

Parents Activism in Service Development. Data from National study in Bulgaria.

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The Message

Need for more and systematic research on the topic. Example:
What is needed to enable parents to go from self-help/family help
activism to helping others to working for policy and system reform?
Mapping serve as a roadmap **that** gives helpful general overview of
the field.

Establishing a community is crucial step!

When parents (with lived experience) and individuals (with learned
experience) work together, they have the greatest impact especially
in field of child protection.

Know How Centre for Alternative Care for Children, NBU

- Research – consultancy – training organization in the field of children's rights
- Set up in 2010 to study and provide consultancy to the Deinstitutionalization Reform (closure of children's institutions and development of community services)
- Reform purpose - shifting the paradigm: from social exclusion of vulnerable children through institutional care – towards strengthening the families and their community integration

Research Methodology Used

- **Strengths-based approach:** studying successful practices: ways of coping with poverty , oppression, trauma, using traumatic experiences to foster development (resilience)
- **Participatory action research (PAR)**— a circular process which studies a phenomenon , plans and implements interventions, and studies their effect. PAR aims at achieving social change.
- It is collaborative: the study “participants” enter the role of **co-researchers** to collect, analyse, publish and use the data accumulated.

Parents' Exclusion from the Social Sector

- Parents' are excluded from the DI reform due to tradition and stigma. Every year 2000 children are separated from their parents. Parents are excluded from the process of evaluating the needs of the children and from the interventions provided to them.
- How to change the pattern?
- There are parents who actively resist being excluded.
- Who are those?

Mapping Parent's Activism in Bulgaria

- The objectives of the mapping:
 - identify parent organisations and parent-individuals who are taking action to ensure that the social sector supports families,
 - identify organizations and individuals who help parents change the social system,
 - to point out the successes and barriers to PA, as well as their needs for further development,
 - to analyze PA, both in its own right and with a focus on how it can contribute to overcoming the separation between children and parents in Bulgaria.

The Research Team

- Team of 15 researchers representing 8 regions in Bulgaria were invited to study parents' activism. Neda Petrova, Ilian Rizov, Diana Dimova, Georgi Yanev, Eleonora Hristova, Svetla Mejri, Arso Ganey, Dimitur Simov and Valeria Simova, Gergana Encheva, Dinka Koleva, Elitsa Lingorsky, Galina Markova, Zhaklina Andonova and **Gabriela Staneva (parent activist)**.
- Selection criteria:
 - their empowering approach,
 - national coverage
 - experts by experience
 - The consultants
 - Prof. David Tobis University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN)
 - Prof. Andy Bilson Professor of Social Work, University of Central Lancashire
 - International Parent Advocacy Network (IPAN) Parents, Families and Allies Network to promote parental advocacy and activism in child protection reform

Defining PA

- The activists aim at achieving social change. They address social taboo and they empower other people and sustainable change #power and collaboration and involves structure that regulates the human relations
- „Social change “ is a process aiming at changing the way people are treated, legal frameworks, culture of services.
- Social change can start with an individual who needs to protect her/his child it can continue to change the community, the region, the national and international level.
- **The big change is from dependency to autonomy.**

The Research Process

The mapping process followed the usual research stages:

- Presentation of the task to an Advisory Group, composed of organisations with experience of supporting PA,
- Creating a common mapping strategy: defining indicators for selecting organisations according to their values, approach for inviting participants and a letter of informed consent, creating a semi-structured interview.
- Inviting and interviewing selected organizations,
- "Snowball" stage,
- Analysis,
- Identifying parents, parent organizations, their successes, barriers, achievements, and needs.
- Analysis by region to describe the context and its impact on PA
- Establishing criteria for PA evaluation
- Analysis and creation of a PA map.

Results

- The team identified 32 parents' organizations and networks and 52 organizations and networks who support PA, 78 (52 parents activist and 26 individuals who support them) individual activists. Who are the parents?
 - - children with disabilities,
 - - vulnerable children of Roma community,
 - - children at risk of poverty, exclusion, neglect,
 - - 'general profile' parent who 'fight' against the authoritarian style of services



The Continuum

The team used a scale to define PA level of work.

1. Actions of individuals concerning their own development
2. Actions of individuals concerning their own family development
3. Actions that involve others - individuals and groups with similar problems
4. Going through processes of creating working solutions
5. Planning collective action strategies
6. Generating power to exert influence on the environment
7. Developing leadership, achieving and sustaining meaningful change and processes

Parents activists

- parents of children with disabilities;
- foster parents and adoptive parents;
- parents from vulnerable groups (Roma and refugee community, parents of victims of violence, young parents who grew up in an institution);
- parents of children with mental health problems, including addictions
- active parents aimed to change educational system;
- parents in the field of maternal and child health and care;
- parents of children involved in parental conflicts;
- parents who actively pursue civil rights agendas.

Life cycle of parent's activism

PA begins with a crisis that makes a parent realize that her/his strategies do not work. It can become a motive for PA.



Supporting Organizations and Individuals

52 organizations and 78 individuals who support PA:

Universities

NGO

Municipality services

Activists

Individuals

The criteria for organisations supporting PA: 1/ parents' involvement, 2/ funding, 3/ character; 4/ sustainability, 5/ scope, 6/ ability to renew, 67/ attitudes towards the mapping process.

Challenges

For parents and parents' organizations:

- **Fear of publicity**
- **Lack of knowledge** associated with the specific sectors parents try to change
- **Marginalization**
- **Leadership and organizational skills**
- **Activism has not been recognized as a field**

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Challenges

For people and organizations who support PA

- **Activism has not been recognized as a field.**
- **Lack of financial resources and policy strategies** to include parents in policy and program decision-making.
- Parents' empowerment and participation in the social sector **are not enough integrated into legal procedures and regulations of services.**

Moving Forwards

- **Now that the field has been recognized it is important to set up a community**
- The network created will continue to develop, to study together, disseminate and advocate for prevention of child and family separation. The network will become a resource center supporting its members in their efforts to transform the protection system into one that supports, involve and empower families.

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Thank you for your
attention!