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Foster Family in Russia: Historical Background and Present Day Situation

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Abstract

The foster family is a new form of orphaned children's life arrangement in Russia, though in the historical past of Russia there was such phenomenon as a foster family. Today, we have also obtained some positive experience in this sphere. The article covers the theoretical analysis of this problem, historical background of the foster family genesis in Russia since 1768, the main characteristics of the modern foster family in Russia, problems which the foster family experiences, and the ways of their solution in different regions of the country, experience of social help to the institution of the foster family in Russia. The basic, most efficient tendencies of the foster family functioning in modern Russia are given in the conclusions.

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1. Introduction

A foster family in Russia is rather a new phenomenon. It got its legal status in 1996 when the Family Code of the Russian Federation was approved. The foster family is understood as the custodianship or guardianship over the child or children. The custodianship or guardianship is implemented under the agreement about the foster family, concluded between the guardianship authorities and the adoptive parents or adoptive parent for the period specified in this agreement (Family code, 1996). By the beginning of the XXI century there were about 1000 foster families in Russia. The goal of such family was to provide orphaned children with psychological equilibrium, comfort,

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emotional support, all these things that are significant for a personal growth and development, the child's adequate adaptation in the society. Today in Russia there are more than 700,000 social orphans, 90% of whom have living parents. About 2/3 of these children are brought up in substituting families (Shustova, 2011).

2. Theoretical grounds

The psychological researches have convincingly proved that the need to have a family is one of the child's strongest needs (Dubrovina & Ruzskay, 1990). Therefore, the best substitution of one's own family absence is a new family. Now it has been proved that the family is a source and the mediating link to transfer the socio-historical experience to the child, and, first of all, the experience of emotional and business relationship between people. In this regard, the foster family in the orphan child's life has to take the central place, and the family educational environment has to "return" the child to the fulfilled life, to form a positive image of the surrounding world. At the same time, many researchers investigating foster family problems (Oliferenko & Dementyeva, 2000) consider that there has not yet been formed a specific model of the foster family suitable for the conditions of Russia. Unfortunately, sometimes the practice confirms these data (return of a child from a foster family back to the orphanage which injures the child even more). The practice of foster families creation has not been widely spread so far, the preference is still given to public institutions of the closed type (Biktagirova, 2011). Therefore, it is important to define the major factors of foster family institution development, the formation of the foster family positive image in the socium, child's adaptations in the foster family.

3. The history of the foster family institution in Russia

The history of the foster family institution in our country dates back to the faraway past. The practice of the foster family creation existed in the Russian history since 1768. In the times of tsarist Russia there was the compendium "Meeting of specialists in children's rights in connection with the war of the 16th year" where there was given the detailed description of the so-called artificial family, which was later called a foster family. It is a family that consists of up to 8 people. Children were brought up in such families up to their legal age. Then this form of a family was forgotten and it was revived only in the 90s of the XX century.

Nowadays such form of children's upbringing is spread in Sweden, Germany and many other countries. The arrangement of children withdrawn from parental families for some period of time into a "foster" family is widespread, in particular, in the USA.

4. A foster family in present day Russia

During the first ten years of the foster family existence, only few people knew about such phenomenon as a foster family, many did not understand its purpose, mixed up a foster family with some other forms of custodianship and guardianship, etc. The results of questionnaires, sample interviews, surveys conducted by students of Kazan federal university over the period from 2005 to 2012 testify to this fact. When asked "Do you know what foster family is", the majority of respondents (from 69 to 84%) answered: I do not know, I can hardly imagine. After having been familiarized with the ideas of these concepts, many respondents said that "it is a family of "very generous people", "I sincerely admire them", "it is a serious and important act", this is the "family which can give care, love, mother, father, protection and education". The answer to the question: "Would you like to take the child into the family?" was given according to gender characteristics. Men answered affirmatively in their majority (79%), women divided into halves. They explained the reason of refusal by financial problems, responsibility and the presence of own children (Biktagirova, 2011). Thus, a great many people in Russia simply did not know about a foster family. The child's financial security in the foster family was low. In the Year of the Family (2008), governmental bodies and mass media turned their attention to the problem of foster families, the allowance for children was increased. The information about the foster family institution got on television, radio, on the Internet; there were allocated additional financial funds for foster children treatment, for the utility bills payment etc. It was the time when the positive image of the foster family started to be created in the Russian society. Some Russian regions demonstrated

high rates of foster family formation and the effectiveness of the institute of a foster family as early as 2005 in Samara region (Gurko & Taseev, 2006). Orphanages (in Krasnoyarsk region, in the cities of Lipetzk and Kaluga etc.) began to close in connection with the children's transference to foster families. In 2010-13 the similar tendency is being developed all over Russia. Today there are being created public organizations aimed to support and help foster families. So, in the settlement of Polyana, Ryazan region there have been built cottages for sixteen families raising adopted children. To render some social-psychological assistance to adopted children and foster parents, there has been arranged the service to support families on the basis of Polyanski boarding-school. Social pedagogues, a psychologist, a logopedist, a lawyer perform this service. On April 1, 2009 the Public organization of foster families "We are together!" was created in the city of Kazan. The main objective of this organization is to facilitate family arrangement of orphan children and children deprived of parental care, and also to help social institutions graduates and foster families. At present, the organization is implementing the project "Family home". The building of the former kindergarten has been allocated to this public organization; now it is being rebuilt into the house in which 10 foster families will live under one roof according to the principle "The children's village". In the house there will be arranged different places for club activities, a sports hall, a cozy cafe for joint holidays, psychologist's, lawyer's, logopedist's offices. It is also planned to allocate two apartments for those orphanage graduates who will decide to continue education, or until they receive their own dwelling (Stepanova, 2011). They will have an opportunity to communicate with foster families, their counselors, they will have possibilities to solve communicative tasks, to get acquainted with daily skills and family life; skills that will help them in the future.

4. The main tendencies of the foster family development in Russia today

At present and in the near future, a foster family is considered as one of the ways for Russia to solve the problems of orphaned children integration into the society. We hold to the opinion that upbringing of children deprived of parents' care, experienced negative social sufferings in their own families, is a great pedagogical work that should be paid. A foster family, on the one hand, should have a material basis for orphans' adoption with the state support, on the other hand, it should be open for specialists. Families should be prepared to participate in the psychological selection, have to be trained, and they should be orientated to collaborate with advisory services. This problem is being solved at public and state levels. So, for example, in the Republic of Tatarstan due to the state support of children's family arrangement, interdepartmental interaction, joint work with mass media and population, 89% of orphaned children and children deprived of parental care are brought up in families of the Republic (Bychkova, 2011). In Yakutia 37 social programs are being implemented effectively. One of the most important programs "A family for the child" won the competition in 2012. The number of orphans identified annually in Yakutia decreases from more than 10 000 in 2008 to 5 852 in 2012, 5357 of them live in families. More than 90% of children deprived of parental care live in families there too. In Yakutia the number of foster families has increased by 10 times for the last five years. (Astakhov, 2013). The process of a child's adaptation in the foster family in modern Russia is solved with the support of governmental bodies at social-pedagogical and psychological levels. For this purpose there have been established clubs of adoptive parents, courses and "Schools for foster parents"; there have been published methodical materials "Expecting a child in the family", "Health of a child", "The coast of hope – parental home", etc. All adoptive parents regardless of their experience get support, consultations, they exchange opinions with specialists. Along with all positive results of the present day situation, some problems which the foster family encounters with may be revealed: adoptive parents are not able to correct orphaned children's mental development deviations caused by early deprivation, moral, physical abuse, chronic traumatization on their own, without experts' assistance. Another problem that appears in the established foster family is adoptive parents' distrust of themselves as a parent, the necessity to prove constantly their love and care, the fear to be a bad parent. It leads to such phenomenon as hyper patronage –overindulge and excessive care, and at the same time the absence of reasonable punishment and restriction system. The hyper patronage inevitably leads to different problems in the relationship including child's deviating behavior that supports the image of an inadequate parent and leads to a greater parental uncertainty. These problems are caused, on the one hand, by the closeness of this family for the society; on the other hand, by the insufficient readiness to accept the child. The similar problem may begin to manifest itself after the child's adoption in the family or in case if the situation in the adoptive family has changed: when the child was

necessary for the solution of own, quite often tragic problems (death of a native child, impossibility to have own children, etc.). Afterwards the family overcomes the stress situation and takes the necessity to raise the child as a burden. Besides, the humane aspect of the child's adoption is insufficiently promoted and recognized in our society. Some people accuse families of mercenary motives, regarding the orphanage as a more "romantic" model of orphaned children upbringing, they think that in Russia families cannot treat adopted children as well as they do in Europe and America, but if "someone wants to bring up the orphan, let them adopt". This negative image is supported also by mass media, for example, by television trials of adoptive parents, at the same time information on positive experience is insufficient. Many families complain of their neighbors' suspicious relation to them, some incidents at schools. The solution of these problems allows to consider the foster family as a professional family - a family, "competently bringing up the Citizen, at the request of the state" (Dementyeva & Oliferenko, 2000). Professionalism of the family is characterized by the specific qualification of adoptive parents who have the corresponding education and experience, who have been trained and educated before they take the child for upbringing; by adoptive parents' services payment for the child's support; by the time the child spends in a foster family. In this regard, purposeful and systematic work with families is arranged. The social worker, social teacher and psychologist rendering fast and qualified assistance to families in critical situation are attached to families. It is also necessary to carry out permanent enlightenment of parents, their training aimed at the effective interaction with children in the family.

6. Main conclusions and offers

Today in Russia there has appeared the necessity to change the public attitude to such families in mass media, to create and "advertise" positive image of similar families.

The effectiveness of foster family institution functioning depends on:

- Opportunities to determine and define timely social problems arising within the process of foster family institution functioning;

- Availability of motivation system based on humanistic values, opportunities for foster parent's activity patronage by social pedagogues and psychologists for the purpose to single out a problem;

- Foster parents' social-pedagogical competency, programs for training and advanced training, their realization.

The efficiency of the child's adaptation process in a foster family depends on:

- The child's age during their inclusion into a family,

- the number of children in the family and their desire to help one more unfortunate child, to share parental love and attention with him, completeness of the family, personal qualities of parents and their ideas about their own and adopted children's upbringing;

- General family atmosphere;

- The child's features determined by their prior experience.

At the present time, the foster family has become an integral part of the Russian system of orphaned children upbringing institutions. High pedagogical potential of this form of upbringing is determined by the fact that its application creates conditions for the maximum realization of legislatively consolidated principle of family education priority according to which all children, deprived of parental care, should be transferred to families for upbringing, and only in case of the absence of such opportunity they are transferred to fostering institutions. Family education is the most important factor of children's cultural values and moral guidelines, interpersonal emotional experiences formation. The pedagogical potential of the modern foster family institution should be implemented through: the system of a family state support and orphaned children family upbringing promotion; the enrichment of a foster family institution legal regulations by pedagogical content; the development of grounded methodical recommendations concerning the issues of adopting orphaned children; psychological, pedagogical and legal training of social pedagogues and other specialists for work with foster families; the system enlightenment of population and future foster parents aimed at the increase of a foster family institution status; establishing of special centers to carry out psychological and pedagogical help for foster parents.

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