked to childhood.

This will change as result of the agreement by an EU working group in June 2003 that all the Laeken indicators should be measured according to a standard breakdown by age, where relevant and meaningful. The working group considers it especially important not to base the examination of child poverty on a single at-risk-of-poverty indicator; it recommends that a standard subset of the social inclusion indicators should be used to monitor child poverty and social inclusion, including:

- monetary poverty indicators
- population of children living in jobless households
- proportion of 15 year olds at or below a level in reading literacy scale
- population of early school-leavers.[42]

42 *Mid-year Report from the Indicator Subgroup to the Social Protection Committee*, European Commission, June 2003

There are many other signs of EU moves to integrate children more specifically in the Social Inclusion Strategy. A workshop on child poverty and families was held as part of the first European Round Table on Poverty and Social Exclusion in October 2002, organised by the Danish Presidency of the Union. Petra Hölscher's research project, commissioned by the European Commission, examines areas of life that are important to children; it identifies what helps and what hinders children's personal development, participation and recognition of their rights.[43] She calls for a comprehensive approach to tackle child poverty, including:

- **recognising child poverty as a specific issue:** reduction of child poverty cannot be achieved as a by-product of a general social inclusion strategy; it demands explicit and integrated child-, family- and women-friendly policies
- **bringing parents into work:** employment creation schemes must balance individualised support, financial incentives and work requirements, without jeopardising benefit entitlements
- **guaranteed basic living standards:** access to decent housing, healthcare and social services, and cash benefits should be user-friendly, simple, and administered in a consistent and non-stigmatising way; as far as possible, generous child-related benefits should be universal

43 Petra Hölscher, University of Dortmund, *A thematic study using transnational comparisons to analyse and identify what combination of policy responses are most successful in preventing and reducing high levels of child poverty*, Commissioned by the European Commission, DG 'Employment and Social Affairs'; final report available autumn 2004

Main conclusions of workshop on child poverty and families

First European Round Table on Poverty and Social Exclusion, Aarhus, Denmark, 17 and 18 October 2002

1 **Make tackling child and family poverty a specific priority**
There is significant intergenerational inheritance of poverty; the impact of structural changes in demographics, the role of the family and the labour market can create new risks.

2 **Identify specific groups at risk**
Statistics based on income disguise the complexity of the issue; we need to get beyond this to identify specific groups of children who face particular difficulties, such as children from immigrant minority backgrounds, many lone-parent families, children with disabilities, etc.

3 **High social expenditure and comprehensive policies for children are effective**
Child poverty is lowest in those countries with high social expenditure on children and families. Money is necessary but not sufficient. Policies for children and families need to:
- ensure an adequate income for families with children by subsidising parenting and improving access to quality employment
- improve access to education and review the role of schools
- ensure access to key services such as health and housing, and also to culture, sport and recreation.

4 **Empower women**
Policies which support equality between men and women, and empower women, are also essential in tackling child poverty. This includes:
- improving mothers' access to secure, flexible and decently paid employment
- high quality and affordable daycare
- sharing of responsibility between men and women.

5 **Pay particular attention to immigrant children**
The next round of National Action Plans should specifically address this issue, monitor trends and ensure the collection of better data. Policies need to pay particular attention to the role of schools and other institutions so that they become dynamic multicultural environments.

6 **Address child and family poverty more systematically in the next National Action Plans**
Member states should be given clear guidance on how to address child poverty, emphasising the rights of children and ensuring that indicators and targets adequately reflect the position of children.

7 **Emphasise the local dimension and quality of delivery**
Programmes must be delivered at the local level in a coordinated, flexible, responsive and child-focused manner that recognises cultural and symbolic barriers.

European Anti-Poverty Network Newsletter (November 2002)

- **high quality childcare:** affordable and flexible childcare is essential for the reduction of child poverty, by making it easier to reconcile work and family and preventing negative outcomes for the child
- **access to education:** education is the main pathway for children to break the cycle of deprivation and to develop the resources and competences for a self-supporting life
- **culture, sport and recreation:** taking part enables children to develop social and personal resources and to lay the foundations for becoming active members of society
- **supporting and empowering vulnerable groups of children:** children with disabilities, abused children, children in care, children with ethnic minority background or Traveller children are at high risk of exclusion; targeted support, focusing on developing self-confidence and self-esteem and on strengthening their family relationships, should be balanced with fostering inclusion in their mainstream peer-group.

Considering the broadness of the child poverty issues, as Hölscher's recommendations prove again, what are the central messages from Part 1 of *Valuing children, valuing parents*?

Above all, it is the need to deepen our understanding – with the children and parents concerned – about the experiences of children affected by poverty in Europe, especially the impact which poverty has on family life, and on the emotional and educational challenges faced by parents.

As family life appears to be one of the key themes that emerged from our review of children's and adults' voices, efforts to listen to the children and parents affected must be reinforced at the European level in the coming years. In trying to reach this goal, we must be cautious, respectful, patient and rigorous in order to avoid imposing adults' concerns and issues onto children. As discussed above, in many cases, attempts to define, measure and understand child poverty rely on perspectives, indicators and concepts from the adult world.

We need research, involving children and parents, which will help us to:

- allow children to express their feelings
- understand what is important for a child and their future
- identify the conditions in the community, and in the families' and children's social environment, which support children and their family and which help them to develop their skills and potential
- gain a better understanding of the ways in which the child's and family's relationships with others can promote their wellbeing
- identify and understand the active role the children play in the daily fight of their family against poverty and social exclusion.

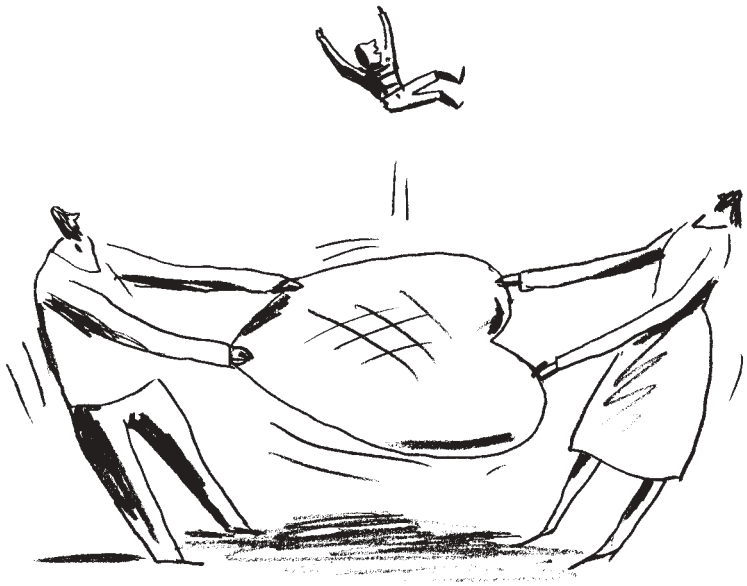
Part 1 also calls for a recognition that intervention by child protection services (educational input, supervision, placement in care) are mainly directed at children living in poverty and makes it clear that debates on child welfare must include the impact of poverty.

part 2

Parents and families
broadening the perspectives

“When the poor fight for the family, it’s not to defend a particular idea of the family, or a moral viewpoint they have acquired from outside – it is to defend their own family, their actual family, in the here and now.”

André Modave, ATD Fourth World



Part 2 **Parents and families: broadening the perspectives**

New challenges for families

"I've never lived in a family, I don't know what it's like. I've experienced violence and that kind of thing. I say to myself, now I'm 21, I'm an adult now, and I think: will I know how to make a family? What will I need to know to make a real family?"

Aurélie, ATD Fourth World Project, Gironde, France, 2000

Our goal is to understand the potential contribution that families could make to the fight against child poverty and social exclusion, rather than to study families as such. Whatever the complexity of families today, we need to consider the evidence that could lead policy-makers and practitioners to focus on families in social inclusion strategies and how they can do this most effectively. These are the issues discussed in Part 2.

'Family life' was judged to be the most important part of life by 86% of Europeans, according to the European Values Survey 1999. Whether rich or poor, the majority of Europeans wish to live happily as a couple in an atmosphere of mutual respect, fidelity, understanding and tolerance. Nevertheless, the majority of analysts recognise that family behaviour has changed substantially over the last 30 years. Every aspect of society in traditionally Christian countries has undergone major change which has had a huge impact on the personal lives of millions of people.

The Joint Report on Social Inclusion by the European Commission notes that the family is losing its status as an institution.[44] Major changes include:

- lower overall birth rate
- higher birth rates outside marriage
- increased numbers of couples who cohabit and new forms of conjugal life
- a sharp increase in divorce.

Two trends are particularly significant:

- the dramatic increase in the number of women who work outside the home, while often continuing in their traditional role as the unpaid carer for dependants at home
- the increasing number of people – the vast majority of whom are women – who live in lone-parent households, which tend to be at greater risk of poverty (40% of people in lone-parent households were below the relative poverty threshold in 1997).

The combination of these trends raises crucial issues of reconciling work and family life: services and systems need to find new ways to support parents who are combining work and home responsibilities, and to ensure that those who are vulnerable have access to adequate care and support.

This issue is particularly critical in Member States like Greece, Spain, Italy and Portugal in which the family and the community were vital to counteract poverty and exclusion. However, lone-parent household in some countries (especially Finland, Denmark and Sweden) are at a much lower risk of poverty.

According to the work of French sociologists, the family has become the principal place in which personal identity is constructed, more so than in the past. In the view of Claude Dubar or François de Singly, the family is a constituent of an individual's fundamental identity.

44 European Commission and Council, *Joint Report on Social Inclusion*, Brussels, 2001

The emergence of a new family, centred on individuals and their sense of personal identity, is based on:

- the individual's wellbeing and search for happiness
- relationships based on choice rather than compulsion
- respect between children and adults, men and women.

Although the traditional institution of the family – with its rigid structure and hierarchy including the 'head of the family' and a division of labour – may have changed, it remains the place in which identity is constructed. In societies in which there are many more reference points, weakening family ties seem to be the principal reason for the weakening of identity.

Some writers see the growing debate on parenting in recent years as a sign of anxiety about the ability of parents to fulfil their roles in an increasingly complex world. Issues include:

- appropriate approaches to discipline
- the role of fathers in family life and upbringing
- the significance of the parental role as an explanation for the failure of children at school, and more recently, for violent and delinquent behaviour among teenagers in 'problem' schools and areas.

Although the term 'parenting' recognises the importance of parents, it can also distract attention from the responsibility of professional services; many children go to nurseries or other temporary care from a few months old, yet difficulties are often blamed on the family rather than the care providers. As Ulla Björnberg said, 'parents have hardly any control over the socialisation of their children outside the family, yet they are held responsible for difficulties which result from it.'[45] According to the sociologist Claude Martin, it is a question of 'thinking about the way parents define themselves and build a sense of parental skill and responsibility'.[46]

Whatever the similarities in these broad trends, there are countless variables; the daily experience of parents in Luxembourg is very different from that of parents in Italy. It would be unwise to make generalisations about the reality of family life throughout the EU and, especially, in the new or future Member States of the EU. When we met project leader Reta Avramescu in Romania, she spoke of the 'spiritual famine' that affects a significant number of Romanian families as the old structures disappear, society becomes more fluid and families must try to adjust to the new demands of the consumer society.

45 Ulla Björnberg, 'La fonction parentale en Europe, tendances évolutives', in *Du politique et du social dans l'avenir de la famille*, La Documentation française, Paris, 1992

46 Claude Martin, *La parentalité en question – perspectives sociologiques*, Rapport au Haut Conseil de la population et de la famille, France, July 2003

Sources of information on the family in Europe

European Observatory on the Social Situation, Demography and Family

A multi-disciplinary network of independent experts, established at the request of the European Commission to:

- monitor political developments and the impact of family policies
- monitor demographic, socio-economic and political changes which have an impact on families
- stimulate academic debate on social, demographic and family issues and related policies.

Website: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/eoss/index_en.html

Mutual Information System on Social Protection in the European Union (MISSOC)

Set up to provide brief, up-to-date, comparative information on family benefits and family policies. Some reports give an overall view of the situation in Europe; others give detailed descriptions of family benefits and family policies in different Member States.

Website: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/missoc/missoc_info_en.htm

Families living in poverty

It is difficult to understand families and their circumstances without taking into account the social environment in which they live; we need to know how families who live in poverty and exclusion in Europe have been affected by the changes described here, and how they have reacted to them.

Over past decades, laws relating to family life have evolved and adapted to changing ways of life in order to manage questions of inheritance, the interdependence of generations and, above all, the stability needed by children. The main influence on this evolution is the way of life of the middle classes. As a result, the poorest families are often compelled – either by social services or for reasons of survival – to conform to laws that are not always based on their reality.

For instance, legal changes aiming to liberate individuals from the 'shackles of the family' appear to be based on a conception of the family in which the father occupies a dominant position. However, in very poor families the man's rights and powers are much diminished, principally because his social status is devalued by unemployment.

Although many European studies attempt to describe the reality of exclusion for families living in poverty, few studies look at how they are affected by social changes in family life. Ghate and Hazel in the UK aim to identify how adults affected by poverty respond to the challenges and tensions generated by family life and parenthood (*see* page 146).[47]

Another research study on life in low-income families explores the views and experiences of people living in poverty (adults, young people and children) in Scotland and their approaches to managing poverty.[48] Participants explain how life is tough on a low income: they acknowledge that they have enough on which to survive, but a sense of not having enough to participate fully in society pervades their accounts. Families report on a wide range of strategies for managing resources efficiently – but these are often described as stressful, with personal cost to the parent. It is clear that many important facets of the lives of these families – sources of both support and constraint – are hidden from public view.

The report identifies issues that require further research, including:

- the impact of Christmas, holidays and a social life on the lives of those in low-income households and the problems these present for them
- parents' hopes and fears for their children's future
- qualitative work with a biographical focus (for families and individuals) to provide insight into how life experiences come together to reduce or intensify the nature of low-income living for individuals and families.

Parents in poverty have to fulfil their role and responsibilities as parents just like any others. They enjoy pleasures and have aspirations and fears – but in circumstances which are much more difficult than those of most other parents. These parents have to cope, think up and seek solutions for others and with others. The general situation, and the particular circumstances they find themselves in, puts a strain on their families and exposes weaknesses much more than is the case for parents who can draw on networks of support, both economic and personal.

Parents in poverty experience overexposed parenting. Parents affected by poverty are far from being 'bad parents', but it is a greater challenge for them than for others to be 'good parents'.

If these parents are offered ways to share their knowledge, and the value of their life experience is recognised, their collective experience can guide those

47 Deborah Ghate and Neal Hazel, *Parenting in poor environments – Stress, support and coping*, Policy Research Bureau, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, UK, 2002

48 John H. McKendrick, Sarah Cunningham-Burley and Kathryn Backett-Milburn, *Life in low income families in Scotland: research report*, Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, University of Edinburgh, Scottish Executive Social Research, 2003

who aim to give all parents the support they need in the present situation in Europe. This includes thinking about the concept of 'normality' within the context of family life.

According to the Brazilian anthropologist Claudia Fonseca, who has worked with families in difficulty in Brazil and in Europe, the question of different family models is at the heart of issues surrounding support for parents in poverty.

> "Whether we accept them as valid or not, the recognition of different norms is becoming more and more crucial to the debate about intervention, not only to encourage negotiation and agreement in place of symbolic violence, but also to allow a closer analysis of the values [that legitimise intervention]."[49]

Supporting poor families, a briefing paper circulated by the End Child Poverty Coalition in the UK, states that 'Generally speaking, child poverty is inseparable from the poverty of their family or guardian'.[50] The Coordinadora de Barrios in Madrid confirms this view:

> "Children's needs are the needs of their families. When families are protected and supported financially, and in terms of housing, work, health, education etc… the children's lives improve substantially. That should be the focus of policies and investment."[51]

The fight against child poverty must take account of the parents' circumstances, responsibilities and rights. Thinking in terms of 'family groups' or the 'family dynamic' can lead us to adopt a more innovative approach in the fight against child poverty.

49 Claudia Fonseca, 'Accompagner les familles en détresse: la perspective ethnologique d'un cas brésilien', in *Accompagner*, collection Mille et un bébés, Ed Eres, France, 2000

50 End Child Poverty Coalition, *Supporting Poor Families: A briefing paper*, 2003, available at www.ecpc.org.uk

51 Statement collected by ATD Fourth World Spain in their exploratory work

Key points

- **Family life is judged to be the most important part of life by 86% of Europeans, in spite of significant changes in family life over the last 30 years.**
- **Family remains the principal place in which identity is constructed; weakening of family ties weakens an individual's personal identity.**
- **Parenting in poverty presents a very difficult challenge.**

Issues for discussion

- **How have families living in poverty been affected by recent major changes in family and social life, and how have they reacted to them?**
- **In society's expectations about the way that parents fulfil their responsibilities, what allowance should be made for the impact of poverty on family life?**
- **If individual long-term identity is mainly constructed within the family, what does this mean for the way that families in long-term poverty should be supported – especially young couples with young children?**

Families in poverty: the need for a broader perspective

"The most important thing is for the whole family to feel respected and valued, and for parents to see that they can help their children as they grow up."

Social worker, Madrid, Spain

In most Member States, children (aged 0–15) are at a greater risk of poverty than adults; in 1997, their average EU rate was 25% compared with 13% for adults (aged 25–49). Young people (aged 16–24) are also at great risk of poverty; 23% of them live below 60% of median income. Evidence shows that children growing up in poverty tend to do less well in education, have poorer health, enjoy fewer opportunities to participate and develop socially, recreationally and culturally, and are at greater risk of being involved in, or affected by, antisocial behaviour and substance abuse.

The Joint Report by the European Commission and Council on Social Inclusion (2001) recognises that belonging to a vulnerable family puts a child at great risk of poverty and social exclusion. Vulnerable families include:

- households affected by divorce
- lone-parent households
- households with numerous children
- jobless households
- households in which there is domestic violence.

Concentrating only on vulnerability when looking at families experiencing poverty and deprivation, leads too often to the view that they constitute a risk and that children may therefore need protection from them.

However, in a review of academic research, Michel Corbillon argues that we should abandon the notion of risk as part of a mechanical causal process.[52] Instead, family life should be approached in terms of complex interactions within which a child can find protective factors that counteract risks even in a vulnerable environment. Work on the role of 'resilience' is part of this approach, although care must be taken not to let a focus on resilience justify leaving the individual to be 'solely responsible for their fate'.[53]

This notion of a complex process allows situations to be understood in terms of many different dynamics – individual and collective, psychological and social. It recognises that children's educational, emotional and relationship experiences require them to take on board a variety of elements, including:

- themselves – their uniqueness, development and so on
- their parents – their skills, needs, socio-economic situation and so on
- the local environment and primary social networks
- cultural background
- local institutional working practices – partnerships and so on.

The experience of practice and projects run by ATD Fourth World can lead us to a similar broader perspective.

Solution-focused policies need positive views to build upon. In this section, we show that the family group and its members can be recognised as a network of affection, bonds, roots, values handed down over generations, skills and

52 Michel Corbillon, *Suppléance familiale: nouvelles approches, nouvelles pratiques*, Matrice, France, 2001

53 Paul Durning, *L'éducation familiale, entre théorie et pratique*, Revue Le Furet, No. 41, France, 2003

strengths. This approach can determine individual and collective behaviour and create the potential for positive action.

Valuing children, valuing parents

Children in poverty – like all children – contribute to what the family is and what they do. ATD Fourth World frequently finds that children are a force for change and empowerment both for their families and in their wider circle. They are actively involved on a daily basis, they can bring about changes within their own families, and they can play a role in their immediate environment and beyond.

The active part played by a child or a group of siblings in helping their families to overcome poverty must be understood and recognised; when appropriate, children can be empowered to carry out this role.

Children also stimulate the strength and potential of their parents. Parents who are regarded by some as a lost cause, are trusted by their children and this gives them the impetus to act. Often because of their children, parents are willing to tackle their problems. For their children's sake, parents who have previously been suspicious of outsiders, go and see the authorities, demand their rights, and talk to the doctor and the health visitor. As the child gets older, parents establish ties with teachers. They can summon up courage to go and talk to these people because the future, and often the present, life of their child is at stake.

ATD Fourth World projects also reveal how children have a very particular value for parents who experience long-term poverty: 'Our children are all we have, our only freedom'. For parents, who sometimes count for nothing in other people's eyes – and often in their own estimation, too – the attention, presence, trust and demands of their child are vital. Parents feel valued and relied upon as they never have been before: 'the child creates their parent'.[54] In this way, the child can be seen a powerful force for good.

If the role of the children is to be valued, parents also need a valuing environment. Children need to be proud of their parents. The general culture of valuing success, beauty and ambition affects the way a family is regarded within a community or the area in which they live – including the status of parents as jobless, or as dependent on the intervention of social services. This process deeply affects the child's psyche (personal shame, being ashamed of one's parents). The deskilling of parents can lead to the partial or total breakdown of the parent-child bond (sometimes the voluntary choice of the child or the parent, sometimes imposed by intervention from outside).

These messages from ATD Fourth World field work challenge researchers and policy-makers in Europe:

- to engage with children and their environment in order to understand the opportunities that they create for overcoming exclusion – within their families and in their communities
- to consider how the family unit and positive interaction – between parents and children, between family and community – can be used as a compass for intervention, focusing on enhancing self-esteem and on creating a positive active role for family members.

This challenge will be the main focus in our discussion paper from now on. In this chapter we therefore focus on the people we have met in the course of our exploratory work, for whom the family dimension is of the greatest importance in the fight against child poverty.

The views of the academics or field workers we present are not ideologists or

54 Brigitte Jaboureck, *Les parents en situation de grande précarité: potentialités et aspirations*, ATD Fourth World contribution to the conference *Parents et enfants dans les sociétés d'aujourd'hui: les forces de la famille et ses faiblesses*, Fédération Internationale des Ecoles des Parents, Juin 2002

theorists about the family, and they don't defend any particular family model. They are simply aware of the importance of networks of relationships, roots, affection and emotional attachment for the development and future of the children and adults in the family.

Family ties and roots

The French sociologist Serge Paugam has taken a special interest in social exclusion, or 'social disqualification' (to use Paugam's own term). In a recent article, he returned to the existence of 'fundamental social bonds that bind the individual to society.[55] He identifies three broad categories of bonds by which you can precisely define types of social breakdown:

- family
- integration
- citizenship.

Here we will concentrate on family bonds. In Paugam's view, 'the individual is born in a family and from birth encounters his mother and father, as well as an extended family to which he belongs without having chosen it.' This family contributes to his upbringing and enables him to begin developing socially.

Psychologists have demonstrated that every child experiences urges for emotional attachment that need to be satisfied. From birth onwards, the child develops family ties that provide emotional stability and protection. It is clear that any breakdown of these ties can have traumatic effects. This happens when children are abandoned or placed in a home after the death of their parents or when the parents are deemed unfit by the authorities.

Sometimes these family ties are not completely broken, but the socialisation of the family is affected to such an extent that it becomes difficult or impossible for the child or teenager to identify positively with their family. This can lead to them breaking with the family in adult life.

From a sociological perspective, supporting family ties is crucial to counteracting these problems.

Many people who offer a psychological and therapeutic approach emphasise the importance of positive recognition of a child's background. Martine Lani Bayle, who is interested in transgenerational values and how the child can be a messenger of these values, writes:

> "The child must know where they come from (…). The child has roots, and roots enable a child to flourish; these roots are above all their parents, they are their foundations; the child's origins lie with their parents; even if their parents have to some extent failed in their roles, the child is still the result of relationships between them; and that is real, it cannot be ignored."[56]

It follows that a supportive intervention is one that develops and strengthens family ties and the roles of each member of the family whenever possible.

In complex interventions, such as temporary or permanent separations, Christine Abels argues that:

> "The child's emotional stability needs to be supported and reinforced, their memories of their parents must not be denigrated, and their self-image must not be damaged by attacking their image of their parents. (…) the child must know where they come from, their links with their natural family must be revived in some way so that they are a part of the child's scheme of things, and so that the child can make their own personal judgment without feeling guilty."[57]

Gilbert Pregno, a psychologist who runs the Kannerschlass Foundation in Luxembourg, explains his approach:

55 Serge Paugam et Mireille Clémençon, *Detresse et ruptures sociales*, Recueils et documents, No. 17, FNARS, Paris, France, 2002

56 Martine Lani Bayle, *A la recherche de la génération perdue*, Homme et perspective, Marseille, 1990

57 Christine Abels, *Enfants placés et construction d'historicité*, Harmattan, Paris, 2000

"If there's one thing that the educational, social and psychological sciences tell us, it is this: a person is a being with a history which is largely determined by the relationships they have with their origins, their parents. These relationships with parents are a fact of life and determine the identity of the individual. That is why we have developed working methods which are at the same time a profession of faith: a child – except in special cases where their safety is at risk – will not benefit from growing up in a foster family unless there is some element of integration with their natural family. This approach must extend beyond the polite exchange of formalities. This contrasts with a 'parentectomy', that is to say the separation of the child from their parents, in which, to use a medical analogy, the aim is to remove the unhealthy part and isolate the healthy part. Given the ties of loyalty between parents and their children, we think that an unprepared or sudden separation, which is not supported by efforts involving the family and the authorities, can only lead to long-term conflicts, and contribute to serious relationship problems. Reductive schemes such as 'parentectomy' are naïve and misguided, and give a misleading impression of simplicity when, in fact, the processes involved remain highly complex."[58]

58 Gilbert Pregno , *Les enfants, orphelins de droits*, Edition le Phare, Luxembourg, 1999

An anthropologist's story

Maria Maïlat *is an anthropologist, a sociologist and a writer. Of Romanian origin, she lives in France with her three children, and has become a French national. For over ten years she has carried out work with a variety of organisations, involving observation, training, and analysis of working practices. Here she describes her experiences and beliefs.*

On my arrival in France, finding myself with no income and nowhere to live, I went to see an adviser at social services. She suggested that I should put my son (who was ten) into care, explaining that this way 'he would have a roof over his head and would pick up the language more quickly'. It was as simple as that. She specifically mentioned my son's interests.

My understanding of the word 'interests' didn't include forced separations of this kind. The parental bond is not a matter of interests, it's something else completely. This bond is the cultural opposite of a utilitarian conception of interests. I hadn't studied, survived in a dictatorship, and developed a self-critical mentality from meetings run by Romanian thugs, so that I could consider the placement of my child in care as somehow 'good'. Impossible, I thought to myself, I must have misheard. This was a blow to my guts, I couldn't think straight. There was something unspeakable and unthinkable in this suggestion which the adviser wasn't even aware of. She wasn't ill-intentioned or resigned; in fact she was alert and attentive to my situation. It seems that she was just saying what the authorities recommend. What argument could have got through to her, while I held my son's hand, both of us in the street? (…)

The fight against the abuse of children and the emphasis on their 'interests' undermines family ties and does nothing to help the precarious nature of parental relationships.

We know that these relationships are undergoing great changes. Family ties are doubly affected by this destructive paradox: on the one hand by sociological instability (the decline of marriage), and on the other hand by social services geared to detecting any signs of abuse, and therefore any difficulties, failings or weaknesses. A new approach is needed which focuses on the following questions: How can we reduce conflict within family life? How can we find ways of strengthening family ties? Intervention by the authorities should occur in an atmosphere of reconciliation and peace. (…)

Parents should be supported by networks of relatives and neighbours. When their child is born, they should find themselves in a supportive, benevolent environment. This structure of mutual support is currently in pieces. (…) Family ties are unique, irreplaceable and they have a price. There is no reason to direct resources to 'professional' foster families, to the detriment of the ties which bind parents and children, brothers and sisters.

Maria Maïlat, *Ni coupables, ni victims*
Revue Quart Monde No. 179 (Editions Quart Monde, Paris, 2001)

Looking at the family as a project

The experimental Franco-Belgian project *Pooling knowledge on poverty* produced an original analysis of family life. Over the course of two years, this project brought together 36 academics, field workers and people with experience of persistent poverty in order to think about how to build an understanding of poverty and social exclusion. Five themes were covered: the history of poverty, the knowledge of the people affected by poverty, family life, work, and human activity and citizenship.[59] The aim of the work on family life was to understand the meaning that people in poverty attach to the creation of their family: how and why people experiencing poverty decide to become a couple, start a family and live as a family.

These events can be viewed as a 'project'. This concept of 'family project' helps to see the family as a form of action against its own exclusion. It allows poverty to be considered not only in terms of hardship, but also in terms of hope, which can help people to get through whatever difficulties they face. The 'family project' is a way of shaping one's own future, motivated by a desire to be part of society.

Interviews with people affected by poverty show that they develop many different projects. The first project is having children, giving them a real hope that life can only get better. Looking forward to the baby's arrival, the birth itself and planning for their future – all these give a certain rhythm to the lives of families. The authors summarise the parents' wishes with this phrase: 'A better life than mine, always'.

The underlying goal of 'family projects' is to give a child independence, so that they can find their place in society. For the very poor, having a baby also involves the hope of gaining respect from society. All the projects pursued by families in poverty aim to maintain the unity of the family and assure a better life for the children.

The authors note:

> "The importance of the family project obviously does not mean that family life will always be sweetness and light. In a way, the more people have had personal experience of a troubled childhood, the more they wish to have children and start a family. There is often a continuity between hardship in one's own childhood, and the gift of life to a new child."

The analysis shows that the success of these projects often depends on the support, or resistance, of institutions and the professionals who represent them. Parents in long-term poverty live in constant fear of being separated from their children. Although they don't think about it in these terms, their principal struggle is to have their 'family project' recognised.

Although the family project may exist, society may not always provide the means to live as a family: financial support, housing, work. When this support is absent, families struggle to get by, to survive from day-to-day.

What emerges from this research is that the 'family project' can be the starting point for a new kind of action against poverty and exclusion.

Building a family is a decision to do something. This could result in parents repeating the conditions that they experienced themselves when they were growing up. But, on the other hand, it could help them to fight against their own poverty. Many have testified that the birth of their children jolted them into action.

59 Groupe de recherche Quart Monde-Université, *Le croisement des savoirs: quand le Quart Monde et l'Université pensent ensemble*, EditionsQuart Monde et Editions de l'Atelier, Paris, France, 1999

The family project

Pierre Maclouf, *who is a sociologist, was involved in the research on* Pooling knowledge on poverty. *Here he writes about the family as a project.*

The people we met live their lives in many different ways. Some are married, others are not: the latter live either as couples, or as lone parents. There can be children from several different relationships in lone-parent homes (whether the parent is married or not). These situations have often arisen against a background of serious splits linked to behaviour considered by the authorities as 'abnormal' or even 'deviant'.

These are ways of living which are far from the moral or social ideals. However, there can be no doubt that for the people concerned, these are families. These people testify to the importance of their relationships with their partners. They never for a moment imagine living without a family. The 'family project' is always tied to a notion of mutual support. Their project is founded on love, and the desire to bring children into this world and support them in it.

We can make a suggestion here which has already been proposed by some researchers: rather than emphasising its decline, the focus of research should be the strength of 'marriage' in the sense of a durable alliance, a long-term 'project'; not immediate self-fulfilment, but the building of long-lasting ties which have been chosen.

For that we need another conception of the family. We need to think about the foundations of this close-knit group which, of course, entails commitments and duties for the individual, but which is simultaneously constructed and desired by the individual, and which is constantly being reconstructed over time.

Pierre Maclouf, *Autonomie et appartenance*
Revue Quart Monde, No. 179 (2001)

Systemic practice: a family-orientated approach

Systemic approaches to the family were born out of research by many different teams of therapists in the USA. In the 1950s, teams working on the east coast (led by Donald Bloch, Murray Bowen, Salvador Minuchin, and Karl Whitaker) and in Palo Alto, California (led by Gregory Bateson with Jay Haley, John Weakland and Don Jackson), developed a theory of systemic practice. The Palo Alto team drew on a combination of communication theory, therapeutic approaches, and the general system theory that had been developed in the 1940s by Ludwig Von Bertalanffy.

This was then popularised by Paul Watzlawick and spread into Europe in the 1970s. Following the publication of work by Watzlawick and other therapists, such as *Pragmatics of human communication* (1967), the systemic approach developed – first in terms of 'family therapy', then in its application as part of family social work.

The basic principle is never to regard an individual as solely responsible for their problems; the individual is one element in a communication system. To understand, and therefore treat, pathological or dysfunctional interactions, the therapist must study the individual in terms of their environment, and the communication within that system.

The family is a system: each person's behaviour is connected to, and depends upon, the behaviour of all the others. If you want to understand the communication and interactions between people, you cannot focus in isolation on individual characteristics such as motivation or personality, or some other character trait or mental illness. In this context, an individual is not ill, or disturbed, or delinquent 'in themselves' – rather their symptoms reveal that there are systems of family or social relationships which function poorly.

As a system, the family changes over time as it goes through different phases of development: the couple meet – the children are born – the children start

school – adolescence – the children leave home – retirement – and so on.

The systemic therapist acts as a 'facilitator of change' in a situation where the family does a certain number of things to maintain stability, and others to change. Guy Auloos, who has been a family therapist and researcher for over 30 years, says:

> "If families have gone through many changes, and these changes have led to less satisfactory ways of functioning, family members will tell themselves that they prefer to remain the way they are (…). Families who have experienced a great deal of psycho-social intervention have not always found intervention helpful, (…and) are obviously not keen to undergo further change when they do not know what the consequences will be."[60]

In his view, changes in systemic practice have led some of those involved to place more and more emphasis on 'family skills'. Starting from the recognition that the observer – the intervener – is implicated in the family's issues from the moment they intervene, he talks of intervention based on 'co-construction' with the families:

> "We work together in a way which allows me to do my professional work, and you to maybe discover a way of functioning which you will find beneficial."

The role of the intervener, which may involve teaching skills, is above all to help families create their own solutions, and find and develop the skills they need to carry out these solutions themselves.

Systemic practice in the fight against poverty and exclusion

Systemic practice has been developed, applied and evaluated in many different situations, and is recognised as a valid form of socio-therapeutic intervention in European countries. Nevertheless, it may not have been used to its full potential in the fight against poverty and exclusion.

Brigitte Camdessus, the psychologist and family therapist, raises this issue in her recent book *La spirale ascendante: faire reculer l'exclusion* (*The upward spiral: combating exclusion*). For 13 years she accompanied her husband, the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, on many of his trips:

> "I became certain that to escape from poverty, all aspects of individual and family life must be taken into account (…) Everywhere I went, I noticed that the more comprehensive and systemic the approach, the more effective the results."[61]

Focusing on France, she explores a whole range of initiatives, past and current, which seek a systemic response that:

- starts from a well-defined assessment of the issues (housing, financial resources, education, jobs, health, intercultural relationships)
- takes into account the complexity of marginalisation
- emphasises cooperation between those involved: families, professionals and volunteer workers.

A 10-year project by a team of family therapists in inner-city parts of New York reached the conclusion that systemic practice can contribute to policy-making and social and educational measures in the fight against poverty and exclusion (*see* page 68). They show the extent to which social workers who intervene in the family, and with individual members of the family, form an integral part of the situation, which is already fragile and which they often destabilise a little more. The team suggests that social workers need to refocus on the whole family system, and to remain in the background so that families can develop their own solutions.

60 Guy Auloos, 'De la culpabilisation à la responsabilisation', in Claude Seron (Ed.), *Miser sur la compétence parentale: approche systémique dans le champ social et judiciaire*, Ed Erés, France, 2002

61 Brigitte Camdessus, *La spirale ascendante: faire reculer l'exclusion*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 2002

A systemic approach to families living in long-term poverty

An unbalanced system

Within any structure, the power of different parts is apt to be uneven. In a hospital for instance, the social work department has less overall influence than the surgical division… Families who are poor and dependent on help from organised institutions are seldom able to influence patterns of the systems that serve them, and constructive intervention is often a matter of trying to redress that imbalance.

Recurrent transitions in the lives of families

All families go through transitional periods. Members grow and change, and events intervene to modify the family's reality. In any change of circumstances, the family, like other systems, faces a period of disorganisation. … Families [living in persistent poverty] often face recurrent and dramatic transitions, many of which are created by the intervention of powerful social systems. The quality of shock and disorganisation in the reactions of family members is not usually understood as part of the process that accompanies transitions. The behaviour is often judged as if permanent, with consequences that compound the difficulties.

Family and the protection of childhood

Principles of family structure and function are generic, but have special features when applied to families served and controlled by the courts, the welfare system, and protective services. For one thing, the affection and bonding in these families is often overlooked. We hear that people are so spaced-out on drugs that they can't form attachments, that mothers neglect their children and fathers abuse them, and that families are violent and people are isolated. All truths for some families, but only partial truths that highlight the most visible aspects of individual and family misery while ignoring the loyalty and affection that people feel for each other. (…)

Families served by the welfare system often look chaotic; people come and go and individuals seem cut off. That instability is partly a life-style, amid poverty, drugs and violence, but it's also a by-product of social interventions. Children are taken for placement, members are jailed or hospitalised, services are fragmented. The point is not whether such interventions are sometimes necessary but that they always break up family structures. The interventions are carried out without recognising the positive emotional ties and effective resources that may have been disrupted as well. (…)

A challenge for professionals

The professional staff are generally overworked and are apt to view a family orientation as an addition to their jobs rather than a useful approach that's central to the work. (…) Workers know they're vulnerable if they don't follow established procedures… The reality of the job doesn't lend itself readily to time spent searching for families, exploring their strengths, and handling the complexities that multicrisis families present. (…) An understanding of patterns, boundaries, and transitions does not translate automatically into effective service, especially when the primary goal is to engage and empower the family. Many poor families are unaccustomed to taking such an active role. They expect social service agencies to do something *for* them (finding housing or keeping an adolescent off the streets) or *to* them (taking the children away or making surprise home visits). (…) Changing those expectations so that the family becomes an active agent in solving its problems requires subtle skills with a paradoxical feature: the staff must learn how to work hard at taking a back seat.

Patricia Minuchin, Jorge Colapinto, and Salvador Minuchin, *Working with families of the poor* (Guilford Press, USA, 1998)

Key points

- **The family group and its members can be viewed a network of affection, bonds, roots and values handed down over generations, which has its own skills and strengths.**
- **Children can be a force for change and empowerment both within their family and in their wider circle.**
- **The family unit and positive interaction – between parents and children, between family and community – should be used as a compass for intervention, directing attention to measures that enhance self-esteem and create a positive active role for family members.**
- **Supportive intervention develops and strengthens family ties and the positive roles of each member of the family.**
- **The concept of 'family project' helps to see the family as a form of action against its own social exclusion and could be the starting point for a new kind of action against poverty and exclusion.**
- **Systemic approach and practice has not been used to its full potential in the fight against poverty and exclusion. This approach reveals the extent to which social workers who intervene in the family, and interact with individual members of the family, are themselves an integral part of the family's situation.**

Issues for discussion

- **How can an understanding of families as a long-term 'project', with the need for building long-lasting positive ties, be incorporated into practice?**
- **How can systemic knowledge and practice become an integral part of planning and implementing individual and family support in the fight against poverty?**
- **What difficulties do practitioners face in focusing on the skills, value, hopes, and projects of the family's individuals and the family group as a whole, in support of family networks?**

Focusing on the family in the fight against child poverty: questions for the European strategy

"Poor children today are born into conditions which are not very different from those of the past. They are more tragic, though, because the world around them has changed. We have to face up to this reality. What are the causes of children being forced to grow up in poverty, what does it mean, what should we do about it? It must not be a matter of judging the parents. It's a question of engaging them by engaging ourselves. Because we are ultimately responsible."

Joseph Wresinski, founder of ATD Fourth World, April 1967, *Ecrits et Paroles* Volume 2

We have presented the views of a variety of people who highlight the importance of the family in the fight against poverty and exclusion. They see the family as:

- a vital network of ties, roots, values and bonds of affection
- the system or subsystem which determines the ways those involved can take individual and collective action.

The building of this group – this family – can been seen as a 'project' which must be supported by:

- valuing the group and the individuals who are part of it
- focusing on their skills
- facilitating access to some fundamental rights.

This is not a moralist approach promoting 'family values'. It recognises the way things are – the reality for the people involved, and the aspirations expressed by adults and children.

Are these views integrated into the current European strategy for fighting child poverty?

Although the development of 'family policies' is beyond the remit of the European Union, concerns about the family group are nevertheless part of European debates and action.[62] Among the common objectives to promote social inclusion agreed at the Nice Summit in 2000, is the commitment to 'implement action to preserve family solidarity in all its forms' (objective 2c). The first Joint Report on Social Inclusion gave details of the actions that Member States proposed to take to achieve this objective, according to their National Action Plans for Social Inclusion (NAPs/incl). In this report, the European Commission commented:

> "Many measures in the different NAPs/incl contribute to preserving family solidarity. These include both general policy areas such as employment, income support, housing, health, education and gender equality, and more targeted policies to support particularly vulnerable groups such as children, the elderly and people with disabilities. However, it is striking that only some Member States specifically prioritise the preservation of family solidarity as a key policy domain in promoting social inclusion. Essentially these are the Member States that have traditionally seen the family as being at the heart of national strategies to

62 *See* in particular the work by the European inter-parliamentary group on 'Family and the protection of children'.

promote cohesion, notably Portugal, Spain, Greece, Germany, Ireland, Italy and Austria. They particularly emphasise the continuing role that the family has to play in the social inclusion of children, the elderly and people with disabilities."[63]

Preserving family solidarity: propositions in the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion 2001–2003

In general, a mix of policy approaches seems to hold out the best hope of preserving family solidarity. These cover the following main areas:

- **Ensuring economic stability and better living conditions** through favourable treatment for families in tax and welfare systems (Austria, Germany, Italy and Luxembourg), recognition of different family types including same sex couples (Germany), assistance to jobless and vulnerable families to find employment (France) and maintaining family allowances to the parents of children in care in order to allow their return into the family (Belgium).
- **Ensuring support at a time of family breakdown and divorce** so that this does not lead to new poverty, precariousness and isolation and more children being taken into care (France). Measures include mediation and counselling services to assist with separation, special support and assistance to victims of domestic violence, strengthening general financial support to lone-parent families, improving provision with regard to maintenance payments (Austria) and measures to ensure that both parents are involved in the upbringing and care of children (Sweden and France).
- **Improving information, training, support and counselling services** which will help families to cope with and reduce conflict, will improve parenting skills and lead to better support for children and a recognition of their rights in vulnerable families (Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Portugal) and will help to maintain the family unit in difficult situations and keep children in stable family situations rather than taking them into care within institutions (Italy and Portugal).
- **Promoting locally-based initiatives for vulnerable families** in disadvantaged communities such as support in Spain to NGOs to develop local integrated support systems and the development of community-based family service centres in Ireland.
- **Promoting measures to reconcile work and family life** such as improved daycare provision and flexible working arrangements.
- **Assisting and encouraging families to care for the sick, disabled and elderly at home** through enhancing support systems in the community, providing help at home and training on care provision (Austria, Greece, Spain, Sweden, Italy and Ireland) and assistance with financial costs resulting from forgoing work to provide care such as a carer's allowance (Ireland) and insurance relief (Austria).

From the Joint Report on Social Inclusion
European Commission and Council (Brussels, 2001)

Many measures are already under way, and this approach has received further support in many of the plans for 2003–2005. Numerous NGOs have carefully examined the contents of these plans and have publicised their assessment of them.[64]

The delegation representing ATD Fourth World to the EU contributed to this work by publishing an analysis of the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion in 2001 and 2003 to evaluate whether the European strategy genuinely reaches and supports individuals and families living in persistent poverty and exclusion. They conclude that national measures aiming towards objective 3b, concerning the fight against child poverty, largely avoided treating children 'as if they were completely independent of their families'; nevertheless, 'the area of family policy in the NAPs/incl, is either under-developed (if at all), or has not been developed in the context of the objective of fighting poverty and social exclusion.' [65]

63 European Commission and Council, *Joint Report on Social Inclusion*, Brussels, 2001
64 *See* www.eapn.org
65 Papers by ATD Fourth World Delegation to the EU are listed in Appendix 2

The Hermange report on Family and Child Protection, adopted by the European Parliament in 1999, recommended that any proposed European legislation should be accompanied by an assessment of the likely impact on families.[66] Establishing tools and indicators would make it possible to monitor whether measures relating to one area of the European anti-poverty strategy have unintended negative effects on another area – especially on family life. For instance, the trend towards allocating social benefits on an individual basis should be evaluated for its impact on family solidarity, especially when the family is in a fragile situation or very young (young couples).

Another example is the possibility that focusing only on the risk of child abuse in developing child protection measures, could weaken community solidarity and opportunities of support. For instance, Article 13 of the Spanish child protection law of 1996 concerns the duty of citizens to intervene when a child is at risk, distressed or missing school, with possible recourse to protection measures. However, The Association for the Defence of Human Rights – Andalucia (APDH-A) laments the fact that this law does not encourage citizens to help the families and children concerned and that some administrative requirements weaken local social support initiatives and the informal networks which support families.

Nevertheless, concerns about the need to support families are rising.

- **The EU Italian Presidency** highlighted the increasing emphasis on family life in the EU Social Inclusion Strategy through the European Round Table Conference on Poverty and Social Exclusion in Turin (October 2003). This identified and analysed innovative policies to support the family and to protect the rights of children within the more general context of measures for combating poverty and social exclusion, as set out in the 2003 National Action Plans.

  In his opening address, Italian Minister Maroni said:

  > "We have no intention of upholding a family model such as the one we believe has been established in Italy – indeed, we are aware of the different types of experience gathered in the different European countries. We would only like to stress the fundamental role played by family in social inclusion policies and assess its concrete experience with a view to exchanging good practices."

  The conference examined the ways in which the social policies of Member States invest in the family as a factor in social protection by fostering its capacity for inclusion. Discussions promoted the preservation of family solidarity as a key policy domain in promoting social inclusion, by taking into consideration a comprehensive approach to the family and family solidarity and assessing the effectiveness of the measures implemented at national level.

- **The EU Irish Presidency** marked the 10th anniversary of the UN International Year of the Family by hosting a major international conference on *Families, change and social policy in Europe* in May 2004.[67] Discussions focused on themes such as Modernising social protection in light of family change, Reconciling the demands of work and family life, and The caring functions of families.

  A workshop on Family as a focus of social inclusion and social cohesion, aimed to develop an understanding of family as a force for, and agent of, social inclusion and social cohesion. It explored how social policy can be configured to support the cohesive and inclusive aspects of families and family life, taking account of recent developments in EU social policy, such as the NAPs/incl. The needs of particular types of families, such as lone-

66 Marie-Thérèse Hermange, *Report on Family and Child Protection*, resolution A4-0004/1999, Commission for Employment and Social Affairs, January 1999

67 S*ee* www.eu2004.ie

parent families, migrant families, low-income families and large families, were considered in the context of social inclusion and the more general question about how society can be made more cohesive.

In the light of these recent developments, we can predict that moves in the European Social Inclusion strategy will attempt to respond to many of the needs and aspirations of parents and children living in poverty. Our exploratory work suggests that it is not only a question of doing more – but of doing things differently. This involves:

- the organisation, training and the spirit in which support is offered
- learning to work on common projects with families
- regarding families as key players with full participation
- finding out about the parents' and children's plans as early as possible, so that solutions are based on their aspirations and skills
- looking at the family group as a whole, before implementing a host of measures.

Taking into account the whole family network and building solutions with them – avoiding doing to people, working *with* people not *for* them – is a complex process. Professionals need training and support to develop the new skills needed for this approach.

Key points

- **The commitment to 'implement action to preserve family solidarity in all its forms' is part of the objectives agreed at the Nice Summit in 2000 to promote social inclusion.**
- **Family policy in the NAPs/incl has not been developed in the context of the fight against poverty and social exclusion.**
- **Focus on family was an important point of social inclusion debates under both the Italian and the Irish EU Presidency (2003/2004).**
- **It is not only a question of doing more, but of doing things differently; valuing and supporting the whole family network requires new skills and support for professional workers.**

Issues for discussion

- **How can recognition of the importance of the family group be incorporated into the European strategy for fighting child poverty and social exclusion?**
- **What changes in policies and practices are needed in the European Social Inclusion Strategy?**
- **To what extent can EU measures and community programmes support practitioners to enable them to innovate, to experiment – and therefore to take risks?**

Child protection and family continuity

"The personal social services are large-scale experiments in ways of helping those in need. It is both wasteful and irresponsible to set experiments in motion and omit to record and analyse what happens. It makes no sense in terms of efficiency and however little intended, indicates a careless attitude towards human welfare."

Seebohm, Report of the Committee on Local Authority and Allied Personal Social Services, UK, 1968

"Placements are a very risky operation. And you should only contemplate a risky intervention after first having done everything to avoid it, such is the risk."

Jean Bédard, Quebec social worker, author of *Families in distress*

We have presented the arguments for a family-orientated approach that strengthens family roots and reinforces a child's fundamental bonds. In this context, we will now review issues related to child protection measures – above all, accommodation in care, which affects children and families living in poverty in the European Union.

Developments in child protection

Child protection in western Europe, in its institutionalised form, has been around for over 200 years; the original purpose was to care for orphans and abandoned children. In the 20th century this social role evolved into child protection intervention when the family was deemed to be 'failing' or when adults were violent or abusive.

Recent developments in child protection remain controversial. Some regard the transformation of child protection from its 'traditional positive sense' to a more complex form of intervention, with mixed feelings. It is associated in some people's minds with notions of social control and intervention, which restrict the right of parents to bring up their children; others think of it as part of society's duty to protect children from abuse or negligence.

Abuse and good care

The notion of 'abuse' is at the centre of the debate. This concept was widely used during certain periods of the 19th and 20th centuries, and has come to the fore again in Europe since the 1980s. The question of identifying abuse has become central to the way in which child protection systems function; a number of countries have made changes to legislation to ensure better awareness of, and responses to, situations involving abuse.

The concept of 'abuse' has been a cause of concern in many different ways, as much among researchers and practitioners as in society as a whole. They began to ask: *How can we define abuse if we have no reference points regarding how to bring up a child 'well' or what we mean by 'good' care?* Indeed, the growing focus on abuse led to more tension, conflict and pressure for many professionals in their daily work, as they sought ways around these problems.

Front line workers frequently face the related questions, *Is it better to protect a child or young person by placing them in care when this care might not turn out to be temporary, or is it better to maintain the family unit? And if so, what kind of support does the family need?*

The notion of a 'good upbringing' or 'good care' can also vary depending on social or cultural background. In 2003, two major universities and two academic networks in Belgium held an international conference on 'Good upbringing in different cultures' to address these issues:

> "Families display a great variety of practices and diversity in the way they operate. Numerous recent studies seem to prove that all types of upbringing have certain flaws that can be compensated by other family resources. Growing up in a family is complex and multidetermined, involving both risk factors and protection factors; there is usually a balance which allows the family to evolve and each member of the family to develop.
>
> The construction of the child's identity is the result of both satisfying and unsatisfying responses to their needs. Crises and suffering are an essential part of life: they are what allow the positive restructuring of identity. That being the case, we must consider how we should tackle this complexity, and how we should manage crises and times of suffering when they arise in the context of a problematic upbringing."[68]

Deinstitutionalisation

A second trend has developed over several decades, becoming particularly pronounced over the last 20 years: it concerns efforts to 'deinstitutionalise' childcare by gradually transforming the children's homes and institutions where many children were accommodated. Traditional institutional care was called into question, particularly after the fall of the Berlin wall when the situation of children in institutional care homes in several central and eastern European countries came to light.

All European countries have placed a great emphasis on developing institutional forms of care that are closer to a family environment. Italy, for instance, has made a commitment to end some forms of institutional care by 1 January 2007.

In May 1999 – in the wake of alarm signals about the situation in central and eastern Europe – the Stockholm international conference 'Children and residential care: alternative strategies' recognised that millions of children around the world grow up in large institutions and that this often has detrimental consequences for the children's future lives. In 2003, a follow-up conference was held on 'Children and residential care: new strategies for a new millennium'.[69] The Save the Children NGO produced an international policy report calling for detailed examination of institutional care in the light of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and proposing action to promote good practice in institutional care.[70]

Child protection systems in the European Union

Child protection systems in the EU and beyond are constantly evolving, and pursue similar general objectives.

Comparative surveys have been conducted in a variety of countries.[71] After 10 years of meetings, studies and seminars across Europe, Alain Grevot presents eight different child protection systems operating in six countries – Germany, Belgium (French-speaking and Flemish), France, Italy, the Netherlands and the UK (England and Scotland).[72] He then makes a

68 Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Université de Mons-Hainaut, European Scientific Association for Residential and Foster Care for Children and Adolescents and Association Internationale de Formation et de Recherche en Education Familiale

69 *See* www.children-strategies.org

70 Save the Children, *A Last Resort: The growing concern about children in residential care, Save the Children's position on residential care*, London, 2003

71 For the UK, see in particular Cooper, Hetherington, Smith and Wilford, *Protecting Children: Messages from Europe*, Russell House Publishing Ltd, 1997

72 Alain Grevot, *Voyage en protection de l'enfance – une comparaison européenne*, Ed. Vaucresson, France, 2001

comparative analysis of different types of access to 'voluntary or contractual' support and 'compulsory' support when the justice system intervenes.

In this analysis, Grevot identifies several factors that influence the precise focus of different systems, and the diversity of approaches:

- different conceptions of the family arising from the professional cultures of social workers based on shared theoretical perspectives
- differing views of the child's interests, and the distinction between children and adolescents in practices which promote independence
- the influence of general social policies on practices which aim to protect children at risk
- the nature of justice and civil society within the national culture ('accusatory' or 'inquisitory' models of justice, thresholds of intervention by the justice system)
- the structure of the State, decentralisation and subsidiarity
- historical influences.

At the end of his travels, Grevot identified three major trends that are present in all the European countries in his study:

- research into progressive responses and the sparing use of the justice system
- the desire to make mechanisms clearer, particularly the points at which authorities move from prevention to protection
- the increasing importance placed on the participation of the 'users' in the assessment of their situation and in the development of responses to it (rights, empowerment).

Key messages from research

Practice in child protection is often based on fragile and contradictory evidence. We must continually ask ourselves whether child placement practice – carried out by well-meaning and socially conscientious societies for the good of children – could jeopardise children's welfare and may actually do more harm than good.

The assessment of, and research into, child protection measures and placement varies from country to country, depending, for instance, on:

- the influence of universities on the training of social workers
- the link between policy-making and academic research (such as the UK's 'evidence-based policy' approach)
- the importance of the issue in the country concerned (the organisation which intervenes, national sentiment, voluntary campaigns and so on).

Two European research associations specifically gather data on the issues examined here:

- Association Internationale de Formation et de Recherche en Education Familiale (AIFREF) (International Association of Training and Research in Family Education) works in French.[73]
- European Scientific Association for Residential and Foster Care for Children and Adolescents (EUSARF) works in English.[74]

Many of the studies cited in this report were published by these two associations.

Both associations are engaged in the objective assessment of child protection systems and intervention. They are moving away from definitions that:

- can lead to the denunciation of non-mainstream practices
- jeopardise the rights of parents to bring up their children.

They promote forms of parental support that:

- take full account of the rights and role of parents and children

73 *See* www.aifref.be
74 *See* www.psy.kuleuven.ac.be/ortho/eusarf/index.html

- lead to the creation of networks of partners and encourage citizenship.

EUSARF and AIFREF both emphasise the importance of academic studies and exchange of information internationally for progress to be made. Separating children and parents in situations deemed 'dangerous' is not sufficient in itself: the kind of action and means available to professionals during separations must be assessed. We should be able to acknowledge that:

- placement decisions may be inappropriate
- the way that professionals act, and the means at their disposal, may be inappropriate or inadequate.

In his introduction to the report of the 1998 EUSARF Annual Conference, Michel Corbillon stresses the point that 'Only a short time ago, discussions about family support were dominated by the debate for or against placement, for separation deemed necessary, or for maintaining family ties.'[75] In his view, changes and new approaches in research now make it possible to move on from this debate which was often purely ideological, motivated by particular viewpoints (pseudo-theoretical schools of thought, economic issues, self-promotion etc).

Corbillon himself chooses to use the concept of *suppléance familiale* (family supply work or family assistance) to talk about different forms of intervention to help parents with the education and upbringing of their children. The word 'upbringing' (*élevage*) has positive associations (to raise up). To bring up a child means to feed, care for and train them. The term *suppléance familiale* indicates that the family cannot be substituted by anyone or anything else, such as an institution. The child's natural family is always present, even if it is sometimes deficient in the short or long term.

Looking at messages from research on child protection interventions, some key points can be highlighted.

- **The difficulty of evaluation**

  Researchers do not seem able to agree on the 'outcomes' of placements. Sven Hessle describes a Swedish study that followed up the life conditions of all children placed in foster care in a major city during a particular year over the course of two years.[76] At the end of the study, the researchers could not agree as to whether or not the actions of the social welfare authorities benefited the children. Cederström found that the outcome for three-quarters of the children was unfavourable; their emotional, intellectual and social development had deteriorated rather than developed.[77] The children who suffered most in care were those whose relationship with their biological parents was poor. Hessle points out that social workers had different opinions about this, and that Cederström found that child welfare officers are seldom in a position to judge the child's overall situation.

  An essential aspect of policy evaluation is the cost of intervention or, more precisely, the costs compared to alternatives practices. This topic would be a useful area of inquiry in future European work.

- **The guiding principle of family continuity**

  Family continuity seems to be emerging as a guiding principle for new kinds of intervention: discovering, supporting, and valuing all the ties in someone's life, particularly family ties. If the child is temporarily separated from their family, they must have access to an extended network of family relationships which are maintained as a permanent source of support and development (*see* **Family continuity**, below).

- **The positive impact of involving parents and developing participatory practice**

  Michel Corbillon has noted that the most significant recent institutional

75 Michel Corbillon, *Suppléance familiale: nouvelles approches, nouvelles pratiques*, Matrice, France, 2001

76 Sven Hessle, 'Child welfare on the Eve of the twenty first century: what we have learned', in Callahan, Hessle, Strega (Edit.), *Valuing the field: Child Welfare in an international context*, CEDR and Ashgate, UK, 2000

77 A Cederström, quoted by Sven Hessle, Ibid., 2000

changes for child protection interventions undoubtedly concern the role of the families.[78] However, although highly desirable, the involvement of families in support systems in one form or another is not easy to put into practice.

Corbillon thinks that current research on the involvement of the parents is taking two directions:

- developing a partnership approach – cooperation between parents and institutions rather than the simple involvement of the parents
- looking beyond the parents – taking the child's whole social network into account.

This aspect is developed in **Involving parents in child protection: a challenge for the future** (*see* page 81).

Family continuity

Sven Hessle, Swedish professor of social work, reviewed the principle of family continuity in his paper *Child welfare on the eve of the twenty-first century: what we have learned*.[79] Our description of family continuity is based on this work.

Hessle identifies three fundamental principles of child welfare which should inform child protection interventions – and that also apply to childhood more generally – regardless of whether children are growing up in favourable circumstances, or are facing traumatising events, such as war, forced migration, or natural disasters.

To have a reasonable chance of leading a normal adult life, all children need:

- **family continuity:** in the course of their lives children must not lose contact with their origins
- **closeness:** children have a fundamental need for a close relationship with a small number of caring adults who are physically accessible to them
- **affirmation:** the child needs to be respected as a co-subject in dialogue.

Hessle's review found that it has taken nearly a century of international research by child welfare agencies to arrive at these fundamental principles; with hindsight they are obvious and no more than common sense to people who are in close proximity to children on a daily basis.

Most researchers agree that the continued presence of their biological parents in a child's life is an absolute necessity, regardless of the circumstances of the child's placement. Placement practice may create a risk of rootlessness and the child's loss of contact with their origins. Hessle therefore stresses the value of family continuity:

> "The child welfare sector must be able to offer children at risk a better life situation than their current one. And here we come to the crux of the problem: the empirical evidence points to the conclusion that placements arranged 'for the good of the child' are not necessarily a better solution for children in the long run than if they had remained in their original home environments. This conclusion, arrived at in a number of countries with differing welfare systems, has led to different attempts to improve care for children whose home environment puts them at risk. [Many] alternative solutions offered in the child welfare and child protection sector have all adopted the same course of action, namely, the implementation of the principle of family continuity."

The principle of family continuity leads to child welfare practice based on strengthening the child's network of family and friends and supporting the development of vital lifelong bonds and relationships.

In contrast, practice based on principles of 'stability' or 'permanence' emerged from debates taking place in the USA. This had a profound influence

78 Michel Corbillon, *Suppléance familiale: nouvelles approches, nouvelles pratiques*, Matrice, France, 2001

79 in Callahan, Hessle, Strega (Edit.), *Valuing the field: Child Welfare in an international context*, CEDR and Ashgate, UK, 2000

on policy and practice in some European countries – especially the UK – where adoption was increasingly promoted, often with minimal attention paid to enabling children to have contact with, and information about, their birth family.

In its many contacts with parents from very poor backgrounds, who often face social exclusion, ATD Fourth World has found that they are more likely to cooperate when child welfare intervention is guided by family continuity. More participatory research is needed at a European level to explore whether 'family continuity' matches parents' expectations as a guiding principle for child welfare systems.

A new paradigm? The emergence of the principle of family continuity in the USA

The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 in the USA guaranteed a certain amount of stability or permanence in the child's life. This law, which has also had a major impact on child welfare in other countries such as the UK, can be seen as a compromise between two conflicting ideological schools of thought in child welfare which were at odds throughout the whole of the 1970s:

- Freud, Goldstein and Solnit argued for early intervention and placing children in families which could provide a stable environment.
- Fanshel argued that children in care must be allowed to have close and frequent contacts with their families of origin if they are to achieve a favourable social adjustment later in life and that the goal of all placements should be to help children to return to their biological parents.

  At a conference in Sweden in 1979 Fanshel said:

  > "I have become an advocate, on the basis of my research data, of seeing down-at-heel parents, parents who are drug addicts, alcoholics, whose actions are bizarre, who are retarded, criminals, prostitutes, to see them as human beings who are of value for their children, as being of much more value in the down-at-heel existence than an imaginary figure whom the child is not allowed to meet face-to-face, whose appearance and reasons for abandoning him he can only fantasise about. I prefer that he meet with his mother, even if she arrives drunk, even if she embarrasses him when she comes to visit and gives the foster parents reason to say awful things about her – it is better that he struggle with that kind of problem than with the problem of her having vanished without a trace."

Nearly 20 years after it came into effect in the USA, evaluations exposing the failure of aspects of this law, along with changing policies, principles and populations, brought about a new way of thinking about child protection, and the principle of family continuity began to emerge. It is linked to a movement that goes under several different names: 'the family preservation movement', 'family empowerment', 'the family support model', etc.

The foremost advocates of the new orientation, McFadden and Downs speak of a new paradigm in child welfare practice based on strengthening the child's network of family and friends, and introducing a lifelong perspective into the thinking on family continuity.

Added to this earlier model is the idea of 'life course'. The goal is to discover, support, and enhance vital lifelong relationships, particularly family relationships, as these are a vital part of the vulnerable child's sense of continuity in an otherwise overloaded network of short-term, unpredictable, and repeatedly broken contacts in care.

Wherever children are placed, they should have access to an extended and augmented network of family relationships as a permanent base and supportive platform. It is no longer necessary to deliberate on placement according to a sliding scale: first a public institution – if that does not work, a foster home – if that fails, adoption. Instead, with an extended and augmented family relationship network as the foundation, it becomes possible to discuss which alternative is really best for the child, for how long a period of time, in relation to the current problem situation.

References provided by Sven Hessle

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Fanshel at a conference in Sweden in 1979 cited by K Vinterhed (ed.) *Barn i kris* (*Children in crisis*), AWE/Gebers (Stockholm, 1981)

Goldstein, Freud and Solnit, *Before the Best Interests of the child*, Free press (New York, 1979)

Kagan and Weissbourd, *Putting families first*, Jossey-Bass publishers (San Francisco, 1994)

Key points

- **Monitoring and evaluation of child protection measures and placement vary from country to country; researchers do not seem to agree on the 'outcomes' of placements and it is relevant to ask whether child placement practice actually jeopardises children's welfare.**
- **Most European countries place a great emphasis on developing institutional forms of care that are closer to a family environment.**
- **The increasing focus on abuse is leading social care professionals to act ever more cautiously.**
- **There may be a conflict between the aim of ensuring that children do not lose contact with their origins (family continuity) and the attempt to ensure that they grow up in a family environment that can provide a stable life.**
- **The 'family continuity' principle leads to practice based on strengthening the child's network of family and friends, and introducing a lifelong perspective.**

Issues for discussion

- **What kind of participatory research in the field of child protection could contribute to a new understanding of issues arising from intervention?**
- **Can 'family continuity' be the guiding principle in child protection systems?**
- **What difficulties or conflicts of interest arise in adopting the principle of family continuity?**

Involving parents in child protection: a challenge for the future

"When things get too hard we ask for help, but the solutions are not what we expected."

Being parents – a contribution from ATD Fourth World members in France

The Council of Europe is currently preparing a recommendation on the rights of children in residential care, including guidelines to improve cooperation with the parents.[80] This text will follow an earlier recommendation on daycare centres stating:

- parent involvement should be recognised as an essential aspect of quality of care centres and of the education received by the child
- there must be a partnership between parents and daycare staff based on a continuing, constructive dialogue, mutual trust, understanding and respect and a sharing of information and expertise.[81]

In the USA, Professor James K. Whittaker of the University of Seattle reviewed research on the effects of placement and showed that out of 11 characteristics considered to be good practice in intervention, only two – the involvement of parents and assigning an adult carer to be the key worker for the child – have been confirmed by research studies as having a positive effect in the long term. [82]

Although it is highly desirable to involve families in support systems in one way or another, research over the past 15 years has shown that it is not easy to achieve this in practice.

The role of parents in child protection

The experiences of ATD Fourth World in Europe shows that – whatever the differences between countries, their child protection systems and their laws – the expectations and negative experiences of parents are similar.

This observation has been confirmed by comparative studies. For example, one group of researchers found that both in England and in France:

> "Families want mutual respect between social workers and families, they want people's dignity to be upheld, even when there are tensions between service-users and professionals, and they would like the reasons for interventions to be explained to them."[83]

For families, these are the factors that determine the quality of intervention, whether the outcome involves the eventual placement of their child or not. Parents who are permanently separated from their children talk about their immense suffering and loss of self-esteem, and refer to how little support they have been given. This common experience is found in the reports presented to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg when parents brought a case on the grounds that their right to respect for family life had been violated (article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights).[84]

British research studies into the role of parents have multiplied in the wake of the 1989 Children Act, which established working in partnership with parents as a priority. They show that implementation has proved difficult:

80 See reports of *Working group on children at risk and in care 2001–2003*, Directorate General III, Social Policy Service, Council of Europe

81 Council of Europe, *Recommendation 2000 –8 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on child day care*, Strasbourg, 2002, www.coe.int

82 James K. Whittakker, 'Repenser la suppléance familiale en internats et en foyers de groupes: enjeux scientifiques et professionnels', in Michel Corbillon, 2001, *op. cit.*

83 Baistow, Freund, Grevot, Hetherington, Spriggs, Yelloly, *Les stratégies des familles et leurs représentations de l'intervention sociale et judiciaire de protection de l'enfance: une comparaison franco-anglaise*, rapport Mire, Paris, 1995

84 See Appendix 1 on Supplement 6

- Cleaver and Freeman show that the most frequent outcome of intervention, or an investigation in cases of suspected abuse, was the further weakening of families who were already vulnerable, thereby leaving the parents deeply worried, with a loss of self-esteem and a sense of powerlessness.[85]
- Hunt and Freeman concluded that British parents affected by child protection judicial proceedings have a negative experience of the justice system: the lawyers are not trained in this field; the parents are not taken into consideration, they are given no preparation, are not involved in the decision-making process, and are given no support once the proceedings are over. [86]
- Lupton and Nixon[87] state that the evidence suggests that the extent of family participation in social work decisions remains extremely limited, despite the exhortations to meet the challenge of partnership,[88] and the overall policy moves that accompany it. In their view, one of the factors that contribute to this relative failure concerns organisational systems and the professional culture in social intervention.

In Sweden, Hessle points out that two-thirds of parents consider the placement of their children with a foster family as a mark of failure. Generally speaking, the parents resent the fact that social services has left them to themselves, that their situation has continued to deteriorate, that placement has not improved the lot of their children, and that when the children come back the problems are just as bad as before.[89]

In Spain, too, issues regarding the parents' role, and social workers' preconceptions about them, are central to criticisms of child protection practices.

Understanding parents: messages from research in Belgium

The work of Vanhee, Laporte and Corveleyn in Belgium, involving 89 sets of parents, explores parents' views on care proceedings.[90] Parents in poverty experience placement as a 'drastic measure which parents have rarely given their free consent to'. They perceive it as a negative judgement on their abilities as a mother or father, involving 'professionals who they feel dominated by'. This

85 Cleaver and Freeman, *Parental perspectives in cases of suspected child abuse*, HMSO, London, 1995

86 Freeman and Hunt, 'Parental perspectives on care proccedings', 1998, in *The children act now – messages from research, studies in evaluating the Children Act 1989*, Department of Health, The stationery office, London, 2001

87 Carol Lupton and Paul Nixon, *Empowering practice? A critical appraisal of the family group conference approach*, The Policy Press, London, 1999, page 50

88 Department of Health, *The challenge of partnership*, HMSO, London, 1995c

89 Sven Hessle, *Familjer i sönderfall* (*Families falling apart*), Norstedts, Stokholm, 1988

90 Vanhee, Laporte and Corveleyn, *Précarité et éducation des enfants: la parole aux parents – de la pratique éducative dans les familles défavorisées*, Ed Garant, Belgium, 2001

The Association for the Defence of Human Rights, Andalucia, writes:

When the legislation was introduced [in 1996], the criterion 'serious lack of protection' was abandoned and all sorts of measures began to be applied to situations. The majority of care orders showed that the criteria applied were less strict, and facilitated all sorts of intervention linked to children in so-called 'risk groups'.

Here are some of the reasons cited to justify intervention: 'the mother refused to cooperate', 'was refused access to the house', 'was unhelpful', 'the social services think that…', 'if they refuse to work with us, we will take away their children'… These reasons led to investigations which established that the children were suffering emotional difficulties or from hyperactivity, and so formed the basis of decisions to remove children from their home.

These practices lead to the placement of children from families who have the least social security cover and which face the greatest social inequalities. As far as the 'damaged' parents are concerned, who find it difficult to adopt new routines and take on new responsibilities, the response should never be to criminalise them. Instead there must be research into finding creative ways of understanding and alleviating the suffering at the heart of the problem.

Whatever the situation, statements like 'the situation is impossible', 'nothing can be done', or 'this child is beyond help' should never be accepted.

Asociacion Pro-derechos Humanos de Andalucia, *¿Niños peligrosos o niños en peligro?*, (Córdoba, 2002)

negative experience is made even worse when the reasons for placement are unclear and when the criteria for ending the placement are not well defined. However, it can be positive – a sensible option – if the placement is based on dialogue in which the parents and family see it as an appropriate response.

Isabelle Delens-Ravier, a criminologist at the Catholic University of Louvain, recently carried out a major study, based on 11 long interviews in which she examined the experiences of parents whose children had been placed in care.[91] She reveals their deep feelings, how much suffering is caused by forced separation and the strategies they used to deal with this experience. She highlights a paradox: 'the placement of children in care weakens the families which intervention is meant to help'. For parents who live in great poverty, being a parent is often the only social identity they have – an identity denied them by taking their children into care.

Delens-Ravier interviewed two principal groups of parents:

- **Highly visible, very vulnerable families**

  These families often face very difficult living conditions, housing and health problems, and the parents themselves sometimes had experience of intervention when they were children. At a certain point in their already difficult and precarious daily lives, a crisis situation shatters this fragile stability and compels them to seek help.

  The parents' requests for help are usually practical, financial ones, directed towards front-line services and not to the 'Aide à la jeunesse' (the statutory child protection services in French-speaking Belgium). The front line professionals who intervene, realising the extent of the problem, or already being aware of the family's problems, refer the family to the child support services. The first response of the child support service is to place the children in care to give everyone some breathing space, and only then to consider and discuss the problems.

  Delens-Ravier observes that the parents' and family's requests are often not listened to at the outset.

- **Families in which there is conflict between parents and their teenage children**

  Social workers aim to understand the family's problems by focusing on the teenager's point of view; the teenager is removed from the family in order to take time to clarify matters. The parents interviewed by Delens-Ravier felt 'disqualified', and that their own reading of the crisis was hardly considered.

Each parent's and each family's reaction is ultimately unique to them, but developing a better understanding of why and how people respond in certain ways can help us to adapt intervention so that it is based on negotiation rather compulsion.

Delens-Ravier differentiates between three types of strategies adopted by parents in response to the placement of their children: powerlessness, protest and negotiation.

- **Disempowered parents**

  The daily life of these families is marked by financial difficulties; they have limited personal, cultural or financial resources or social networks. They are clearly unable to seek help from the social system. These are often parents who were placed in children's homes themselves when they were children, or who experienced a major break from their family. They have no family model to identify with.

  In these circumstances, the adults' sense of parental identity is crucial. Delens-Ravier says, 'In one way they became respectable citizens when they became parents'. Their participation in, and link with, society depends on

91 Isabelle Delens-Ravier, *Le placement d'enfants et les familles – Recherche qualitative sur le point de vue de parents d'enfants placés*, Ed. Jeunesse et droit, Belgium, 2001

the fact of being a mother or father; that gives them a social identity, a personal identity and a future. The existence of their child helps them to put the difficulties of their own childhood behind them, and look forward to the future. With children anything is possible – a future can be constructed. The symbolic effect of placement is the destruction of their personal and social identity; a total catastrophe beyond comprehension. Placement represents the non-recognition of their role: they are labelled as an unfit parent and the effect is like a death sentence.

Their response represents a regression to a state in which they make great efforts but are not in control of anything.

> "They expend an enormous amount of energy, pacing up and down the corridors of the juvenile court, knocking on the wrong doors, turning up at court when they haven't been summoned, telling people how much they are suffering and how much they want to be considered in the intervention process … But these responses are generally regarded by others as inadequate, ill-timed, and not what was expected of them. It indicates to social workers that the parents have once more failed to understand, that they haven't done what was expected, what was asked of them, or that they are doing things at the wrong time."

Their relationship with the professionals is therefore one of dependence and powerlessness; if help involves negotiation, it is conducted against a background of total constraint, with parents only agreeing through fear of the consequences if they refuse. Standing up for themselves means adopting new approaches, and many parents feel that they don't want to end up being dealt with by yet another social worker who will revive their feelings of having been 'disqualified'.

So 'disempowered parents' deal with their anguish by waiting for help and by submission – not knowing how to act or react any more.

- **Combative parents**

  These parents come from a whole range of social backgrounds. They are generally attached to a certain model of the family which they can identify with; this helps them to develop a strategy to get round their problems. They deal with the label of 'unfit parents' through anger, opposition and recourse to aspects of identity other than being a parent. These parents are in open, and often total, conflict with the social workers.

- **Coolheaded negotiators**

  These parents are often in a similar social and economic situation to disempowered families, but have a strong, idealised sense of family – even if it is rooted in poverty and sometimes violence. These family roots give them support. Delens-Ravier notes that it is often the mothers who deal with the authorities and who have ambitions for their child's future. Having felt 'disqualified', they manage to rebuild their self-esteem.

  These parents develop a strategy by distancing themselves from the label of 'unfit parent'. Although these mothers have experienced non-recognition and disqualification, they rise to the challenge and are determined to prove that they are capable of being 'good mothers'. This is how they negotiate with the social workers, by trying to see how placement can be a form of social integration and support in the upbringing of their child. Their identity will be re-evaluated in terms of social integration. They delegate a certain amount of parental authority in exchange for recognition of their qualities as a parent. The intervener's recognition of their qualities is therefore a crucial element in allowing the relationship between the intervener and the parent to develop, and constructive negotiation to take place.

Delens-Ravier reaches the following conclusions

- **Placement: standard response**
  Placement remains a frequent, stereotyped response to family problems – a 'standard measure of intervention' which forms the focal point for all the actors involved. Although the majority of social workers say they make every effort to avoid placement, the evidence shows that placement is still a beacon; every aspect of intervention, every action and every family initiative revolves around the issue of placement.
- **The first contact**
  Delens-Ravier calls for an objective analysis of the first reports on families: who wrote the reports, what remarks have been noted, etc.

  In most cases, they seem to be based on the initial impressions of the first social worker to visit; they report disturbing signs, incompetence, difficulties facing the family, and their own concerns. This first report often forms the basis for the whole family file. The parents are tainted with an image they find very difficult to shake off, and one which causes social workers further concern.
- **Non-recognition or requalification?**
  The parents who were interviewed generally share a feeling of 'non-recognition' which goes beyond their socio-economic differences. They expressed their feeling that the intervention that led to the placement of their children had 'disqualified' them, and that the intervention process did not recognise their roles as parents.

  Their impression of intervention is not of support which helps resolve family problems, but of their stigmatisation as unfit failed parents. They feel that they are the object of intervention. All the families, whatever their social background, speak of feeling on unequal terms with the social workers.

  We have to find ways to allow parents to find, or rediscover, their roles as parents and as citizens. Intervention which separates children from their parents has no point unless it allows a process of parental 'requalification'; in other words helping parents to discover, or rediscover, their role in bringing up the child, whether that is a real or symbolic role. You never help a child by denigrating their parents.
- **Partnerships**
  Delens-Ravier's research focuses on the views of those affected by intervention measures. In her view, there should be a return to principles by which professionals reposition themselves as partners of the family and the community, see themselves as learning from the parents and the networks of support around them. They must realise that their personal and professional development goes hand-in-hand with that of the parents and other clients.

  The service-users must not become all-powerful over the social workers, who would end up feeling completely inadequate, crushed, and bad.

  The idea is to try to work together towards a better relationship between professionals and service-users by starting from the service-users' own assessment of the problems they face.

Giving parents more say: initiatives in France

The Naves-Cathala Report, commissioned by the French government, asks what role there is for parents whose children have been placed in care. The authors concluded that:

> "[There is] a real lack of understanding on the part of professionals regarding the way families work (and vice versa)…institutional practices

Being parents: thoughts about care accommodation, ATD Fourth World France

Background to the contribution

The parents who contributed to the writing of this text were supervised by an educational support programme, Aide Éducative en Milieu Ouvert (AÉMO), or had children placed in care. Some of them had spent lengthy periods in care themselves when they were children.

An initial working document, consisting of anonymous extracts from 18 interviews with some of the parents in the group, was presented to them without any added comments. Two meetings were held for everyone to share their thoughts and alter the draft text. All the parents approved the final text.

The document *Being parents: thoughts about care accommodation* was one of the sources used by Pierre Naves and Bruno Cathala in their report *Temporary care and placements of children and adolescents: decisions which test the French child and family protection systems*. (The complete text can be found in volume II of the Naves-Cathala Report.)

When things get too hard, we ask for help but the solutions are not what we expect

We realise that our very bad living conditions can be a major problem for our children. In the family we go without as much as we can but sometimes this leads to fights or other problems. And there's always alcohol, too, and the family can break up and then we're all alone…When things get too hard we ask for help, or the school or the health services (hospitals, infant care centres) report on us, or sometimes the neighbours.

> "We were living with two children, a one-year-old and a two-year-old, in a garage, with no water, no electricity, no toilet, nothing. So they took our children away. What we expected was a heated place to live, money for food and a job so the children could be proud of us. Instead they took our children away."

Residential care is often limited to material security. When a child is said to be in danger, what kind of danger is it? Is it because five of us are living in two rooms? Or because the parents are unemployed? The solution would be to find us a place to live rather than to take away the children. Maybe they're blaming some of us for being alcoholics. This doesn't mean we don't love our children. The solution is not to remove the children, but to help us to stop drinking.

Even when a care order is understood or agreed on, the placement causes pain for both children and their parents

When a child is taken away and put in care, it's really heartbreaking for us. Being in care is sometimes good for the child. There are times when we ask for this solution because we realise that we just can't manage by ourselves. This gives us peace of mind: adults who were placed in care when they were children say that they were able to learn to work, to 'use their ten fingers' usefully. For us as parents, when the children are not at home we have an opportunity to get back on our feet. For example, we can use this time to move into a new apartment with decent living conditions, which helps us prepare for the children's return.

Punishing the parents

Nobody would be able to count all our tears when our children are put into care. But we are often under the impression that the children have been placed so as to punish us. No one explains anything to us and we just don't understand why the children have been taken away.

Breaking the ties between parents and children

When our children are put in care we don't see them grow any more, we're no longer at their bedside when they are sick, we no longer take them to school, we don't educate them any more. We gave birth to them but we don't see them growing up. After several years of separation, parents and children have to learn to relate to each other again. We are like strangers and that, too, is a form of suffering.

When the children start coming home at weekends or during holidays, our reaction is to spoil them because we want to show them that we love them. But this makes it difficult to be demanding and to have any authority over them. At the end of the weekend or the holiday period the children have to go back to the foster mother or to the institution and they sometimes ask us why they can't come back for good. We don't always have the courage to tell them, which is why they feel we are betraying them or rejecting them. Sometimes we just can't manage to send them away and this puts us in a bad situation in terms of the judge in the juvenile court. The children know very well that we are no longer in control, but that it's really the judge, the social worker or the foster mother.

Living in fear

When we are being watched over by a social worker in an educational support programme, we're afraid of doing something wrong, we're afraid of defending ourselves because we think that if we do that our child would be placed in foster care. We feel that if we object to anything they will blame us for something.

We feel we are being controlled, we don't know how to act any more.

> "The first time I went to see her (in the foster home) they were at my side, watching what I was doing as if I was a child. Afterwards they told me I didn't know how to give the baby her bottle. The more they said this, the more I believed it. I thought I was an unfit mother. They asked me whether my partner fooled around with the baby. They blamed me for lots of things, but when you're young you don't always know what you're doing."

What's more, the social worker asks us what it's like in our family. We don't like that. We are entitled to have our little secrets with our children and they deprive us of that. Sometimes their intrusion into our lives is unbearable, so some people lose their temper and insult the judge or the social worker. But this always hurts them, and all of us know this.

Being with mum is what matters most

When a child is in care, we feel that we are being watched. We are afraid of doing something wrong.

When life gets too hard we think our children will be taken away because we know families who were in that situation. So we try and be discreet and go unnoticed, we keep a low profile.

> "When I was moving around with my kids, I was always afraid of asking for help at the welfare office because when you talk about social assistance it means risk of care. What I wanted was to live in hiding. I sent them to school because it was necessary. But when you're living in hiding you can't ask for food stamps, or clothing vouchers and all that. When you ask for social assistance they require you to show them your documents. I was afraid to get these documents, I was constantly afraid because as soon as I registered I was in the computer, in the files and I could be found. All I wanted to do was to be in hiding to keep my kids, not to have them taken away from me. My kids knew that, they could tell. And they're really great – they never complain.
>
> Even now when you ask them about their life when we were roaming around, they never complain even when we didn't always have enough to eat and they didn't have good clothes – in fact they only had two changes of clothes a year.
>
> But what mattered to them was that they were with mum. I saw how my kids responded when we had to run away, when we were forced to leave. They weren't afraid because they were with me. I never saw fear or anxiety in their eyes, never."

The lottery of relationships

We have a good relationship with some social workers and childminders, and we can work together for the future of our children. When relationships are good, there is a spirit of trust between the social worker and us, and the educational support programme turns into a real form of support. You can have a real dialogue in this case.

But, it's a little like a lottery. If things don't go well, we have almost no way of changing things. When relationships are bad, we're always the ones who are punished. We don't get our children back or the educational support programme is extended. They accuse us of being uncooperative. In practical terms we have no way of changing things. When we ask to change social workers or foster parents, in most cases the judge just confirms the original choice. Sometimes the judges don't even answer requests for change.

We feel like a cog in a wheel

If we ask for anything, we feel like we're caught up in a vicious circle. We have no control over anything any more. Educational support programmes or temporary placements are full of obligations. We're obliged to accept appointments even if they don't suit us. Sometimes we have to travel long distances to pick up the children or to see them in their home or at the foster family place. We lose a lot of time and energy. It also costs a lot of money and with our limited budgets this can easily become a major problem.

We don't speak the same language; we don't come from the same world

We want judges to advise and guide us. It's right for them to tell us what we are doing wrong, but not to be against us. They must listen to us and give us a chance to defend ourselves.

That is the heart of the problem: we don't speak the same language and we don't come from the same world. Judges don't understand what we're saying because they don't know who we are. Too often, they just rely on reports from the social services when they take decisions … If we had someone who knows what we are going through in life, and who is familiar with the legal jargon, when we see a judge we would be able to explain our position and also understand why certain measures are being taken. We would have the ways and means to discuss and to cooperate. These people would act as mediators.

The need for training

There's another solution too. All institutions dealing with families living in poverty should get additional training to help them do their job better. The people we have in mind are the judges, the lawyers, the doctors, the teachers, the police and also the social workers. Often decisions are taken after a first impression of us, without letting us explain ourselves.

Extracts from a contribution compiled with parents
ATD Fourth World, Noisy-le-Grand, France (May 2000)

which inhibit dialogue, and a feeling of powerlessness and humiliation [among the families]. It is impossible for the families to defend themselves in a calm and measured way. [They] very rarely have the help of a lawyer, they are denied access to their file … their fear of having their children placed in care prevents them from expressing themselves freely."[92]

They found that 'major shortcomings remain concerning the help which should be available to parents'. In particular, the information given to the Inspector of Child Social Support, and the reports submitted to judicial authority, are of insufficient quality. They are characterised by:

- absence of information regarding the family's economic and social background
- psychological assessments which are rarely supported by facts and detailed analysis
- the impossibility of knowing whether the report was written following a multidisciplinary evaluation
- the absence of alternative options suggested to the parents.

The report also tried to give the parents concerned a voice and included individual and collective contributions (*see* page 86).

Some field workers have commented upon this report, saying:

"The consequences of these shortcomings, the inadequacy of the assessment process, and the vagueness of the reasons given for placement all severely affect the parents who are hurt and humiliated by seeing themselves devalued, by words they don't understand – 'immature parents', 'paranoid father', 'ambivalent mother', 'absence of a sense of upbringing'.

What can you say to a devastated mother who hears the phrase 'emotionally-inadequate family environment' and realises that she is being accused of not loving her children?"[93]

These criticisms provoked numerous debates over the last three years, and led to the publication of *For and with children, their parents and the professionals – a contribution to the improvement of the child protection system*.[94] This report proposes 15 priority measures, including:

- helping parents and children affected by judicial decisions to gain access to their files
- emergency accommodation and daycare projects for isolated mothers and families
- the development of new forms of support for families in difficulty, to include a social and child benefit scheme that provides an alternative to either bringing up the child at home or separation of children from their parents
- a broader range of interventions.

The report recommended that a 'National observatory of children at risk' should be set up to improve monitoring of child protection, reinforce effective current practices and give a legal basis to innovative actions. This observatory was created in April 2004.

Adoption and birth family: conflicting challenges

Adoption is used as a solution in the context of child protection in some countries, but avoided in others. Like other child protection measures, adoption may occur where the family background is one of severe poverty, and often creates real conflict between agencies and birth parents.

The issue is worthy of its own European study, but here we look briefly at the situation in three of the countries included in our study.

92 Bruno Cathala and Pierre Naves, *Accueils provisoires et placements d'enfants et d'adolescents: des décisions qui mettent à l'épreuve le système français de protection de l'enfance et de la famille*, Journal Officiel, France, 2000

93 Marie Cécile Renoux, 'Halte au sentiment d'injustice et à la peur du placement', in *Revue Quart Monde* No. 178, Ed Quart Monde, Paris, 2001

94 Pierre Naves, *Pour et avec les enfants et les adolescents, leurs parents et les professionnels. Contribution à l'amélioration du système français de protection de l'enfance et de l'adolescence*, Report on proposals submitted to the Ministry of Family, France, June 2003

A clear strategy in England and Wales

In England and Wales, a wide national debate on adoption led to the Adoption & Children Act 2002. This law will not be fully implemented until September 2005, although some parts came into force in 2003.[95] The key aims of the Act include:

- encouraging more people to adopt children in care by ensuring that they are offered the support they need
- cutting harmful delays in the adoption process by establishing a statutory Adoption & Children Act register to link children with approved adopters, and by requiring courts to draw up a timetable for adoption
- introducing a new 'Special Guardianship' order to provide permanence for children who cannot return to their birth families, but for whom adoption is not the most suitable option.

Between 1976 and 1999, the total number of adoptions in England decreased from 16,000 to a little under 5,000 a year. Following the new direction of child protection policy, the figure has increased slightly again since then. In 2001–2002, 3,400 adoptions (out of 5,100) were the result of action by the child protection services; most other adoptions were by grandparents or other relatives.[96]

The government's objectives, which have been in place since 2000, are to increase the number of adoptions:

- by 2004–2005, to increase by 40% the number of looked after children who are adopted, and aim to exceed this
- by 2006, to achieve a 50% increase.

While the UK, like elsewhere in the EU, has experienced a decline in the number of newborn babies available for adoption, efforts to boost adoption for children taken into care by local child protection services have provoked fierce debate and led to distressing experiences for families.

Many different organisations have responded to these changes and available data and research have been assessed. Academics warn that local authorities will put government targets before the needs of the children in care.[97]

The Social Care Institute for Excellence has produced a comprehensive overview on the issue of adoption of looked after children.[98] Although this does not address the question of the poverty background of birth families, Alan Rushton recognises that:

> "Despite the emphasis on the 'adoption triangle' (composed of children, adoptive and birth parents), research attention has not been equally distributed to all sides of the triangle. The bulk of the work has been based on adoptive parents' views and their accounts of their children, with research on birth parents' experience pre- and post-adoption lagging far behind. One possible reason for this is the reluctance of birth parents to consent to involvement in research on an especially painful topic: the loss of their child/ren to adoption. It may also be the case that social services have not in the past pressed for research into this group, their advocate organisations may not be as influential as those for adopters, and there may be a reluctance to expose the level of need for support services for this group. Recent practice papers, however, do show a growing interest in providing services for birth families."

ATD Fourth World UK was one of the organisations that tried to give voice to birth families and their concern for the children involved. It published a briefing document on adoption whose findings were based on interviews with birth families, adoptive parents and people who had been adopted themselves.[99] It also contributed to a parliamentary debate on the Bill through

95 *See* www.children.doh.gov.uk/adoption/implementact.htm
96 Figures from *Children looked after by local authorities, year ending 31 March 2002*, England, Government Statistical Service, Local Authority statistics, Department of Health, Crown, England, 2003
97 See for example: Anna Gupta, *Sacrificed for targets*, Community Care, UK, 25 April 2002
98 Alan Rushton, *The adoption of looked after children: a scoping review of research*, Knowledge review No. 2, Social Care Institute for Excellence, UK, 2003
99 ATD Fourth World UK, *In Focus: Adoption*, London, Summer 2001

written evidence that highlighted the views of families living in persistent poverty, including a range of specific recommendations on:

- listening to the views of birth families and their children
- evaluation of access to fair justice
- respect for the child's right to an identity
- promoting contact between birth parents and adopted children.

Submission from ATD Fourth World UK on the Adoption and Children Bill: extracts

- Adoption should not be considered unless it is truly in the best interests of each individual child, not in response to the interests of prospective adopters or to meet targets set by Government.
- Adoption should be seen only as a last resort, not as a solution to the failings of the care system and the inadequacies of support services to families living in persistent poverty.
- Before dispensing with parental consent, judges must ensure that social services have met all obligations in respect of family support; that all other options to adoption have been thoroughly investigated (including kinship care); that the child's views and interests have been accurately represented; and that adoption is truly in the best long-term interest of the individual child.
- The principle of the Children Act should continue to apply throughout adoption proceedings – in particular, the principle that the state cannot intervene in family life unless the court is satisfied that the child concerned is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm. Accommodated children should not be adopted without this having been demonstrated.
- At present, many local authority social service departments looking after children also act as adoption agencies; this creates a conflict of interest both financially and ethically. Social Services should not act as adoption agencies; alternative local and national arrangements should be made.
- Adoption support is necessary and should be statutory for children (adopted and non-adopted), birth parents, extended birth family (especially grandparents and siblings), prospective adopters and adoptive parents. Post-adoption support for birth parents and non-adopted siblings must not be given less priority than services for adopted children and adoptive parents. This support must be adequately funded to ensure that it is provided free of charge to all birth families nationally.

These recommendations are to be published in full in Supplement 2.

Debate in Italy

In March 2003, a father in Turin locked himself in the local Child Court and threatened to set himself on fire after the appeal judge had rejected his appeal and ruled that his seven-year-old son, who had been in care since 2001, could be adopted. This 'other news' reported by La Stampa newspaper caused a brief debate in the press.[100]

The public prosecutor for minors in Piedmont and the Aosta Valley deals with around a hundred cases a year, many of which concern the children of parents who are addicted to drugs or who have psychiatric problems. He said that the decision to allow a child to be adopted is taken only at the end of a long process. His office also deals with babies abandoned at birth or shortly after (about 40 children a year); proceedings are much faster in these cases. The prosecutor said:

> "Legal proceedings concerning the adoption of children are always fraught because in the vast majority of cases the parents cannot accept having their precious one taken away from them. Seeing your child put up for adoption means that you have failed as a father or mother. Very few can accept this calmly."

100 Torino Cronaca, *La Stampa*, Italy, 26 March 2003

Many lawyers in Italy have proposed the introduction of an 'open adoption' scheme (also discussed in England), which would give parents the opportunity to maintain ties with their children, including when the children have been entrusted to another family.

Repeal of law in Belgium

The situation is different in Belgium where they have chosen to protect birth families from adoption without consent – particularly families affected by poverty and exclusion. A working group set up by the Ministry for Justice investigated a law that had allowed adoption of children in institutional care without the parents' consent, if their parents were 'obviously uninterested' in them.[101] This legislation had been criticised by groups representing people in poverty ever since its introduction in 1987. The vast majority of approved applications concerned children who were placed with foster families, and not in institutional care; the application was brought by the foster family itself with the intention to adopt the child. In this way, many families in poverty and exclusion were penalised because their living conditions were not taken into account and the parents themselves were hardly consulted.

Supported by the findings of university studies, and the experiences of NGOs for over ten years, the working group quickly came to a unanimous conclusion which resulted in the repeal of the law in 1999.

101 Rapport bisannuel du Service de lutte contre la pauvreté, la précarité et l'exclusion sociale, *En dialogue, six ans après le Rapport Général sur la Pauvreté*, Belgium, 2001

Key points

- **Research has shown the importance of involving parents and children in social work practice, but this remains limited and the outcome of intervention may further undermine families who are already vulnerable.**
- **When children and parents are separated following child protection intervention, parents should be given support to help them resume and strengthen their role in bringing up their children.**
- **Practitioners should receive appropriate training to support families living in long-term poverty who are affected by child protection measures.**
- **Adoption often occurs in families from a background of severe poverty, but research on the experiences, needs and aspirations of birth parents before and after adoption are rare.**

Issues for discussion

- **What kind of mandate, training, support and organisation do practitioners need if they are to find better ways of involving parents?**
- **How can the involvement of parents in research on child protection contribute to the development of participation in practice?**
- **What practical issues arise when child protection targets concentrate on empowering parents and building on the efforts they make to protect their children?**

New directions for family support in Europe

The family group proves to be a complex network of affection, bonds, roots, values handed down over generations, and the system or subsystem which determines individual and collective behaviour and potential for action. The constitution of a family can be seen as a 'project' which needs to be supported by focusing on the skills and value of the family's individuals and the wider family network, and by enabling them to gain access to certain fundamental rights.

Policies combating poverty and exclusion cannot afford to ignore these perspectives. Family projects – the dynamic which leads adults and children within a family group to share values, aspirations and plans – need to be supported through new forms of social solidarity.

Families in poverty, like all other families, need support. It is crucial to work with them and others to find the means to create the best future for their children.

Parents from very poor backgrounds – often facing social exclusion – may support a form of child protection which is founded on a principle of 'family continuity': a right to family life. Thinking about children in poverty as members of the 'family group' or 'family dynamic' leads us to adopt new approaches and perspectives. It presupposes certain ways of working:

- partnership with the family in a supportive atmosphere in which the parents' skills are recognised
- measures and systems which, as early as possible, enable parents to play the central role in shaping their child's future
- taking a family's general situation into account and working with them to improve it.

There are many issues for discussion about how to create closer links between child protection policies and policies aimed at combating poverty. We need to continue working at the European level to find ways of linking the daily struggle of families against poverty and exclusion with their desire, shared by us all, to keep their children safe from harm.

The studies we have looked at lead us to hope that all those involved in child protection interventions and family support continue their efforts to work collaboratively in a way which results in effective help for both children and parents, whether or not they are living against a background of poverty.

We must learn to work with families who are in great difficulty, seeing them as key players and getting to know, as early as possible, the parents' and children's projects so that solutions can be found which take their aspirations and their skills into account. All of this requires new types of training, new tasks, new types of intervention – not only for social workers but also for others who are involved.

part 3

Happy families
initiatives and practice

“ The family cannot be replaced,
it must be completed, made secure,
supported. ”

Joseph Wresinski, founder of ATD Fourth World

Part 3 **Happy families: initiatives and practice**

Exploring the field

In Part 3 we look at creative practices and approaches in the project countries. We explore the issues in a broad and general way to stimulate thought and the exchange of ideas, and to identify promising areas for research even within institutional systems that have sometimes been heavily criticised.

We concentrate on:

- interventions and systems related to child protection
- practices concerned with family continuity
- action that recognises family members as the primary stakeholders and enables them to control the support process.

We are cautious about using the phrase 'best practice': it is often difficult to separate the practice from the practitioners, and from the context in which it operates. Descriptions of good practice often focus on the outcome of an initiative, and are less clear about the spirit and background in which it was developed, the people involved and the process. Because of this, it is often challenging to apply specific examples of good practice more widely.

Paying for prevention

Any new approaches and programmes would eventually be subject to budgetary decisions if they were to be implemented. However, we have chosen not to make financial and economic issues the main focus of our exploration; we have not, therefore, discussed the cost of the initiatives that we describe.

In most countries, decisions about how funding is divided between *preventive action* and *intervention* in cases of crisis, danger and risk, are taken against a background of budgetary constraints. In western Europe, the current trend is towards reducing public funding for preventative measures which are not required by the country's laws. The debate is not over, as shown by the recent work of the Social and Economic Council in France:

> "Regarding the right to a normal family life, progress has been made in the questions being asked, if not yet in the reality on the ground. Our proposals favour keeping children with families. The cost of placing a child in institutional care is 128 euros a day, compared to 43 euros a day in a foster family. These funds could be reallocated to support a more humane and less costly prevention policy by focusing on the parent's capabilities."[102]

Statements at the regional conference in Budapest on *Children deprived of parental care: rights and realities* and the *Changing minds, policies and lives* project, clearly indicate that stakeholders in eastern and central Europe were asking for resources to be redirected towards basic support services.[103]

The work of Gosta Esping-Andersen could, for example, act as a starting point for discussion of these issues.[104] He compares the impact of providing financial support to someone, with making a social service available to them. Basing his analysis on Scandinavian countries, his findings emphasise the importance of universal access to family support services. This option enables most mothers to work, and allows their children to benefit from pre-school, which helps their development.

Esping-Andersen also notes that 'resources' are a vital component. Long-

102 Conseil économique et social, *L'accès de tous aux droits de tous par la mobilisation de tous*, Journal Officiel, Paris, 2003

103 UNICEF, *Report of the Regional conference on Children Deprived of Parental Care: Rights and Realities*, Occasional Papers No. 1, Geneva, 2001

104 Gosta Esping-Andersen, *Why we need a new welfare state*, Oxford University Press, UK, 2002, and *What might create more equal opportunity? Money, cultural capital, and government*, University of Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, Spain, 2002

term financial security and adequate housing are very important. A secure income increases people's willingness and capacity to accept risks. Risk-taking might include undertaking training, entering an apprenticeship, facing the unknown and meeting new people. As a thinker on the welfare state, his view is that new research is needed on the interactions between the 'money dimension' and the 'culture dimension'. He also affirms the urgent need to develop new family policies in many European countries.

It is clear that financial investment and solidarity are both essential to the success of forms of intervention which boost parents' and family members' capacities to act and make decisions.

Empowering parents and families must not consist only of saying: 'You are the ones who know what is good for you, you are the ones who know how to respond to the problems you face'. This approach could be used to justify policy decisions at local or national level that withdraw from social intervention to support families. This risk must be avoided. Empowering parents actually calls for providing families with people able to be at their side in negotiating a successful way out of their problems. Professionals and volunteers must have the means, skills and support to say, 'As you negotiate your way out of your problems, I am at your side, I am working with you to create the conditions which will enable you to be successful'.

The facts and data presented in this paper clearly show the need for an increase in the amount of funding and in the direction of funding towards preventative and support schemes. National and local budgets, both in terms of size and distribution, must focus on intervention which is agreed with the family and is centred on the family, as well as supporting the development of networks and services in the local community. Institutional childcare must evolve towards services which are close to the families, and at the same time, temporary childcare solutions must be developed which can support families' needs and projects.

Within this change in the focus of funding, existing structures (children's homes, networks which coordinate and monitor foster families …) must be able to play a role and to become agents of this change.

Building foundations for new relationships

“It’s important for people to understand what it means to be in poverty, to offer proper training about poverty to people, because it’s not the same to be a parent or a child in poverty as to be a parent or a child not in poverty. (…) The Government needs to ensure that social workers are properly trained about poverty and families – by families who have experienced poverty.”

Parents’ views
ATD Fourth World UK response to consultation on *Every child matters*

Overcoming child and family poverty and exclusion requires a long-term investment in both new practices that create direct change and in strategies that develop an environment within the community in which:

- it is possible for all children to have friends.
- we meet and listen to people living in poverty in an attempt to understand their experiences
- we are able to identify the strengths and skills of people who face long-term poverty and create opportunities for them to demonstrate these.

Part 3 concentrates on initiatives in the field of practice. A few examples are also given of action aimed at building positive relationships in the long term, mainly based on ATD Fourth World initiatives in Europe.

Encouraging friendship and solidarity between children

Children who are given the opportunity to interact in positive ways with other children from different backgrounds are less likely to act in a discriminatory way, both as children and as adults. Many children within Tapori groups (*see* page 37) explain that the worst thing about persistent poverty is ‘to have no friends, to be left out’. Too often, children from secure or well-off families learn very little about life in poverty, while children from families living in poverty have only their immediate, difficult environment to learn from. Yet Tapori projects demonstrate that children from all walks of life have an innate sense of justice and empathy for others, unless they have lost these concerns through abuse or very difficult lives. By asking for and expressing their ideas and experiences about ways to create friendship, the dynamics of Tapori nurtures the children’s sense of pride and responsibility.

Vanessa, a nine-year-old member of a Tapori group, says:

> “Even if they live in poverty, Taporis do things for people who are poorer than themselves. They make friends with others who are left out. I like to go and play with someone who is all alone. It’s true, you’re a little bit scared, but you have to do it. You have to start by being a friend.”

Clara and Rita, two children from a small village in France, are members of the local Tapori group. Clara is growing up in a family that is respected, recognised and well-liked in the village. Her family is very concerned about other people. Rita lives in a trailer. Her family is waiting to be relocated to more secure housing, but for years their request has not led anywhere.

She explains how her family is treated by some in the wider community:

"Some people make fun of us … They see us as dirty, even though we are not dirty. They see that we live in a trailer. Fortunately, the teacher defended us, and so did Clara. We are often called names; we would prefer that people speak nicely to us. One boy has made peace with us. He says hello to us, and he plays with us."

At school, Clara became friends with Rita and made it possible for her mother to meet Rita and her family. With the support of Clara's mother, friendship grew between the two girls and with others, within the Tapori group.

Many initiatives encourage children to take action against poverty and they respond willingly by putting a lot of effort into raising money. But children can also be encouraged to discuss questions about their daily lives and their immediate surroundings which open up possibilities for living together, now and in the future. They could be encouraged to think about:

- how to make sure that all children can form friendships
- whether there are children living near them who are not included in local activities
- which children are easy to make fun of.

This type of question is central to the educational campaigns supported by the Tapori movement (*see* page 37).

Campaign in schools in Belgium

The *Building friendship between children* campaign was run between December 2002 and May 2003 in French-speaking Belgium by Association La Ruelle, ATD Fourth World and the LINK communication agency; it was funded by the Cera Foundation.

Two thousand letters promoting the campaign were sent out to all primary schools (including special schools) and the campaign reached nearly 230 classes and 4,400 children in 92 schools.

The project had several strands:

- **friendship packs** with a handbook for teachers and material for children, which included booklets recounting the stories of children living in poverty
- **discussion sessions** about a major area of their life – school, friendships, housing, health, work – where the children discovered how all these areas of life are interlinked
- **art and craft** on the themes they had discussed. The children chose one of their pieces to display in a final exhibition, including collective artworks on the themes of the campaign.

Around 30 schools sent their projects to the campaign coordinators and these were displayed at an exhibition in Brussels. The exhibition was opened by Robert Collignon, President of the Parliament of Walloon, and Monsieur Nollet, representing the ministry for Childhood and Primary Education.

Talk with us, not at us: setting up constructive dialogue

In many countries, real efforts are being made to get the greatest number of 'stakeholders' and the general public more involved in the fight against poverty and exclusion. Achieving this goal calls for real political will and long-term commitment.

A fundamental challenge for these initiatives is finding ways to promote the participation of people from a background of poverty.

ATD Fourth World in the UK carried out a project that involved parents living in poverty in formulating policies to combat exclusion through taking an active part in policy forums, in partnership with relevant professionals and policy-makers.[105] *Talk with us, not at us* outlines this project.[106] This, and other initiatives, seek to create the conditions required for genuine participation by service-users in the development, implementation and evaluation of public policies to support families living in poverty.[107]

Since the adoption of the General Report on Poverty in 1994, Belgium has grounded its commitment to fight poverty by stimulating and monitoring dialogue between different parties:

> "A difficult dialogue between those who can only recount their suffering and their struggles, and those in the public services responsible for implementing policies, whether in terms of social benefits, housing, access to work, health …"[108]

The first two-yearly report, published by the Belgian Service for combating poverty and social exclusion in June 2001, considers questions surrounding this kind of dialogue in depth.[109]

To take one example of a 'dialogue project', monthly meetings on issues around child placement and child/family support interventions have been held in French-speaking Belgium since 1998. They are attended by representatives from the child support services in the French community of Belgium (including people who work in the central administration and field workers), and activist members of two organisations that work in a participative way to express the views of people living in poverty: Luttes Solidarité Travail and ATD Fourth World Belgium (*see* Appendix 1 on Supplement 8).

Similar projects can be found in Flanders: the 'Movement for people and families on low income' in Ghent and Ostend have run them for a number of years in relation to child protection measures.[110]

Participative approaches can only produce a high quality of analysis and proposals if there is an ongoing dialogue that allows enough time for a full exploration of the issues, and for trust and mutual understanding to develop between all those who are involved. A one-off consultation cannot achieve this.

Recognising the strengths of those who face poverty

Writing life histories

Enabling children – or anyone else in a situation of poverty and exclusion – to build or rebuild their own life history, is a key element in the fight against poverty. This can remain in the private sphere; for instance, the 'life history research groups' set up in Paris, France by the Institut International de Sociologie Clinique (International Institute of Clinical Sociology) supports individuals to connect their own life history to its sociological and historical background. This has had significant benefits, especially for groups working on themes such as 'Shame and poverty'.

ATD Fourth World has set up many initiatives in Europe and around the world by collecting different life histories that contribute to thinking about the kind of support that families need (*see* Appendix 2 **Further reading**).

The academic Patrick Brun, who has made a detailed analysis of this approach, uses the *communicative action* theory of Jurgen Habermas and the *narrative identity* theory of Paul Ricoeur, to show the liberating power of this

105 ATD Fourth World UK, *Participation works: Involving people in poverty in policy-making*, London, 2000

106 ATD Fourth World UK, *Talk with us, not at us: how to develop a partnership between families in poverty and professionals*, London, 1996

107 EAPN, *Special participation report*, Network News, No. 101, Brussels, July 2003 – Uniopss, *Guide des outils et méthodes de participation des personnes en difficultés: la participation au service de l'insertion et de la citoyenneté*, France, March 2003

108 Roi Baudouin Foundation and the Belgian Government, *Rapport Général sur la Pauvreté*, 1994

109 Rapport bisannuel du Service de lutte contre la pauvreté, la précarité et l'exclusion sociale, *En dialogue, six ans après le Rapport Général sur la Pauvreté*, Belgium, 2001

110 Mouvement des personnes à faibles revenus et avec enfants asbl, *Ensemble, nous allons de l'avant: à propos de la méthode de dialogue and Echanger des mots pour un avenir: une méthode de dialogue pour les démunis avec les parlementaires fédéraux et flamands*, Belgium, 2000 and 2002

approach and how it helps to build a new source of knowledge about poverty and exclusion.[111]

In terms of its practical application, focusing on the central theme of child protection intervention, we shall look at Christine Abels-Eber's project with children placed in foster care in France (*see* page 140).

Involving service-users in training professionals

One way of adapting intervention to the needs of *users*, rather than the needs of *providers*, is to enable users to participate in the training of those who work for these services. Several projects are currently under way in Europe to identify the conditions and practices that make this participation possible.

- Three project partners in the UK (Royal Holloway University of London, the Family Rights Group, and ATD Fourth World UK) are working with parents living in poverty to determine the feasibility of future social workers being trained by service-users, and the conditions that are necessary to achieve this. This project started in 2003 and was mentioned in the UK's National Action Plan for Social Inclusion for the period 2003–2005.
- *Pooling knowledge on anti-poverty practice*, a Franco-Belgian project, brought together 16 professionals from a variety of disciplines within anti-poverty practice and 16 people with experience of living in conditions of poverty and exclusion. They sought to identify the conditions that would encourage positive interaction between those with professional knowledge, and those with knowledge based on personal experience of poverty.[112] One of the outcomes from this project is the creation by ATD Fourth World of an ongoing intervention team dedicated to the co-training of various types of professionals alongside people with personal experience of poverty and exclusion in their daily lives.

111 Patrick Brun, *Emancipation et connaissance – les histoires de vie en collectivité*, Harmattan, France, 2001

112 Groupe de recherche-action-formation Quart Monde Partenaire, *Le croisement des pratiques: Quand le Quart Monde et les professionnels se forment ensemble*, Editions Quart Monde, Paris, 2002

Key points

- **Children who are given the opportunity to form friendships with children from different backgrounds will be less likely to act in a discriminatory way, as children and as adults.**
- **Inviting and expressing children's ideas and experiences about ways to create friendship nurtures the children's sense of pride and responsibility and is a fundamental dimension of the fight against child poverty and social exclusion.**
- **An ongoing dialogue is needed between those who experience poverty and those in the public services who are responsible for implementing policies.**
- **There should be greater public awareness and involvement in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.**

Issues for discussion

- **What measures can be taken to create opportunities for the development of friendship and solidarity among children?**
- **What resources and structures (of time and money) are needed to support ongoing dialogue between families and all those involved in supporting them?**

Family happiness: a key to prevention

"It's about not having the same expectations in terms of what you can provide whether or not you're a family in poverty. They still think we should be able to provide all the same things that everybody else can with three or four times the income. They were saying to people with young children, you're not stimulating them. You don't have enough toys, you don't have brightly coloured pictures on the walls. You've got to have money to buy all of these things."

Parents' views
ATD Fourth World UK response to consultation on *Every child matters*

All parents – whether young or old, rich or poor – need support to meet the challenges of parenting. The key is to find forms of intervention that allow them to express their particular needs, and to create an environment where the response reflects the aspirations of parents and children.

Many initiatives involve families from every background, even if they originally focused on the needs of families in poverty. Rather than being 'support', they offer families an opportunity for 'quality time' which contributes to family happiness: leisure activities, making things together, projects, making contact with others in a supportive and non-threatening environment. By building trust and networks or a sense of belonging to a 'community', these initiatives enable families to request help or find out about their rights, knowing that they will be listened to and efforts will be made to find a solution.

Early childhood matters: support for families with young children

The benefits of supportive intervention at an early age have been widely recognised in Europe for many years. Many early childhood initiatives offer support to parents, the mother in particular, from as early as possible – in other words, as soon as the mother is pregnant.

An appraisal of practices in Europe, conducted in 1999 with the support of the European Commission, confirmed the importance of these initiatives; it found that early psycho-socio-educational prevention is more effective than curative or repressive approaches, above all when preventative measures occur within a community context and are based on partnerships between all those concerned.[113] Academic studies of the Head Start (created nearly 38 years ago) and Early Head Start federal programmes in the USA confirm that pre-school care, support and educational services for very young children and their families have positive effects on the children.[114]

Many European organisations promote, develop and support projects focusing on early childhood. For instance, for several decades the Bernard van Leer Foundation, formed in the Netherlands in 1949, has promoted projects in European countries, aimed at children aged between 0 and 8 years old who come from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds.[115] As well as providing financial support for projects, the Foundation runs a centre in the Netherlands

113 Peterander, Pithon, Speck and Terrisse, *Les tendances actuelles de l'intervention précoce en Europe*, Ed Mardaga, Brussels, 1999
114 Brooks-Gunn, Kamerman, Neuman and Waldfogel, 'Social Policies, Family Types and Chlid Outcomes in Selected OECD Countries', OECD social, employment and migration working paper No. 6, May 2003
115 *See* www.bernardvanleer.org

which gathers information on early childhood initiatives, and conducts investigations into the quality of service in daycare and other forms of support. The foundation contributed to *Children in Europe*, a European publication to share information about initiatives aimed at children and their families.[116]

From the beginning, ATD Fourth World recognised the importance of focusing on early childhood and working closely with parents who are living in poverty. In *The children of the excluded*, the psychologist Marie Catherine Ribeaud described ATD Fourth World's experience of pre-school projects, which began in 1966.[117] These were not only aimed at children; they also reintroduced parents to the educational process, as the first step in 'bringing school' to those who had most to gain from it. The goal was to involve parents in the teaching as much as possible in a pre-school context. When they wanted, and were able to, parents came in to the nursery school and played with the children or went for a walk with them.

Initiatives in this field were quickly taken up at a European level. Within the framework of the very first European anti-poverty programme (1975–1980), ATD Fourth World ran a family support and early childhood project connecting initiatives in France and in the United Kingdom. A very powerful and detailed account of this innovative approach to overcoming poverty by starting with pre-school children and their parents was writtten in French by Alwine de Vos van Steenwijk and published with funding from the Van Leer Foundation.[118] Based on data from earlier pre-school programmes (1969–1972), this account shows the transition from the participation of parents in the development of the pre-school programmes to collective policy development, reflecting the right of parents to have a decision-making role in their child's education.

More recent projects like the Club des bébés (baby club) in Reims, France, which has been running for about ten years, extend this pre-school approach. The booklet *Growing up together: parents and little ones* is an accessible guide for parents, and also a tool to help social workers deepen their understanding of poverty and the adults who are affected by it.[119] Many other baby clubs have been set up, run by various different agencies in the same spirit of aiming to support families in poverty.

Baby clubs in Brussels organise weekly meetings for parents with their young children. Parents play with the children and everyone gets to know each other. They are not asked to talk about their problems, but to share their knowledge of bringing up children. From time to time, an expert is invited to the meeting (a local doctor, a pre-school teacher and so on). At the parent's request, the educational team can go to their home to offer more direct support or to meet a social worker with whom the parents are having difficulties. Team workers may also be put in touch with families by local social workers. What they find most difficult is getting parents to come along, and helping them to conquer their fear. Baby club meetings sometimes help families who were completely isolated to make contact with neighbours and relations.

ATD Fourth World has also set up projects in rural areas to create spaces for playing and for meeting people; for example in the Antrain district in Brittany. These projects combine early childhood support with a community dynamic by setting up a group run by local residents who want to encourage everyone to become involved in the social and cultural life of the area.

116 Children in Europe is published in English by Children in Scotland. Similar issues are available in seven other European countries.

117 Marie Catherine Ribeaud, *Les enfants des exclus*, Lutter/Stock, Paris, 1976

118 Alwine de Vos van Steenwijk, *Il fera beau … le jour où le sous-prolétariat sera entendu*, Editions Science et Service, Paris 1977

119 Isabelle Deligne et le Club des bébés, *Grandir ensemble: parents et tout-petits*, Editions Quart Monde, Paris, 1993

A national programme: Sure Start in the UK

Sure Start, the ambitious national programme set up by the British government in 1999, is the cornerstone of the drive to tackle child poverty and social exclusion. This programme aims to significantly improve the lives of children under the age of four from poor backgrounds.

Inspired by the Head Start and Early Head Start schemes in the USA, Sure Start focuses on four objectives:

- improving children's social and emotional development
- improving health
- improving children's ability to learn
- strengthening families and communities.

Specific national targets include:

- 20% reduction in the proportion of children perceived by social services as being at risk
- 6% reduction by 2005–2006 of the number of women who smoke during pregnancy
- 5% reduction by 2004 of the number of four year olds who need professional help for slow language development.

Launched in six successive waves over three years, there are now over 520 local Sure Start programmes running in deprived neighbourhoods in England, reaching a third of children in poverty aged under four. To avoid stigmatising children and families, Sure Start schemes are developed on a community-wide basis. Each local programme receives public funding for several years in return for conforming to the Sure Start objectives and undergoing rigorous assessment.

Representatives from the main statutory agencies and associations in the area are invited to work together on new projects or to strengthen existing ones. So while the programme's objectives and financial impetus are fixed at the national level, the programme is run by members of the local community. Local initiatives are planned and implemented by people with local knowledge. Each local programme is therefore unique in the partnerships it creates and the details of its operation.

Another key element of the Sure Start approach is the development of partnerships with local parents. Many programmes have been developed gradually through meetings where local residents were invited to talk about their needs, and to get involved with the Sure Start programme.

Although programmes vary according to local needs, many of them include information campaigns, home visits by Sure Start outreach teams, increased support for children and adults, collective play activities, childminding and childcare information, as well as access to primary health care.

Across England, regional and national Sure Start programmes are aiming to achieve the government's objectives in different ways, by:

- supporting the development and implementation of local programmes
- collecting and sharing information on good practice
- monitoring the performance of local programmes through target figures set at the national level
- an unprecedented investment in the evaluation of the project; around 45 researchers will be involved in ongoing studies and analyses of the effectiveness of Sure Start, with significant funds allocated to a research programme up to at least 2008.[120]

The lessons from this UK programme will be useful beyond its national context.

120 *See* www.surestart.gov.uk and specific website dedicated to the evaluation of Sure Start: www.ness.bbk.ac.uk

Local projects for parents and young children

Support for mothers and babies in France

In France there are also centres for medical and social action in infancy (CAMSP). The centre in Roubaix, run by the paediatrician Maurice Titran, focuses on the 'requalification' of parents, and on creating support networks. In Titran's view, later problems in a child's development are greatly influenced by the type of support given to parents and intervening parties. He says:

> "Giving a child a real life means allowing the child to be 'adopted' by their parents, and vice versa; it also means that the child must be able to recognise themselves as the child born of these parents – parents who may have limitations, but who nevertheless have value in themselves, value that we can seek and nurture together, with the child."

His centre, which works with expectant mothers who are alcoholic, aims to create an environment which allays fears and encourages mutual respect between parents and social workers. Many mothers attend the centre after they have had their babies in order to continue participating in exchange groups.

The CALME project, which was set up in 2001 in a suburb of Lyon, is a support centre providing full accommodation for expectant mother and babies.[121] This type of support, although rare, makes pregnancy and childbirth a calmer experience for mothers who live in long-term poverty.

CAMSP and other creative early childhood support structures like CALME are often faced with very long waiting lists and cannot respond to all the needs expressed by those who attend.[122]

Early years project in Barcelona, Spain

Since 1998, the *Pre-infant project* has supported families that face difficulties, starting before the birth of the child and continuing until the child is three years old. Giving support throughout the pregnancy helps to establish a good relationship with the mother. During pregnancy women are more receptive to this type of collaboration and almost all – even the most reluctant to accept support among them – agree to it. It becomes more difficult to make contact when they already have children.

121 Henri Cormier, *Accompagner les mères le plus tôt possible*, Actualité sociales hebdomadaires, No. 2321, France, 2003

122 Caroline Helfter, *Des réseaux de sollicitude autour des enfants et de leurs parents*, Actualité sociale hebdomadaire, No. 2303, France, 2003

Trust is the key

Carmen Calefat, a project worker, gave this account of the work of the Pre-infant project:

> We work particularly with parents who have drug or alcohol problems, and with teenage mothers. Although their living conditions are often very difficult, the risks for these families are about being unable to use the services which are available – because they are unaware of them or do not dare to use them.
>
> The project gets in touch with expectant parents or mothers who are brought to our attention by drug centres, social services and hospitals. The parents choose where the first visit takes place. This is normally in their home or on their doorstep. Sometimes it is a long time before we are invited into their home. The important thing is to establish a relationship with them. Once we have gained their trust, it is very easy to work with them. Sometimes we are with the mother when she gives birth, if she has no one else and she asks us to be there.
>
> When the baby arrives we continue to visit these families at home to see how they look after the baby. We film them with a video camera and watch the video with them, so that they can see how they look after the baby and how they can develop their parenting skills. We monitor progress up to the child's third birthday, the age at which the child can start nursery school; then other services can take over. Families are often quite isolated when the child is between 0 and 3 years old. As the child grows older, our visits become less frequent, in keeping with the child's pace of development.
>
> We try to help families without judging them or

making decisions for them. We also make every effort to dispel any guilt the mothers may feel for not always being able to care for their child properly. Our work often involves mediation between families and social services. We have discovered that if families can think about their situation in a calm way, they feel comfortable calling on the help of social services and are less worried by the prospect.

We also try to get the help of all the relatives we can find (parents, grandparents, uncles) as well as the local community. But if a member of the family interferes, we try to keep them out of the picture.

We work with parents and families who are on the verge of having their child taken away from them, but where there are still doubts.

Social services know the families, but often there is no one working with them. They give them lists of goals without knowing the difficulties they face in daily life. For example, someone may tell a mother to bath her baby every day without knowing that she has to walk for half an hour to get to the water supply, while she is still recovering from the birth.

We have sometimes helped mothers who have given their child to the adoption agency. In this situation there is often support for the foster family, but none for the biological mother.

Building confidence with families at Hagalund, Sweden

The Family Centre at Hagalund in greater Stockholm is in a deprived neighbourhood of prefabricated buildings, where a large proportion of the inhabitants are unemployed, immigrants, lone-parent families, individuals with low income and people on long-term sick leave. Hagalund is also a neighbourhood with a vibrant community life, a feeling of togetherness and ongoing efforts to improve life in the area.

The Family Centre was established in 1993 and its principal objectives are to:

- provide a meeting place for parents with small children in the area
- provide practical support for families
- improve and maintain the social network surrounding families
- develop teamwork amongst professionals and with community members
- implement preventative work through ongoing action.

There are 12 members of staff: four social workers, two midwives, two paediatric nurses, two pre-school teachers, one secretary/receptionist and a director.

The open pre-school is the heart of the activities of the centre. All the parents with pre-school children in the neighbourhood are welcome and between 20 and 40 attend every day. The pre-school teacher's task is to stimulate and initiate parent-child relationships, and support initiatives from the parents.

Expectant parents and parents with children below school age attend the Maternal and Child Health Care Programme.

Parent education groups and regular consultations with a paediatrician and dentist are also available, as well as group activities, including parents of children with eating disorders, and children with alcohol-abusing parents.

One of the most significant features of the centre is the way it tackles issues surrounding child protection measures and the prevention of placement in care. The centre's staff includes child welfare workers who have the legal authority to investigate situations of child abuse and neglect, and to remove children if necessary. Academics describing the centre explain:

> "The presence of child welfare workers may frighten families who worry that workers will not approve of them and the way that they are caring for their children. These fears are exacerbated by differences in culture and language and the lack of support from relatives and neighbours that many families experience.

However, the situation at the centre is different. Parents get to know child welfare workers from their earliest contacts and work with them in many different activities. Child welfare workers are able to initiate support measures at an early stage in cooperation with the family and to become a support and resource person, rather than a threatening figure who only appears after serious problems have developed. There is a strong feeling amongst staff that children are assured much better protection under these circumstances than when child welfare workers and parents are strangers and are suspicious of one another.

The activities of the centre are being evaluated at the moment by an external research team… but staff already know that the numbers of children requiring placement outside their families has dropped dramatically, and when a child must be placed outside the family, it is usually in cooperation with the parents."[123]

One-to-one support for families and children

Many initiatives offer one-to-one support to families who are isolated or in difficulty or to the individual child. This often depends on volunteers investing a lot of time and energy on a long-term basis, in order to gain trust and form a partnership with the parent or child. This could be defined as a 'mentoring' approach.

Some schemes are very local; others, organised by major NGOs, are more widespread. All these projects focus on introducing the people concerned to a wider circle of contacts.

- **The social aid system in Sweden** This offers access to 'family contacts' – neighbours or other people who receive out-of-pocket expenses for volunteering to support families in difficulty; for example, by having a child to stay for a weekend. Local social services supervise the project by vetting the volunteers. This is a popular scheme in Sweden where nearly one in a hundred children benefit from links with a 'family contact'.[124]
- **Educational mentoring in France** The term *parrainage* (mentoring) or *parrainage éducatif* (educational mentoring) is sometimes used to describe this kind of initiative. Many parents, especially lone parents or parents with little extended family, are aware of their children's lack of contact with 'mentors' who can act as role models. Some of these parents express an interest if they find that there is an organisation nearby which could eventually find them a 'volunteer mentor'. The social services in some local authorities also run respite care schemes with *familles relais* (respite families).
- **Family support schemes in Belgium** The Kauwenberg centre in Antwerp organises support families, *steungezinnen*, who are prepared to offer support not only to the children, but to the whole family. They can accommodate children for short periods, but they see the parents as equal partners, and help them to learn how to deal with certain problem situations.

  In four districts of Brussels (Etterbek, Ixelles, Auderghem and Anderlecht), local families can accommodate children on an informal temporary basis. There is a network of volunteer temporary foster families who are approved by the local social services. This network allows children to be accommodated at very short notice at the end of the day, or at the weekend, when other services are closed but when a family has a sudden problem.
- **Home-Start** in Europe uses volunteers who visit a family to build up support, practical help and friendship (*see* below).
- **ATD Fourth World** attempts to balance involvement in long-term collective

123 Eriksson, Garphult, Hessle, Jernberg, Levin and Wils, 'The focus on family when children are at risk: Swedish Policy in Practice', in Callahan, Hessle and Strega, *Valuing the field: child welfare in an international context*, Cedr and Ashgate, Aldershot, England, 2000

124 G Andersson, 'Support and relief: the Swedish contact person and contact family program', *Scandinavian Journal of Social Welfare*, Vol 2: 54-62, 1992 and G Andersson, 'Involving key stakeholders in evaluation – a Swedish perspective', *Social Work in Europe Journal*, Vol 6, No 1, 1998

projects and individual support. The aim is to enable parents to regain their self-esteem and the resources to act as the prime carer of their children. One-to-one support may take the form of family-to-family support. For instance, volunteers and their own family may go on holiday to a holiday camp or cottage with a family they are supporting. This gives a real sense of partnership and shared experience, much more so than if the volunteer simply provided the resources for the children of the family to go on holiday, which could be resented by the parents.

A European network of mentoring and support organisations is currently being developed with the aim of discovering and connecting initiatives all over Europe. The European Network of Children and Youth Mentoring Organisations (ENCYMO) already involves around 100 organisations from 15 European countries. About 20 of them have their own national networks of local branches; the others are independent and only operate in one region.[125] In Germany, many local mentoring schemes have been set up by local branches of large support organisations. In France, several associations including Enfance et Famille d'Adoption (EFA) were pioneers in setting up mentoring for children placed in children's homes.[126]

The Home-Start approach

Home-Start International is an organisation that helps to prevent family crisis and breakdown by offering emotional support and friendship and practical (non-financial) help to families with young children. Volunteers visit families regularly in their own homes, continuing for as long as necessary. They also introduce families to a wider circle of contacts and services in the community.

In 1999, representatives of all Home-Start countries agreed to a statement of principles and practice, which makes a commitment to work towards the increased confidence and independence of the family by:

- offering support, friendship and practical help to families with at least one child under school-age
- primarily meeting families in their homes, where their difficulties exist and where the dignity and identity of each individual can be respected and protected
- reassuring parents that challenges in bringing up children are not unusual and emphasising the pleasures of family life
- developing a relationship with the family in which time and experiences can be shared and understanding can be developed; the approach is flexible to take account of different needs
- encouraging the parents' strengths and emotional and physical wellbeing for the ultimate benefit of their own children
- encouraging families to widen their network of relationships and to use the support and services available within the community effectively.

Normally every Home-Start service employs at least one paid organiser who has relevant training and experience, and whose duties include:

- the recruitment, preparation and support of volunteers
- liaison with other agencies working with families with young children
- the initial visit to each family; careful attention is paid to matching volunteers' skills and experience to the needs of families
- identifying, with the family and the volunteer, when the need for support is coming to an end and providing any necessary follow-up and evaluation.

Organisers and volunteers are usually parents themselves or have had parenting experience. Volunteers are supported by Home-Start organisers and other Home-Start volunteers and, where appropriate, by professional workers

125 For information on their locations *see* www.encymo.org

126 For more information on France *see* www.collectif.parrainage.free.fr

associated with the family. All volunteers attend an initial course of preparation and receive additional information and support to meet needs that develop in the course of their work with Home-Start.

Home-Start now has schemes in five European countries:

- Ireland (3 schemes)
- Norway (13 schemes)
- the Netherlands (40 schemes)
- the UK (320 schemes)
- Russia (5 schemes).[127]

Other countries, such as Hungary, are seeking to adopt the Home-Start approach.

Home-Start in England – a volunteer's experience

They invited me to an interview to find out about my personal reasons for volunteering. Then I went on a training course for one afternoon (2–3 hours) a week for ten weeks. Each session dealt with a different theme: listening, communication skills, how to be aware of our prejudices and learn not to prejudge people, how to notice signs of a mother's deep depression, threats to child security and, lastly, the importance of confidentiality.

At the end of the training, a full-time member of Home-Start visits each trainee volunteer to discuss what they think about it, what they liked or didn't like, and to talk about the kinds of families which the volunteer feels ready to meet. Then a professional team tries to match up a family's needs with a suitable volunteer. When the time comes, a full-time member of staff accompanies the volunteer when they meet the family, introduces them to each other, and then withdraws so that the parents and the volunteer can get to know each other.

Every month the full-time member of staff gets in touch with the family and the volunteer separately to see how everything is going; whether things can carry on as they are, if some issues need to be straightened out, or if the whole thing is not working out and should come to an end. Volunteers are regularly offered further training. What I also really like is the support of the full-time staff who are extremely receptive and are excellent listeners – if you have a problem with a family, you're not alone.

There is a wide range of cases, because Home-Start supports families with a child under five who are going through a difficult time. Poverty is not one of the required criteria. There can be cases of depression, or of multiple births, in all families – but it's true that the families who need to call on the help of a service rather than calling on those around them are very often isolated families who are affected by poverty.

Evaluating one-to-one support

At the European level we need to explore how, and in what conditions, poor and excluded families turn to mentors or volunteers for individual support. However, there has been little research into the impact of this one-to-one voluntary support in Europe, although several studies in English-speaking countries have analysed the short-term effects.

Reynald Vergnory, a field worker in France says, 'The mentors need to be mentored'. He thinks problems could be prevented if mentors received psychological support, and regular meetings between parents and mentors where each listens and is listened to.

Mentoring for children

Reynald Vergnory writes:

> "Children say to themselves: what did I do wrong to make my parents entrust me to someone else? Mentoring can also lead to cultural conflicts. When the emotional investment is too great … there can be feelings of jealousy between mentors and parents."[128]

127 Figures for 2001 (Annual Report 2001 – Home-Start International). *See* www.home-start-int.org

128 Reynald Vergnory, 'Il faut parrainer les parrains', in Journal *Convergence*, Secours Populaire Français, France, March 2002

The Big Brothers/Big Sisters organisation in the United States is the largest and oldest national mentoring organisation, with 75,000 mentors operating out of 500 local branches across the country; 80% of Americans are aware of their work. In 1993, they commissioned a study into the effectiveness of mentoring, based on a sample of 960 children aged between 10 and 16 who had requested a mentor. Half of them had a mentor for 18 months; the other half were not paired with a mentor but were put on the waiting list. All the children were interviewed at the start of the study using questionnaires focusing on self-esteem and behaviour, the child's affection for peers and their parents, and school performance. Eighteen months later, all 960 children were interviewed again using the same questions. The results showed that those who had been paired with a mentor consumed less drugs and alcohol, were less violent, had more positive feelings towards their parents and their peers, and achieved better results at school.[129]

Support for families

Home-Start UK has commissioned evaluations of its services. In 1999, a study was conducted in Scotland with a sample of 139 families.[130] The evaluation consulted not only the volunteers and the supported family, but also the social workers who had referred the families. The majority of social workers said this type of support had contributed to improving the children's behaviour and that the families found it easier to overcome their social isolation, and the problems they face in daily life, because they have someone who will listen to them.

Acquiring new skills: parenting training

Many initiatives in Europe offer parents information and training on parenting, child development, educational approaches and basic hygiene.

- **Parents and teachers schools in France**

  Across France there are around 40 Parents and Teachers Schools that work with parents, voluntary groups, professionals and children, with the dual objective of understanding and preventing difficulties in family and in educational life. They offer a variety of resources and services at the local centre or in other locations in the urban or rural area (schools, social centres, neighbourhoods), including:
  - telephone helplines
  - flexible and varied support (Parents' Houses, Parents' Cafés, places where parents and their children can go, toy and book libraries)
  - consultations for parents, children, teenagers and couples facing issues and difficulties, crises or tension in the family
  - group activities (support groups for parents or children, group discussions, meetings on key topics such as parenting, family/school relationships, violence, adolescence, authority).

  A Parents and Teachers School encourages dialogue in the family, contributes to building bridges between parents and professionals, and listens to their needs. At times when parents, like others responsible for a child's education, may feel disqualified and invalidated, these schools help them to regain confidence in their abilities as an adult, focusing on what each has to deal with, and clearly defining their roles.

  A national federation of parents and teachers schools (FNEPE) has been running in France since the 1970s; there is a similar national federation in Belgium and also an International Federation for Parent Education (IFPE).

129 from Randolf Gränzer, 'Cherche… parrain', in revue *Le Furet*, No. 41, Strasbourg, France, 2003

130 A Kirkaldy and A Crispin, *Home-Start in Scotland: An Evaluation*, Dunfermline, Home-Start UK, 1999

- **Parent Management Training programme in Norway and Iceland**
  Programmes developed in the USA are currently becoming more widespread in Europe, although local realities can be very different from those in North America. For example, the Parent Management Training programme (PMT) is being used in Norway and Iceland to train parents to manage their children's behaviour in a positive way: to give precise instructions, to learn self-control and to maintain a constructive working relationship with the child's school. Sessions are based on role-playing, which allows parents to put the techniques they have been taught into practice, and to have a better understanding of the child's perspective. Parents meet the instructor once a week for between 10 and 20 weeks. They also have access to telephone support between sessions, as well as support when they have to deal with institutions such as their child's school.[131]
- **Parental training pack in Romania**
  With the support of Unicef and a Romanian foundation 'Our children' (Copiii nostri), the ministry of education set up a project to 'train people to train parents'. This project's main tool is a pack of eight illustrated booklets on discipline, diversifying your children's activities, hygiene and toilet use, sex education, accidents in the home, communicating with your child, rewarding and praising your child, difficult nights. Three thousand of these packs were produced by Unicef in Romania.
- **Luxembourg**
  The Kannerschlass Foundation, which supports children in difficulty, set up a parents' school in Luxembourg in 2002, supported by the Ministry of Family Affairs. It follows the spirit of the Polish educationalist Janusz Korczak, who acknowledged the right of every child to 'make mistakes, once or several times', so that they can experiment and draw their own conclusions from their experiences. At the first meeting, participants are asked about their expectations regarding the school, and also what to avoid so that others are not discouraged about coming.

  After a young mother asked how she could learn more about bringing up a child, the ATD Fourth World Luxembourg team told people about the school and other young families with children soon decided to take part. Volunteers helped with transport and sometimes by babysitting to enable parents to participate. A small group regularly took part in seminars and lectures in 2002–2003 on topics as wide-ranging as What does it mean to be a parent in 2002?, A child's psychological development, Parents' and children's rights and responsibilities, A paediatrician's view of a child's development, Positive education.

  This initiative will help to identify how parental training can respond to the needs and aspirations of families who have been affected by poverty and exclusion over a long period of time.

Evaluating parenting education in the UK

There is wide variation in the style, structure and content of group-based parenting programmes in the UK, ranging from general support for parents, to those that work with parents facing specific difficulties. Different types of parenting programmes are available from health services, community education and from voluntary and private sector organisations. They are delivered by both salaried staff and volunteers.

Research shows that parenting programmes can be effective in improving behaviour problems in young children.[132] Behavioural approaches can improve the behaviour of 3 to10 year olds by teaching parents how to change events

131 M Sigmarsdottir, *The PMT Project in Hafnarfjordur*, Iceland, 2003

132 J Barlow, 'Parent-training Programmes and Behaviour Problems: Findings from a Systematic Review', in A Buchanan and B L Hudson, *Parenting, Schooling and Children's Behaviour*, Ashgate, UK, 1998.

leading up to the problem behaviour using social learning techniques such as positive reinforcement, negotiation and finding alternatives to punishment. There is also evidence that group programmes are more effective than working with individual parents because they are able to see how these techniques are implemented and to practise newly acquired skills.

One of the best documented approaches to parenting programmes was developed by the clinician Carolyn Webster-Stratton at the University of Washington's Parenting Clinic in Seattle, USA.[133] These programmes are now becoming more widespread in the UK using their original form or an adapted model. The programmes are run in collaboration with parents, and promote community and school involvement.

- The **basic programme** assists parents to develop support networks and teaches parenting skills using videotapes which portray a range of situations and ways of responding to them (*eg* non-violent discipline and child-directed play).
- The **advanced programme** works on parental relationships.
- The **partner's programme** supports children's academic learning and develops parent-teacher relationships.
- The **child social skills programmes** works directly with the child.

The most marked improvements in behaviour are achieved when the programmes are applied together; the partner's programme is required in order for improvements in child behaviour at home to generalise to peer interactions and classroom behaviour.

In one UK trial of the Webster-Stratton programme, the parents of 90 children met in small groups for two hours a week over 13 to 16 weeks. Each group consisted of parents of six- to eight-year-old children. A detailed training manual was used, and included topics such as play, praise, incentives, setting limits, discipline and handling misbehaviour. Video clips of parents with children were used with constant reference to the parent's own experiences and predicaments. Parents were helped to practise new approaches during sessions and at home, and were given written feedback after every session. Difficulties were shown to be normal, humour and fun were encouraged. A crèche, good quality refreshments and transport were provided.

Group leaders were supervised weekly, to ensure they adhered to the programme and to develop skills, using videotapes of the sessions to rehearse therapeutic approaches.

A multicentre evaluation of a Webster-Stratton videotape parenting programme has recently been completed in the UK. The outcomes of the trial were measured five to seven months after completion of the course and showed significant improvements in the children's behaviour. This evaluation shows that the method worked well with disadvantaged families, cost no more than conventional treatments, and that attendance levels were good.[134]

133 www.incredibleyears.com describes the Webster-Stratton's approach. See also Carolyn Webster-Stratton, 'Researching the impact of parent training programmes on child conduct problems', in E Lloyd, *Parenting Matters*, Barnardos, UK, 1999

134 S Scott, Q Spender, M Doolan, B Jacobs and H Aspland, 'Multicentre controlled trial of parenting groups for childhood antisocial behaviour in clinical practice', *British Medical Journal* No. 323, UK, 2001

Creating good times and happy family memories

When people talk about happy times spent with their family, they may describe a day in the country, an outing with their father, or an unforgettable holiday. This kind of family experience strengthens family bonds, gives everyone the chance to relax and feel free, refreshes everyone before returning to the daily grind, and can develop friendships with other families.

Joseph Wresinski, founder of ATD Fourth World, said:

> "The right of poor families to be able to relax, to have a change of scene, to have some free time and recharge their batteries, is not recognised. (…) It seems that today times are too hard to think about holidays, about

> offering parents and children in the most worn out families, who have the hardest lives, the chance to feel like human beings, people who have the right to think, to laugh, to play, to marvel at things (…) The right to holidays is the right to be human.”[135]

Numerous community initiatives and local associations organise family outings and discovery or craft activities to allow families to do things together away from home in a relaxed, peaceful atmosphere in the company of other families. The British publication *Creating magic: a celebration of innovative projects tackling child poverty from the ground up* features a wealth of such initiatives.[136] Projects like these can transform relationships between people – within the family and throughout the community.

Many initiatives exist to help poor families go on holiday. However, field workers know how fragile these projects are and the need for significant investment to keep them going successfully.

From the beginning, ATD Fourth World has run family holiday and respite projects, particularly using three family homes in Europe: a farm at Wijhe in the Netherlands, a family holiday home in the French Jura and Frimhurst Family House in Surrey, England. Building on this practice, there have been interesting developments over the last few years – particularly in France, with the addition of the ‘access to holidays and leisure’ objective to the law combating social exclusion in 1998,[137] and ATD Fourth World’s efforts to build an association of tourism partners to enable poor families to go on holiday.

ATD Fourth World has a long history of organising ‘family events’ that enable families from all walks of life to get out and about, with a special focus on creating conditions that guarantee the participation of isolated families facing long-term poverty. For these families, events like this make it possible to rediscover themselves within the family unit, to meet other families and to build friendships that can help them in day-to-day life. Families from all walks of life benefit from meeting one another in these gatherings.

For some years these ‘family time’ initiatives have flourished in Europe, involving many innovative ideas and a wide range of projects and experiences adapted to the strengths and resources of the teams and of the people living in these areas. Family times – which can be an afternoon, a whole day or a weekend – are based on social interaction, and recognition of the aspirations and abilities of the families. Activities often focus on enabling families to express themselves through art and craft; art workshops are often organised by artists. Other family time initiatives simply involve trips to the seaside or the countryside, or cultural trips, all of which help families to enjoy themselves together as a family and as part of a group of families.

Supporting self-help initiatives in France

Many projects aim to forge social and supportive links in communities; Ireland and other countries place a great deal of importance on community-based approaches. Although the culture and history of France is resistant to the idea of ‘communities’ and ‘communitarianism’, it recognises the importance of forging ties based on respect and solidarity among people at the local level. Indeed some field workers in innovative projects want to be seen as ‘forgers’ or ‘agents’ of social ties.

The family happiness initiative

The Association for the local development of the Saint Jean district (ADÈLE) is focusing its work on a large deprived area in Beauvais. In 2000, a local

135 Joseph Wresinski’s foreword in ‘Pour une politique de vacances familiales’, *Revue Igloos*, No. 119, Editions Quart Monde, Paris, 1984

136 Local Network Fund for children and young people, *Creating Magic: a celebration of innovative projects tackling child poverty from the ground up*, Community Links, UK, 2002

137 See article No. 140, *Loi d’orientation relative à la lutte contre les exclusions*, Journal officiel, France, 1998

mother, who was involved with ADÈLE, started the Family happiness initiative (*Au bonheur des familles*) with the support of other parents. It is focused on a few run-down tower blocks which accommodate 250 young families, mostly of French origin; a large proportion of parents living there do not work and have to rely on benefits.

It aims to restore parents to their parental roles – with both parents and children assuming their responsibilities and regaining control over their family life. The focal point of the project is a place where parents can drop in for a coffee, meet each other, and talk with councillors, local officials and social workers.

The scheme has set up various activities:

- a discussion group with a psychologist (requested by the parents so that they can learn how to give their children a better future)
- silkscreen painting workshops that provide a different setting for parents to meet
- a group family outing for around 50 parents and children every school term, organised by local parents
- family holidays for five or six families a year, particularly for those families who have never been on holiday
- support with homework after school, organised with parents.

The project leader acknowledges the difficulty of getting the most isolated families to participate. A core group of families develops and it can be difficult to involve new ones. In order to actively reach and welcome new families, each of the families already involved is asked to invite a new person to the events at the start of a new school year.

Participating families say that they get a lot out of forging new ties: friendships are made in the community, people meet each other and ask one another for advice. They find themselves in a position to assume their parental and community responsibilities.

Parenting project in Dieppe

The Parenting project, which ran from 1993 to 1998 in a district of Dieppe, involved those stigmatised by poverty and exclusion. A variety of different professionals and others in the local community adopted an overall approach, and created a programme which included:

- a discussion group, in which the topics reflected the concerns of the parents at the session
- lectures focusing on parenting issues
- seminar days.

In the report describing this project, the authors identify these strong points:

- The social workers came out of their offices and had wider contact with people.
- They didn't act as experts and recognised the need to learn from the parents.
- Some social workers became personally involved in the groups as parents.
- There was a real partnership between families and organisers, and a good balance between them.
- Everyone had an equal say and was listened to by everyone else.[138]

Five social workers made up the steering group at the launch of the project, along with five parents who had found it difficult to overcome their feelings of reluctance and shame and to take part in meetings. Together, they had a crucial role throughout the project. The project was funded for five years and has now ended, but the exchange group carries on in the same vein.

138 Georges Falconnet and Reynald Vergnory, *Travailler avec les parents pour une meilleure cohésion sociale*, Ed ESF, France, 2001

'La Parenthèse' project

La Parenthèse project (literally, the short break project) was set up in the La Rocade district of Avignon by the Community Centre for Social Action in response to the growing isolation of some families in difficulty, and the weakening of social ties and solidarity within the community.[139] It established a centre for families with very young children on the site of the former crèche (whose attendance had fallen by 75% between 1995 and 1999).

This project was based on four key areas:

- **Providing a meeting place**
  The centre is open four half-days a week and one Saturday a month. All parents are welcome and play full, active roles in what happens. Easily accessible, this 'space and time' allows parents to:
  – get out of the house and have a change from the constant demands of caring for their child
  – exchange ideas with other parents
  – be mutually supportive of other parents, confronting problems together
  – find ways of broadening their child's horizons within the local area.
- **Developing mutual recognition and respect**
  Creating positive relationships with the institutions, associations and services who deal with families with young children so that everyone has easy access to the facilities which are already available.
- **Setting up an information centre**
  Providing information to parents and professionals on parenting, the family, changing family forms etc. to encourage people to take part in informed, open-minded approaches, involving new ways of understanding the issues, and in a spirit of sharing knowledge.
- **Partnership with parents**
  Relationships must be based on welcoming, listening and exchanging ideas.

139 ATD Quart Monde France, *Mettre en œuvre le partenariat – Seconde évaluation de la loi d'orientation relative à la lutte contre les exclusions*, Paris, November 2002

La Parenthèse: a project leader's perspective

There are always as many adults as children at La Parenthèse. The parents come along because they want to; they sit down in the garden or inside, and chat between themselves or play with their children. They have a coffee, find information, organise trips, exchange addresses or discuss services… The 'link workers' (that is how the team staff members are known) don't ask questions. The team's overriding concern is to respect parents by recognising everyone's roles. Some simple common sense rules are applied in a flexible way.

The paradox of being both rigorous and flexible means that supervision is necessary, and practices must be evaluated. Even things that appear simple can actually be very complex (for instance, the role of the staff, who are vital, is not always clear: educator/organiser/link worker/coordinator). Families see the 'link workers' as people who can ensure that everyone has access to a public centre.

It is a great pleasure for all involved to find how well people who attend the centre get on, even when they don't know each other. The creation of these new relationships leads to an atmosphere in which the regulars take it upon themselves to welcome newcomers, even when no staff are present. Rebuilding social ties with and between families is a gradual process, and many obstacles need to be overcome along the way.

The simplicity of the project's activities had to be grounded in an awareness of the complexity of external factors that could interfere with the project's success. A profound sense of consideration for others had to be put into simple terms and be reflected in everyday action in relationships between yourself and others – individually and collectively. The staff wondered exactly what their roles were: where, how far, why, until when.

One of the key factors in the project's success was transparency in dealing with parents. They must always be kept informed about who is doing what. Out of respect for each family's way of life and history, there must be a trusting relationship between

professional staff and parents, with regard to the child. And it must be all right for parents to turn up and 'do nothing' – being there is what counts.

The success of the 'La Parenthèse' project can be measured quantitatively by looking at the attendance figures for the centre, which have grown and grown. In qualitative terms, the project's success can be seen in the improvement of relationships between professionals and parents and, most importantly, in the way parents have assumed responsibilities themselves. This calls for some comment:

- It is a never-ending process: to maintain the trusting relationship, there must always be mutual respect, and daily frictions and difficulties in human relationships must be carefully managed.
- Each individual's contribution is vital: everyone must be given every opportunity to express themselves, because there is a wealth of knowledge to be tapped. But it is a difficult process; it involves identifying and addressing humiliating situations, and maintaining relationships based on trust and solidarity.
- It takes time: some parents come along once and don't come back; others come back, sometimes a long time afterwards. 'It takes a long time', say the parents who know how much time people need to get through the ups and downs of life. Tenacity is needed by the parents and the social workers in order to succeed.

Christine Lalire
From a debate on 'Promotion of the family'
Cité des Sciences et de l'Industrie (Paris, February 2002)

A national parental support network

Along with many other schemes, projects like Au bonheur des familles and La Parenthèse have benefited from a national network: the Parental Support Network (les Réseaux d'Écoute, d'Appui et d'Accompagnement des Parents – REAAP). The network focuses on parents and families; it is not directly connected to issues of child poverty or child protection. Its main function is to encourage the creation of places and social spaces where parents can meet and talk.

According to Elisa Terrier, REAAP Network coordinator in the Lower Rhine area of Alsace, its creation was a political and symbolic decision by the government of the day in response to the general feeling that parents were to blame for many of society's problems.[140] There has not been a sudden breakdown or resignation on the part of parents and families. Nevertheless, society has become more complex and there is a need to support initiatives, often already in existence, which help parents generally, including how they position themselves with regard to professionals.

The network was launched by the French government at the Family Conference in June 1998 in order to help parents in their educative role. It operates on the basis of:

- strong commitment from the family
- high involvement by associations, particularly family associations
- the coordination of state services linking ministries with very different skills, particularly the Ministry of Education which has made school-family partnerships one of its priorities.

Four broad areas of action were funded:

- specific action to boost parent-school relationships
- the exchange of knowledge and skills between parents
- meetings between parents and professionals
- activities for parents with their children.[141]

In 2001, the network made the improvement of family-school relationships a priority. A report entitled *Strengthening relationships between families and schools*, co-signed by the Minister for Education and the Minister for the Family explains this objective:

140 Interview by ATD Fourth World, 2003
141 *See* www.familles.org

> “The Parental Support Network’s main objective is to promote activities that enable parents to fulfil their parental role in daily life. At school, we know that the quality of relationships between teaching staff and parents can play a major part in pupils’ achievements at school and in helping the education system to serve its purpose.”

Parental Support Network Charter

Main objectives

- To promote meetings and exchange between parents, and to offer parents the services and resources they need to fulfil their educational role.
- To this end, to promote a network of all those who can support parents in their formative roles with regard to their children.

Principles of action and organisation

1. Enhance the parents’ roles and abilities: responsibility and authority, self-confidence, handing down family history to children, setting guidelines and limits, child protection and development.
2. Support relationships between parents, and therefore promote types of support which involve parents, particularly parental associations.
3. Encourage organisations with which parents come into contact, to embrace and develop new initiatives.
4. Support a better balance between family life and work.
5. Run campaigns to recruit and train volunteers or professionals in order to encourage the development of new practices that ensure a good balance between the participation of parents and intervention by professionals.
6. Ensure that these places are accessible to all parents, by monitoring attendance in terms of social backgrounds, age groups, and cultures.
7. Draw up a code of ethics supporting family relationships and open to all forms of family. It will be based on texts which describe the rights of the child and of the family.
8. Set a timetable, based around a convention to be held every few years involving the different partners.
9. Focus on building a responsive and relevant network, with a diverse range of volunteers and professionals who are all committed to supporting families, to respecting people and their independence, and drawing on the latest information available.
10. Participate in building a shared system which facilitates the exchange of information, the evaluation of projects, information-gathering, transparency, precision, visibility and the rapid growth of this movement.

March 1999

In many French departments, the Parental Support Network focused on pre-existing initiatives in its first few years. These were often run in a collaborative way, with the aim of encouraging the exchange of knowledge, evaluation and expansion. In the Lower Rhine area in Alsace, for instance, between 50 and 100 schemes are connected to the network (depending on the criteria used). In addition to these schemes, there was a concerted effort to encourage new projects; in Lower Rhine, for example, the policy targets rural areas of north Alsace by setting up meeting groups for local parents, in response to the isolation of many families.

Many project leaders who run collective schemes which support parents and build ties, emphasise how much the Parental Support Network’s impetus and ethos has helped to get the projects up and running. However, the Network remains fragile, depending on the commitment of many people working on the ground. A report of the French Economic and Social Council, published in 2003, says that the Network has contributed to closer working relationships between institutional partners and organisations providing parental support. However, projects do not always reach very poor parents, who often do not feel comfortable approaching people offering services.[142]

142 Conseil économique et social, *L’Accès de tous aux droits de tous par la mobilisation de tous*, Journal Officiel, France, June 2003

The Network is, quite rightly, based on an ethos of non-stigmatisation – open to all parents rather than aimed at 'target groups'. It should, however, take the specific needs of certain families into account, and overcome the difficulties of reaching these families and involving them in projects.

Key points

- **The benefits of supportive intervention at an early age have been widely recognised in Europe.**
- **The development of one-to-one support to families from volunteers needs to be evaluated.**
- **Many new initiatives in Europe offer parents information and training on parenting skills and access to social spaces where they can meet, talk and initiate self-help projects.**
- **Recognition and support is needed for community initiatives and local associations that organise family outings and holidays, and that aim to bring people together from different walks of life and to reach isolated families living in poverty.**

Issues for discussion

- **How can the most vulnerable families in poverty benefit from mainstream community initiatives and programmes?**
- **How can an inclusive and supportive local environment be developed, which enables friendships to develop naturally between families from all parts of the community – especially parents living in severe and persistent poverty and exclusion?**
- **How can the need for freedom and recreation be taken into account in the allocation of funding and resources for children and parents living in poverty and exclusion?**
- **What guidelines are needed for training, supervising and monitoring volunteers who offer family support?**

Being closer to children and parents: alternatives to separation

> **"We are never credited with the work we've done to get towards their standards We're always put down for not reaching these standards, not that we tried our hardest and got nearly there."**
>
> Parents' views
> ATD Fourth World UK response to consultation on *Every child matters*

Family Group Conferences

Family Group Conferences (FGC) are a way of empowering families who are going through a difficult time or a crisis so that, as far as possible, they can make decisions on how to resolve the situation. Their aim is to support the plans made by the family network, by listening first and foremost to the views of those directly concerned – the parents and children.

FGCs originated in the Maori community in New Zealand in the 1980s and were given a statutory basis in their 1989 Children, Young Persons and their Families Act. This Act recognises Family Group Conferences as the key process by which families make decisions about children and young people in need of care or protection. The introduction of FGCs led to a reduction in the number of children and young people placed in care as a result of child welfare measures, and also led to a decrease in the number of juvenile offenders going to prison. New Zealand makes widespread use of FGCs in situations where major decisions about children and young people are taken, and recently announced extra funding for the model.

The Family Group Conference approach is currently being adopted and evaluated in many European countries, notably Ireland, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the Scandinavian countries. Many statutory social services departments and NGOs are developing this approach and it is the focus of analysis at national and international level.[143] Supplement 11 (*see* Appendix 1) will address these developments and review numerous data and assessments available on this practice.

The Family Group Conference approach

Family Group Conferencing has acquired varied characteristics in the different locations and countries where it is used. Although 'home-grown' models will reflect local needs, according to Jo Tunnard, three crucial elements must be present for the term Family Group Conference to be appropriate:

- A wide definition of 'family' is adopted that includes extended family as well as close, concerned friends and neighbours or significant people.
- The family always has the opportunity to plan in private.
- The family's plan is agreed by the professionals, unless – and only unless – the plan places the child at risk of significant harm. [144]

The original New Zealand model is principally characterised by a five-stage intervention process, which begins as soon as a problem arises or is identified.

143 See for instance the International institute for restorative practices website: www.iirp.org
144 Jo Tunnard, 'Mechanisms for empowerment: family group conferences and local family advocacy schemes', in Cannan and Warren, *Social action with children and families*, Routledge, London, 1999

1 **Preparation with the family and the family's network** An independent coordinator prepares the conference by identifying and gathering together the family network. This can take several weeks or months. The coordinator's role is to facilitate exchanges and refrain from offering preconceived ideas of the outcome.
2 **Information-giving** The professionals explain their concerns to the family.
3 **Private family time** The family is left alone to arrive at their own plan for the future of the child or young person.
4 **Agreeing on the plan proposed by the family** Professionals evaluate the safety and legal issues. Resources may be procured to help implement the plan.
5 **Monitoring and review** Professionals and family members monitor the plan's progress and follow-up meetings are often held.

Robert Tapsfield, former director of the Family Rights Group in the UK, who is an enthusiastic campaigner for the development of FGCs, says:

> "Family group conferences build on the strengths of families and communities and enable families to take responsibility for leading decision-making in situations where otherwise the state would take over this responsibility. They recognise the right and responsibility of families and communities to make decisions about their children and provide a framework for families to exercise this responsibility and for the state and families to work together to safeguard and promote children's welfare. At a family group conference, it is the family who make a plan for a child or young person. The state's role is to support the family plan, unless it would not keep the child safe, in which case the state would take over responsibility for decision-making."[145]

Support schemes in an open environment

Child protection systems in many countries include measures which specifically provide support and supervision to a child and their family in their usual environment (or in an 'open environment' – *en milieu ouvert* in French). This type of intervention, either requested by members of the family or required by the justice system, often serves as the final stage before a placement solution is considered.

- In **French-speaking Belgium** it is called AMO in (*Aide en Milieu Ouvert*).
- In **Germany** it involves a support plan (*Hilfeplan*), agreed on jointly by the social worker and the family, which can include socio-educational support (*Sozialpedagogische Familienhilfe*).
- In **France**, this type of measure is known as 'Educational action in an open environment' (*Action Éducative en Milieu Ouvert – AEMO*).

National AEMO in France

Breugnot and Durning examined 25 research papers on AEMO, published in France between 1990 and 2000.[146] They highlight a number of issues:

- The extent to which the different parties are involved in the intervention measures; many studies revealed how fathers are accorded only a minimal role at all stages of intervention measures.
- The AEMO focuses on the child, but the researchers assert that most of the time it is the whole family situation which leads to intervention: family history, the role of each member of the family. They suggest that it could be preferable to take a comprehensive approach and intervene at the level of the whole family rather than the individual child, whose problems are symptomatic of the family's wider difficulties.

145 Family Rights Group, *Green paper on children at risk:submission on family led decision making*, UK, January 2003
146 P Breugnot and P Durning, 'L'AEMO, objet de recherche en émergence – analyse de 25 rapports', in Chrétien and Durning, *L'AEMO en recherche: état des connaissances, état des questions*, Collection Points d'appui, Ed Matrice, France, 2001

- The studies clearly show that the number of minors and families who are monitored by one social worker largely determines all aspects of the intervention.
- Some studies examine the way in which objectives are set (such as 'partnership' for example). Are these objectives clear? If partnership is an objective, where do all the assessments, reports and files on the family fit in, and what kind of access does the family have to these reports? The studies show that working in pairs (either two social workers or one social worker with another professional) remains rare, but is an approach worth thinking about and exploring.

This is confirmed by the French Economic and Social Council which notes that:

> "AEMO is essentially focused on the child, and does not take sufficient account of the whole family, even though the child at risk is often a sign that the whole family is in difficulty. The pattern of visits by the AEMO educators – once every three weeks in some départements – does not allow effective work to be done."[147]

The Council recommends that the AEMO's interventions support the whole family, and that there should be an increase in AEMO's funding to increase the availability of educators.

Many of those who work on the ground are aware of the flaws in the system, and seek innovative solutions. In the Loire area, for example, in 1997 the local authority (*Conseil Général*), family law judges and the 'Protecting Childhood' (*Sauvegarde de l'Enfance*) association developed a system entitled 'Alternatives to placement', which led to all interventions, including AEMO, being coordinated with other forms of support (such as a family worker assigned to the family, financial support for various bills, holidays).[148] This kind of action indicates to families that the authorities want to do all they can to avoid placement, and it also galvanises the family into taking a more proactive approach. This system still raises issues for those involved, such as whether the intervention in the family is too intrusive. Nevertheless, it is one way of trying to find alternatives to placement.

Dominique Fablet describes other innovative schemes linked with AEMO, which have a similar approach to preventing placement and supporting families.[149]

The 2003 Naves Report suggests that France should add to its range of support systems by introducing a new kind of government benefit (Educational and social family support allowance) which would help to find other alternatives to a choice between AEMO or separation of the child from the parents.[150]

PAMO: an innovative project in Luxembourg

Concerned about rising numbers of requests for placement orders, in 1993 the Kannerschlass Foundation (*see also* page 110) set up a placement prevention scheme with the support of the Luxembourg Ministry of Family Affairs. The Support in an Open Environment project (*Projet d'Action en Milieu Ouvert – PAMO*) involved converting a residential home, which up to then had been used to accommodate young adults and teenagers.

Three types of intervention were identified within the framework of this project:

- **Advice and guidance for, and with, the family** Thinking about the problems which led to the need for help; exchanging views, perspectives and possible ways of dealing with the difficulties.

147 Conseil économique et social, *L'Accès de tous aux droits de tous par la mobilisation de tous*, Journal Officiel, France, 2003

148 Laurence Potié, *Fiche d'expérience: pour une alternative au placement dans la Loire*, MRIE, France, December 2002

149 Dominique Fablet, 'Innover dans le champ de la suppléance familiale', in Michel Corbillon, 2001, *op. cit.*

150 Pierre Naves, *Pour et avec les enfants et les adolescents, leurs parents et les professionnels. Contribution à l'amélioration du système français de protection de l'enfance et de l'adolescence*, Report on proposals submitted to the Ministry of Family, France, June 2003

- **Educational intervention** Different approaches to parenting are suggested to parents to help them deal with the situations which led to the need for assistance.
- **Therapeutic intervention** Helping family members, through their own efforts, to perceive and understand their intra- and extra-family relationships in a different light.

Lisy Krieps describes the project in *Children without rights*:

> "The goal of the three forms of intervention is to give clients the opportunity to develop new perspectives on their family and individual futures; for this reason the professionals leave the clients with the responsibility (and choice) of whether they benefit from the support or not. There can never be any question of judging behaviour or attitudes, or of recommending alternatives which do not support the family…
>
> Help is provided only on the basis that the clients want it. In critical situations where the professional considers the child to be at serious risk, despite the support programme, they must inform the appropriate authorities concerned with child welfare. Everyone involved must be kept fully informed when these steps must be taken."[151]

In the PAMO scheme, intervention is divided into three stages:

- **Stage 1** The interveners try to develop a comprehensive understanding of the difficulties surrounding one or more members of the family, and evaluate the family's possibilities for change.
- **Stage 2** (usually lasting between five months and a year) The emphasis is on an intensive approach to tackling the major problems and setting short-term goals. The aim is to encourage the child or young person, and their family, to develop their own resources to deal with the problems.
- **Stage 3** Stepping back: the progress and setbacks encountered in stage two are assessed, and any changes that have taken place are analysed. The team of professionals adopts a lower profile and encourages the family to experiment with their new-found resources.

Krieps concludes that:

> "time is a key factor in psycho-educative intervention. It is a matter of not responding immediately, but taking the time to consider how to respond. Don't rush through stages, don't cobble together case files, don't apply the same solution to each different situation. Under the PAMO scheme, few cases are treated concurrently. Each professional sees no more than five or six families a week; each meeting with a family must last two to three hours in order to maintain a high standard of work which is well-prepared, structured and evaluated …
>
> While we used to ask questions like 'Why is he doing that?' and 'Whose fault is it?', now we prefer to ask 'What do you want?', 'What can you do about it?', and 'What can we do about it?'. We can try to find out why and how a youngster became a drug addict. We can also look for ways to get him off drugs without suffering too much. There is no point in looking at the past unless it helps you understand the present so that you can open up new possibilities for the future."

151 Lisy Krieps, 'Le projet d'action en milieu ouvert: quelques données sur les concepts de travail de ce service', in Pregno Gilbert, *Les enfants orphelins de droits*, Ed Le Phare, 1999

152 Alain Grevot, *Voyage en protection de l'enfance*, Ed Vaucresson, France, 2001

Confidential doctor service

Alain Grevot gives a detailed description of the confidential approach developed in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands in *A look at child protection*.[152] The pioneers of this approach were the Dutch, with the 'doctor-confidants' – a doctor in whom one can confide about someone else without risking legal repercussions for slander.

Belgian adoption of the confidential approach developed between 1979 and 1984 with *Kind in Nood* (in Flemish Belgium) and *SOS enfants* (in French-speaking Belgium). These were a major influence on the first German child protection centres (*Kinderschutz-Zentrum*).

This approach forms part of a trend that seeks to deal with family violence without recourse to legal intervention which could lead to prosecution. Grevot identifies the characteristics of this approach:

- **Proactive intervention** The professional contacts all those concerned (among the family and those close to the family) and attempts to involve them all in the process, based on their own worries and uncertainties. This is an essential element of the intervention.
- **A reminder of the law** For instance, the *Kinderschutz-Zentrum* team in Lübeck stress the legal procedures relating to sexual violence against children, and the legal obligations which the intervening professionals must abide by unless the family group and the individuals in question act to halt all such attacks on minors and seek the necessary treatment.
- **Evaluating the involvement of individuals** During work with a family group, the team evaluates the facts and the family's desire to improve the child's situation. If possible, individual or family therapy work is initiated. It includes looking into ways in which the offender can make amends with the victim, and setting up a group within the family to look out for problems.

Families First: crisis management

This solution-focused approach was inspired by the work of American therapists at the Brief Family Therapy Center in Milwaukee. The objective of these therapists is to support each member of the family. They consciously aimed to differentiate themselves from social work which – whether overtly or not – was limited to protecting children in families in difficulty, and favoured separation in times of risk or crisis. The team in Milwaukee, led by Insoo Kim Berg the founder of the therapy centre, starts from the principle that even when relationships are extremely difficult, it is always preferable to spare the child and the whole family the trauma of separation (*see* Appendix 2 **Further reading**).

Frameworks of intervention that led to Families First programmes were gradually developed, based on different US pilot project such as the home-builders programme, developed by the Behavioral Science Institute in Seattle. But programmes in Europe were mainly introduced with the support of the Department of Social Services of Michigan State.

For some years, the Families First intensive six-week family training programme schemes have been running in Austria, Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. In Germany they are usually named under the practice concept of *Familien Aktivierungs Management* (FAM).

Families First Luxembourg

Families First Luxembourg (FFL) defines itself as a mobile crisis intervention service, to prevent the placement in care of children from families in difficulty. The programme began in September 1999, and is managed by the Luxembourg Red Cross in collaboration with other organisations (Caritas-Jeunes et Familles, Epi, and the Lëtzebuerger Kannerduerf Foundation).

FFL staff have completed training on all-embracing approaches and have also undergone special Families First training. One professional works intensively with the child and their family for six to eight weeks with the aim of enhancing the family's capacities and potential. To maintain the quality of

support, each professional deals with no more than two families at any one time; workers always have access to support from a supervisor. In 2001, 34 families benefited from crisis intervention.

Families First Luxembourg: extracts from an information leaflet

Values

- Men and women have the right to their own culture and their own way of life.
- Children have the right to be with their family and to fundamental relationship structures.
- All members of the family have the right to thrive, and the right to physical and mental security.
- Every action is based on the positive desires of the people concerned.
- Every family can evolve in a positive way.
- Family members are equal partners and must be treated with great respect.

Methods

Families First Luxembourg (FFL) starts from the principle that when a crisis occurs, people are ready to change their lives. The crisis is not negative; it involves the potential for positive change.

The aim is to avoid placement of the child outside the family, given that it is generally in the interests of the child to remain with their family as long as the child's security is guaranteed. As soon as the social worker starts considering external placement, FFL intervenes immediately in order to turn the crisis into a positive event.

Using a combination of several proven methods, and with the intensive support of an FFL member of staff over a period of six to eight weeks, external placement of children can be avoided.

The amount of time spent working with the family fluctuates between five and twenty hours a week. FFL uses a combination of several different methods of family and child support. We use techniques for assessing family support which can also be used for short interventions. In addition to these, there are therapeutic methods which deal with behaviour and encourage dialogue.

Especially for families from modest backgrounds, it is important to work with their social environment and use a 'case management' approach. The socio-economic conditions which are vital to sustain the family are also taken into account. (…)

We work with the family in their home. Each FFL member of staff works with no more than two families at any one time, so that they can devote all their energy to them. The 'family in crisis' can contact the FFL worker at any time. The programme lasts for a maximum of eight weeks. At the end of the programme, the family will be stable enough to be supported by normal procedures. (…)

The FFL service can help to avoid the placement of children where it is not absolutely necessary. Nevertheless, external placement is often necessary when: it is needed to protect the child; the change of scene has a therapeutic effect; it gives the family some relief; and when it is specifically requested by the parents or the child.

But when placement occurs solely based on outward signs, or because the social worker's patience has run out, or when feelings of guilt prevent any positive exchange and any search for existing resources, whether hidden or forgotten, the Families First Programme offers an alternative. (…)

Families First projects in Germany

A three-year federal model project to pilot Families First programmes in Germany started in two Länder (Saarland and Rheinland-Pflaz) in September 1996. Evidence showed that among nearly 100 families who benefited from this support, 60% of the interventions prevented children from being placed in care.[153] This lead to the creation of numerous long-term projects using the FAM approach. A network, DV-FAM (Dachverband FAM – Families First programme Germany), is creating links between around 30 local projects. The GISA Institute (Gesellschaft für Innovative Sozial Arbeit) is providing training programmes and quality assessment of the projects. Major social work organisations like Diakonie adopted this tool in some of their projects and this innovative practice gained media coverage (*see* overleaf).

153 Gesellschaft für Innovative Sozial Arbeit, *Familienaktivierungsmanagement: ein Bundesmodellprojekt und seine Folgen*, GISA Gmbh, St Wendel, Germany, 2001

Families First in practice: the Wurtz family

The Wurtz family are all in the dining room around the table. The father, 29, has tattooed arms, and is sitting on the carpet. Veronika, the mother, is talking. Luke, 5, listens curiously, while Jenny, 6, draws on her 3 year old sister Joline's face with a crayon. Almost an ideal family. Except that the Child Protection Office has recently threatened the parents with the removal of their children if they are not prepared to accept outside intervention.

For some time a social worker had been coming to see the family. Her task had been to work with Jenny, whom the doctor had diagnosed as having slight learning difficulties. But the social worker was confronted by the father, a baker who had recently lost his job. 'She told my husband that he should be less strict with me and the children', explains Veronika Wurtz. The parents put an end to the collaboration. According to this young mother, the social worker is responsible for the family crisis. The Child Protection Office sees the situation differently: according to them, the children are stressed and aggressive, they rip up the curtains in the house, and even tortured a kitten to death.

This is a case for Maria Löcken. As a member of the FAM project run by Diakonie in Düsseldorf she wants to help families resolve this kind of crisis. She does not think it important to reveal their failings. She is less interested in their faults than what the family members can achieve, and she wants to show them the potential they have within them. Maria Löcken wants to find the forces for good. She intervenes so that the family can remain together.

For six weeks, this 'crisis manager' was at the Wurtz's disposal 24 hours a day. She lived with them, not according to a strict timetable, but when the parents and children most needed her. The rest of the time, the family could get in touch with her at any time on her mobile phone.

'We've got problems.' Veronika Wurtz makes no secret of it. Sometimes tempers fray in the family with three young children. At bedtime, for example, when the girls keep getting up and can't settle down. Then it all erupts.

Since 'Auntie Maria', as the children call this vivacious woman with a deep voice, has been helping at bedtime, evenings are very different. With her help, the parents have come up with a new nightly routine which they like and which helps the children to settle. Have something to drink, then read a story – that's part of the routine at bedtime now, as well as thinking about the broader picture. 'I'm too patient', says the mother, a little critically. 'Now I can be very frank.'.(…)

In FAM, or Families First as this American family-centred approach was originally called, nobody causes any problems, neither the parents, nor the children. Veronika Wurtz gets a file out of the drawer and shows the coloured pages painted by the young parents and their three children – it helped them to realise their strength of character and their abilities. The mother beams when she talks about Luke, who shares everything with his sisters and is very concerned to make sure that everyone gets their fair share. But Luke is also the one who shocks his parents with his violent outbursts.

Maria Löcken, an ex-teacher, makes a point of finding the good points in difficult children. She has often asked parents and teachers who complained, whether they had anything positive to say about the child in trouble. She wants to see to it that adults don't only look at the child's faults and judge them on these faults, but see their strengths and nurture them. (…)

In some cases, crisis intervention fails, for example when one of the parents is sexually abusing a child, when a mother isn't physically or mentally fit to care for her child, or when the children prefer to live away from home. However, in 90% of cases, children can remain with their families after FAM intervention.

In any case, the Wurtz family are making plans for the future. Luke, the bundle of energy, will let off steam by learning a combat sport. Joline will go to a nursery every day and the mother will have lunch each day with Jenny, who is in first year infants. She hopes that her husband will soon be able to start earning again, and for herself she hopes that she will find 'someone I can trust who will listen and give me advice'.

Gafga Hedwig, 'Diakonie – Kein Mensch besteht nur aus Fehlern – ein Familienprojekt', (Chrisma plus, Chrismon, novembre 2000) (available at www.chrismon.de/ctexte/2000/11/11-9.html)

A breathing space in times of crisis: on-demand care for children

In **One-to-one support for families and children** (page 106), we described the benefits for parents of having a relationship with a support family or mentor who can take care of one or more children at short notice. This type of respite care can also be provided on demand through access to daycare, school facilities, children's centres, residential care or fostering.

The Relais Parentaux scheme in France

The *Relais Parentaux* scheme was trialled for the first time in France in 1985 by the Passerelle 92 association in the Hauts de Seine département. Today six other projects of this type are operating in France.[154]

Children can be taken care of for a few hours or a few weeks, either on a continual basis or otherwise:

- The family makes a financial contribution, adapted according to their situation.
- The only admission formalities required are authorisation by the parent for accommodating the child and discharge if medical attention is required.
- The child protection services are not automatically informed.
- Parents are allowed to be with the children at mealtimes, bath time etc.

According to the evaluations carried out by the different projects, the average stay varies between 11 and 27 days (consecutive or not).

These schemes for accommodating children avoid placement in situations where the parents' problems mount up (having nowhere to live, temporarily having no money, 'the need for breathing space'), and become a useful resource for the parents. Caroline Helfter explains that:

> "By acting as a simple and pragmatic response to the needs of the parents, this tool has quickly been adopted as a form of social support by the local authorities, which initially needed a lot of convincing."

Support Care in the UK

In the UK, Support Care schemes attempt to address similar needs by drawing on a network of foster families; these usually work directly with families to help prevent family breakdown and admission to the care system. Support Care was initiated in Bradford in 1996 by social worker Joy Howard.[155]

> "I was working in a fostering unit and realised it was a resource that was needed … If families are in crisis, and all you can offer them is a week in care, that can be a damaging experience. I felt we needed something in-between."[156]

At that time, Howard had a lot of foster carers on her books who felt they could not accept any more long-term placements, but still had something to offer. Sometimes foster families give up after a difficult placement; Joy Howard envisaged a new type of care that was much less stressful and more immediately rewarding.

The scheme started with six foster families, now there are 25. Most placements, which involve a few nights a month, or maybe a whole weekend, last between six and nine months. Over 200 children and young people are referred to the scheme each year, and only around five or six of them end up in care.

In 2003, the scheme was running in various forms in about 11 authorities around the UK. This number is now growing. All the schemes have the backing of the charity Fostering Network, which has recently obtained funding for a full-time worker to coordinate and advise on the development of schemes

154 Caroline Helfter, *Une pause pour mieux vivre son rôle de parents*, Actualités Sociales Hebdomadaires, No. 2317, France, 2003
155 Joy Howard, 'Support Care: a new role for foster carers', in Ann Wheal, *Working with parents: learning from people's experience*, Russel House Publishing, 2000
156 Anne Gulland, 'Welcome break', *The Guardian*, London, 16 April 2003

nationwide. In Birmingham, the care is undertaken by registered childminders rather than foster families, but the principles remain the same.

Support Care offers children and young people some time away from home, and a break for their parents. Most families are referred to the scheme when they reach a crisis point, although a renewed emphasis on prevention means that earlier interventions are on the increase. All placements are planned, time-limited and based on a contract between all parties – parent/carer, young person, foster carer, family social worker, and family placement worker.

In her evaluation of the scheme, Joy Howard points out some important findings:

- Parents are reassured when they have a range of alternative options, and a number of families have withdrawn their request for accommodation when other options were on the agenda. A constructive offer of help can take the heat out of the situation and allows a family to think through what they can do for themselves. Knowing that help is at hand can be enough to make a difference.
- The provision of daycare was not originally part of the Support Care scheme, but it began when a very experienced carer could no longer offer overnight stays. It proved to be one of the most popular solutions, and is now often requested from the start. It has also become an invaluable resource when a school exclusion threatens to overwhelm an already troubled home situation. The development of daycare has shown that flexibility can produce excellent results.
- Most Support Care placements have achieved their aims within a year. Some families and young people do return for a second go and re-referrals are always taken.

A social centre for children in Romania

The social centre for the children of St Dimitri is a day centre established several years ago with the support of the large orthodox parish of Stravopoleos in Bucharest. The centre now employs around 15 staff and operates independently of the parish.

Its work is essentially preventative; it provides a place for children aged between 6 and 18, who generally go to school, to have two meals a day, have medical and psychological check-ups, get school and vocational help, and receive spiritual support. A maximum of 40 children can be accepted at any one time, often with different children for each session because some go to school in the morning, others in the afternoon.

The centre supports families by staying in touch with parents, who can ask for a priest to visit or for social help. The families who send their children to the centre discovered it in different ways:

- some were originally introduced to it at the beginning of the project, when the centre had street workers who made contact with children
- some were mentioned to the centre by churchgoers in Stravopoleos who would say, 'I know a family in difficulty'
- some heard about the project and came on their own initiative
- some children were sent by state child welfare services after the centre had been alerted by social services or the school.

The centre aims to prevent children from leaving their family homes and ending up on the street as a result of a complex combination of different factors: failure and dropping out of school, weakened family units due to persistent poverty. The centre also takes children involved in antisocial behaviour.

Children who attend the centre undergo medical, psychological and legal assessment. They are personally supervised and their progress is monitored.

Family visits aim to involve parents in the education of their children by making them familiar with the projects which concern their children, and with information on the children's results. They are also an opportunity to offer advice and support to the parents, including acting as a mediator in relationships between the parents and their children.

The centre's team organises artistic and cultural activities, such as educational games, excursions and sport. The centre runs two complementary projects in parallel:

- *You're not alone* involves home visits and help in the home for families with a disabled child. The children who attend the centre are involved in this work.
- A network of foster families who are willing to take children or whole families on a short or long-term basis if required.

The work and thoughts of members of the team at the children's social centre in St Dimitri

The centre's founder decided to:

- have a young team of professionals who are the centre's most valuable resource
- not to change the project every six months in order to get the results desired by some international funders
- focus on education, and not to become an emergency aid project
- run a small-scale project in order to guarantee high quality work.

The founder recognises that in a country with major economic and social problems, the centre can only make a difference little by little – 'Like the ripples made by a pebble dropped into water'. When she talks about the centre to people working in other fields in Romania, 'it gives them hope'.

The **psychotherapist** had to make a lot of effort and financial sacrifice to pursue this kind of career in Romania where, for many years, the teaching and practice of psychology, embracing modern international ideas, was forbidden. Some university lecturers had little practical experience and when she began practising, she had very few reference points by which she could evaluate herself. She continued to train herself and attended seminars organised by French practitioners. Of her work at the St Dimitri centre, she says, 'It's a small centre here. It's a conscious decision so that we can work closely with the children. You really see the life in these children.' Working with the parents demands a lot of energy that would otherwise be directed towards the children. It is a reminder of the limitations of what a small team can do.

The **ceramics artist** is an integral part of the team; he organises workshops on pottery, traditional ways of firing ceramics and glass painting (a Romanian tradition depicting icons). The centre relies on this work, often of very high quality, to produce calendars, cards and original gifts for sale as a contribution to the centre's finances.

The team's **orthodox priest** offers spiritual support to the children and visits the parents. He sets achievable goals for families of the children who attend the centre and establishes an atmosphere of trust in which parents feel able to talk about financial problems, particularly being in debt to lenders, and other issues, such as health problems or irregular papers.

Networks of children's centres in Poland

Zofia Waleria Stelmaszuk describes networks of linked children's centres, rooted in the Warsaw children's communities of the 1920s.[157] These centres work as a flexible system, offering daycare and after-school care, sports, leisure, occasional work activities, and friendship to local children and young people. At times when the situation at home was particularly difficult, children were able to stay overnight, or for some weeks, under the care of their educator. This

157 Z W Stelmaszuk, 'Residential care in Poland: Past, present and future', in *International Journal of Child & Family Welfare*, Volume 5, Number 3, Acco, Belgium, 2002

provided an alternative to placement without breaking the links with the child's school and friends.

This system, proven under different political circumstances, is now replicated in many communities throughout Poland, although funding cuts have reduced some services.

The system is based on a partnership between children and educators and is intended to supplement family care, not as a substitute for it. The child can choose the group they want to belong to. Many of the educators have themselves grown up within the system and are committed to their own specific culture.

There is a special, clear value system (internal code) emphasising rights and responsibilities, including responsibilities for the youngest members. There are also many important traditions and rituals, such as community meetings, voting and group decisions. Many of the former residents, once they are independent, come back to offer their support to the younger members of the organisation.

There are also completely new projects in Poland, mostly run by NGOs. Karnafel conducted a study in 1998 covering the whole of Poland and identified 57 'innovative' programmes.[158] All had been started in the 1990s, most of them in the early 90s, principally in Warsaw and the other major cities. For instance, an institution has been transformed into a multifunctional centre designed to assist the family, offering a wide variety of services focused on daycare and short-term care. It also provides an emergency shelter for mother and child, and services within the family home to prevent a child being placed out of the home.

Framnas: creating change with teenagers and families

Located in a suburb of Stockholm, Framnas is a treatment and school facility for teenagers from 13 to 16 years of age, their families and their networks; the emphasis is on the importance of the bond between young people and their parents, no matter how fragile this relationship has become. The children and families that come to Framnas are referred by social service child welfare officers, and have experienced problems for many years. The parents, relatives and others closest to the children are worried about their future; in their minds, it is often a question of life or death.

The children's situation makes it impossible for them to remain at school. Framnas offers a full-time non-residential school programme as well as counselling and other supportive services. Children and their families usually attend Framnas for between six months and three years. Framnas began as a public organisation funded by the county council in Stockholm, but since 1991 it has been a worker cooperative run by the 17 members of staff.

The Framnas staff say that all the parents want the best for their children, and that the children are loyal to their parents:

> "Blood is thicker than water …children and parents are intimate allies, linked together by invisible bonds. As a result of these bonds, the parents have the power of control and influence. The staff cannot compete with the force of the influence parents have on their children. Parental force and influence exist no matter how the surrounding world find the parents' competence. As a result of this ideology, Framnas has developed methods to emphasise the power of influence that parents possess to guide their children. This will minimise authority intervention and help of experts."[159]

158 Z W Stelmaszuk, 'La mise en œuvre de changements dans le système d'aide sociale à l'enfance dans un pays post-communiste', in Michel Corbillon, 2001, *op. cit.*

159 Extract from 'Policy Declaration of Framnas School and Therapy Center', in Eriksson, Garphult, Hessle, Jernberg, Levin and Wils, 'The focus on family when children are at risk: Swedish Policy in Practice', in Callahan, Hessle, Strega (Edit.), 2000, *op. cit.*

The centre's approach is built upon several core beliefs:

- Experts have disarmed/undermined the parental force/strength and influence, so parents have lost their parental power.
- The job of the professional is to help parent regain their sense of their own power.
- Solutions come from many sources. The job of the staff is to create a context where families can express their strengths and use their resources. If staff ask young people and their families for their goals and plans, really listen to what they say and accept it, then families can be provided with something that is useful for them.

The centre's staff try to develop methods which conform to this philosophy. Staff begin their work with families from the first time they meet. Families are invited to visit Framnas before they make their decision to apply. They are asked to examine the organisation thoroughly to find out whether Framnas can be of help or not before they decide whether to take part.

Parents know that the staff will be totally open with them, that they will not discuss them with other professionals without letting them know, and that the staff never keep secrets between themselves and the children. Children know this too. Parents know that they will get all important information about their children, which means that children are not exposed to conflicts of loyalty between their parents and staff – they can be sure that parents and staff are working together to help them.

An important part of the work of Framnas is to bring experts and families together to set small realistic goals and to work together to find the means to reach these. In the process, everyone shares responsibility for failure – but, above all, the pride of success is also shared and is not exclusively seen as the achievement of the experts.

Everyone is aware that it is a long and sometimes difficult process. It is also the staff's job to notice the smallest changes and to help parents, children and others to appreciate and become aware of progress. Staff say that they walk 'baby steps' in the right direction.

Accommodating the whole family

In many countries, services offering emergency accommodation for the whole family remain limited. In France, some family-focused centres, such as the emergency family accommodation centre in Roubaix (Cap Ferret), gained media coverage and raised awareness about the lack of support for families who find themselves homeless.[160] However, many other centres often separate families – for instance, providing accommodation for the father in one place and the mother and children in another. The issue of emergency accommodation in Europe, and how it takes the family's situation into account, could well be the focus of a future study.

Holistic residential project

For a long time, ATD Fourth World and its partner organisations have been running family accommodation and support projects in the suburbs of Paris. These offer long-stay schemes and are often the last resort for families facing insecurity and crisis, who are at risk of being split up by child protection measures.

The Family, Social and Cultural Promotion Project in Noisy-le-Grand (France) was set up in 1970 on the site known as Château de France where huts, originally constructed in 1956, had housed more than 250 families in the most complete destitution. This was where Joseph Wresinski set up the

160 Michel D'Haene, 'Parents-alités et CHRS – Approche clinique au centre d'accueil familial 'Cap Ferret' à Roubaix', in *La parentalité exposée*, Collection Mille et un bébés, Ed Erès, 2000

organisation that has now become ATD Fourth World (*see* page 15).

The Château de France Estate is made up of 78 housing units, managed by the Emmaüs company for moderately-priced housing (SA HLM). Under an agreement, 35 units from this total are reserved for families experiencing multiple deprivation, such as:

- **housing** – condemned housing or lack of accommodation
- **employment** – no qualifications, and no sustainable social rehabilitation through employment
- **family life** – children in care or likely to be placed in care
- **health** –poor health, life on disability benefits.

The families living in this estate may have experienced several years of constantly changing circumstances during which couples have never had an opportunity to begin a genuine life together or with their children. For them, family break-up is a real fear.

Work with these families by the ATD Fourth World team in Seine-Saint-Denis is part of a pilot social insertion project made possible through a close partnership with Emmaüs housing association and the state. The stable accommodation offered by Emmaüs is governed by an official agreement, and thus guaranteed by Individual Housing Benefit. ATD Fourth World uses this housing to support families in the process of taking over the tenancy of their accommodation, which will eventually enable them to assume their responsibilities as tenants (payment of rent and insurance, access to housing 'culture', good relationships with neighbours). The security of stable housing allows families to pursue other aspirations.

The goal goes beyond simply providing emergency rehousing. Through a comprehensive approach that promotes family and social welfare, the aim is to enable families to:

- achieve independence and the necessary skills to be able to assume their rights and responsibilities in raising their children
- obtain normal housing (which requires them to acquire a housing 'culture')
- play a full part in social and working life.

Families who arrive at the estate are listened to and supported so that they can express their aspirations and priorities, which can cover the most diverse fields:

- education of children
- access to care
- vocational training
- access to employment
- learning to live with one's neighbours
- managing daily life
- learning to be more independent when dealing with the authorities
- access to cultural associations and the voluntary sector.

These lists are drawn up in partnership with the ATD Fourth World team, local partners and the family. This approach is regularly assessed with the families and updated through the addition of new steps. It has been used for several years with a succession of obstacles, failures and successes.

Families come to the project on the basis of a three-year stay. Some leave before three years have passed, others need longer support in this kind of environment and can stay longer. An evaluation of a ten-year period from 1990 to 1999 showed that 60% of the families stay less then four years in the project.[161]

The family's stay at the Chateau de France Estate is a step towards social reintegration. Between seven and ten families leave their flat each year, having regained the strength for a new beginning in better conditions.

161 ATD Quart Monde, *Bilan d'Etape 1999 – Cité de promotion familiale et sociale*, France, 1999

Parenting support at Noisy-le-Grand

ATD Fourth World integrates activities to strengthen parenting into a holistic programme to support the entire family.

- The community and family pre-school enables parents to play an active role in their toddler's development and awakening. Once in nursery school, children take part in a cultural activity in the housing estate and the district aimed at reinforcing what they have learnt, particularly language skills.
- The Cultural Pivot is targeted at children from 6 to 12 years. It entails a daily process of sharing knowledge to develop children's sense of curiosity and receptiveness to the outside world through books, computing, communication, technical and artistic workshops. A special partnership has been established with the town's multimedia library and other cultural structures.
- The family centre is a community centre for adults, which organises meetings, celebratory events and workshops that combine relaxation, mutual assistance and citizenship. It serves as a resource centre in terms of assuming responsibilities and participating in voluntary activities. The family centre is where the partnership with the various institutional bodies can be developed (housing association, schools, social services). It is also a place for cultural activities, such as the poetry workshop that was set up in 2002.
- The 'human activity' project gives adults and young people an opportunity to become involved in a range of activities that link paid employment, training and culture, with the goal of helping them to imagine a future beyond periodic rehabilitation projects. This aspect of the centre's work led to the creation in early 2002 of the *Travailler et Apprendre Ensemble* (Working and Learning Together) company which offers adults the opportunity to work in a workshop which reconditions computer equipment, and has other production activities.
- The community dimension encourages a collective dynamic and ties between residents on the estate and beyond (family and social activities). The role of neighbours who have experienced the same difficulties is crucial. Many of the first steps towards the activities offered within the housing estate have only been possible with the help of neighbours who were strangers a short while before, but who newcomers could relate to immediately. When the acquisition of knowledge becomes a group affair and receives approval from all generations, families no longer need feel 'guilty' and 'humiliated', but can feel pride instead.

The part of the project aimed at toddlers (which mainly revolves around the community and family pre-school), the Cultural Pre-pivot, and the special support for some families are all examples of ATD Fourth World's innovative approaches to prevention, and child and family protection.

The ATD Fourth World team frequently sees the hope that the birth of a child inspires in a family, the impetus it gives parents in long-term poverty to overcome obstacles, and the capacity of these parents to do all they can for their newborn babies. On the other hand, the team sometimes has to deal with parents who are absent from the community pre-school or who find it difficult to look after their children when other people are watching them. The hardships of daily life also sometimes affect visits to young children with their families at home ('family pre-school').

A mother gave this account of the community pre-school:

> "I really like coming to the pre-school because at least I know I'm with my children, I'm very vigilant. It's true that sometimes my mind is elsewhere, but I know I play more with my children at pre-school than at home. At home, the children stay in their room and play on their own. When I play with them, there's not time to play for long! But when I'm at pre-school, I can play with them and there are other children too; so that means they get used to being with other kids. We feel so happy there that we forget all our troubles, all our worries."

The team always tries to find a balance between responding to young children's needs (perceived by staff and/or expressed by the family) for whom each day of their development counts, and support for parents over a long enough time to build up trust so that they become aware of the problems and the situation can change. The main point of this approach is to allow parents and their little ones to 'grow together' so that they can build a solid and trusting bond between one another.

Many of the families who come to the centre have children who are supervised by AEMO, or children in either institutional care or with a foster family; they are therefore monitored by external professionals who are not part of the project team. They are also in contact with professionals in the local area – mother and baby protection centre, medical-psychological centre etc – and professionals from outside this sector with whom they have established links. This means that the centre's team must work in close cooperation

with these professionals and their institutions, in order to get to know each other better, to gain a shared understanding of the families concerned and to make sure that efforts to support the families' plans are well coordinated.

This collaborative work also aims to help families to attain a greater sense of family wellbeing. So the project team gives parents the support they need to be users and partners in structures such as nursery schools, health centres, play areas, toy libraries, crèches, multimedia centres. To enter into this kind of partnership, parents must feel confident in their abilities as parents, and supported by the relationship they have with their children. The family promotion project therefore aims to create the conditions in which parents and professionals can share their knowledge and experiences with others in confidence, and learn to recognise the abilities and needs of their children, in an atmosphere of security.

Ska children's village in Sweden

Ska children's village, which covers about 80 acres of land on an island about 25 km from Stockholm, is under the jurisdiction of the city's Social Welfare Service. At any one time, up to 15 families and 25 staff and their families are living together in a 'treatment village'. The families live in individual homes and are responsible for their own cooking, household management and finances during the stay. There is a school, a nursery, a gym, a football pitch, a laundry and a cafeteria. A small supermarket and an indoor ice rink are twenty minutes' walk away in a nearby community.

The families who come to Ska are in deep crisis, with serious relationship problems, drug problems, social deprivation, violence, children with behavioural problems. Most of them do not have anyone to support them in daily life. Moving to Ska is voluntary, but families are aware that if they do not come to Ska, their children may be removed from them. They stay for one to two years – sufficient time to achieve lasting change.

This village was created in the 1940s as a place for emotionally disturbed children; from the very beginning, evaluation showed that children were treated more successfully when their natural parents were involved in their progress. In 1972, the village changed to a family treatment centre but the original name, the Children's Village, was retained because of the emphasis on meeting the needs of children.

The main objective of the Children's Village is to offer a therapeutic environment that supports the psychological and social development of the parents as well as the children.[162] Social isolation is broken down as families participate in the village community and take an active role in decision-making. Families are encouraged to learn not only from other professionals, but also from each other's failures and successes. An important part of the treatment is a fundamental belief that all people possess the capacity to implement lasting change in themselves.

A treatment plan is established for each family through the joint agreement of social services authorities, the parents and the staff of the Children's Village. Follow-up is carried out continuously in evaluation meetings. A variety of treatment approaches are used: pedagogic methods, individual, family and art therapy and, of course, learning from one another in the tasks and experiences of everyday life.

Groups of parents learn about children's 'normal' development, what could happen when things go wrong, and how to achieve more adaptive patterns of life. The therapist's role is more to be a facilitator than an instructor. Families who share common socio-economic backgrounds and experiences learn a great deal from each other that middle-class professionals cannot teach them.

162 from Eriksson, Garphult, Hessle, Jernberg, Levin and Wils, 'The focus on family when children are at risk: Swedish Policy in Practice', in Callahan, Hessle, Strega (Edit.), 2000, *op. cit.*

Time that parents do not spend with their children (they are involved in many pre-school and school activities), is used for practical work together with personnel in the EKO-group – a non-profit company with social goals. This group is responsible for the maintenance of buildings, gardens, the animals, and the operation of the lunch restaurant. The EKO-group offers meaningful work which is integral to Village functioning. A chat between a parent and one of the external staff, side-by-side, while getting a job done, can sometimes be more effective than any classical therapy session.

Since the inception of the village, there has been an emphasis on research and evaluation. Very few treatment facilities in Scandinavia have had such a focus on documentation. In 1996 a new model for evaluation was created, including follow-up interviews one year following discharge from Ska, which provide feedback to improve treatment approaches. A study by Hessle and Wåhlander between 1999 and 2000, following up the progress of 97 families who stayed at Ska in the 1970s, revealed overwhelmingly positive results. Most parents said that they felt as if they belonged as a contributing member of a community while they were at the village, and that they regained a sense of optimism and the belief that it was possible to achieve positive change.

Key points

- **Solution-focused schemes and alternative practices in many EU countries lead to a reduction in the number of children and young persons placed in care.**
- **Support schemes or emergency accommodation often fail to provide support to the whole family rather than individuals.**
- **The quality of intervention is usually directly related to the number of children and families that each individual practitioner supports.**
- **On-demand flexible respite care for children offers a useful resource for parents.**
- **Projects that provide long-term accommodation and support for whole families should be evaluated to inform the development of new initiatives.**

Issues for discussion

- **What conditions enable families experiencing long-term poverty and isolation to take part in, and benefit from, empowerment practices such as family group conferences?**
- **Are short-term support programmes appropriate for families facing severe and persistent poverty?**
- **To what extent should residential accommodation for the whole family become a resource for child protection and family rehabilitation programmes?**
- **What is an appropriate caseload for a support worker who is dealing with families in crisis, and what are the financial implications of implementing this?**

Supporting bonds between parents and children in care

"All parents need help caring for their children at some point. The poor do not have the means to be supported in the same ways as other families. Placement should be like a financial grant, helping the family to look after their children so that solutions can be found to their problems. This kind of intervention strengthens the ties between the child and the parents, not the other way round."

Jean Bédard, Quebec social worker, author of *Families in distress*

The gap between messages from research and practice

Various authors stress the need to regard placement intervention as 'support which helps parents to find, or rediscover, their roles as parents and as citizens'. Intervention that separates children from their parents has no point unless it allows a process of parental 'requalification' – in other words, 'helping everyone find their roles, and helping them to fulfil these roles by giving parents the space they need'.[163]

Our European exploration confirms that many projects are heading in this direction, but there is still a long way to go. In spite of all the research into how to involve parents more in the placement process, this has not translated into practice. When parents *are* involved, there are often misunderstandings. ATD Fourth World teams in many different places meet parents who are left on their own when they have been separated from their children. They say, 'We are forgotten'.

A number of authors highlight the extent to which 'returning children to their family' is a 'devalued' or 'unrealistic' objective in the eyes of some professionals.[164] For instance, Hélène Milova studied practice and listened to staff in two residential homes in the Paris area between 1999 and 2000. This study reveals the contradiction between the official objectives underpinning placement in care and the reality of what it offers. The staff members interviewed saw the goal of returning a child to their family as unrealistic. The reasons they gave included the severity of family conflicts and the need for young people to become independent. It was a matter of providing children and young people with the best living conditions and education that the institution could offer; these were often better, from a material point of view, than conditions at home with their families. A typical consequence of this practice is that young people for the most part get used to life at the residential home and, even if they are not in serious conflict with their parents, they have problems during temporary stays with their family, and even more problems when they return on a permanent basis.

Judicial procedures

We do not look in detail at the judicial procedures that accompany care orders; this is a vast and complex subject, particularly when the systems in many different countries must be taken into account. Supplement 6 will deal with placement case law at the European Court of Human Rights (*see* Appendix 1).

163 Isabelle Delens-Ravier, 2001, *see* page 83
164 Hélène Milova, 'Placement en foyer et retour en famille', *Revue Quart Monde* No. 178, Editions Quart Monde, Paris, 2001

Many parents across Europe say that they are unhappy about the way they are defended in child protection hearings in court. The experiences of the ATD Fourth World teams confirms that few lawyers are prepared to argue against the evidence put forward by experts on these delicate matters, and they regard finding what is in the 'interest of the child' as tricky, complex, and sometimes 'diabolical' (the term *diabolique* was used by Françoise Tulkens, judge at the European Court of Human Rights, in a public speech in 2001). This raises issues about lawyers' training and – more generally – about access to fair justice for parents and families living in poverty and exclusion.

The general trend in Europe is towards minimising judicial intervention, avoiding compulsory intervention and offering support on the basis of consensus. For instance, research in the United Kingdom showed that a great deal is spent on bringing a child protection case to court; making these resources available to support the family in the first place could have prevented the need for court proceedings.[165] Nevertheless, issues of 'fair justice' remain vitally important.

There has been some progress in this area. In France, for instance, a decree was adopted in 2002 concerning families' (parents and minors) access to parts of their child protection case files to guarantee and reaffirm the *principe du contradictoire* (principle of respecting the arguments of all interested parties). The law states that when a child is taken into care, the *Aide Sociale à l'enfance* service or the care institution must provide parents with information. Decree No. 2002-261 gives new rights to parents and children who are affected by intervention on the basis of child laws.

This focused attention on the way this measure was implemented. There was media coverage of innovative schemes such as 'cultural mediation'.[166] Under this scheme, judges dealing with cases involving children call on a mediator so that they can have a better understanding of the culture and the reality of life for families of foreign origin in situations where the child is deemed to be at risk.

The new focus on the situation of families facing the judicial systems also stimulated valuable local initiatives: after discovering that families in persistent poverty are isolated and in need of support, one lawyer in the Lille region set up a project, with the involvement of all the relevant state bodies, to offer a welcoming, friendly place for parents and children to meet after they are separated.

Collective support for the parents of children in care

Three recent projects aim to address issues of isolation which can affect parents who have been separated from their children by placement orders, and to help them think, with the help of others, about the legal aspects of their situation.

'Cry for help' group in Belgium

Since 1995, the Cry for help group (*De Noodkreet van de Ronde Tafel*) has run a meeting every two weeks in Louvain attended by about six families whose children are, or have been, placed in care. This discussion and mutual support group helps parents to deal with many different family issues (school, education, weekend activities, possible contact with official bodies).

One of the group's objectives was, whenever possible, to facilitate the speedy return of the children and to give parents the support they need to take charge of their children again, even if the children have behavioural problems and demand a lot of attention. The scheme has had a positive effect:

> "Among the families concerned, the number of children in care has been halved. The children who remain in care gradually stay at home more

165 A Cooper, R Hetherington and I Katz, *The risk factor*, Demos, London, 2003

166 Barranger and de Maximy, *L'enfant sorcier entre ses deux juges*, Ed Odin, France, 2000

> often during holidays. Some children are placed in care again, but this time when there is full collaboration between the parents and the authorities."[167]

Le Fil d'Ariane in France

Le Fil d'Ariane was set up in France in 1998 to prevent the placement of children in care and to support families whose children are in care. Catherine Gadot, the founder and director, was separated from her own daughter for six years. Her daughter was six months old when she was placed in care. Gadot describes the experience:

> "At the time I found it very difficult to cope with the separation which made me think I was a bad mother, that I was incapable and irresponsible, and that a foster family would be better than me. After a hard struggle, with myself, the social workers and the authorities, I got my daughter back. That is why I decided to set up this organisation, to give parents the support that I had needed so much."[168]

The organisation is run by volunteer parents, and offers:

- **listening** – a 24-hour helpline and meetings between parents
- **information** – useful and suitable services for parents
- **support and mediation** – acting as a mediator between social workers and parents.

My child is in care, I have rights – the leaflet for parents published by *Le Fil d'Ariane* – has been widely circulated with the support of the Ministry of Family Affairs. It answers questions such as:

- What is the Child Welfare Authority (*Aide Sociale à l'enfance*) in France?
- What does it do?
- Under what circumstances can a child be taken into care by this service?
- Where will my child be placed by the authority?
- What are the parents' rights and responsibilities when their child is in care?
- Who makes the decisions about the child's daily life?
- What are the child's rights?
- What happens if you abandon your child?

Kinderschutz-Zentrum discussion group in Germany

This scheme in Berlin has only been running since 2003.[169] Child protection in Germany is regulated by the child welfare law, which gives parents the right to support when they are having severe difficulties in bringing up their children. It is only when the child's development is seriously threatened – and when it has not been possible to implement a support plan with the parents – that the child can be removed from the parents against the parents' will. The removal must be assessed for its legality.

The *Kinderschutz-Zentrum* child protection centre in Berlin is open from 9am to 8pm every day, offering confidential support, which can be anonymous, with no bureaucratic procedures to go through. When a child has been removed from a family, the centre can constantly monitor whether continued separation is still justified.

The centre's team say that removal creates major problems. Many parents feel more hounded than supported by the child protection service; they feel targeted and demoralised. It is difficult to support parents who feel devalued, who may live very isolated lives. Often, they haven't had a single positive experience of the local authorities, and they don't expect any better from the child protection service. Attempts to make a connection with them often end in failure.

167 *Journal du Droit des jeunes*, 'Pauvreté, enfants, placement', No. 197, Belgium, 2000
168 Catherine Gadot in *Mon enfant est placé, j'ai des droits, Le fil d'ariane*, France, 2001
169 From information provided by Georg Kohaupt and Jürgen Werner, Kinderschutz-Zentrum Berlin, 2003

Relationships between the child's foster home, child support services and parents can be marked by conflict. In order to make some progress, the centre offers group meetings for parents whose children have been placed in children's homes so they can share experiences with each other and discuss a variety of issues such as:

- What is our role in the process as parents?
- How can we fulfil our responsibilities towards our children?
- How can we deal with the ways our children change when they are in the residential home?
- What are our thoughts on family at this stage?
- How can we contribute our ideas when we are dealing with the child support service?
- How do we react when our children live with other 'parents' who 'compete' with us?

Discussions on these topics focus on the parents' interests. Ten meetings are held, once a week. The meetings take place in the offices in Berlin, so that they are not too closely associated with the residential centres. Parents are told about the groups and the benefits of getting involved with them by social organisations or child support social workers, but they decide for themselves whether to take part.

That is the theory behind the scheme; the team says that the reality is more complicated. After many people said there was an urgent need for this kind of group, only four sets of parents signed up for it. Getting the scheme going was a slow process, with a lot of effort going into maintaining good relationships between all involved. The parents' problems are very varied and the circumstances leading to placement are often particularly complicated. The scheme is still in its early days and it is difficult to predict how it will evolve.

Temporary accommodation: strengthening the parent-child bond

Collaboration with parents must be seen as an essential qualitative element in the task of accommodating children. Practical experience, research studies and cases examined under article 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights all confirm that favourable results can be achieved from the placement process only if the parents are positively involved.

The professional staff of residential institutions, or foster families, do not usually have the task or the means of supporting parents at times when their children are in care. Our exploration confirms the need for training, supervision and organisation to encourage schemes which involve parents, on an individual and collective level. The professionals and volunteers linked with intervention must be given training to help them understand the socio-cultural backgrounds of children (particularly when the families concerned are affected by poverty and exclusion), so that they develop positive, respectful attitudes, and are able to enter into a dialogue and undertake projects together.

Moving in this direction, care for children – whether institutional or in a foster family – could become a service which is more closely connected to the family, with temporary care for children developed to support the family's projects and needs. Within this process, the existing structures and their staff (residential homes, the networks which monitor and support foster families) can be agents of this change.

National and local funding to support this movement will need to favour types of intervention which involve family input in decision-making, and which

support family projects, within the context of local or community solidarity. Family and friends care should also be recognised and supported as a positive care arrangement.

Kinship care: a 'family continuity' oriented alternative

Across Europe, there is increasing recognition of the benefits of kinship care for children who would otherwise be accommodated in a foster or residential placement. Kinship care can be defined as the provision of full-time nurturing and protection of children by adults (other than parents) who have a family or friendship relationship bond with the parents and children. This care is usually provided by grandparents. Kinship care arrangements may be informal, formal or within a foster placement.

In most project countries, there is a lack of reliable data about the number and the situation of children and young people being brought up by a grandparent, relative or friend, but many national policy moves and NGO position statements support the development of formal kinship care as an alternative to other forms of placement. In 2003, Felicity Collier, Chief Executive of the British Association for Adoption and Fostering, said, 'the first route to permanence for any child should be a safe and supported return to the birth parents followed by a placement in the wider family network'.

Numerous reviews and reports address the issue, especially in the USA, where the use of kin as carers has expanded faster than the ability of administrations to assess whether existing care policies are appropriate for kinship care.[1] In Europe, research evidence strongly suggests that children cared for by relatives do at least as well as children cared for by strangers.[2] Young people talk of feeling safe and secure within the extended family, avoiding being 'in care' and being looked after by strangers, and maintaining links with family and with brothers and sisters. Yet international comparisons suggest that many countries have not yet resolved the question of how to provide financial and other support to family and friends carers unless they are registered foster carers. Some EU Member States, such as Germany or Ireland, are legally required to pay kinship carers at the same rates as non-family foster carers.

Evidence also confirms that low-income households are over-represented among kin care-givers; children in kinship care face more environmental and economical hardships than children in non-kin foster care. Kinship care provides children with continuity; carers are usually familiar to the children and help children maintain family ties. The challenge for policy-makers is to create adequate funding and support to secure these benefits.

In *Funding family and friends care: the way forward*, the Family Rights Group recommends that family and friends care is recognised and developed as a distinct care arrangement for children, commanding its own policy, guidance and regulation.

1 Jean Stogdon, *Grandparents and kinship care in the USA: an account of a journey to the United States of America to explore the role of grandparents and kinship care*, 1998, available at www.grandparentsplus.org.uk/research-1/index.html
2 Alison Richards and Robert Tapsfield, *Funding family and friends care: the way forward*, Family Rights Group, London, 2003

Integrating parents into the support process at KinderHaus in Germany

The headquarters of KinderHaus can be found in a very tall housing complex in north east Berlin. It is one of the biggest residential centres for children and young people in the Berlin area. The association offers 26 different types of care and support, depending on the needs and wishes of the child and their family. The association operates on three core principles:

- focus on the social environment
- involving children, young people and their parents
- facilitating access to art, culture and knowledge.

Among the 26 projects, there is:

- daycare
- group accommodation (children and young people, with a significant presence of professionals)

- WG's (*Wohngemeinschaft*) – accommodation communities for teenagers with more independence
- a children's farm
- a house for very young mothers
- temporary accommodation for crisis situations.

These schemes are run in five different centres as well as about 25 units around the city. At the end of 2002, the schemes were working with a total of 250 children. The youngest are the babies of young mothers (aged 14–15), who are cared for in the main KinderHaus centre where fathers can also visit. The oldest are aged 21–22.

The KinderHaus wants parents to tell them their opinions – in discussions and also through anonymous questionnaires. This feedback is an important part of the work; staff examine it closely and try to improve areas that are criticised. So far, results of the surveys have been very positive.

How can you integrate parents into the support process?

We discuss things with the parents from the outset so that we can work out what will help the family with their difficulties. That could be placement in care, or some other form of child support. When the parents have parental responsibility, and want help from the centre, they must sign a form requesting help with bringing up their child. Signing this form is the start of their active involvement in the support process. If they have sufficient income, they must contribute towards the costs.

If placement in care is decided by a court or by a specially-assigned guardian, the family has the legal right to express their wishes or their choice. The options will be put to the family by a child welfare social worker. If the children are old enough, they can assess the options and choose the one they are happiest with. The child or young person does not always have to make their decision in front of their parents. With some families, their problems are so serious or relationships are so strained that the parents do not dare or do not want to take this step.

The children arrive accompanied by a social worker, a parent, a friend, or an acquaintance. The fact that children and young people who will come to live here can see, with or without their parents, what it is like here, and make their decision in full knowledge of the facts is already a good basis for the programme. There is a preliminary interview before the child, young person or family make the decision whether to come to us. In this interview we try to find out about the expectations of the people concerned, to set short-, medium- and long-term goals which we want to achieve, and we talk about ourselves, the way we see things, what life is like here, our rules etc…

(…) Our work must be transparent to the families. For example, we talk to them about our impressions of their child in terms of the child's strengths and weaknesses, how we and the parents can together help the child. Generally speaking, parents know where their child lives and are allowed to visit on request. This is not the case if the child's wellbeing could be put at risk.

(…) The more parents feel that they can take an active role in their child's life after separation, the more they feel accepted and understood by the staff, and the better the whole collaboration works between us. Many parents take on small responsibilities while their child is with us. For example, they take their child to the doctor, take part, along with us, in meetings with teachers, come and discuss things with us, celebrate birthdays and national holidays with their children. We invite parents to group occasions or other events at the KinderHaus.

Most children are in frequent contact with their families and visit their parents at weekends. The child's weekends usually alternate between staying with the family and being with the group at the centre. The group is temporarily the place where the child feels most comfortable, so it is important for the child to spend time with their group at weekends, and have fun with them.

When it is not possible for the child to visit their family regularly at home, we try to encourage child-family contact in our centres. Sometimes child protection is necessary because the child has been physically or emotionally abused by the parents. In these situations we expect parents to work on their problems, so that they will be able to spend time with their children. Even in these cases, we try to maintain child-parent contact; we are present during meetings so that we can protect the child if necessary.

Some parents refuse to take part in any collaboration. They show little or no interest in their children. It's sometimes painful to see parents who

won't lift a finger for their children. Sometimes, despite all our efforts, we can't get through to these parents and establish a basis for work together. Children and teenagers suffer a lot in these cases.

(…) The work is always very difficult when the placement has been decided by a court or social worker and the parents don't agree with it. It's a blow to the parents and they lose all trust. These parents are often fiercely opposed to any sort of collaboration. In some cases, we manage to build up enough trust with parents to work together. But they very rarely see anything positive or constructive about this kind of support and often refuse to enter into any communication.

(…) The parents who choose to place their child with us retain all their rights and parental responsibility during the whole placement. Even if they have agreed to imposed measures, and have given up some of their parental authority, they still have the right to air their opinions regarding the work being done with their child. They are ultimately the ones who know better than anyone what kind of intervention will help them.

Katrin Breutel
KinderHaus Centre (2003)

Placement near to family and home

The Family and Social Interaction programme, developed in Getafe (in the Madrid area), is an example of 'territorialised' residential care – an approach which has been used in several regions in Spain over the last few years.[170] It is based on the belief that the community to which the children belong contains not only the factors that deprived them of protection, but also the socialising agents and community support which can help them to compensate for the problems in a natural way, and provide them with support adapted to their needs.

The programme is coordinated by two teams: the staff of the residential home where the child is in care, and the family support team. Foremost in the team's thinking is that their work is a temporary measure, and they have these two objectives:

- to create an educational and protective environment for the child as close as possible to their normal home: the same school, the same friends; the same doctor
- to work with the family to resolve their problems, always in a spirit of collaboration; building solid foundations that will allow the return of the child.

Foster families who help children to understand their roots

Christine Abels-Eber, a social work trainer, ran an experimental project with nine foster mothers in the Indre and Loire area in France, which lasted for two years from 1990. It aimed to help foster mothers work with foster children in the construction of their life history and to answer their questions about their origins.

For the first six months, the trainer helped the foster mothers to construct their own life histories. This was a group activity, which enabled the foster mothers not only to gain a deeper understanding of what this could mean for children who may have had a difficult life marked by moves and separations, but also to acquire the skills to help children construct their own history (family trees, finding old photos, producing written work or drawings, and, in particular, visits to their natural family).

In this pilot project the aim was to help foster children to free themselves from traumatising feelings of guilt, and to gain control over their often strange and confusing life history. The trainer also developed a schematic tool called a 'placement tree', which gave a graphical form to placement history with entries for all involved (adults and children).

170 Suarez Gonzalez and Perdomo Molina, *La periferia urbana: atencion residencial* , Documentacion social, Revista de studios sociales y de sociologia aplcada, No. 120, Madrid, 2000

At the end of the project, the foster mothers produced a joint evaluation. Here are some extracts:

> "This work confirmed, in our minds, that the bonds with the parents and the natural family must not be broken – they're so important for the children, and we didn't always realise. (…)
>
> The children went on research trips at weekends, with visits to their parents but also to grandmothers or aunts they don't normally see. In this way they found out about their family.
>
> Most of the natural parents who helped their children to draw family trees were comfortable with the idea. They were interested and sometimes got involved partly because they found it useful for themselves as well. We think that this helped them come back into their child's life to a certain extent, because it strengthened their position, their importance and their identity as parents – and they are the child's parents, not us. What puts their mind at rest and helps them to assume their true role is that the foster family does not appear on the child's family tree. (…)
>
> This work gave us a reason to talk with children about their natural family, and to reposition ourselves in relation to that family by reassuring them about our intentions and by demonstrating to them that we weren't trying to replace them. It allowed us to see that each family, whether a natural or foster family, has its problems, and to accept everyone as they are without judging them."[171]

171 Christine Abels-Eber, *Enfants placés et construction d'historicité*, Harmattan, France, 2000

Key points

- **Placement in care should help parents to strengthen their roles as parents and as citizens; however, returning children to their family is seen as unrealistic in the eyes of many professionals.**
- **Increasingly, changes in law and practice are seeking to offer families support or child accommodation on the basis of consensus; for parents facing long-term poverty, being listened to and understood in fair procedures, whether judicial or not, remains vital.**
- **Parents who have been separated from their children by placement orders need support to cope with their isolation and despair.**
- **Collaboration with parents is an essential qualitative element in the task of accommodating children.**
- **Supporting the bonds between the child and their family and community of origin, and placing them in residential care or with a foster family, are not mutually exclusive and can reinforce each other.**

Issues for discussion

- **What procedures and practices are needed to arrange support and, if needed, placement in care on the basis of consensus?**
- **What changes are needed to ensure that families receive fair justice in legal proceedings concerned with the care of their children?**
- **What preparation and support is needed for when the child returns to their natural family, either on a temporary basis (family occasions, holidays etc), or for the long term?**
- **How can residential care homes and foster parents be prepared to welcome children from very poor families and to take their family background into account?**

Developing high quality services

"I had one social worker help see me through a very traumatic process, and I didn't get what I wanted in the end. But by seeing me through the process, making sure I was informed, keeping me up to date, I felt respected. And that's a good social worker. I walked out with my heart broken, but my dignity intact."

Parents' views
ATD Fourth World UK response to consultation on *Every child matters*

At the end of every main chapter of this discussion paper, we have identified some of the issues that should be addressed in any discussion on the features of good quality services for families living in severe and persistent poverty. This chapter completes the process of identifying these features and is the starting point for a wide-ranging debate on the development of high quality services.

Key features of high quality services

Working constructively with parents: recognising fundamental ties

The first – and principal – criterion for creating services is to tackle child poverty through a comprehensive approach to the family that takes account of family ties, daily life, the family's needs and aspirations.

One of the key messages of this paper is that the fight against child poverty must involve recognition of the natural fundamental bond between a child and their parents. It is an undeniable fact, and a potentially powerful force for positive change which must be tapped. It is not only a question of respecting these bonds, but of helping to construct them, consolidate them and draw on them as soon as possible.

As a result, intervention will seem much more complex for professionals in many ways (relational, organisational). It requires more than simply 'supporting a child who lives in poverty'; it is necessary to collaborate with families to promote and support the whole family group.

Even in the most fragile situations, where everyone agrees that the child is at risk, professionals cannot work constructively with parents unless they acknowledge from the outset that 'parents want their children to flourish'. This *a priori* perspective influences every aspect of the intervention: it determines the kind of relationships and the direction of the intervention. It involves recognition of parents as parents and as potentially important allies in any intervention that aims to protect a child and safeguard their development.

The family continuity principle described in Part 2 is at the heart of several schemes that aim to create alternatives to parent-child separation, including new types of temporary care (for children or whole families) geared to strengthening the family unit. For the vast majority of families living in poverty, this option is a sign of the quality of service provided, and they regard it as a key factor in helping them take up the support which is offered.

The family group and the identity and experience of 'being parents' are

central to how people in poverty interact with society, and are fundamental to improving their situation. This is demonstrated by the work of Delens-Ravier (*see* page 83) and confirmed by the experience of ATD Fourth World.

That applies to the adult parents, but also to the children. That is why the family continuity principle can also be understood in a broader sense:

- *vertically* in terms of guaranteeing lifelong ties
- *horizontally* drawing on these ties at certain points in time.

Children are key players in the fight against poverty and exclusion, galvanising the family into action.

Social and community life

Many of the people we spoke to – both parents and professionals – emphasised the importance of acting in the context of the child's social environment or community.

A number of schemes, rather than being specifically targeted at family support, aim to encourage local or community development for all, and to find ways of getting families together for social occasions, discovery and to introduce new circles of friends and acquaintances.

Many parents living in poverty express a desire to be less isolated, to have more positive contact with people in the area, to be able to participate in community life in an atmosphere in which they feel accepted and respected. We have mentioned a number of community schemes to facilitate access to social life and community participation: social interaction groups, groups in which people can relax, parental groups, centres for parents and children, family outings and holidays, leisure activities and cultural visits. These projects often have multiple positive effects:

- When they participate, the parents and children who are affected by poverty and exclusion, have time together as a family in a relaxing, stimulating and liberating environment.
- Participants get to know each other and mutual support networks develop naturally.
- Encouraged by the presence of others, people are more willing to express themselves and they acquire the skill of articulating their views and thoughts, which is essential for communicating with others, particularly in situations where they are dealing with a professional on their own.
- When professionals take part – sometimes as a resource person, but also as ordinary participants, parents, or service-users – people have an opportunity to find out more about them and the services they provide. The contact is no longer based on an individual's relationships with a professional in a crisis situation, so the relationship can be constructed in a different way.

Many schemes have demonstrated the importance of developing support networks for children and families (such as, Family Group Conferences (page 118), comprehensive family therapeutic approaches (page 121), the Framnas centre in Sweden (page 128). It takes time and commitment to find existing networks – however fragile – for isolated families living in poverty and exclusion, and to strengthen them.

Offering opportunities for families to meet, share their experiences and learn from others, with skilled 'resource people' (professionals or volunteers) present, not only provides them with information; it can also give them the confidence to call on support services when they need them.

Other important factors

We have shown that quality within services for families in long-term poverty depends upon valuing and strengthening positive ties in the family and the community. From the different projects and practice across Europe examined in this paper, it is evident that a number of other factors also contribute to effective support for families isolated by poverty and exclusion:

- removing barriers: accessibility, non-stigmatisation and trust
- transparency and control
- flexibility, adaptation and continuity
- building good personal relations
- respecting parents and enhancing their skills
- time and availability
- building a common cause and risk-taking.

We need to examine how these factors relate to the key feature of family and community ties and to each other. For instance, enabling parents to have control over the support process can create a demand for increased availability and a greater presence of key support workers to prevent the family becoming isolated or rejected because of actions that they may take on their own initiative that are not understood by others in their environment.

In the same way, the enhancement of parenting skills depends, above all, on the parent's relationships with others, notably their peers. The relationship between the professional and the parent is not sufficient in itself. An essential element in this process concerns the development of the family's support network, in the extended family and in the local area.

Removing barriers: accessibility, non-stigmatisation and trust

To avoid stigmatisation, schemes should be available for everyone, with an accessible centre and a good mix of service-users; it is vital for them to be open to everyone in the area rather than focusing on a narrow target group. Nevertheless, both in theory and in practice, schemes must take into account those who find it most difficult to participate and make sure that they are able to be fully involved.

The main challenge facing many projects concerns reaching the families who have the most to gain from the service provided. Institutional and voluntary sector support schemes are often available, but the families who need them most do not use them. This raises several issues about recognising the barriers that prevent people from using services, whether services are easily accessible and whether the delivery of the service is geared to the needs of the most isolated families.

One barrier may be the result of previous experiences. Asking for help is not an easy thing to do. If past experiences of 'help' which didn't help have contributed to feelings of distrust, access to services becomes even more difficult. One of the major obstacles to accessing support for some parents is the fear of entering a process which could end with the removal of their children. One young mother told ATD Fourth World UK that she was unwilling to become involved in a Sure Start programme, as they were 'spies from social services' in charge of child protection. Of course this is untrue, but that is incidental: it shows how deep-rooted is the fear of some families of having their children taken into local authority care.[172] This fear can lead to behaviour which weakens the family even more. Gaining or restoring trust in the support services means taking into account all the factors identified in this chapter.

Making sure that parents and children are informed about their rights and

172 From ATD Fourth World UK contribution to the March 2003 meeting of the UK All Party Parliamentary Group on poverty with Rt Hon Andrew Smith MP, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions assessing the Government's Anti-Poverty Strategy

the services available to them is part of the answer. Several schemes have invested in ways to reach parents and families where they live. Supplement 10 will look in detail at the practices of the Kauwenberg Centre in Antwerp, Belgium, which aims to make its services accessible to all families isolated by poverty and exclusion (*see* Appendix 1).

The WellFamily Service, initiated by the Family Welfare Association (FWA) in the UK, aims to offer a holistic approach to families' problems by providing a bridge between health and social care. Family support coordinators (FSCs) are based in settings where families already go, such as doctors' surgeries; they offer information and advice, listen and discuss concerns – and provide a response.[173]

ATD Fourth World wants to continue developing pilot projects in Europe which aim to make existing schemes more accessible to poor families, and to analyse in detail the factors surrounding questions of accessibility.

Transparency and control

Family Group Conferences (page 118), and the Support Care scheme in which parents can request temporary care for the child (page 125), demonstrate the importance of parents having control over the support process, and a clear idea of its consequences. This is a fundamental criterion for good quality services. The French debate about access to families' files is another example of this issue.

Flexibility, adaptation and continuity

Many of the service-users we met in the course of our exploration stressed how difficult it could be to get small-scale support which they felt they needed at certain times. In some situations the support was disproportionate to the family's needs and did the family more harm than good. Or the family got no help. A social worker told us, 'I can get a large grant to fund educational support for a lone mother with four children, but I can't get a much smaller amount for her to pay a cleaner to come in for three hours twice a week.'

In Germany, being flexible and adaptive to the needs of parents and children is associated with the buzzword *Entsäulung*, which can be translated as being able to act beyond the rigid confines of social and educational support structures.

In the UK, there is a debate centred on the question *Whose services – users or providers?* Research must continue into flexibility and adapting to the family's needs, but there must also be an emphasis on continuity and permanence. A high turnover of staff or the lack of qualified personnel in social services makes it very difficult to maintain a high quality of service, particularly for the most vulnerable families.

Building good personal relationships

Several 'intervention charters' (*see* Home-Start International, page 107; Parental Support Network (REAAP), page 116; Families First, page 123) call on relationship skills and respect for difference on the part of the professionals. This is a key aspect of 'quality of service' for families in poverty and exclusion. We talk of skills rather than human qualities because building relationships is an ongoing process, not something that exists from the outset.

Authors identify the need for tolerance, patience, humility, and a willingness not to always set goals.[174] Claudia Fonseca argues that professionals must be able to reassess their own norms and perceptions, know how to see their own role in perspective, and even question the value of their contributions (*see* page 60). That is one of the objectives of the project *Pooling knowledge on anti-poverty practice* (*see* page 100).

173 Lonica Vanclay, *The Well Family Service Model: a practice Guide*, Family Welfare Association, UK, 2001

174 Jean Luc Aubert, 'La relation d'aide', in *Lire et faire lire dans le Bas Rhin* newsletter, FOL and UDAF, France, 2002

Catherine Le Grand-Sébille, an anthropologist, writes:

> "We should think about the first encounters in those 'support' centres, these establishments of all different kinds where the new arrival is so frequently asked to reveal themselves, to allow themselves to be assessed, to suppress their identity, to recount their story, to justify themselves, to sign agreements to abide by rules or good conduct charters, and even to make life plans.
>
> But the power of hospitality can consist in doing without words, escaping the formality of speech in favour of a smile, a gesture, an approach to the relationship which will reassure and assuage fears. It must never be a case of reducing the other to silence. We must listen to each other well in order to get on. We are simply saying that there should be a place for calm and quiet understanding in support relationships – communication unimpaired by noise."[175]

This approach is shared by many ATD Fourth World projects, in which the

175 Catherine Le Grand-Sébille, 'Se laisser affecter par l'autre: approche anthropologique de l'accompagnement', in *Accompagner*, Collection Mille et Un bébés, Erès, France, 2000

What parents in poverty want from family and parental support: messages from two national surveys

Parenting in a poor environment: stress, support and coping

Between 1997 and 1999, Ghate and Hazel of the Policy Research Bureau surveyed over 1700 parents living in poverty in the UK and conducted qualitative interviews with almost 40 families. They identified how parents are weakened and 'put under pressure' at the individual, family and community level, but also how they remain resilient, and develop coping strategies by drawing on the community and existing support.

They identify several key messages about how parents would like family support to be offered and delivered:

- support must allow parents to feel that they are 'in control' of the situation
- services must be practical, useful and able to meet parents' self-defined needs; services must assess needs in partnership with families.
- services must be more accessible, with longer opening hours and reduced waiting times
- support must build on the existing strengths of parents, and their networks and communities
- there is a downside to some social support, and the loss of privacy associated with some services significantly inhibits their use.

D Ghate and N Hazel, *Parenting in poor environments: stress, support and coping* (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, UK, 2002)

Evaluating French measures against social exclusion

In France the law on combating exclusion is evaluated every two years. In the context of the second of these evaluations, in 2002 ATD Fourth World France conducted a study that included a survey of 270 people living on very low incomes or in poverty and 273 front line professionals. This is a summary of quality of service factors that were identified.

- **Families and professionals must listen more closely to each other**
  When they talk to professionals, many people hold a lot back and reduce their responses to what is strictly necessary. People who have a negative experience generalise about all professionals on that basis. Relationships are even worse when people feel that they have been humiliated. People grow tired of telling their story to countless different professionals and can't see how they feature in the professionals' decisions.
- **Respect and recognition of people's abilities**
  Families want to be treated with dignity and do not want to feel that they are being judged by professionals or by the neighbourhood. They want simpler language which is easier to understand; literacy difficulties should be taken into account.
- **Reaching the poorest and identifying their needs**
  Professionals are not able to devote enough time to each situation; 60% of professionals say that they do not have enough contact with the people in the most difficult situations. The poorest families are hard to identify and may not come to social services voluntarily. Given the lack of time and resources, in order to be effective professionals give priority to identifying needs which they have the means to address, rather than the most severe and complex needs.

ATD Quart Monde France
Dossier d'évaluation de la loi d'orientation relative à la lutte contre les exclusions (Paris, 2002)

first contact with poor families often involves being together or doing something together, rather than questioning, assessing or giving advice.

Respecting parents and enhancing their skills

Sometimes professionals must persevere to enable parents who have been exposed to poverty and exclusion over a long period to demonstrate their parenting skills. 'You must believe in it more than them', some workers say.

If people have had a long experience of counting for nothing, it takes time to regain self-esteem. But it is essential, both for the parents and for the children.

It is vital in a 'therapeutic' context, as Jacques Dayan pointed out:

> "A parent must be helped to develop their self-esteem if further efforts to solve these problems are to be possible. (…) Regaining a certain amount of self-esteem is necessary so that the parent can have a clearer perspective of their children's situation. It is only after recognising their own suffering that a parent can recognise that of their children …"[176]

It is also vital for the construction of identity and social interaction for the children (the importance of the way their parents are regarded, respect for their parents in the environment around them).

Respecting parents must be even more central to intervention when efforts to enhance their skills appear to call into question their abilities as parents. These aspects must constitute an important element of the 'service' offered in connection with the placement of a child in care.

Time and availability

Support needs to be available before there is a crisis. When they have a positive experience of support tailored to their needs, many parents say that they regret the fact that the support arrived so late. We need to create environments in which parents are aware of the services available, and already trust in them.

The quality of services based on human relationships, and provided in a context of serious problems, suffering and calls for help, depends on intervening professionals and volunteers being accessible at the right times. We have seen how schemes like Family First, the Kannerschlass Foundation's PAMO project, La Parenthèse and other parent-child support schemes have tried to meet this demand:

- 24-hour assistance
- limited numbers of cases dealt with at any one time
- opening hours adapted to the needs of families.

The vast majority of people we spoke to thought that the criteria of time and availability are being neglected in the current socio-economic climate and in current policy-making.

Building a common cause and risk-taking

Building partnerships between those who intervene and the families, and supporting the parents' and children's projects, are an integral part of many different kinds of support schemes: therapeutic, educational or more general.

The evaluation by ATD Fourth World of French measures against social exclusion (*see* page 146) stresses the importance of giving professionals the tools to develop cooperative relationships and partnerships with the people who are affected by their interventions:

> "Cooperation leads professionals to share people's aspirations, to work with them to achieve their projects, with each bringing their own perspective, experience and skills to the process. It allows people to feel more at ease with the professionals, and enables them to play more of an active role in changing their life."

176 Jacques Dayan, 'Parentalité et vulnérabilité', in *La parentalité exposée*, Collection Mille et Un bébés, Erès, France, 2002

Some professionals who have reflected on supporting families talk about creating an alliance centred on a project, maintaining this alliance over time and coping with setbacks. The Canadian professor of social work Marilyn Callahan, who has studied numerous schemes from an international perspective, stresses the importance of building a common cause between parents and social workers, and of being on the same side and making plans together for the benefit of children and their families.[177]

French professionals have raised the question 'Will professionals need to integrate new activist approaches into their support work?'[178]

These approaches respond to what parents and families want; they will no doubt form part of the evolution of social, educational and therapeutic work over the years to come. Nevertheless, it would be useful to pay close attention to the way these processes are implemented at the European level. We can already examine in detail the experience in countries where support (especially in the domain of child protection) is based on voluntary participation, where the authorities favour action that is agreed with families on a contractual or voluntary basis. This is the case in Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands, for example.

However, some of those running ATD Fourth World projects have observed cooperative schemes in which parents in severe difficulty have 'signed up' to support plans, even though these plans do not correspond to their true aspirations.

These are the kind of issues that we must continue to explore in a European context. They will undoubtedly lead to the question of 'sharing risk'. Taken together, the quality of service factors lead us to envisage a kind of social work that 'absorbs the risk' in family life – which is always present but in the background – and must leave parents in charge of their children's future.

'We are always in the delicate position of supporting families in which the child could be at risk', said one professional.[179] In European societies, the prevailing approach is based on precaution and general avoidance of risk, but if we are to provide the poorest families with high quality services, we must ask some fundamental questions about whether we are prepared to take risks which, *a priori*, we do not want to take, and what risks we are talking about.

'How can we work together with a family on their projects – projects which are manageable by them at their own pace, based on realistic goals which we want to achieve together, on the understanding that if we fail, we fail together?' asked Marc Otjacques, member of Lutte Solidarités Travail in Belgium.

Being, not doing

The quality of service factors mentioned in this chapter relate less to ways of *doing* and more to a way of *being* – a way of being that enables parents and families to have control over decisions. Of course these factors do translate into ways of operating or organising procedures and services, but they are principally about the general mission the professionals are charged with, the way they are trained, supported, monitored and their work evaluated.

Rob van Pagee, director general of Eigen-Kracht Centrale, which implements family group conferencing in the Netherlands, says:

> "The problem resides in society's perception of social workers, the image of social work projected to society: social workers are seen as saviours, so people become social workers in order to save individuals. We must send out a different message to society. (…) The Family Group Conferencing model is interesting for me (as a social worker) because at last I can

177 Marilyn Callahan, 'Valuing the field: lessons from innovation', in Callahan, Hessle, Strega (Edit.), 2000, *op. cit.*
178 Brigitte Dumont, 'Aller au-délà du regard impossible … Quand ce sont les familles elles-mêmes qui font changer le regard du professionnel', in *Accompagner*, Collection Mille et un bébés, Erès, France, 2000
179 Annie Offe, 'Comment accompagner dans la parentalité des familles à problèmes?', in *La parentalité exposée*, Collection Mille et Un bébés, Erès , France, 2002

perform a role that I am competent in: facilitating, rather than taking decisions concerning another person's life, which in any case is as unhelpful for them as it is for me."[180]

This approach is a challenge; it requires greater or different skills among professionals. It involves sharing the risks facing service-users: you aim at success, but you might fail together.

This approach also requires a new way of evaluating professional practices, particularly concerning progress with the families who have the most difficulty in benefiting from the intervention. Paying particular attention to these families does not mean that others will lose out. Many examples in education, and more generally in the history of innovations in social work, show that skills and practices that are developed to deal with the most complex situations, contribute to improvements for all.

180 Cited by Laura Mirsky, *Family Group Conferencing Worldwide*, International Institute for Restorative Practices, www.iirp.org, USA, 2003

Key points

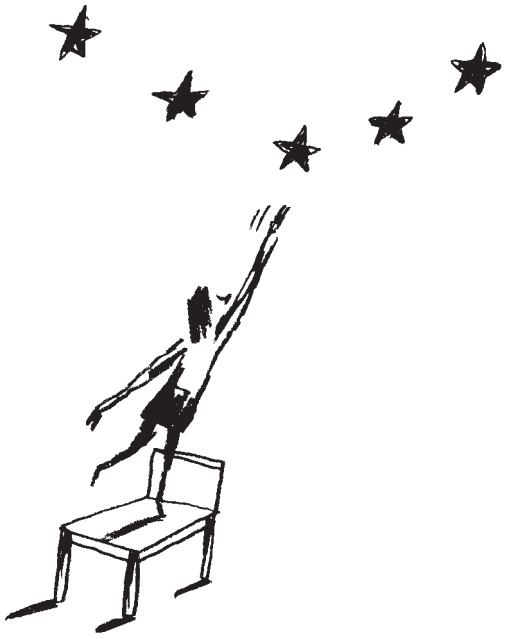
- **Child poverty should be tackled through a comprehensive approach to the family that takes account of family bonds, daily life, the family's needs and aspirations.**
- **Recognition of parents as important allies in any intervention is the cornerstone of accessible quality services for families living in long-term poverty.**
- **Community development should provide ways for families to meet socially and to develop new circles of friends and acquaintances.**
- **The impact of fear of social intervention on access to support services should be understood; environments should be created that parents are prepared to trust.**

Issues for discussion

- **Of the quality criteria that have been identified by our research, which are the most relevant and important for services for children and families living in poverty, and how can they be achieved?**
- **Are there contradictions between the identified criteria for providing good quality services, or repercussions from implementing any of them, which need to be resolved?**
- **What conditions need to be in place for projects in communities affected by poverty and exclusion to involve the families who are the most socially excluded and to respond to their needs and aspirations?**

Conclusion

Fundamental ties and fundamental rights: key elements in the fight against child poverty



Fundamental ties and fundamental rights: key elements in the fight against child poverty

Respecting and enhancing family ties is a vital part of improving access to rights and escaping poverty and social exclusion. In the course of our exploration, we discovered that there is a dynamic at work in which fundamental ties and fundamental rights are closely interwoven. Investment in local development and social bonds – drawing on the knowledge, confidence and solidarity of local communities alongside input from professionals – often makes it possible for people to access their rights, and to carry out their responsibilities as adults and as citizens.

Parents cannot take steps towards accessing their right to support unless they can be confident that the bond with their child will be respected and they have become familiar with, and learnt to trust, a local professional. Of course here, as elsewhere, this complex process must not be simplified. A lack of financial resources can limit people's capacity to participate in social networks, just as it can limit their capacity to access certain forms of support.

We must reaffirm the need for countries in Europe to give priority to a commitment to guaranteeing fundamental rights in this area:

- respect and support for family life
- adequate means of existence
- access to training, jobs and the services which support job-seeking
- housing and the local environment
- health care
- education
- cultural life.

Our exploration has concentrated on the experience of children and parents who are denied several of the fundamental rights, which can be summarised as 'the right to live and grow together as a family':

- the right to bring up a family whose life together as a family will be respected
- the family's right to protection
- the children's right to grow up with their parents in conditions which promote their welfare and development.[181]

This exploration led us to focus on certain aspects of the lives of children and parents who face poverty and social exclusion. This was a deliberate choice, and future work will have to consider these reflections in the context of many other issues, particularly challenges regarding education and training (success at school and the social integration of children), and economic circumstances (access to jobs for young adults and parents, suitable housing and so on).

This paper's contribution must form part of a comprehensive, coherent approach to a European Social Inclusion Strategy – an approach that can take into account every aspect of life, as well as the complexity of human relations and the way our societies are organised.

181 Articles 7 and 9 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights and articles 8, 9, 18 and 27 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

The central messages that emerge reveal that more work needs to be done in order to:

- understand with children and their parents what it means to live in persistent and severe poverty
- link child protection policies with anti-poverty strategies that respond to the aspirations of children and parents
- understand 'family' and 'connectedness' dynamics, and support its positive aspects
- support and create innovative and empowering ways to work with families who are trapped in severe and persistent poverty.

Having reached the end of this exploration, we suggest that this type of comprehensive approach should be centred on two key elements:

- research into effective access to fundamental rights
- strengthening the fundamental social ties which recognise the humanity, value and diversity of every person and create the possibility of increased solidarity within society.

John Murray, Executive Secretary of the Directorate of Social Cohesion of the Council of Europe, said:

> "An exclusive stress on the rights of the individual cannot form a sufficient basis for social cohesion. A society is cohesive only when people are prepared to accept responsibility for one another; indeed, individual rights will be best protected in societies where people feel a shared responsibility for the rights and welfare of all."[182]

We face the challenge of how to create a complex dynamic based on positive human relations and effective access to fundamental rights which will secure the future that children and their parents want. We hope that this work, which has taught us once again the value of gathering messages from research and practice from across Europe, will open up new approaches and new exchanges in response to this challenge.

182 John Murray, Council of Europe, *The challenges facing contemporary social policy in Europe from the perspective of families and family change*, European Union Conference 'Family, change and European Social Policy', Irish Presidency, Dublin, May 2004

Appendices

Appendices

Appendix 1
Supplements

The supplements, which are briefly described in Appendix 1, complement the information and analysis in *Valuing children, valuing parents*. They are intended to stimulate discussion and ideas in the European exchanges promoted by ATD Fourth World following publication of this paper. Some of them will serve as tools in these exchanges, but most will be used more widely. Towards the end of 2004, they will become available at
www.atd-fourthworld.org/europe/valuingchildren/index_vcvp.htm

Supplement 1
Tackling the issues of child poverty and child protection measures: a brief overview of the 10 countries involved in the project
Information on the situation in each of the ten project countries (Germany, Belgium, Spain, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Romania, UK (specifically England) and Sweden), focusing on:

- action to combat child poverty
- perceptions of the links between child protection intervention, child support services (particularly placement in care) and the poverty and exclusion of some of the children affected.

A short transnational overview of child protection systems is also included in this supplement.

Supplement 2
How parents living in severe poverty can contribute to policy development: experience in the United Kingdom
This supplement examines policy developments from the perspective of people who are affected by persistent poverty and exclusion in order to promote their involvement in future exchanges in the context of a European debate. It focuses on issues arising from recent events:

- the drive to tackle child poverty and the development of new forms of family support
- the debate on the child protection services which followed the inquiry into the death of eight-year-old Victoria Climbié (Lord Laming, The Victoria Climbié Inquiry, The Stationery Office, 2003)
- the publication of the Green Paper Every Child Matters (Department for Education and Skills, *Every Child Matters*, The Stationery Office, UK, September 2003)
- the debate on the revision of adoption law.

Although the participation of service-users or clients is often actively sought, the views of some families are still not being fully taken into account. This supplement draws extensively on contributions from parents and families which are the result of:

- policy forums, run by ATD Fourth World UK, where debates are held on aspects of public policy
- interviews in which parents reflected on the issues surrounding their children's wellbeing and the social work related to this, particularly family support and child protection.

Supplement 3

Child poverty in central and eastern Europe: initiatives in Poland and Romania

When the Berlin wall fell in 1989, it would have been difficult to predict the changes in central and eastern Europe over the following decade. To differing degrees, these countries experienced an economic crisis, which exacerbated an underlying social crisis that had been growing since the mid-1970s. Social services were weakened, while families had to cope with growing poverty and a new phenomenon – unemployment. Families that had stayed together up to that point, fell apart under this burden and, in the absence of adequate support, their children ended up in care or on the street.

This supplement examines this situation and the action taken in response to it. It gathers together analyses of the first 15 'transition years'. It recalls that in countries such as Poland and Romania, the story didn't start in 1989 – these countries have had experiences from which others can learn.

Supplement 4

Fighting child poverty: how children and young people can participate

An assessment of the current drive towards the participation of children, following the adoption of the international Convention on the Rights of the Child (article 12: the child has the right to be heard and his/her views taken into consideration) and the United Nations Special Session 'A World Fit For Children' (2002). Among the national and European schemes which aim to encourage children's participation, particular attention is paid to schemes involving children from very poor backgrounds in urban or rural areas, as well as initiatives which encourage the participation of children and young people in children's homes.

Many adults have difficulty in recognising the value of children's contributions, arguing that:

- children who speak are not representative
- certain children become 'professional spokespersons'
- it is difficult to sustain schemes as children grow up
- there is a risk of children being manipulated.

Despite the problems, participatory action must continue to be researched, supported and evaluated. In the context of the fight against child and family poverty, it is vital to make sure that the poorest children are reached, that their parents are also involved in these schemes, and that projects do not separate children living in poverty from other children.

Supplement 5

Focus on early childhood: a project promoting family, social and cultural welfare by ATD Fourth World in Noisy-le-Grand, France

The experiences of a family before its arrival and during its stay at the ATD Fourth World Family, Social and Cultural Promotion Centre in Noisy-le-Grand.

Work relating to early childhood is central to the project, based on an approach which demands an in-depth knowledge of the children, the parents, their background, and the ties between them and with their social environment.

The early childhood team and a child psychologist meet once a week to share and discuss observations. This collective approach allows staff to develop a greater understanding of the children's and parents' requests. It helps them to find ways to discuss their observations with families in a trusting atmosphere and to suggest ways forward that take their aspirations into account.

The staff team and the parents who stay at the centre share a common

concern for the children's wellbeing and development. This concern influences all aspects of family life. The efforts of the parents and the brothers and sisters to secure the best future for the youngest members of the family bring the family together and increase their stability, self-esteem and independence.

Supplement 6
The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg: case law relating to the placement of children in care

Based on a speech in 2001 by Françoise Tulkens, a judge at the European Court of Human Rights, this supplement concerns appeals contesting care orders or compulsory separations of children from their parents that have been brought before the court in Strasbourg.

Around 15 cases are examined – concerning Germany, Belgium, France, Italy, Norway, the Netherlands, Romania, the UK, Sweden and Switzerland. They demonstrate the need for thorough checks on child placements. According to the European Court, although compulsory separations are permissible, in most cases they are not justified unless their ultimate goal is to reunite the natural parent with the child. The placement of a child in care must be a temporary measure that ends as soon as circumstances allow.

Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights states that 'everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life', and defends families against arbitrary interference by the authorities. The analysis of appeals linked to article 8 reveals that the law also affirms that States have 'positive obligations': they must act in a way which supports existing family ties, so court decisions must give children and parents the opportunity to meet so that they can maintain and strengthen their relationship with a view to an eventual reunion.

The supplement includes a detailed look at the case 'Kützner v Germany' (26 February 2002) which concludes that Germany acted in breach of Article 8. The case is notable because the Court gives less weight than before to the local and national authorities' views regarding the child placement decisions. This case also reminds States of their obligation to seek solutions involving family support and other alternative responses before taking the radical step of placing the child in care.

Supplement 7
The role of birth parents of children in care: recent debates and reports from Italy

This supplement examines in turn:

- how natural parents fit into foster care
- the national objective to close some types of children's homes by 1 January 2007
- the debate about adoption for children who have been placed in care by child protection services.

It starts by reviewing the report *Children and teenagers placed with foster families*, published by the Centre For Documentation and Analysis on Childhood and Adolescence in 2002. This presents the results of the first survey to cover the whole of Italy; this follows the adoption of law 149 on the 'right of a minor to a family' in 2001, strengthening respect for the rights of the child, and also protecting and raising the status of the natural family.

Law 149 also introduced the objective to close 'care homes for minors' by the end of 2006. The supplement looks at the debate surrounding the planned closure, which featured in the Italian press in Spring 2003. Italy is preoccupied with what should happen to the 11,000 children and young people who are

currently accommodated in these institutions. The national association of foster families does not support moves to convert large institutions into small family-type care structures. Although the President of a Child Court has emphasised the usefulness of institutional care and the need to guarantee 'absolutely' the temporary nature of placement, the government has reaffirmed its commitment to the closure programme and support for alternatives such as foster care and adoption.

The supplement addresses these different topics from a particular perspective: what do we learn about the natural families, how are they involved in placement procedures, how are their views taken into account and what kind of support do they receive?

Supplement 8
Child protection and youth support: an exchange of ideas between professionals and service-users in the French community of Belgium
This supplement describes the ongoing exchange and consultation programme running in the French Community of Belgium on issues surrounding child placement and support intervention aimed at children, young people and their families. Consultation group meetings are held once a month and include administrative staff, field workers and service-users gathered together by anti-poverty organisations. The supplement covers:

- debates in Belgium which led to the setting up of this consultation group
- an account of its work from 1998 to 2003
- the conditions which made a constructive dialogue possible and how this dialogue is beneficial for the different stakeholders involved.

In its first biennial report, *In dialogue, six years after the General Report on Poverty* in June 2001, the Service de lutte contre la pauvreté, la précarité et l'exclusion sociale highlights the value of the group's work not only in terms of content, but also in terms of working methods based on dialogue and exchange – ' the most far-reaching experience of dialogue' of all those who participate. In the words of one member, 'I don't think these things can be easily reproduced, but the scheme shows that new ways of approaching problems are possible'.

Supplement 9
'We tell you about our worries, and the efforts we go to because of our love for our children': the experience of child protection services recounted by parents in Luxembourg
A couple in Luxembourg affected by child protection interventions record what happened to them, sharing their concerns and describing their efforts. The parents concentrate on what is central to their lives: the desire to grow as a family together and to do the best they can for their children. Their story involves a variety of different parties who are concerned about the wellbeing of the family and the children.

The couple pay particular attention to key periods that coincide with stages in a child's development:

- pregnancy and birth
- when the child reaches two years old and starts to become independent
- starting school.

They reveal the extent to which these periods can be times of great uncertainty, involving a feeling of failure and loss of self-confidence. At these key points, the parents engage with the problems, think about them and look for information and explanations.

This couple's story raises questions about the kind of contact there should be between families and professionals: what should be done to ensure that all

parents, particularly those in poverty and exclusion, can be supported during key periods. It also shows how parents act and react to the group of professionals who work with them –living in a state of constant tension, always seeking a way out.

Supplement 10
A family approach: the Kauwenberg Centre in Antwerp, Belgium
The Kauwenberg centre is a support and drop-in centre for families in Antwerp and the surrounding area, which works with around 150 families who are affected by persistent poverty and exclusion. It employs a team of eight salaried professionals and numerous volunteers, including around fifty people who have had experience of poverty. This supplement describes the enormous range of group activities and individual support offered by the centre, using a 'family approach'.

The centre makes particular efforts to reach the most isolated families living in poverty and to make them aware of the centre so that they do not see the offer of help as some sort of threat and can use the centre's services if they wish. Great care is taken during the first meetings to avoid increasing these families' feelings of distrust. Constant efforts are made to maintain contact with 'those who drop out' in order to avoid ending up working only with 'the strongest' families.

The supplement includes the views of parents who participated in activities run by the centre, expressing their commitment, as citizens, to developing a strategy to combat poverty and exclusion.

Supplement 11
Empowering families: Family Group Conferencing
Family Group Conferencing (FGC) started in New Zealand in the 1980s, and has been developed in the UK, in the Nordic countries (Finland, Norway, Sweden and Denmark), in the Netherlands and in Ireland.

By drawing on numerous evaluations of 'Family Group Conferencing' published in social and scientific literature in the English-speaking world, this supplement aims both to emphasise the innovative aspects of this tool, and also to examine it in relation to the needs of families living in long-term isolation due to severe poverty and exclusion.

Appendix 2
Further reading

Nearly 250 studies and publications, especially in English, French, German and Spanish were cited or referred to in the original French version of *Valuing children, valuing parents*. A selection of English references are listed here for further reading. We also include some website addresses which were useful in the course of our work.

Papers, reports and books by ATD Fourth World

Children of our time: policies for children for the next 20 years – a white paper, Contribution to the UN International year of the child, Editions Science et Service, France, 1979

Comments on the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion of the 15 countries in the European Union, ATD Fourth World Delegation to the EU, Brussels, Belgium, September 2001

Education: opportunities lost – the education system as experienced by families living in poverty, London, United Kingdom, 2000

Every child matters consultation – submission by ATD Fourth World on behalf of the England Anti-Poverty Platform of the UK Coalition Against Poverty, London, United Kingdom, Autumn 2003

Frimhurst, a place of Freedom, Fourth World Journal, London, United Kingdom, Summer 1998

How Poverty Separates Parents and Children: A Challenge to Human Rights, Contribution to the UN 10th anniversary of the International year of the family, New York, USA, 2004

In Focus: adoption, London, United Kingdom, Summer 2001

Memorandum of Evidence to the House of Commons Special Standing Committee in respect of the Adoption and Children Bill, London, United Kingdom, November 2001

National Action Plans for Social Inclusion 2003-2005 as instruments in the fight against extreme poverty, ATD Fourth World Delegation to the EU, Brussels, Belgium, September 2003

P*arents as the first partners of their children's future: an objective for an inclusive Europe*, Proceedings from the 7th European meeting of the Fourth World People's Universities at European Economic and Social Council, Brussels, Belgium, 2001

Participation works: Involving people in poverty in policy-making, London, United Kingdom, 2000

Talk with us, not at us: how to develop a partnership between families in poverty and professionals, London, United Kingdom,1996

Tapori children defend the Convention on the Rights of the Child, contribution to the Special Session on Children at the UN, Pierrelaye, France, May 2002

The poorest, partners in democracy: the Wresinski approach, London, United Kingdom, 1991

This is how we live: listening to the poorest families, Contribution to the UN International year of the family, Editions Quart Monde, Paris, France, 1994

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Edwards, Samoylova et Sleeth, *Family at stake: extreme poverty endangers the right to live as a family*, Contribution to the International Conference 'Let every child have a family – transformation of children's home', Bratislava, 22 to 25 March, 2001

Pauline with Anneke van Elderen, Pauline, *Families of courage*, London, United Kingdom, 1984

Moraene Roberts, *Parenting and Poverty*, Talk on 22/04/02 at the Conference on the framework for assessment of children in need and their families, London, ATD Fourth World, UK, 2002

Jona Rosenfeld and Bruno Tardieu, *Artisans of Democracy: how ordinary people, families in extreme poverty, and social institutions become allies to overcome social exclusion*, University Press of America, Maryland, USA, 2000

Joseph Wresinski, *The Wresinski Report: Chronic Poverty and Lack of Basic Security*, English translation of 1987 French official report, Pierrelaye, France 1994

Papers, reports and books on poverty, child poverty and children's participation

Adelman, Ashworth and Middelton, *Britain's Poorest Children: severe and persistent poverty and exclusion*, Save the Children UK, London, United Kingdom, 2003

Fran Bennett with Moraene Roberts, *From input to influence: participatory approaches to research and inquiry into poverty*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, United Kingdom, 2004

Fran Bennett and Sandy Ruxton, *Including children? Developing a coherent approach to child poverty and social exclusion across Europe*, Euronet, Brussels, Belgium, 2002

Bradbury, Jenkins and Micklewright, *Child Poverty Dynamics in Seven Nations*, Innocenti Working Paper No. 78, UNICEF, Italy, June 2000

Brooks-Gunn, Kamerman, Neuman et Waldfogel, *Social Policies, Family Types and Child Outcomes in Selected OECD Countries*, OECD social, employment and migration working paper No. 6, Paris, France, May 2003

Cantillon and Van den Bosch, *Social policy strategies to combat income poverty of children an families in Europe*, Working Paper No. 336, Luxembourg Income Study, Luxembourg, Dec 2002

Canto Sanchez and Mercarder Prats, *Child Poverty in Spain: what can be said?*, Innocenti Occasional Papers, No. 66, UNICEF, Italy, September 1998

CERC (French Council for Employment, Income and Social Cohesion), *Child poverty in France*, Paris, 2004, report available in English at http://www.cerc.gouv.fr/rapports/report4cerc.pdf

Child Participation Working Group, *12 Lessons Learned from the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children*, International Save the Children Alliance, London, United Kingdom, 2004

Dan Church Aid, *Report from Romania: a childhood in the streets*, Denmark, 2001

Department for Work and Pension, *Measuring child poverty consultation*, United Kingdom, 2003

Petra Hölscher, *A thematic study using transnational comparisons to analyse and identify what combination of policy responses are most successful in preventing and reducing high levels of child poverty*, University of Dortmund, Report commissioned by the European Commission, DG 'Employment and Social Affairs', Brussels, Belgium; final report available autumn 2004

Gerison Lansdown, *Promoting Children's Participation in Democratic Decision-Making*, Innocenti Insight, UNICEF, Italy, July 2001

Local Network Fund for children and young people, *Creating Magic: a celebration of innovative projects tackling child poverty from the ground up*, Community Links, United Kingdom, 2002
John Micklewright, *Child poverty in English-speaking Countries*, Innocenti Working Papers, No. 94, UNICEF, Italy, June 2003
Micklewright and Stewart, *Child Well-Being in the EU – and Enlargement to the East*, Innocenti Working Papers, Economic and Social Policy Series no. 75, UNICEF, Italy, Feb 2000
Tess Ridge, *Childhood poverty and social exclusion from a child perspective – Studies in poverty, inequality and social exclusion*, The policy press, Bristol, United Kingdom, 2002
Debi Roker, *Worth more than this: young people growing up in family poverty*, The Children's Society, 1998 (Interviews with 60 teenagers)
Helen Russell and Christopher Whelan, *Low income and deprivation in an enlarged Europe*, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg,2004
Save the Children UK, *The real deal*, United Kingdom, 1999 (The views of 150 young people aged between 14 and 24 on the subject of social exclusion)
Save the Children Italy, *The Rights of Children in Italy: perspectives in the third sector*, Report drawn up by the Working Group on children's rights, Rome, Italy, English translation 2002
Service de lutte contre la pauvreté, la précarité et l'exclusion sociale, *Another approach to poverty indicators in Belgium – Summary*, Centre pour l'égalité des chances et la lutte contre le racisme, Brussels, Belgium, March 2004
Carolyne Willow, *Bread is free: children and young people talk about poverty*, Children's Right Alliance for England, July 2001 (Interviews with 106 children from different groups, 60 of whom were aged 7 and under).

Papers, reports and books on child protection and care policies

Callahan, Hessle and Strega, *Valuing the field – child welfare in an international context*, Cedr and Ashgate, Aldershot, United Kingdom, 2000
Cleaver and Freeman, *Parental perspectives in cases of suspected child abuse*, HMSO, London, United Kingdom, 1995
Bronwen Cohen, Peter Moss, Pat Petrie and Jennifer Wallace, *A new deal for children? Reforming education and care in England*, Scotland and Sweden, The Policy Press, United Kingdom, June 2004
Cooper, Hetherington and Katz, *The risk factor*, Demos, London, 2003
Cooper, Hetherington, Smith and Wilford, *Protecting Children: Messages from Europe*, Russell House Publishing Ltd, United Kingdom, 1997
Council of Europe, *Child sexual abuse in Europe*, Council of Europe Publishing, Strasbourg, France, 2003
Department for Education and Skills, Green paper *Every Child Matters*, The Stationery Office, Norwich, United Kingdom, 2003
Department of Health, *The challenge of partnership*, HMSO, London, United Kingdom, 1995
Department of Health, *The Children Act now – messages from research*, The Stationery Office, United Kingdom, 2001
Ducci Valerio, *Children in institutions: the beginning of the end – on Italy*, Innocenti Research Centre, UNICEF, Italy, 2003
European Forum for the Child Welfare, *Are children protected against violence in Europe?*, an initial comparative study on the laws, policies and practices in the European Union, EU DAPHNE programme, Brussels, Belgium, 1997

Government of Romania, *Chance for innocence – Review of progress for institutionalized children in Romania*, Bucarest, Romania, 2002

Herczog, Neményi and Wells, *Routes and Reasons: Children Entering and Leaving Institutional Care in Six CEE/CIS Countries*, UNICEF Child Care Forum, Preliminary Report, Geneva, October 2000

International Journal of Child and Family Welfare, *Special Issue – Residential care: Last resort or positive choice? Lessons from around Europe*, Volume 5, number 3, Acco, Belgium, September 2002. See for example: Fernandez del Valle and Casas, Child residential care in the Spanish social protection system, and Zofia Waleria Stelmaszuk, Residential care in Poland: Past, present and future.

Ursula Kilkelly, 'The best of both worlds for the children's right? Interpreting the European Convention of Human Rights in the light of the UN Convention of the rights of the child', *Human rights quarterly*, Vol 23, No. 2, 2001

Lord Laming, *The Victoria Climbié Inquiry*, The Stationery Office, 2003

Roberts and Warman, *Adoption and looked after children: international comparisons*, Family policy briefing No. 1, Family policy studies centre, University of Oxford, 2001

Alan Rushton, 'The adoption of looked after children – A scoping review of research', *Knowledge Review* No. 2, Social Care Institute for Excellence, The Policy Press, United Kingdom, 2003

Save the children, *A Last Resort: The growing concern about children in residential care, Save the Children's position on residential care*, London, United Kingdom, 2003

Social Exclusion Unit Report, *A better education for children in care*, United Kingdom, Sept 2003

UNICEF, *Report of the Regional conference on Children Deprived of Parental Care: Rights and Realities*, Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS) and the Baltic States, Occasional Papers No. 1, Geneva, 2001

UNICEF, *A League Table of Child Maltreatment Deaths in Rich Nations*, Innocenti report card, No. 5, Innocenti Research Centre, UNICF, Italy, September 2003

Voice from the child in care, *Sometimes you've got to shout to be heard – Stories from young people in care*, London, United Kingdom, 1998

Ann Wheal, *Working with parents: learning from people's experience*, Russel House Publishing, 2000

Papers, reports and books on family support

Insoo Kim Berg, *Family Based Services: A Solution-Focused Approach*, W.W. Norton, United Kingdom, 1994

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Useful websites

ATD Fourth World **www.atd-fourthworld.org**
Bernard van Leer Foundation, Netherlands **www.bernardvanleer.org**
CERC, France **www.cerc.gouv.fr**
Child Rights Information Network **www.crin.org**
End Child Poverty Coalition, UK **www.ecpc.org.uk**
Eurochild (with reports from Europrean Forum for Child Welfare) **www.eurochild.org**
Euronet **www.europeanchildrensnetwork.org**
European Anti Poverty Network **www.eapn.orrg**
European Community Action Programme to Combat Social Exclusion 2002–2006 **http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/soc-prot/soc-incl/index_en.htm**
European Exchange Programme A lobby for children **www.lobby-for-children.org**

European Observatory on the Social Situation, Demography and Family **http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/eoss/index_en.html**

European Network of Children and Youth Mentoring Organisations **www.encymo.org**

European Scientific Association for Residential and Foster Care for Children and Adolescents **www.psy.kuleuven.ac.be/ortho/eusarf/index.html**

European Union Daphne Programme **http://europa.eu.int/comm/justice_home/funding/daphne/funding_daphne_en.htm**

Every child matters Green Paper, UK **www.dfes.gov.uk/everychildmatters**

Family Rights Group, UK **www.frg.org.uk**

Home Start International **www.home-start-int.org**

International Association of Training and Reseach in Family Education **www.aifref.be**

International institute for restorative practices, USA **www.iirp.org**

Joseph Rowntree Foundation **www.jrf.org.uk**

The National Family and Parenting Institute, UK **www.nfpi.org**

Parenting Education and Support Forum, UK **www.parenting-forum.org.uk**

Réseaux d'Ecoute, d'Appui et d'Accompagnement aux Parents, France **www.familles.org**

Social Exclusion Unit, UK **www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk**

Sure Start, UK **www.surestart.gov.uk** and **www.ness.bkk.ac.uk**

Tapori **www.tapori.org**

UNICEF Innocenti Research Center **www.unicef-icdc.org**

What Works for Children? and the Evidence Network (joint initiative between Barnardo's, the University of York and City University, UK) **www.whatworksforchildren.org.uk and www.evidencenetwork.org**

Appendix 3
Statistical indicators

Their principal aim of the information in this appendix is to provide figures for the numbers of children affected by the issues in this report. We have therefore tried to gather together a number of comparable figures in order to have a 'statistical idea' of:

- **Children in economic poverty**
  Between 1 and 3 children in every 10 are at risk of economic poverty (family income of less than 50% of the national average in the ten project countries – around 13 million children.
- **Children and parents separated by child protection interventions**
  Between 1 and 4 children in every 200 are affected by child-parent separations due to child protection measures – somewhere between 600,000 and 650,000, depending on the figures used.

This last group is not wholly a subgroup of the first group.

We were unable to find any tables which compared statistics across the countries we are looking at. But many articles, national and international reports note the difficulty of gathering comparative data either at the national or European level concerning 'children at risk'. This highlights the inconsistency of the data and the problems involved in finding accessible ways to stimulate thought in Europe on some of the issues tackled in this report.

The European Union and its Member States are therefore invited to adopt new means of monitoring the issues mentioned here and of sharing and crosschecking figures such as these in years to come.

Sources

Nearly 20 different sources were used to compile the tables. Interpretation of these sources was sometimes problematic because of the fragmentation of data and the different ways in which Member States gather and present data. Some figures are not taken directly from the source data but have been calculated based on source data (adding two or more figures together, for example).

Interpreting the data

The tables must be interpreted with care. The use of different available data would have produced different results. For example, the data supplied by the Household Panel with regard to the level of poverty amongst children does not correspond to the figures provided by Luxembourg Income Studies (www.lisproject.org).

In some cases, there is a variation according to whether or not the figures take into account children who are subject to adoption procedures (children waiting to be adopted and in care). In some countries, short-term placements can be incorporated, in others they cannot.

The same goes for the many different articles and national/international reports which offer figures for the number of children in care or supervised by social services. Each country has several different social care systems that can lead to the separation of children from their parents.

Data on children in care

Some figures are unclear about the exact nature of the placement in care; for instance, when a child is placed within the extended family: does the child still live near their parents? In Sweden the whole family is sometimes welcomed into institutional accommodation, so there is no separation.

We have tried not to incorporate figures for children who were placed in institutions:

- due to severe disabilities
- following judicial proceedings because of criminal activity
- following the imprisonment of one or both natural parents.
  (The European Committee for the Children of Imprisoned Parents (Eurochips), which works on behalf of children separated from an imprisoned parent, estimate that each year almost 500,000 children are affected by this type of separation, sometimes with both parents in prison.)

Table 1 – Population of children and economic poverty in the ten project countries

	Population (thousands) 2000	*Population under 18 years (thousands) 2000*	*% under of 18s*	*Economic poverty among under 18s (% under 50% of av. income)*	*Economic poverty among under 18s (% under 60% of av income)*
Belgium	10,249	2,137	21	12.9	19.6
France	59,238	13,456	23	16	23.4
French Com of Belgium.	4,228 (1)	929	22		
Germany	82,017	15,529	19	10	21.8
Italy	57,530	9,997	17	15.7	23.3
Luxembourg	437	97	22	8.8	23.6
Poland	38,605	9,400	24	28.3 (under 16s) (2)	
Romania	22,438	5,073	23	21.4 (under 16s) (2)	30.8 (1997) (3)
Spain	39,919	7,341	18	18.2	25.4
Sweden	8,882	1,914	22	Less than 4% (4)	
UK	59,415	13,523	23	18.3	27.1
UK – England	49,181 (5)	11,900 (under 16s)			
UK – Scotland	5,064 (5)	1,105 (5)	22		
	Main Source 6 UNICEF 2002			Main Source 7 from EHCP – Eurostat 1996	
Total for the 10 countries	**439 million**	**76.7 million**		**Total pop affected: 12.95 million which is 17 % (50 % threshold)**	

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Table 2 – Number of children separated from their parents following child protection measures in the ten project countries and types of placement
Note the number of children placed in care is the actual figure, not 'in thousands' as in Table 1.

	Number of minors placed + reference date in care (separated from parents)	*Placements in institutions, schools, nurseries …*	*Proportion in care (%)*	*Placements with foster families or relatives*	*Proportion in care (%)*
France	135,000 (2002) (1)	72,000	53	63,000	47
French Com of Belgium	13,937 (2000) (2)	4,950 (see 2)		2,700 (approx)	
Germany	118,710 (31/12/2000) (3)	69,720	59	48,990	41
Italy	25,200	15,000 (4)	73	10,200 (5)	27
Luxembourg	850 (31/12/2001) (6)	620	73	230	27
Poland	108,000 (2000) (7)	58,000	54	50,000	46
Romania	87,750 (31/12/2000) (8)	57,180	65	30,570	35
Spain	27,030 (31/12/1997) (9)	13,890	51	13,140	49
Sweden	14,320 (2001) (10)	3,320	23	11,000	77
UK – England	59,700 (31/03/2002) (11)	13,730	23	45,970	77
UK – Scotland	5,880 (31/03/2000) (12)			3,050 (foster family)	
Total for these countries or regions	**Total number affected: 596,380 which is 1 in 100 children on average**			**Various sources see below**	

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Appendix 4
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“For us, the family is the most important thing.
Without families, we can’t live, we can’t grow up.
But families can’t live in homes or in communities without friendship.
Without friendship, there is no life.”

From the Children’s Appeal, ATD Fourth World International Children’s Forum, Geneva, 20 November 1999

Valuing children, valuing parents **is essential reading for all those who are concerned with the welfare of children and their families. It offers an opportunity to learn from effective practice in 10 countries in Europe.**

Valuing children, valuing parents **highlights the need to listen to children and parents who face severe and persistent poverty in their daily lives. It focuses on the family as a resource in understanding the experience of poverty and developing strategies to eradicate it.**

Children growing up in long-term poverty are more likely to be taken into care than children from other backgrounds. *Valuing children, valuing parents* therefore looks particularly at the experiences of children and parents who become involved with the child protection system. It helps child protection agencies to reshape basic assumptions, practices and policy strategies in their approach to families in poverty.

The European Union Social Inclusion Strategy asks Member States to implement action to ‘preserve family solidarity in all its forms’ as part of the drive against poverty and social exclusion. The research and evidence presented in *Valuing children, valuing parents* suggests how this can be achieved and reinforced. It challenges policy-makers, academics, anti-poverty activists, social workers and community workers to develop partnerships with families to find new ways of supporting them that are effective, humane and empowering.

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