

## Material 3

### 1. Child's perspective

When I was in my mum's belly I heard screams that frightened me. I knew that my father beat my sisters, Aśka and Monika. I also knew that my father did not beat my mum only because she was pregnant. I did not want to be born because I felt it would be even worse. The days I spent in my mother's womb were full of warmth. It was a place where I felt safe. Everyday I heard how my father called my mum and my sister the worst names. I knew he was afraid of hitting my mum. I did not want to be born because I knew that father would be able to beat my mum then. I was afraid that he would beat me too. When I was born I thought that my father would change, that he would no longer drink vodka and beat us all. However, on the first day after leaving the hospital I understood that he became even worse. Everyday I heard my father yelling and calling my family (my mum and sisters) names. I saw how he beat them, kicked them and treated them you know how. The worst days were when my father beat me. He beat me with whatever came to hand: a cable, a heater, sticks, hands and other things. It hurt badly. When I cried, he hit me even worse. When somebody protected me, that person and me were beaten even more. All those days were cold, grey and full of fear. We were all scared of our father. He was unpredictable, cold and so full of hatred. We had no hope that our lives could ever be better. We did not know that those days that were like a terrible nightmare, would be forgotten. We did not know that our lives would be completely different, that we would go to a children's home. One day, out of a sudden, police came and took us there. They told our parents that they were supposed to appear at court for the process concerning us. Of course they did that, but they did not want us to go to the children's home. Father went to prison for abusing us. I went to the children's home in K. and my sisters – to another one in B.

It was not so bad, but I missed my sisters very much. At first it was very hard for me, because older kids sometimes bullied me, but one of the carers really looked after me. I dreamt about seeing my mother and sisters and missed them very much. Each evening I used to stay for hours by the window looking for someone to visit me...

One day my carer told me that there is a family interested in me and my sisters and they would like to take us to their home. I did not know what to say... After all, I missed my mum... If I only could talk to her... Ms Magda told me, however, that I would see my mum soon, that she knew about everything, but she was not able to take care of me then because she had a lot of problems. Apparently, that family agreed that if my mum wanted that, we would be able to see her...

I did not know what to do. I dreamt about living in a normal home, just like my school friends... Without beating and screaming. I did not want to stay in the children's home. After all, it is not a normal home.

Ms Magda told me not to worry, that I would be allowed to make the final decision myself. "Just try, give them a chance, meet them," she said. I agreed. Now I'm only waiting for that meeting and in the evening I imagine what they and their house look like. But, will they like me?

Ania, 13 years.

Source: Sesja druga: Praca zespołowa dla zapewnienia dziecku stabilizacji życiowej (2011). IN: PRIDE Podręcznik dla kandydatów na opiekunów zastępczych i adopcyjnych (p. 29-30). Warsaw: Towarzystwo Nasz Dom.

## 2. Biological parent's perspective

“It is so hard to accept all that.”

The loss of my child was painful enough, but I feel even worse when I have to fight for her attention with those superparents during meetings. Maybe you do not see it, but this is how I feel then. Janina, an employee of the District Family Support Centre, told me that such meetings will teach me a lot and help me to become a better parent. Do not think that I do not know that I am not a very good parent, but those people seem so great that I do not see any hope for myself.

Tadeusz and Zuzanna are foster parents of my child. They seem to be nice people. I am really grateful to them that they took care of my child, as I have no-one else who could do that. However, when Janina goes with me to their house, I feel terribly embarrassed. The worst thing is that I do not know what I should do and everyone is watching me. It would be easier to let them do everything for me, but my daughter Beata looks first at me, then at them and it is clear that she does not know what to do, either. I am sure she thinks I am no good. I am really trying, but always something happens and everything becomes more complicated. It drives me crazy. I have that feeling as if the world was against me. Why does such a thing never happen to my neighbours' family?

Beata is anxious too during those meetings, I see that. She does not know how she should behave in my presence because I am her mother, but I do not take care of her. Ms Janina tells me that I am still her mother and should behave as if we were at our own house. But I do not feel confident with all those people around me. I am not surprised that Beata does not know how to behave. Well, I do not know too.

Sometimes, when I know that I have to go there, I barely can force myself to get up and dress. I really want to meet Beata, but it is connected with so many different things which are not pleasant at all. You can imagine how a woman feels when she has to go to someone else's house to meet her own child. To a house of people who take care of her child, when she cannot, talk to the girl's teachers and help her more than her own mother could have. Do not think I am ungrateful. The foster parents do their best and I see that. They are interested in my opinion and talk with me a lot about my child. They do their best so I would be able to decide about Beata's future, as Janina said. It is helpful. It allows me to feel that I have at least some influence on my daughter's life, but it will never be the same as if she lived with me. Of course that one room where I live could not be a good home.

The feeling of gratefulness will not erase the pain of being separated from my own child. On the contrary, it makes it even worse. I am sorry when I get angry at the foster family, but sometimes I am not able to control myself. It is so hard to accept all that. I wish I could make it all right, so Beata could come back to me, but I am not sure if it ever happens.

Jadwiga, a mother of a child in a foster family

### 3. Biological parent's perspective

They told me that I had to leave her...

I am Zuzia's mother. I am going to tell you something about myself.

I started hearing those voices before Zuzia was born. I was around 16 and attended school. It was very troublesome – the voices were becoming more and more persistent. Kuba, Zuzia's father, was my boyfriend when I was 16. I got pregnant and married him. At first I thought that those voices are only the result of stress. You know, little sleep, a lot of worrying about money, a small child, etc.

But I still heard those voices and sometimes people said that they were worried about Zuzia. Someone sent a family counsellor who helped for a while. However, around the time Zuzia was 7, I was hospitalized for a whole year. I missed her eight birthday. I knew they all are ashamed of me, but in the hospital it was hard as well. The family counsellor and neighbours helped me to return home. Six months later Kuba became seriously ill. He died two years later. I had no money, no family, no job, my own health problems and an 11-year-old daughter who was a bundle of nerves.

I asked my aunt for help. She helped me to take care of Zuzia for some time. She took her to school, feed her, etc. I still had no job and less and less money.

I often forgot to take the prescribed pills. Zuzia sometimes looked scared when I made no sense. Then, one day, I was evicted from my flat. Zuzia was taken to a foster family and I had to live on the streets. Being homeless deprives of everything. I know that Zuzia has to have a home and go to school, have friends and live with people who are able to take care of her. But I am not there.

They told me I have to leave her. But I have no-one else but her. I sent her postcards and money. I really hope that Zuzia receives them and that she knows that I care for her even when I am not with her. Maybe she will save some money and visit me one day.

I visit her only once a year, according to the agreement. However, each time I am very excited. Zuzia is well and is growing fast. I regret the way the events developed, but it seems that she is happy and she has found her place in that family. Her happiness is very important to me!

Source: Sesja czwarta: Strata (2011). IN: PRIDE Podręcznik dla kandydatów na opiekunów zastępczych i adopcyjnych (p. 28). Warsaw: Towarzystwo Nasz Dom.

#### 4. Biological parent's perspective

“Today is the first day of the rest of your life”

My boys have been with me again for as long as two years and I think these were the best two years in my life. There was a time when I was not able to get up to make them breakfast or take them to school. Now such things give me so much happiness! It seems all that happened so I would understand how happy I can be!

I had a difficult childhood, but I guess it was no worse than that of many other people. My parents had left and for some time I lived with one aunt and then another. But I was quite clever. I liked school. Then I got lucky for the first time. I was admitted to the university and, thanks to a scholarship, I completed the first year of my studies. At the university I met Asia. I still see her – how beautiful and young she was. I can barely believe in everything that happened later. We got married and we loved each other very much. She was pregnant, but that was not the only reason of our marriage. Asia's mother was not very happy when I married her daughter. Now I understand her more. For some time Asia and me were doing really fine. She still worked part-time at school and I had two jobs. We were poor, but it was a short period of happiness in my life. However, after giving birth to the second child, Robert, something happened to Asia. I talked to many doctors about that. She stopped being herself and did not take care of the children as she used to. I was still trying to work. For some time it was fine, but then it started getting worse. I did not know what to do. Maybe now I would make a better choice. But then Asia and me were only kids – we were both 20.

Asia more and more often thought about suicide. After what I think was the third attempt during one month we went to a hospital with two little kids and I decided I cannot live like that any longer. I took the children to my mother-in-law. I simply left them there. I came to a conclusion that she would be able to look after them better than me. I also thought that maybe I would be able to do something with Asia, so she would stop constantly thinking about death. You can blame me for leaving my children after everything that happened. I regretted that night a million times. However, I was in a such psychological state that I could not have done anything else.

The court made a lot of fuss about me leaving my boys. It is true that I did not visit them for many months. I am not proud of that. I simply tried to run away from all that. For two year I was living like a tramp. If I had any money, I would have sent them to my boys. I was several hundred kilometres away when Asia finally succeed in doing what she had been trying to do for three years. But I was far away. I did not comfort the boys. They did not even know where to look for me. Asia's mother became the boys' legal guardian. When I finally returned one year later, she did not even allow me to see my children. Asia's mother died one year later – completely unexpectedly. It was a stroke or something like that. The boys were taken to an emergency shelter. I became aware of that six months later. When the news reached me, I hitch-hiked to them for two days.

I spent a lot of time trying to explain my behaviour to the judges, lawyers, social workers, psychologists and all those other people. I think I am still trying. But there is no explanation. However, I still remember that sentence: „Today is the first day of the rest of your life.” It was still not too late for such a first day! I loved my boys, I really loved them.

I remember the first meeting at the centre. It was the first time I met Jan and Renata, the boys' foster parents. I think I hated them because they had what I yearned for. I was appointed a family counsellor named Zofia Szczeńiak. „Szczęście” in Polish means „luck”, so I thought she will bring me luck. I was right.

At first Zofia was tough – a real businesswoman. She was even arrogant. She was often late and always made me sign some papers. We argued a lot and I did not believe that

she wanted the boys to return to me. She was often looking at me with cold eyes, saying: “Jurek, you never wanted to see your kids for almost three years. I am sorry, but I find it hard to believe in you.” I think she wanted to dampen my enthusiasm. However, she helped me to find a job, sent me to consultations and was funny in way – she was excited when I did what she told me to do. Then I finally started meeting the boys, although I still did not want to talk with their foster parents. I thought they were my enemies and they watched me carefully during meetings with the boys, as if they waited till I made some mistake or something like that. I was shocked when I found out that they told Zofia that I was really good with the boys. During the next meeting they told everyone that they believed the boys should see me more often. Then I understood why they were so unapproachable. They loved my boys and wanted to protect them. Many people supported me. Even my boss wrote a letter to Zofia, describing me as a very responsible employee. It took a lot of time and there were several difficult moments. I think the most helpful was the visit at Jan and Renata’s house. They helped the boys to understand the whole situation. I would never do that without them.

Zofia sent me a Christmas card. She wrote: “Jurek, thank you for restoring my belief in true fatherhood, you have taught me a lot.”

Now I perform a father’s duties every day and I am deeply touched, seeing how my boys are growing up.

Jurek, a father “reborn”

Source: Sesja druga: Praca zespołowa dla zapewnienia dziecku stabilizacji życiowej (2011). IN: PRIDE Podręcznik dla kandydatów na opiekunów zastępczych i adopcyjnych (p. 27-28). Warsaw: Towarzystwo Nasz Dom.