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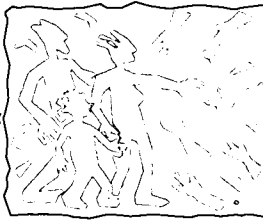
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ABSTRACT

The Resource Families project experiments with new ways of meeting information, support, and assistance needs of Italian families with infants and defines new directions and procedures to inform the development of regional social policies in Italy. The project, funded through the Bernard van Leer Foundation and managed by ISPES (Istituto per la Promozione dello Sviluppo Economico e Sociale), is carried out in five Italian regions: Basilicata, Calabria, Emilia Romagna, Lazio, and Sardegna. This document consists of the following reports on the project: (1) "Resources Families Project," describing the social and political context for the project, local implementation, project impact, and perspectives; (2) "Proposal for the Second Phase," including goals and strategies and a working plan; (3) a report describing the 1995-98 implementation in Sardegna; (4) a report describing the 1994-98 implementation in Calabria; and (5) a report describing the annual plan for the Basilicata region. Three kinds of action took place: (1) co-planning activities and services, involving cooperation among health, education, and welfare agencies and the participating families; (2) community service management; and (3) support for families with difficulties in order to enhance their integration in the community. Report 1 notes that the project had positive results for families' perceptions of themselves as a strong component of a new form of social citizenship and had a positive effect on agencies' professional staff. This report suggests possible processes for service design and implementation. (KB)

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PROGETTO INTERREGIONALE
SULLE POLITICHE SOCIALI
PER LA FAMIGLIA E L'INFANZIA

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RESOURCES FAMILIES PROJECT

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THE “RESOURCE FAMILIES” PROJECT IN THE ITALIAN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE NINETIES

THE PROJECT

The Resource Families project may be placed within the wide debate of rethinking the reorganization of the welfare systems in general, and of creating specific welfare systems for local communities. The central elements of this reflection are linked to the contents and to the modalities with which the services are delivered; to their actual responding to the citizens’ needs; to the connection between the professional staff activities, and the socialization skills of the clients themselves. It is a matter of redefining both the forms with which the agencies have become an actual presence in the community and are a “resource” to support and guide the changes of the community itself, and the extent to which these processes invest and involve the availability and abilities of the clients of the agencies.

Two are the main aims of the project:

1. Experimenting the new ways and new forms of answering the needs of information, support, and assistance of the families, particularly those with infant children
2. Defining new directions and new procedures to articulate the Regional Governments social policies.

The reflections on the new directions of social policy have identified the following as qualifying points for the achievement of a new welfare system:

- a) **the family as the subject of social policies**, considering the family as a subject of social policies means to acknowledge their ability to make choices; to propose themselves as “specialized staff” of the interventions, with their own knowledge and skills; to define work routes integrated with those of the agencies; to orient the general guidelines that concern them directly.

- b) **integration among social services, health care service, education and cultural services**, integrating all interventions carried out by various agencies in a connected system of activities, which would highlight specific competencies, and different modalities of work in the wider frame of the objectives defined jointly together.
- c) **giving value to local specificity** as to designing projects, socializing skills, interventions, etc.
- d) **giving value to the relation between public and private**, giving citizenship to the various modalities of relationship that exist between public agencies and other subjects available, in order to coordinate the actions in the local communities
- e) **the connection among the various institutional levels** with power of decision and policy making, planning and financial management as to social policies.

The Resource families project is managed by ISPES and financed by the Bernard van Leer Foundation. The project is carried out in 5 Italian Regions, Basilicata, Calabria, Emilia Romagna, Lazio, Sardegna.

THE CONTEXT

Families with children

Families with children must face the increase of everyday life complexity, acquire skills, define strategies to combine care-taking work and work outside the family; they must face relational transformations, rapid instability of the family life cycle, and the continuous redefinition of intra- and extra family relationships as their children grow up. Today families often do not have any reference to traditional family and community networks; have poor relational resources in daily life; and find it difficult to combine care-taking time with the poor flexibility of the job market. The traditional services in favor of childhood often no longer respond to the new articulation of the needs of families. In such conditions, even normal events in the life cycle of a family may become critical events if there are no resources available to cope with them.

Furthermore, on the one hand there still exist traditional areas of poverty that mainly hit families with children in some rural areas and/or in some areas of southern Italy; on the other hand there is evidence that the disadvantages and difficulties typical of urban areas are strongly increasing.

The social policies for the family

Traditionally, in Italy there does not exist an explicit policy in support of the family; there do exist actions aimed at categories, addressed to specific target populations, or general services for all citizens. Within the specific legislation that regulates the health services or other social and welfare services, and education services, some agencies that assumed the function of supporting families were developed (i.e. the Family Consultancy). The national specific legislation up to 1977 was the pre-war one. In the '90s some regions adopted specific legislation to support parenthood and started the experimentation of services that would respond to the new articulation of the needs of families and minors. Only in recent years have the local agencies begun to adopt explicit policies for the family, as well as to foster activities aimed at the promotion of childhood wellbeing. In this context, Law 285/97 "Dispositions for the promotion of the rights of childhood and adolescence", has the objective of creating a network of all the different subjects operating in the field within the same territory, in order to pursue the following goals:

a) support for parent-child relations and against poverty and violence, and the creation of alternative services to the institutionalization of minors, b) the promotion of positive actions in order to promote the rights of childhood and adolescence.

From a methodological point of view, the law provides for the tuning up in the design of projects at the local agency level, within the regional action plan, and it identifies the action plan agreement as the instrument for the coordination of the various institutional subjects.

The system of the social and health services and education services and the connection among various institutional subjects

While the arrangement of the National Health Service in the '80s would favor forms of institutional integration between the social and the health services, and in many Regions the legislation provided for the joint management of the social services within the Local Health Units (USL), the reform of the National Health Service at the beginning of the '90s, has institutionally brought about a non-integration of the health services with the social services. Even in those Regions where the Municipalities had widely delegated the USL (the Local Health Units) and where attempts had been made at experimenting a strong integration between social and health provision, in the 90's we have witnessed the re-appropriation of the powers previously delegated by the Municipalities. The centralization and specialization of the health centers and services has then led to a concentration of resources at the second level; to a contraction of resources at the level of basic services throughout the territory; and to a decrease of investment in preventive intervention and health education, whose action, among other things, requires a close cooperation between health and social services to be effective.

Also the public education system has undergone in the '90s a progressive centralization and urbanization, with the progressive closing of schools, mostly in extra-urban areas; and it continues to present gaps not only among the various levels of schools but also with extra-scholastic activities. The system of pre-school services is extremely differentiated as to its diffusion and organization among the various regions in Italy. There are areas with a serious lack even in the traditional typology of services (day-care and nursery schools); and there are other areas in which, because of both the unbearable financial burden imposed by such structures, and their inadequacy with respect to the new family strategies, new typologies of services are being experimented (micro-nurseries, home day care...).

The relationship between the various institutional levels is made extremely complex by a legislation which fails to clearly define the principle of subsidiarity among the different services, and which is not linear in the definition of the levels of planning and management; by a clear cut separation of the health management from the local autonomies; by the survival of agencies such as the Provinces, which continue to have the function of connecting the different plans of action albeit being squeezed in between a “State of the Regions” and a “State of the Municipalities”.

The subjects of social policies

The 1991 legislation that regulates volunteer work and social cooperation has helped defining new subjects of social policy who contribute, together with the local agency, to the promotion of the community's wellbeing. Social policy does not wear out with public policy; rather one witnesses the emergence of a plurality of subjects as producers of services, of various forms of solidarity, of self managed collective services. New forms of social collective identity are developing and are acknowledged, and the landscape of volunteer work, associations, mutual groups, self-help groups... is enriched. But the multiplication of the subjects of social policy risks proposing a bipolar (public/private) model, a fragmented and self-referential model if such subjects do not have community roots capable of enhancing forms of responsabilization, of participation, and of aggregation with the primary networks. This can furthermore lead to new forms of society citizenship (participation of collective subjects) on the one hand, but on the other it can also lead to a dynamic of bureaucratization and “publicization” of the private social agencies which would not give voice nor would represent the family as a social subject, meant as a primary relation network.

The transformation of the citizenship strategies and of citizen participation

During the '90s the concept of the citizens political participation that had strongly characterized the '70s and 80's has been transformed. The National Health Service is depoliticized (the USL is no longer the organ of the Municipalities), but forms of information and protection of the rights of the clients of the services are introduced; in the relation between the citizen and the local agency forms of transparency and de-bureaucratization are introduced, which protect the user of the service or the carrier of a right. If, on one hand, a

new concept emerges of the client of the Public Administration, on the other hand the multiplication of the subjects of social policies can allow for a passage from a concept of participation as control of the goals of the system, to a concept of participation as plural production of the goals of the system. The crisis of political citizenship can leave room to individual subjects (clients and users of the services) or prefigure forms of society citizenship (participation of collective subjects).

The policies of community care and networking

The philosophy of community care has been the guideline of the policies of de-institutionalization from the '70s to nowadays, which have shaped an arrangement of organizations and of typologies of action meant to integrate or substitute the primary networks, in order to allow people at risk of institutionalization to avoid being expelled from their own life environment and relationships, and which can allow their family members to meet their care-taking obligations. However, often a model of care-taking in the community has been put into place (territorial services, home care services, etc.) rather than care-taking by the community (which is to say community empowerment). Strictly connected to the crisis of traditional welfare, both debate and experimentation of networking have started once again. The concept of network concerns both a variety of intra-subjective or interacting connections, and a variety of services and structures connected one to the other.

The theoretical and methodological approaches to networking vary, but they all have in common the promotion of strategies of community empowerment, of increasing resources, in order to ignite processes of change, of strategies to connect the subjects to the network.

The methodology of social work

The complexity of the needs on the one hand, and the fragility of the relation networks on the other, are elements that compel the social workers to elaborate complex responses to the needs of their clients, rather than punctual and fragmented ones. This also compels them to give a technically specific response, but taking into account the networks of relationships of the clients of the agency. It is the ineffectiveness of the single reparatory social welfare intervention that imposes to the social services action to be more and more qualified as social network action , rather than social assistance. It has to be preventive more than reparatory; to

be directed to supporting everyday life strategies rather than intervening upon a crisis or emerging need. The crisis of traditional welfare and of the centrality of public action demands a profound reflection on what it means to promote the user's autonomy, igniting a process, breaking all dependence on the social service; it makes it necessary to think over again how to transform the welfare dependencies on the agency into inter-dependencies in the community.

Upon the above mentioned elements of this context the " Resource Families Project " in its articulations and localization has the following goals:

1. identifying and experimenting support and assistance actions for the care-taking functions of the family with children
2. experimenting at local and regional level social policy strategies for the family
3. identifying and experimenting forms of methodological integration among services and of connecting various institutional subjects
4. identifying actions to support the family as a subject of social policy
5. identifying forms of active society citizenship in the reorganization of the relations between families and services
6. experimenting a network with institutions and families, which would have as its own connotation the founding of community empowerment based not on the fracture existing between the institutions and society, but rather on their mutual reinforcement
7. experimenting a methodology of social work that work on daily life rather than on risk, on the growth of autonomy, but also, at the same time, of interdependencies.

THE LOCALIZATION OF THE PROJECT AND THE INSTITUTIONAL INTERLOCUTORS

The “Resource Families” project meant to tackle on a twofold level the hypothesis of the reorganization of the welfare system:

- a) On the one hand the local action --micro- communitarian-- meant to give value to the resources of a community and to promote forms of active citizenship; to create synergies among vital worlds, families and agencies, in order to promote the wellbeing of minors, the care-taking skill of parents, the ability to overcome critical moments of the family life cycle. In order to do that, the group “resource-families/agencies” was experimented as model for group action.

- b) On the other hand, the action meant to give roots to models of experimentation which could potentially be disseminated and taken on by local and regional institutions as possible innovative models of social policy for the family.

The project, therefore, on the one hand has adopted its own methodologies of networking, on the other can be identified as an institutional action aimed at proposing forms of taking on the experimentation at the various institutional levels.

Considering the absence of a national unifying legislation and the fragmented framework proposed by the various Regions, it seemed of particular importance and meaning to start experimenting in five Italian Regions: Basilicata, Calabria, Lazio, Emilia-Romagna and Sardegna. These regions are different for what concerns the demographic data on minors (children with less than five years of age are the 6.4% in Calabria, in Emilia the 3.6%); the composition of the families; the systems of services for infancy; the forms of citizenship, of relations between the citizens and the institutions; the forms of infancy disadvantage or difficulties.

If on the one hand the project had to cope with wants of the public actions, with services for infancy that are not able to adequately perform their tasks of family development, on the other hand it had to face the critical points of a system of services like the one in Emilia, which is excessively structured and hardly flexible to the changes in the needs of the families.

The regional level had been chosen as the best level for the possible experimentation of social policies for families, considering the power of legislation of the Regions together with those of complex planning and coordination, if compared to the local agencies.

THE LOCAL EXPERIMENTATIONS: THE RESOURCE FAMILIES AND THE PROFESSIONAL STAFF

THE METHODOLOGY

The local project design was methodologically articulated in moments that were the same for all the experimentations:

1. *Training and self training activities* of the professional staff of the concerned agencies (social workers, psychologists, medical doctors at the Family Consultancy, etc.) consisting of the thorough study of subjects connected to work organization, knowledge of the territory, network, action plan:
2. *Identifying the resource families* using criteria such as the care-taking and solidarity skills, the capacity to reorganize one's life when facing the family life cycle; the interest towards forms of social involvement, a fair –non excessive—social political exposition
3. *The training of the families* which was focused on their knowledge and their skills; and which explored the possibility of utilizing them in relation to the agencies and the community.
4. *The training of the resource families group and of the professional staff together*; the common need analysis and the study of modalities to ignite responses on matters such as procreation, care and education of children, moments of crisis in the family life cycle, families in difficulty.
5. *Joint action plan* among the agencies and the resource families based on the identification of common objectives, and on the accomplishment of specific activities by each of the group members
6. *Constant assessment* of the activities and their outcomes; redesigning actions.

THE RESOURCE FAMILIES

The resource families are a resource for the community, a resource for the professional staff and the agencies, a resource for other families. The assumption of the experimentation was that of overcoming the traditional attitude the social welfare and health services have towards the agencies clients. This implied, therefore, judging the families not as passive clients, but as actual actors of change, subjects capable of defining not only their own or the community's needs, but of tackling possible ways of responding to these needs. It implied judging them to be competent subjects, with a knowledge of their own territory, of the networks of relations of the community and able to activate them.

Families and not individuals, not citizens, not volunteer workers, not resource-persons: families because what is at stake here is the family's relational skill and the family's ability to networking relations as a complex body. The family as a social relation, as a reticular structure which, being a network, moves between the two poles public/private, connecting them and giving public attention to its own functions. The family as complex network of relations, able to ignite complex structural and symbolic relations, becoming the possible core of a society citizenship. It does have a different value and impact when people put their own relations, their own skills as individuals inside a network of relations, or when they do this as members of a family (the parent, the child, the grandmother, etc.) which is inside a network of relations in its own right. In the activated working groups, even when only one family member was present, s/he represented the family's network of relations, with its complexity, something which had to be acknowledged by the professional staff.

I quote from the paper of one of the coordinators of the regional projects who is here analyzing some critical points which the professional staff/resource families groups had to cope with: *"In the occasions of work that were created, all the families highlighted the fact that they were not at all isolated; that they do have relationships with other families and with formal and informal groups (cultural centers, leisure time groups, volunteer associations, and mutual help groups); and that they are able to activate their relations in order to achieve the goals they think are of interest to others as well. This was an aspect often totally underestimated by the professional staff. They did not manage to see the "families", whom*

they used to think of and address to, not casually, as ladies, mothers, or parents, as subjects carrying a "personal" experience. In this way the professional staff, by highlighting some characteristics of the people attending the meetings have oriented the work of the joint group towards what they were able to read only as the "personal" interest of the single participants, not of the family as a whole."

The resource families are not a volunteer group, have not got their own institutional objective, but they contribute to the definition of common objectives among families and agencies; they do not express themselves with solidarity actions, but with actions of reciprocity: a family with a need asks resources to other families, but can, at least potentially, be a resource for others too. The resource families are not groups of self help who help the group members to cope with common problems.

From the testimony of a resource family: "... I think that the discriminating factor about the resource family if compared to volunteer work, whether it be catholic or non catholic, is this network pattern that is built, and thanks to which one gets to know who the social workers are, what the Family Consultancy does, what other agencies do --all things that one had probably never wondered about in one's everyday normal life..... But by the time one joins into this project one understands the importance of one's time given to it; one understands that this time is aiming at something: the relevance given to the family's point of view. Even though the people who deliver the services may be mothers or fathers in a family of their own, when delivering the service in their own mind they know they are dealing with their job: that's their professionalism. We think that this identity of the "family" must spring up to the foreground. How does the family, this subject of social policies, get into the institutions?"

The differentiation among the actions led by recognized volunteer groups, the solidarity individual actions, and the actions of the resource families is made clear in a document of the resource families of Calabria:

"To synthesize we can say that we are part of local groups (constituted by us families and by the agencies professional staff who get together to:

1. *Design activities to be put into action on behalf of single families or wider groups, with the aim of supporting difficult situations or preventing difficulties;*
2. *Assess how previously started actions are getting on;*
3. *Discuss specific issues or problems identified in the territory;*
4. *Get a better knowledge of the Agencies and how the citizens use them, getting to know the formative actions started in the community by agencies and associations.*

As Resource Families:

- *We are families available to collaboration with the agencies that follow “certain ways”*
- *We are a community observatory*
- *We enhance the use of the Agencies, and help other citizens to learn about them*
- *We participate to actions addressed to single family units, and we extend the possibility of informal support relations in the community*
- *We never participate as “islands”, but as a part of a social network*
- *We stimulate the activation of connections among different structures and agencies in order to improve the relation between the institutions and the citizens*
- *We stimulate and support the agencies professional staff to activating some initiatives that are considered valuable for the community*

The strength of our joint work lies in the fact that:

- *The resource families do not substitute the Agencies*
- *The Agencies do not substitute the families*
- *The proposals about what to do come from the families and/or the professional staff*
- *The actions are designed together on the basis of the action plan.*

And from the document of a group of Sardinian families:

“Who are the resource families?”

They are families who are able to “spend their knowledge more than other families, which is to say, to observe and reflect about their experience and about the experience of others. They are able to develop some actions together with others, which is to say to team work.

*They are families whose **care-taking and solidarity** skills are manifest:*

care-taking skills: it means grasping the needs of the other and elaborating some appropriate responses; it implies responsibility in the sense of assuming consistent behaviors with respect to what has been observed

solidarity: it is strictly connected to the capacity of care-taking and, consequently, it means help to make choices.

*They are families who work in a **network of relations**, both in difficult and in normal situations. The resource families operate:*

with and within their own relations and those of other families

with and within the network of institutional relations

*They are **available** families because they are interested in taking an active part in the changes that the community tries to carry out*

They are families who collaborate with other families to “make family”, which is to say to develop: care-taking abilities, solidarity, social relations, autonomy of choice, organization skills”

THE PROFESSIONAL STAFF OF THE AGENCIES

The professional staff of the health, social welfare, education agencies, are a resource for the community in which they operate thanks to the technical competence and the skills they have. However, often the professional staff are not the carriers of a sharable knowledge that their own clients can use immediately. The technical services, the support or integrating services for the family, wont be directly usable until social networks are created. The support of the specialist in moments of crisis of the family life cycle; the technical support meant to substitute or to integrate some lacks in the family relations; exactly because of their technicalities and for the lack of reciprocity between specialized staff and client, cannot be as effective as a relation among families. Nevertheless, the increased complexity, centralization,

specialization of the services, does not often allow the professional staff to work unless by offering very specific services which answer very specific needs; never do they work with strategies aimed at modifying community relations and networks. The resource families can be a resource for the professional staff and help them to get to know the community; to put themselves in the shoes of the clients of the agencies; to make their service delivery more effective; to act for the sake of change, enhancing autonomy and non passive dependency from the agency by igniting networks of relations that avoid dependency. The resource families can be a tool for the professional staff: they can help enhancing community care policies which reinforce the families' ability to cope with their care-taking obligations; carrying out mediation activities between the clients and the agencies, and risk and difficulty prevention activities in order to reinforce the normality and strengths of the families with difficulties, rather than stigmatizing their pathologies and fragility.

Within the Resource Families Project the professional staff certainly had to tackle some main critical things:

1. the resource families selections. They were difficult because of a) the poor integration of the social and health services, often specialized on pathology and damage, with the widely generalized social, cultural and education services, carries with itself a consequence for the professional staff, which is to say a poor knowledge of normality b) hardly ever the client of a service is perceived also as a potential resource
2. the difficulty to put themselves at the families level, to plan jointly with them, and rather, the tendency not to share information and objectives, not to involve the families in the definition of objectives, but only on the means to achieve them and considering them pieces of a pre-defined plan
3. the difficulty to hold onto a strong technical specificity yet at the same time questioning one's means of observation and action upon reality
4. the need to identify integration with other professions and creating synergies with various social subjects in order to increase their own ability to act and solve complex needs.

THE ACTIONS

The guidelines of action activated in the different places of experimentation are diversified, and reflect on the one hand the needs of a community and on the other its ability to respond to these needs.

One can basically identify three kinds of action:

- a) overall actions for co-planning activities and services
- b) community services management actions
- c) support actions for families with difficulties

Co-planning actions

An example of the co-planning action of an overall service --which implies both the integration among the agencies, and integration among the families and the agencies-- is the *birth process* which has been experimented, or is still in progress, by various local groups of professional staff and resource families. The projects that were activated were able to tackle some of the most critical points of the traditional birth process services promoted and delivered by the Health Services: excessive specialization; poor integration among services; lack of continuity between pre and post birth; poor impact on the daily and practical abilities and knowledge of the neo-parent. Some quotations from the projects: “...often parents, when they come back home after their child's birth, have to cope with a thousand difficulties: practicalities, doubts, insecurities; often they are and they feel lonely... they need to know more about the services available to them, how to chose the pediatrician, where to go for this or the other need, and what to do when a certain need is not met with ready responses. They would like to discuss with somebody, sometimes a specialist, sometimes another parent who has a little more experience” (Ravenna)

This experience and the institutional tasks of the Family Consultancies led to the planning of projects that aimed at activating support actions on behalf of parents during the first period of their newly born baby's life and with some specific objectives:

- *Being the support for exchange, for dialogue and organization of the new parents. The resource families are proposed as an opportunity of discussion to examine and highlight*

doubts, insecurities, ways of being and living the relationship with the child's development; the relations within and without the family unit; making use of the agencies. They put families that need mutual help in touch, and organize meetings.

- *Building a way of connecting the services and the new parents. The resource families can give information about the presence of agencies for parents or children, about how to have access to them, about the services they deliver. They can stimulate and orient new parents into making use of the agencies' services and presenting them with their own needs, eventually organizing together with the professional staff the responses.*
- *Support precocious and protected dehospitalization. The resource families can support new mothers upon their coming back home....This can become a tool for connecting hospital services and territorial services.*
- *Taking charge, with differentiated forms of assistance, of situations that present one or more difficulties or risks. The resource families can be involved by the territorial and/or the hospital services in projects that support families with difficulties in care-taking and in relating with the newly born.(Porto Torres).*

A second example are the initiatives of health promotion. From a document on the resource families in Basilicata:

“Promoting health through the family

The initiatives existing within this course of action consist of:

- a) the organization of meeting places where parents can exchange ideas and discuss themes and problems of particular aspects of the family life cycle, in an informal way and with the collaboration of experts;*
- b) the collaboration of the resource families in the activities of health education and of prevention of difficulties which the various agencies carry out in schools;*
- c) the organization and management of opportunities for children and youths for the prevention of difficulties and adolescent unrest;*
- d) the promotion of women's health;*
- e) assistance for the family in the presence of special pathologies.*

These activities can favor a greater responsabilization of the families with regards to health care and self-protection; a greater mobilization of the local communities in the prevention of difficulties both for minors and families; a greater attention to the prevention of certain pathologies; an initial outlining of activities for the promotion of their general wellbeing. The realization of these activities implies collaboration with the family consultancies, with the Sert, with hospital wards, with the social services of the ASL (Local Health Agencies) and of the municipalities. These initiatives are consistent with the projects and the design of activities provided for in the regional health and social welfare plans.”

A third example are the projects addressed to adolescents and pre-adolescent children like the project “*Feeling well together in Scalea*” designed by a group of resource families/professional staff who gave rise to a program agreement between the municipality of Scalea, the ASL (Local Health Agency) the School District, and the Region Calabria.

The general objectives of the project are:

“Realizing a strong environmental context, dynamic and mature for preventing youth difficulties

promoting the youths’ wider participation to Community life

integrating activities, initiatives and social and health services, especially those for adolescents and parents

making these services and activities closer to the needs of adolescents”

Two are the planned activities that involve the agencies, some institutional organizations, some volunteer associations, and the resource families:

- Integrating School, Health and Municipality for preventing school difficulties
- Integrating the activities of the Youths Aggregation Center with those of the Youths Space of the Family Consultancy for preventing youths difficulties

Actions for the management of the services

In some contexts, the co-planning actions have resulted in some projects for the management of the services in co-management or cooperation between public sector and resource families. The experimentation and the projects that have already started are different. We will give only a few examples, from the resource families' reports.

The group of resource families of Montemilone (Basilicata) started experimenting a summer camp for minors and succeeded in involving some young volunteers in the initiative and in convincing the Municipality to take charge of it. *“Over the past year the activities have been different, but the summer camp is our best expression; it is planned in order to meet the needs of the weakest families, but it ends up offering hospitality to all who apply to it..... In '97 it was run only in the morning at the same time of the parish's camp: 20 very young animators with no experience whatsoever, but with lots of good intentions and strong will, freely interpreted our indications. This year, although with no change as to the period, it will take place in the afternoon too. The Municipality will take care of the organization, and will support the activity by creating training spaces...for the young animators....and training spaces for the available parents as proposed by the resource families group.”*

The resource families of Polistena underline two basic points in their experience:

- 1) *“The constitution of a bank checking account to face emergency situations. We felt this need because of how terribly slow the bureaucracy for any support service is. This was and will be the best means for sudden actions, but which must remain occasional, and will be kept reserved and should be a stimulating opportunity for those who benefit from it.*
- 2) *The investigation made by the families and the youths in order to tackle possible responses to the problems they complain about(. . .) In particular, we designed a project to realize a versatile center that can be a broad and worthwhile structure for the youths' leisure time (. . .).”*

The resource families of Porto Torres:

“We in Porto Torres felt the need to work not only on single problematic cases, but also on “normality”. In our municipality there are neighborhoods that have priority needs if compared to others. For this reason we have (us, the agencies and others) promoted a series of initiatives always keeping in mind the situation in those specific neighborhoods, where we

tried promoting bonding among children, the elders and the families of the neighborhood In the satellite neighborhood we promoted the opening of the Elders Center with a playing space for 6 to 10 and 11 to 14 year-old children. Actually, what had initially seemed to be most difficult, having access to the ways of life of this neighborhood, defined as "at risk", was not at all difficult; but we must admit that the contribution of social workers, the psychologist and the educator was very useful. . ."

In Emilia Romagna the resource families groups/professional staff proposed the organization of ways to welcome 0 to 3 year-old children as an alternative or integration to traditional daycare centers:

"We'd like to organize a wide network of welcoming points for single children or for small groups in homes, public and private spaces, in order to meet the needs of parents who work at particular times or on shifts and who, in any case, are looking for solutions for the care-taking of their kids." (resource families and professional staff in Ravenna).

All the experiences reveal a strong design and management ability on the resource families part, which nonetheless tends never to substitute itself to the public agencies, but to stimulate them, integrate and utilize them for their skills, within shared objectives.

Actions on behalf of families with difficulties

The collaboration among the resource families, the social services, and the Family Consultancies professional staff allowed for the setting up in many realities of support activities for families with difficulties using modalities that tried to overcome the traditional welfare approach. The actions meant to promote and develop the potentialities within the family unit in difficulty, and to enhance the family's integration in the community in order to overcome and contain the factors that determine family or individual difficulty. The objectives are to help the families and minors with difficulties come out of the isolation and exclusion circuit in which they very often find themselves; stimulating and supporting the recovering of family care-taking skills; assisting families in their choice of education and care of their kids; helping them to access and make use of the services delivered by the agencies; making the economic, psychosocial, health and education services effective; coordinating the agencies services with those delivered by volunteers.

A resource family from Cosenza says: *“Starting with the connection between the specialized-professional knowledge of the professional staff and our knowledge, and in particular our resources, we chose to collaborate on a kind of intervention called “daily support”. That is support for those families with major difficulties in dealing with their daily lives, and during the “normal” transactions of life. Support started according to a network of informal relations in order to fill in those gaps left by a life style in continuous transformation in which everyone lives through joys and pains in his/her own isolation, to re-propose those values that were once fulfilled by parents, friends, and neighbors. Through forms of listening and sharing, we resource families can activate a mediation between the families in the community and the agencies.”*

When introducing the families with difficulties to how they could offer them support, some resource families and professional staff groups used the concept of *“by your side in a familiar way”*, in order to underline the supporting action based on reciprocity which the resource families can carry out.

Such experiences allowed to tune up important projects and work methodologies, and also to thoroughly think about the social services policies on foster families. The foster family provision is classically one of those actions in which the agencies have used the foster families in order to achieve their institutional goals of protection of the minors, by awarding these families with parenting skills. The resource families project allows for a methodological reconsideration of some critical points of the foster family provision: active project design, often denied by the services in traditional experiences of the supporting family; the support family’s role with respect to: the minor with difficulties and his community avoiding his/her alienation from it --i.e. when they are sent to far away foster families; the reciprocity between family with difficulties and the support family afforded by the sense of belonging to the same community.

IMPACT AND PERSPECTIVES

THE RESOURCE FAMILIES PROJECT'S IMPACT ON THE DIFFERENT LEVELS OF ACTION

It is rather a complex thing to evaluate the overall results and impact of the “resource families” project at the different levels of action: at the family level and at the professional staff level; at the agencies and at the local governments level; at the Regional level. Like in all social actions it is difficult to assess the direct impact of the project, the synergies, the ignited processes, the overall outcomes. It is a fact that the Project finds wide responses and confirmations of its theoretical hypothesis and its methodology within the wider debate on the re-organization of welfare; on the new subjects of social policies; on the relationship between public and private in the definition of social policies. From a methodological point of view the experimentation carried out did represent an anticipation of what would be later promoted and enhanced by law 285/97, and can by all means be identified with the action plans tackled by that law. Certainly, in some areas the actual planning of actions can now take over the experimentation phase and some services can be continued as an integrating part of the agencies and the community. In others, the experimentation should still be continued and supported; in others no results have yet been appreciated that would make the services effective. Different factors may have influenced the more or less successful establishment of the project, but we shall not linger upon this subject. We would rather propose some considerations as to the impact of the Project at the different levels of action.

Impact on the families

The processes activated and the results obtained as to the initiatives allow us to assess the effectiveness of the activities methodology for:

- Promoting the growth of the families as to their relation skills and project design skills with respect to their care-taking obligations
- Increasing the awareness of the families as to their skills and competence

- Increasing the ability of assuming one's responsibilities concerning the community's problems
- Acquiring abilities of project design and co-planning with the agencies
- Giving a public role to families, giving community importance and weight to being open towards social involvement and solidarity
- Reinforcing the networks of relations among families, and among families and the community's private and public subjects

The visibility and the weight of the families' social action depend on the context, and on the network of synergies that were created.

The families' new perception of themselves as a strong component of a possible new form of social citizenship ignited the beginning of a reflection on the ways the resource families group can be coordinated, and a possible Association of Resource Families is being considered.

The impact on the agencies' professional staff

The Project had an effect on the motivation of the agencies' professional staff who took part in the local planning groups, besides having an immediate feedback on their professional qualification as to:

- Acquiring methodologies for the integration among agencies, and among agencies and informal resources
- Learning observation and learning techniques about the community in which one operates
- Ability of co-planning with other subjects
- Group (or groups) work skills
- Increasing their ability to operate not merely with simple activities, but with complex actions as well
- Acquiring a network of human and relations resources as a tool to fulfill one's institutional goals

- Activation of new action tools and methodologies in order to respond to the needs of one's clients

The impact on the agencies and on local governments

Even though a short term experimentation is not sufficient to allow for an evaluation as to the Project's impact on the policies of the local agencies, it is a fact that in some realities the conditions for the experimentation to become an integrated part of the planning of the services delivery, and to take on the continuity typical of any methodology of long term work and action do exist. This is particularly true for what concerns the integration between the agencies and various institutional competencies; the collaboration between the public and the social subjects; the possibility of preventive actions and of community empowerment. For what concerns the methodological point of view, in some local experimentation the method of the program agreement was established as a tool for coordinating the various institutional subjects in order to achieve common goals, as declared also in law 285/97.

The Project then also allowed for shedding light on one of the crucially critical points of the organization of the agencies' services delivery, by also suggesting possible methodological processes: how the agencies can design and plan; how to connect the political indications with the interpretation of the professional staff's needs; how to transform the expression of needs into modalities to solve them.

The impact at regional level

The Project regional coordination groups formed in each Region worked with very different modalities and effectiveness. The project was perceived in different ways in the five Regions, although they all joined in the hypothesis of consolidating the experimentation. Certainly, it is in Basilicata that the project had the strongest participation. There, the dissemination of the experimentation is more capillary, and it was possible to graft it onto the overall training provision for the professional staff of the Family Consultancies. In other Regions, such as Emilia Romagna, there predominates the strong local autonomy in the experimentation, whereas it is difficult to identify and assess the paths of the project's impact as it coincided

with law 27/89 on matters of choice of procreation and care taking obligations towards one's children.

Generally speaking, the experimentation made some generic regional indications more concrete and visible with respect to the social policies for the family; it made some possible forms of integration between the social and health services explicit, independently of any institutional set up; it allowed the focalization of attention on the necessity to give value to local specificity, to connect the different administrative levels, to disseminate a culture of experimenting. It reinforced throughout concrete, visible and reproducible actions, the orientation towards: a) integration between social and health services, b) interventions of social policy rather than social assistance services, c) preventive actions rather than repair of damage actions, d) the services clients' participation to the definition of the objectives.

PERSPECTIVES

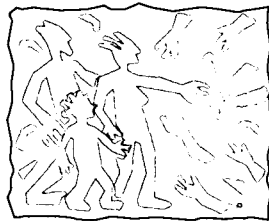
The "Resource Families" Project proposed a methodology of work that concerns the hows of making social policies. By social policy one means here the assumption of responsibility on the part of a society of issues and problems that concern and invest it directly; the organization of resources to take action upon problems that concern society at large and the community more specifically. The perspectives identified by the project concern all the five points that the Project had preliminarily identified as qualifying points for the realization of the new welfare system.

- A. **The family can be the subject of social policy;** the families are available to get involved on themes of social policy; the families are available to take responsibilities; the assumption of responsibility can pass through making use of the families' knowledge, and not only through their "participation", which is to say that families can be given value for what they do and what they know. The conditions must be created for families to be able to express themselves at their best, on the basis of their experiences and their know how. The families have privileged areas of action if compared to the professional staff's: it's

their work within the informal networks. The families can connect the vital worlds with the institutional worlds. A transformation of citizenship is possible: from political participation to society citizenship. . .

- B. The experimentation with the families concretely allowed for the identification of specific objectives of **project design integration among the social, health, and education services**. Prevention and promotion are an integrating part of the agencies that have different institutional competencies, but who are oriented towards the achievement of the same objectives of wellbeing of the population. The integration between services institutionally non integrated takes place more easily on “normality”, on strategies of prevention and promotion, rather than on the interventions of reparation of damage and cure that demand separate and specialized actions.
- C. In the general directions framework, the modalities and resources which a community has to cope with its problems and its own strategies of responding are specific; in order to promote effective actions of social policy one has to take the local abilities, availability, and resources into account. The Region, starting from this, should orient, define tools, but not modalities of realization. It should enhance experimentation and flexible solutions to the problems of a community; identify priorities but leave to the local level the organization and the modalities of action. The experimentation allowed the need to give *value to local specificity* and favor forms of a community self organization to come to the surface.
- D. The private --meant as the expression of vital worlds, such as families, subjects, groups, associations-- can have a function of public and social importance by cooperating together with the institutions to the definition of objectives, of the strategies to achieve them, and co-managing together with the public services the responses to the problems. The experimentation carried out demonstrated that the *relationship between public and private social agencies*, which is strategic for the integration of the community resources, can be effectively mediated by the families, the networks of their primary relations, and their ability to co-plan coordinated and synergic actions.
- E. The possible modalities of **connecting the different institutional levels** --also endorsed by the most recent legislation on infancy and family-- have been identified and verified in the course of the Resource Families Project, which had among its objective also the

definition of procedures for the articulation of the social policies at the local, area or district, provincial or regional levels. Tools such as the institutional agreement plan, the protocols, and the work plans can be effectively used to define the general guidelines for project design and management, and they are compatible with the activities endorsed by the law for the promotion of the rights of childhood and adolescence.



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RESOURCES FAMILIES PROJECT

PROPOSAL FOR THE SECOND PHASE

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- 1.1 During a meeting for the evaluation and discussion of the meaning and organization of the second phase, the social worker of a family consultancy affirmed: "We are no longer speaking of the Family Resource project, but we are talking about a way of working, and how to utilize it in our various activities." One could say that this observation encapsulates the difference between the initiative carried forward up to the end of 1998 and that which is proposed as of March 1999. In the previous phase, the foundations were laid, and the results were evaluated, for a joint effort consisting of planning and implementation, involving specialists of the health and social services and resource families for the local and regional communities. The initiatives were directed at enhancing already existing activities, and at creating new activities specifically for childhood and for other family groups. In this new phase the results obtained by these working groups should be consolidated, increasing the range of their actions to those other sectors of the life of the local communities which directly affect childhood and the family.
- 1.2 A way to plan and to work, born of the necessity of bringing forms of support and assistance to the stages of development of childhood and to the life cycle of families, has become a strategy for intervention which can be utilized in different territorial contexts, and in highly diversified organizational situations. In fact, the first experiences grew out of the reflection on the difficulties of the services in responding to the needs of parents in the processes of care and education of their children, and on the availability demonstrated by other families in answering those needs autonomously. This situation gave rise to the observation that resources exist among the citizens of the local communities which can be valuable in terms of childhood and the family, and the services themselves can be thought of as a resource and not only as providers of more or less valuable intervention. Resources consist of presence, capacity, and knowledge; the possibility of their utilization can be planned within a project whose potential can be oriented towards goals which benefit the collectivity.
- 1.3 The experimentation, carried out in five regions with the constitution of twenty-four working groups, highlighted the way in which the resource families were capable of making available their own knowledge, competence, and capacities, in order to orient the intervention of the services. This action took place by gathering and analysing needs and requests, and filtering into the channels of informal relations the knowledge, information and requests which could enhance the actions of parents and of social aggregations with regard to children and adolescents; and stimulating, in this way, the attention of the local communities to the demands made by the development of their newest members. Childhood and the family are not the recipients of predefined activities, but there is a way of observing and listening to the different ways in which they express indications of how they want to live, to interact, to relate to the existing opportunities, and of how they want to contribute to creating new

ones. From this point of view, the experimentation has given important indications on the family as welfare subject. Families are not a set of individuals of differing ages and conditions, towards whom diversified forms of intervention are directed, but rather a social category, an aggregation with their own characteristics, capable of expressing their own collocation – that is, of indicating the social environment within which they can function, of taking part in choices, of assuming specific responsibilities on themes of interest to the collectivity. In this definition, the family mainly takes care of itself (or can be helped to take care of itself), and through this caretaking it takes on itself the burden of questions which concern the whole community. From this point of view, childhood itself is a social category which can express needs, indicate ways of intervening, and propose forms of being with which the community must come to terms. These concepts are taking on importance as points of departure for the guiding principles in the planning of intervention on the part of territorial agencies (municipalities and health services) and, in some cases, on the part of the regional departments. The specific actions carried out by the working groups were essential for the verification of the validity of the methodology utilized, but it was the validity of this new and different point of view which led to the interest and involvement of the agencies.

- 1.4 The new phase can therefore be set up through direct partnerships with the territorial and regional agencies. In the experimental phase, these agencies have shown their attention to the initiative by investing in the participation of their specialists and the structures of the services, and by utilizing the indications which emerged. The main prerogative and point of departure for this new phase, in many cases, is the full acceptance, on the part of the agencies, of the results, the goals, and the objectives of this way of working in favor of childhood and the family. On the basis of this consensus, the agencies are interested in signing a “protocol of intent” with the Foundation B. van Leer and with the entity which will realize the activities, in order to formalize the co-participation and the co-responsibility, both reciprocally and with respect to the working groups. In this way, it will be possible to guarantee the consolidation of the actions undertaken and the spreading of the effects of this way of interacting with the needs of childhood and of the family on the part of the resources present in the local communities.

2. Results of the Experimentation

- 2.1 The verification of the activities realized and the evaluation of the results reached were the object of specific meetings held in all the regions, and they are documented in specific summaries. An overall analysis of the project took place in the seminar held in June, 1997, in which a member of the Board of the Foundation took part, among others. During the meetings, which saw the

participation of the families, specialists of the services, and representatives of the Regions, it became clear, in particular, how the project contributed to the creation of a social protagonism of the families, through the expression of the capabilities that are present in daily actions; and how it called attention to the need for procedures of support for children to be realized jointly by the families and the services, and not only through the organization of single qualified actions. The documentation of this meeting is gathered in a book.

- 2.2 In the month of November, 1998, a national meeting was organized, for an overall evaluation of the project. Besides the protagonists of the project—families, specialists of the services, and representatives of the Regions—in this meeting participated experts and representatives of the Ministry of Social Affairs, of the Ministry for Equal Opportunity, and of other national government offices.

The debate on the *evaluation* report that was presented underscored the way in which the actions realized through the project had brought to light: a) the possibility of new social policies only through a joint action of public services and citizens; b) the determining function of non-institutionalized volunteer work for actions directed towards childhood and the family; c) the centrality of intervention in favor of childhood, in the reorganization of local welfare; d) the necessity of giving a privileged place to policies of support and assistance for the parenting functions, compared with technical-specialistic intervention; e) the development of specific actions for situations of discomfort and difficulty of children and of families, in the context of initiatives in favor of “normality”; f) the difficulty of realizing these processes without the link between the different territorial agencies having authority in these sectors, and between the different institutional levels.

- 2.3 The project was proposed and conducted in an *institutional and social context* characterized by:

- families which often have no reference to traditional family and community networks, with scarce daily relational resources, with difficulty in combining care-taking time with the scarce flexibility of the job market. The traditional services in favor of childhood often no longer respond to the new articulation of the needs of families. In such conditions, even normal events in the life cycle of a family can become critical events, if there are no other resources available for them. In the Italian situation, moreover, on the one hand there are persistent traditional areas of poverty, which penalize above all in some rural areas and/or areas of the Mezzogiorno (southern Italy) the families with children; and on the other hand there is a strong increase in manifestations of the disadvantages and discomforts typical of urban areas.
- In Italy there does not exist an explicit policy in support of the family; there are activities directed at specific target populations, or general services for all citizens. The only health and social service which has assumed the functions of family

support is the family consultancy, which originated, however, more specifically in relation to the choices of procreation. Only in recent years have the local agencies begun to adopt explicit policies for the family, as well as activities aimed at the promotion of childhood wellbeing. The national law, "Dispositions for the promotion of the rights of childhood and adolescence," approved in August, 1997, fits into this picture. The goals it pursues are: support for parent-child relations and against poverty and violence; innovation and experimentation in educational services for early childhood; the promotion of leisure-time recreational and educational services; the development of positive action for the promotion of the rights of childhood and adolescence. Many of the working groups in the project noted that the general points of reference and some of the proposed initiatives already form part of their way of preparing and actuating initiatives. The law provides for the fine-tuning of projects at the local agency level, in the context of a regional program; and it identifies, in the program agreement, the instrument for the coordination of the various institutional participants.

- The organization of the national health service in the 1980's favored forms of institutional integration between social and health services. The successive reform of the mid-90's has led to a non-integration of the health service institutions with those of the social services. The centralization and specialization of the health centers and services has led to a concentration of resources at a second level, to a contraction of resources in the basic services throughout the territory, and to a lower level of investment in preventive intervention and health education, where effective action requires, among other things, a close cooperation between health and social services.
- In the 1990's the public education system has undergone a progressive centralization and urbanization, with the progressive closing of schools, especially in extraurban areas; and it continues to present a separation not only between the various levels of schools but also with extrascholastic activities. The system of services for early childhood is extremely differentiated among the various regions in Italy. There are zones with a serious lack even in the traditional typology of services (day-care and nursery schools) in which, because of both the unsustainable financial burden imposed by such structures and their inadequacy with respect to the new family strategies, new typologies of services are being experimented (micro-nurseries, home day care...).
- The relationship between the various institutional levels is made extremely complex by norms which fail to define clearly the principle of subsidiarity between the different services, and which are not linear in the definition of the levels of programming and of management.
- The new norms which discipline volunteer work and social cooperation tend to place them among the new subjects of social policy. This has led to the emergence of a plurality of subjects as producers of services, as forms of solidarity. But the multiplication of subjects of social policy risks proposing a

bipolar (public/private) model, if such subjects do not have community roots capable of leading to forms of responsabilization, of participation, and of aggregation with the primary networks.

- Initiatives of community care are directed primarily toward the creation of forms of organization which can allow persons at risk to avoid expulsion from their own life environments and relationships, and which can allow their family members to meet their care-taking obligations. However, a model for action in the community has been put in place, rather than a model for action on the part of the community. And the efforts of the network itself have developed forms of contact between the services, with limited strategies for connection between subjects of the networks.
- Social work continues to be characterized as social welfare action, more curative than preventive, more directed toward material support than toward crisis intervention or emerging need. There has not yet been a deep reflection on what it means to promote the autonomy of subjects in difficulty, and on how to transform the dependence upon welfare services into interdependences in the community.

2.4 *The groups of specialists and resource families* adopted a working method, for acting in this context, articulated in *four distinct moments*:

- *Analysis of the situation.* The aspects of community life with which to interact, or in which to intervene, are proposed both by the families and by the specialists. Many activities were initiated on the basis of observations and considerations made by the families (“Where can the small children of mothers called for seasonal work be left?” “Why is it that only the children of those families who do not need it take part in that municipal activity?” “I saw Francesca in the street all day—does her mother look out for her?” “My niece’s cousin just got out of hospital with a newborn baby and finds herself in difficulty; what can we do for these mothers, and once we’re about it, also for the fathers?”), or by the specialists (“The Local Health Agency (ASL) is proposing a project in favor of breastfeeding: how can we realize it?” “How can we improve the health-education initiatives in the schools?”). The deeper understanding of the meaning and importance that these aspects have in the life of the community leads the group to decide if it has the resources, the competence, the availability to take on such responsibilities, or if it is preferable to entrust the initiative to other subjects.
- *Elaboration of a project.* Once the themes and initiatives to be undertaken have been decided upon, the group defines the objectives to be reached, the strategies to be adopted, the means to be utilized, the collaboration to be sought (which other agencies, which other groups, which people to involve), the action to be taken. It is decided which activities will be done by the specialists and which by the families, and in what way they will be coordinated. (If the objective is the assistance of new parents, and the strategy is to create points of reference consisting of families and home visits, how can the services prepare the families to furnish information and support; which other families can be involved in the development of this specific action; which materials can be distributed; how can

they be prepared together; how can a list of newborns be obtained rapidly from the municipal services; which new parents will be contacted by the families directly and which through the services in order to inform them and allow them to take part in the initiative...)

- *Separate actions.* In the realization of the activities, the families and the specialists utilize knowledge, competence, approaches which are completely different, having clarified and agreed upon them beforehand. (E.g., a new mother, if necessary, can obtain the visit of a midwife. This can take place after the first contact with the resource family, and it will follow a discussion with them. And it will concern specialistic aspects in which the families do not have technical competence.) The families and the specialists maintain “rapid contact”, consisting of telephone calls and informal meetings, to coordinate and redirect the intervention.
- *Verification/evaluation of the actions.* The parents who take their children to the summer care-taking structure, managed by the resource families with the collaboration of the resource youth and of other associations, would like to understand better how to play with their children themselves. Can a meeting be organized, compatible with their schedules, to talk about it? The new mothers would like to meet with each other; how and where can it be done? In the formal meetings which the families and specialists hold periodically, generally once a month, the effects of the actions taken are examined, and the activities are reorganized. But, in particular, discussions take place on how the groups and the other community resources can respond to the requests and the needs that are revealed gradually in the course of the activities already undertaken.

2.5 The adoption of this methodology allows the groups not only to set up and to manage the single initiatives effectively, but also to highlight the effects these have in the context of social policies for childhood and the family. The single actions are the answer to real needs of the families who live in the local communities and to problems which directly affect the whole community (“The fact that there are disadvantaged families and children is a question that affects everyone.”); and, at the same time, these constitute an indication and a direction in which the subjects present in a community (agencies, associations, single citizens) can contribute to the consideration of questions of common interest.

The initiatives realized by the groups are different, and articulated in different ways, in relation to the environmental conditions and the local and regional organization of the services. They can, however, be partially exemplified in relation to the elements of institutional and social context evidenced above.

- *Actions with families with children.* The groups have set in motion procedures for the assistance of couples and of parents in the choices of procreation and of early childhood care and education, bypassing the single and separate activities of the services. The collaboration between

specialists and families has led to the setting up or strengthening of systems of information (legal, health-care, psychological) which can be given to couples who are preparing for marriage. (An activity in which other municipal services—the Registry—the parishes, and other volunteer groups are also involved. From a socio-sanitary point of view, the initiative is considered important in the prevention of abortion.) The families take part in some meetings of the birth-preparation classes, answering, on the basis of their experiences, the doubts and fears of the future parents. It is also the beginning of their offer to be a point of reference once the new mothers return home. The families are available, talking with the new parents, giving them material things, reassuring them and directing them towards a constructive use of the services, alleviating the solitude of the new mothers. They lead, in fact, to moments of exchange, of encounter, of small acts of solidarity with each other. It is the community which tries to receive a new member and which, in part, supports the family in this delicate passage of its life cycle, which prevents forms of difficulty and discomfort. The growth of the children is followed, organizing activities for the socialization of those children who do not go to the nursery schools, and meeting with the parents on the various aspects of the psycho-physical development of the children. Projects of the health services such as breastfeeding and the prevention of infant malformation have successively been included in these procedures.

- *Actions of social policy for childhood and the family.* Some groups, in collaboration with other volunteers and with the municipalities, have activated structures in which to take care of the children of those mothers who, especially in the South, work during the summer months or at other times of year. These initiatives, like those with the new mothers, have created the conditions for collaboration and solidarity between family groups. In some cases, the young people who collaborated in the activities continued the educational assistance of the children in situations of difficulty during the rest of the year.

Almost all of these groups have realized initiatives which are generically known as health education. These are activities directed towards the improvement and support of parenting skills in relation to the various phases of development of their children. There are two courses of action: meetings with the parents, and the organization of “parent spaces.” The meetings are often organized with the educational structures, and they have a formative/informative function, in order to activate a process of co-responsibilization with respect to the welfare of infants and children. In the meetings the specialists illustrate a theme from a scientific point of view, and the families from the point of view of experience. The “parent spaces” have been created, organized, and managed by the resource families as places of exchange, comparison, and organization among parents. Open

once or twice a week, they allow the parents to meet without any impositions, to consult material, to obtain information, and periodically to discuss with experts specific subjects regarding parent-child relationships.

In a framework of the prevention of difficulty and of forms of alienation in childhood and adolescence, many groups, anticipating the indications of recent national norms, have organized recreational activities and workshops both during the summer and continuously during the whole year. In this case, too, the resource families and the specialists utilize structures and economic contributions of the municipalities, as well as the collaboration of other volunteer organisms, sports and cultural associations, etc.

A large part of the work of some groups concerned the support given to families in situations of discomfort or difficulty. On the basis of projects elaborated by the groups, the resource families took the responsibility of activating fathers and mothers into taking care of themselves, their home, and their children, taking part together in the actions of daily life. Many took the children into their own homes, when the family situations were particularly critical. They contributed to the search for job opportunities for the mothers. All of this, in the perspective of the responsabilization of the parents, the social integration of the family, but particularly the care and protection of the infants and children.

These actions indicate the meaning that an active social policy in favor of childhood and the family can have, based not on single activities of the services, on controls and economic contributions, but on the activation of the capacity of choice and the utilization of the capabilities of each family.

- *Activities of integration among the services.* The overall planning of the activities, which constitutes the principle instrument for the action of the groups, created the conditions and at times even forced the specialists of the social and health services to interact, to integrate their skills with respect to common objectives. The side effects are a greater rationalization of the activities of the services, a greater specificity, and greater effectiveness; but also a greater utilization of these same services by the families in the most difficult situations. They are the main recipients of the activities for new mothers, of those for health education, of assistance for infants and children.
- *Actions with other subjects of social policy.* The resource families highlighted the fact that within local communities there are skills and availability which, in order to be mobilized for the realization of initiatives of common interest, need not necessarily be contained within formal organisms. One could say, on the contrary, that the very fact of not being bearers of special interests allows them to operate with a dignity equal to that of the services, and to involve in the activities other groups of volunteers and other associative formations. In this way, these presences have become a real resource for the community, and not only the managers

of particular activities. But it is in the formation of new volunteer forces that the social significance of the resource families emerged fully. In order to obtain the collaboration of young people for the activities with children, members of some groups went into the schools to present their initiatives and their needs. In many cases there was an ample response, and the families dedicated a particular attention to the preparation of these young people, to be first volunteers and then participants in a specific activity. Moments of tension were not lacking, but the groups of resource youth have broadened their initiatives and constitute a support also for other volunteer agencies.

- *Actions in favor of informal networks, and social work.* The strength of the resource families lies in being part of and at the same time visible expression of the informal networks which exist in every community. It is through this capacity for dialogue within the living world that the actions can reach even those families farthest from the institutions and can intervene in situations of difficulty for children. Theirs are proposals of support and assistance, not rules and duties to follow. This makes them credible and identifies them as points of reference, not only for the actions they promote, but also for situations new to the community (the arrival of immigrants, crises of family relationships, emergencies in the care of psychological suffering...). The social work carried out validates their proposal as resources for the community, and at the same time also helps other aggregations and individuals emerge as resources in the utilization of their skills and capabilities; activating processes of self-responsibilization which probably constitute one of the principal routes for reorganizing welfare policy intervention.

2.6 Many of the initiatives experimented by the working groups have been included in the planning of social activities by the municipalities (actions in favor of families with small children, intervention for the prevention of difficulty in childhood and adolescence, parent spaces...) or in the programs of the Maternity-Childhood Departments of the ASL Local Health Agencies (activities of support for new parents, health education...). Other activities led to the reevaluation of the instruments utilized for actions regarding situations of difficulty (economic assistance given within a project which aims at forms of responsabilization of parents, fostering which becomes an instrument in the process of socialization of the children and not a means of distancing them from the family of origin...).

In this sense, the groups are contributing to the redefinition of the contents and modalities of social policy for childhood and the family at a local level, but with the possibility of a broader application in the future.

In some regions, regional representatives took part directly in the activity of the groups; in others, only in the evaluation meetings. In this way they were able

to gather the operative meaning of general concepts such as the enhancement of the social role of the family, the action of community networks, the integration of services, the centrality of childhood in the development of the community... These elements have become significant aspects of regional planning documents, or for the directives of the assessorates which are responsible for childhood and the family.

- 2.7 The expression “resource family” begins to be utilized by experts and specialists who deal with these questions and who did not take part directly in the activities of the project. The term appears in a meeting organized by the Province of Reggio Emilia, and in another in the City of Rome. Specialists of the services have presented their experiences in the first national convention on childhood and adolescence, and the report of evaluation will be presented at a convention on family policy organized by the Ministry for Social Affairs.

3. Goals and Strategies of the Proposal

- 3.1 The need for a new phase of the initiative, tied to the joint efforts of the specialists of the social and health services, derives from the *necessity to support the passage from experimental action to permanent forms of intervention on the part of those services which deal with childhood and the family*. The activities of the working groups could remain limited and could lack continuity, in spite of all the important aspects highlighted by the results obtained, if *initiatives of assistance in a few crucial points* are not put in place. These consist of:

- The planning and organization of activities which must take account of, and as much as possible respond to, the regional and local directives and plans of intervention. Up to now, the groups have worked on problems identified through their own observations, and planned according to their availability.
- An increase in the capacity of self-propulsion and development of the groups. The activity of the groups has been supported by actions of verification and adjustment in planning, involving external contributions. It is necessary to set up means of self-training and of reflection and planning based, to a larger degree, on the expert contributions of the specialists and of the most experienced families. The first occasion in which these capacities will be put to trial will be the training of the new families who have entered the groups and the families in the informal networks which take part in the realization of specific initiatives.
- The creation of forms of coordination and interaction among the existing groups, through initiatives which involve, separately or jointly, the specialists and the families. The reinforcement of the working groups will also take place through a greater exchange between the specialists and the families, both at regional and at interregional level. In these meetings, themes of common interest will be studied

in depth, and projects will be prepared to be presented jointly to the agencies. These and other relationships will lead to the formation of a stable and formal coordination among the groups. In this way, “associations of resource families” of a territorial or regional character can be brought to life. These forms of aggregation will be the instrument for managing exchanges and assistance among the groups, and for support for the continuation of their activities after the conclusion of this phase.

- The diffusion of the methodology within the Local Health Agencies (ASL) and the Regions. The “most experienced” groups, after an adequate training, can make an important contribution in preparing families and specialists of the various health and social services to utilize the methodology adopted in other geographical areas. To make the families protagonists of a joint action with the services, and to listen to childhood, can be a *modus operandi* made available, even with diversified characteristics, not only for the constitution of working groups similar to those already existing, but also for other forms of aggregation which interact with the resources of the local communities.
- 3.2 The proposal means to be an articulated working instrument for collaborating with the existing working groups and with the agencies, which are represented by the specialists, on those aspects which are essential for the continuation of a meaningful presence of the groups themselves. It has thus, as an overall objective, the *reinforcement and the enhancement of the meaning and the impact that the actions of the working groups have upon the initiatives in favor of childhood and the family which are planned and realized at a community and institutional level.*
- 3.3 In this hypothesis, the modalities to be adopted for coordination with the regional and territorial administrations assume an essential function. For the realization of this new phase, the possibility of defining a general agreement, in the context of which the planned activities can be undertaken, is being examined with the administrations that are involved. This could be done through the adoption of protocols of intent. The protocol of intent is a document by which the signing agencies and organisms indicate a convergence of intent in reaching objectives held to be of common interest, an agreement as to those objectives and the modalities of realization, and the common commitment of resources for the actuation of the activities. It indicates the recognition of equality among the signing agencies, with relation to the initiatives which are proposed. The agreement about intentions is underlined, and subsequent to these, the recognition of procedures agreed upon for realizing them.

The agencies, by means of conventions or contracts, can entrust to another organism the material and operative realization of what they have agreed to. This body must, however, respond in the ways indicated for the actuation of

the initiatives, the use of the means put at their disposal, and the correspondence of the activities to what is set forth in the protocol of intent.

Two types of protocols of intent are being examined: one with the Regions, and another with the territorial agencies with which the initiatives will be carried out at a local level.

4. Courses of Action

The overall articulation of the activity, in this phase, will be characterized by the continuation of the forms of intervention directly concerning childhood and the family, by a more direct definition of the role of the resource families in the rethinking of welfare actions, and by the consolidation of the internal life of the groups and of the relations with other resources present in the local communities. The courses of action consist of:

4.1 *The areas of planning.* These include the activities which all the groups together are carrying forward. The reach of the work undertaken can be increased via new operative means.

- *The birth process.* The resource families are engaged in activities of: a) orientation for new families; b) assistance for the parents in the functions of neonatal care, and support for mothers and fathers in the reorganization of a family necessitated by the birth of a child; c) orientation in the use of the services and of the health structures; d) taking charge in new-parenting situations presenting particular health or social problems; e) activation of forms of collaboration and exchange between families.

The new activities should contribute to: - making the precocious dehospitalization of new mothers less problematic; - utilizing the various forms of checkup and control on growth and development in early childhood; - diminishing the improper use of health services; - developing a greater responsabilization of the agencies with respect to early childhood care and education, in the sense of creating new types of services.

The initiatives would be carried out in collaboration with the family consultancies, the appropriate hospital wards, the maternity-childhood departments and the social services of the municipalities.

The forms of intervention are consistent with the provisions of many regional health plans, with relation to the project of “maternity-childhood protection” and to highly integrated health and social services.

- *Promoting health through the family.* The initiatives existing within this course of action consist of: a) the organization of meeting places for parents to exchange ideas and discuss themes and problems of particular aspects of the family life cycle, in an informal way and with the collaboration of experts; b) the

collaboration of the resource families in the activities of health education and of prevention of difficulties which the various services carry out, also with the collaboration of schools; c) the organization and management of opportunities for socialization and training, for children and for young people, for the prevention of difficulty; d) the promotion of health for women; e) assistance for the family in the presence of special pathologies.

The new activities can favor: - a greater responsabilization of the families, in health care and self-protection; - a greater mobilization of the local communities, in the prevention of difficulties in minors and in families; - a greater attention to the prevention of certain pathologies; - an initial outlining of activities for the promotion of wellbeing. The realization of these activities implies collaboration with the family consultancies, with the Sert, with hospital wards, with the social services of the ASL and of the municipalities.

These initiatives are consistent with projects and planning activities provided for in the regional health and social welfare plans; and they are compatible with the activities provided for in the law for the promotion of the rights of childhood and adolescence.

- *Planning local social welfare activities.* The resource families are carrying out initiatives of: a) support and assistance for families in situations of discomfort and difficulty; b) taking charge of minors in at-risk family situations; c) daytime fostering for infants and children; d) socio-educative assistance for minors; e) social integration of families and minors; f) taking charge in situations of psychological suffering.

The new initiatives can favor: - the preparation of municipal and district plans for social welfare intervention; - the individuation of new modes of intervention in multi-problematical family situations; - the development of the capability to manage one's own situation, on the part of families in difficulty; - the enhancement of assistance through non-monetary instruments; - the responsabilization of the local communities with regard to situations of family suffering; - the collaboration among the various volunteer and social-cooperation organisms.

The activities are undertaken in collaboration with the family consultancies, the municipal services, and the ASL, and they can also involve other health services.

- 4.2 *The monitoring of health and social activities in favor of childhood and the family.* The resource families have already undertaken actions of verification of health and social activities. These initiatives were organized with the services to verify the impact of some of the activities on the end users and on the relationships between the services. Utilizing their work with the informal networks, it would be possible to set up a system to monitor the concrete realization at the territorial level of some of the health and social activities in favor of childhood and the family. The monitoring, utilizing these ways of working and specific criteria indicated by the groups, could constitute one of

the principal instruments for collaborating and for orienting the general planning, on the part of the Regions and the territorial agencies, of activities directed to childhood and the family. The monitoring would make more visible, almost measurable, the contribution that the resource families and in some cases other volunteer groups make to the organization and management of actions of welfare assistance.

4.3 ***Dynamic self-training.*** A training procedure will be carried out with the two components of the working groups, aimed, on the one hand, at highlighting the contents of the planning and of the instruments for the verification of the activities realized by the groups; and on the other hand, at the management of the groups themselves and of their interactions with the informal networks and with the other forms of aggregation present in the local communities. The various steps of training will also be utilized to prepare, with the help of the specialists and of the families, those instruments (forms for verification, for needs analysis, for the presentation of problematic aspects) which can be used by the groups to reflect on their progress and to reorganize their activities. These instruments will also be the means by which, after the conclusion of this phase and in a clearer and more explicit way, external contributions can be requested in a sort of distance training. In this way it will be possible to set in motion a process of self-training which strengthens the groups' capacity for action and helps in the creation of links and activities with other subjects. In this course of action are included the contributions that the older working groups can give to the diffusion of the working methodology. These contributions can take the form of the presentation of experiences and the organization of training occasions which can utilize the materials and procedures developed.

4.4 ***The aggregation of the groups.*** Various meetings have been held in the different regions for an exchange and a comparison of the experiences that the groups of families and specialists have acquired over time. Relationships have thus been activated among the groups, even though not in a systematic way. The importance of these links has been recognized by everyone involved, leading in Basilicata to the coordinated planning of initiatives and the intention of forming a regional association of resource families.

The creation of stable aggregations among the groups, which can take the form of legally constituted associations or of stable coordination organized in other ways, represents one of the essential elements in making permanent and giving impetus to the action of the resource families.

In some areas, where there are several working groups, area coordination will be organized.

The various forms of aggregation will be prepared, with appropriate training, for the management of the continuation of this social action of the families, in particular in favor of childhood, and for its further strengthening.

5. Working Plan

The activities of this phase will be set up in *three principal modules of organization in time*: the first part, an intensification of the courses of action (six months); the central part, of widespread planning (a year); and a part for the consolidation of autonomy (six months). The working plan keeps in mind only partially that the activities will be realized by groups with differing degrees of experience and of institutional collaboration, and thus, although maintaining a common organizational directive, the activities will necessarily be articulated differently in the different realities.

- 5.1 ***Bringing the courses of action to peak condition.*** The analysis of the formative needs and the activation of means of training/self-training constitute the main focus of this module. At this stage the activities completed and those in progress will be reexamined, and the projectual and organizational capacities of the groups will be reevaluated. In this way, a discussion can be initiated with the territorial agencies, to make the actions of the specialists and the families more convergent with those agencies' own courses of intervention in favor of childhood and the family. The actions taken by the groups, and the cultural contents which are their basis, will be presented to the workers of other health and social services, to lay the foundations for the possible formation of new groups. During the training activities, the preparation of instruments for self-training and distance training will be initiated. The realization of the training activities will make use of the capacities and skills present among the specialists and the families which constitute the groups. The constitution of small groups of trainers in each region, and a regional and interregional activity of such groups, may be possible, following a specific preparation.
- 5.2 ***Widespread planning.*** The increased linkage with the courses of intervention of the agencies, the monitoring activity, and the widespread community visibility will lead to a considerable increase in the projectual and operative workload of the groups. They can meet this new dimension by involving and including among the resource families, with suitable training, family units or single citizens who are available for commitments in specific activities but less interested in participating in activities of analysis and planning. A further contribution can come from the activation and the preparation of groups of resource young people, in particular for managing initiatives with children. Another form of action will consist of the collaboration that the families and specialists can give to other volunteer organizations and other services which deal with themes related to childhood and the family. In this way, it is possible to specify more completely the meaning that the family's right to citizenship can take on. In this period, the existing groups can take charge of the formation and training of new groups, in order to spread the working

methodology. This process can be faster than was possible previously. The actions, in fact, will be more sharply focused, and they can utilize ways of training and of working which have already been tested.

- 5.3 ***Dynamic consolidation.*** The final period of this phase will be dedicated to the specific verification of the working instruments which have been prepared in the previous periods—in particular, those dealing with planning, self-training, and the ways of working with other resources present in the local communities. These evaluations can also reinforce the ties among the various groups and lead to the establishment of more formal relationships. The analysis of these instruments cannot help leading to a reexamination of the collaboration with the agencies which signed the protocols of intent, and thence to a redefinition of these relationships, in order to make the action of the groups more incisive. During these evaluations the documentation of the actions undertaken, as well as the publication of materials concerning the experience gained, can be more finely tuned. All of this can constitute a further element for the orientation of initiatives in favor of childhood and the family.
- 5.4 ***The autonomy of the groups.*** All of the external collaboration which is given to the groups is aimed at giving them working instruments which are suitable for their intervention in favor of childhood and the family, and which allow them to plan for a permanent presence in the local and regional communities. For this reason, the meetings among groups at regional and local level, which until now have been held annually, will take place once every four months. Their goal will be to activate and to make operative the forms of aggregation that the groups have chosen in each region. This can take place by supporting and increasing not only the various aspects of collaboration and exchange among the groups, but also the links with institutions and with other volunteer groups. The capacity for presence and for action in the interests of childhood and the family can thus be expressed without external support, and with increasing autonomy.

6. Documentation and Publications

The activities of the groups will be documented through the preparation and the printing of:

- 6.1 ***Annual regional notebooks.*** In these, the contributions that the various groups present during the periodic meetings at the regional level will be put in order and synthesized. The purpose is to illustrate the activity of the groups and to highlight those themes and problems of regional interest regarding childhood and the family which must be brought to the attention of the institutions and of citizens in general. For this purpose, the notebooks must have an adequate graphic presentation.

- 6.2 *Notebooks of local experiences.* These are the analytic presentation, documented by testimony, of the activity and initiatives of the local groups. The purpose is to give indications and references on the way in which a proposal for social commitment of this type, on the part of the specialists and the families, can be carried out. The notebooks of the experiences of three groups (Lavello, Porto Torres, and Scalea) are currently in preparation. These notebooks will be completed first. Later, as the activities proceed, the possibility of preparing other notebooks can be considered.
- 6.3 *Publication of a book.* The passage from the experimentation of the constitution of the working groups to the determination of their autonomy will be presented in a volume published by a national publishing house. The book will be prepared by the leaders of the project and by the specialists and families who take on a determining function in the training activities and in the management of the forms of regional aggregation.

7. Expected Results

The secondary effects of the mobilization of community resources with regard to childhood and the family are not easily circumscribed. The activities provided for involve various dimensions of community life: the institutional, the formal and the informal; and the effects they can have on each of these are highly diversified. The expected results indicated here thus constitute points of evaluation which can be utilized in orienting the further development of the action of the groups.

- 7.1 *Community attention for childhood and the family.* The first element consists of the development of activities meant to satisfy families' needs of daily normality. It is important, for example, that in some of the "parent spaces" managed by the groups there are discussions on how to deal with cultural themes in the families, or how to maintain the emotions of the couple after several children and several years... It is a question of modifying a cultural dimension in which intervention is for care and healing, and only occasionally for the improvement of living relationships within the community. This derives from a scarce attention and a lack of listening to what families and children express. In this sense the organization and use of public spaces are important for parents and children to do things together (games, use of tools...), as is the continuity of initiatives for socialization, which can contribute to dealing even with situations of discomfort and difficulty.
- 7.2 *Effects on planning, for the agencies.* The most evident results are small steps in the long and difficult course of the integration of efforts among the services. Along with this is the involvement and coordination of groups and associations in the activities of the agency for childhood and the family; the planning of initiatives for the promotion of wellbeing rather than the prevention of

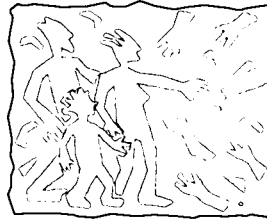
difficulty; the utilization of financial resources for the enhancement of the competence and capacity of the various social categories and also of individuals; the coordination between territorial agencies and between these and the Regions.

- 7.3 *Coordination and mutual support among the groups.* The function of point of reference should emerge among the families within the groups, with the main purpose of maintaining contact with other local organisms and with the other groups. This can favor the exchange of information, the organization of projects to be presented jointly for city and supracity initiatives, the contribution of training between one group and another. The monitoring of the activities and the formalization of a coordinating group among the specialists can favor interaction with regional and ASL planning and can promote debate within the groups on new initiatives and proposals.

The setting up of forms of aggregation, which can assume different characteristics in each region, can constitute a determining element for the results of this phase.

- 7.4 *The diffusion of the working methods.* To make this way of working accessible and usable for other families, other groups, other specialists, other public and private bodies is the general goal of the efforts of diffusion which will take place. The participation of the specialists and the resource families in the initiatives for childhood and for other family units promoted by other organisms can constitute one of the best means for comparing methodology and forms of intervention. The fine tuning of instruments of training/self-training, and their management on the part of the specialists and families, can become the most direct way to promote and manage the acquisition of a methodology for action. The printing and publishing of the documentation and of the working materials will be the other principal means of making known and proposing this course of reevaluation and reorganization of social policy in favor of childhood and the family.

LE FAMIGLIE



RISORSA

PROGETTO INTERREGIONALE
SULLE POLITICHE SOCIALI
PER LA FAMIGLIA E L'INFANZIA

RESOURCE FAMILIES PROJET

Work group of Porto Torres (Sardinia)

Synthesis of the Experimentation Process

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Regione Sardegna Work Group of Porto Torres

SYNTHESIS OF THE EXPERIMENTATION PROCESS

1995 - 1998

Work Group of Porto Torres

SYNTHESIS OF THE EXPERIMENTATION PROCESS

The involvement of the agencies

The proposal for the experimentation, submitted by the Regione Sardegna to the Municipality of Porto Torres and to USL (Local Health Unit) n°1 of Sassari, was discussed at local level during the first months of 1995.

The interest shown by the Agencies, especially the municipal Social Services Department, and the Maternity and Infancy Services of the USL, allowed for the direct involvement of the public agencies which, for what concerns the organization of the local system of agencies, have wider and specific competence on the protection and promotion of the wellbeing of families: the *Municipal Social Services* and the *Family Consultancy*.

When the experimentation started the activities implemented by the Municipal Social Service resulting from the competence bestowed upon the Municipality with Regional Law 4/88 concerned:

- Support to family units and individuals in conditions of social and economic difficulty (economic support, psycho-social support, social and educational assistance);
- Protection of minors (foster family custody and institutionalization of minors);
- Support to bringing up and educating children during their first years of life (day care);
- Promotion of opportunities for socializing; introduction to social life, to school and to the work market for minors, youths and adults (summer camps for minors, workshops for adolescents "at risk", use of financial support and facilities for "the right to study");
- Support to initiatives on behalf of social development promoted by community organizations and groups (financial support to volunteer groups)

The actions carried out by the Family Consultancy, as to its institutional obligations of health prevention and promotion, and of protection of maternity and infancy, bestowed upon it by national laws (L. 405/75 and L. 194/78) and by regional law (L. R. 8/79) consisted of:

- Assessment of health and prevention activities of diseases during evolution age (collaboration to investigations carried out by school medical agencies, and to health education campaigns)

- Pregnancy check ups; child birth psycho-prophylaxis courses, prevention of gynecological tumors; support to choices of procreation (contraception, sterility, IVG); support to women in menopause; sexual education addressed to youths.
- Counseling and guidance services to families and individuals on problems related to adolescence difficulty; intra-family relation difficulties; school difficulties; adoption applications.

At the beginning of the Project, how the agencies contributed to the promotion and the implementation of the families wellbeing, which is to say how they organize and deliver various services, was the object of analysis and comparison shared among the professional staff. During six months, the latter carried out a process of *reflection/self-training* in which the elements concerning work organization, networking, data and information use, were thoroughly examined, and which highlighted:

- ✓ significant elements on which new modalities of action could be based
- ✓ the need for improving and qualifying the way of "being a community agency"
- ✓ the need for developing forms of interaction among the agencies that would allow addressing the various actions and the specific professional skills towards common objectives

- ✓ spaces for project design and action in which to eventually develop collaboration among the professional staff, the agencies, and the families.

"During the first part of the Project, there was a phase of preparation and training that we consider very important as it was substantial --which is to say, we worked on issues that could be actually met in our work. First of all, it was very helpful for us to thoroughly think about how we were working; about our method of work, and how professional staff and agencies collaborate with one another. It helped us understand that, as to the relation that the agencies (Municipality and Family Consultancy) had with the community and with the target population, many things had to be improved, such as communication, method, and approach. Our forms of relation were kind of rigid, brought to a sclerotic." G. Pacetto, report of the professional staff group, Cagliari, November 10 1997.

This first phase of work came to an end when the professional staff identified some families that could collaborate to the experimentation.

The involvement of the families

The potential Resource Families were identified on the basis of some main criteria: care-taking and solidarity skills; ability

to reorganize one's own life cycle, and understanding of others' life cycle; introduction into social relations networks, openness towards social facts, and non excessive social and political exposition.

The professional staff of the Family Consultancy and the Social Agencies, using the relations that each agency had in the community --which is to say through relationships established with individual clients, with volunteer and private social organizations, and with other agencies-- identified about 25 families in Porto Torres who were asked the following:

- Taking part into a "work group" in order to tackle, together with the agencies' professional staff, significant and problematic situations or aspects in the Porto Torres community;
- Getting involved for the community's sake as a family;
- Collaborating with the agencies to support and promote the citizens' ability to take action;
- Working on situations or aspects singled out together with the professional staff;

Among the contacted families, 16 took part to the presentation meeting and discussion of the proposal that was organized in the month of October 1995 -an occasion during which the activities of the agencies were thoroughly illustrated- and out of those 16, 13 families responded positively. These are family units who have in some case small children, in other cases

adolescent children, and in other cases adult children; therefore it is families with diverse composition, who share, as they were given the opportunity to show, the availability to:

" . . . give some of our time to pay attention also to other people's problems; develop relations with them and help them to communicate with one another and with the Institutions' professional staff." A Orlando, Resource Families report, Arborea, November 30 1997.

At the end of 1995, a work plan was set up on the basis of the availability shown by the families, and of the interest of the agencies to qualify their modality of action. Each member of the group shared moments of joint analysis, of thorough examination of specific subjects, and worked for designing, developing and assessing all actions previously defined together.

Joint analysis: first indications for setting up social policy actions

The analysis that the newly formed work group carried out between October and December 1995 consisted of examining the families' needs, and the kind of agencies and actions already existing concerning the different phases of the family life cycle: before birth period; children's first infancy; the

phase in which children become adolescents; and the families who are in difficult conditions.

The thorough examination of these issues with the Resource Families highlighted the families' --as a group-- knowledge about social actions, and their evaluation as to their effectiveness:

"...sharing among the Resource Families gave us the opportunity of "seeing" ourselves and of knowing better and more tangibly how the population were seeing us, because they are families who live in this territory and therefore talk and listen. In this sense, the contents emerged throughout the meetings did not only reflect their own interests, but were also coming from their friendships, and a whole group of people close to them."

P. Campa, professional staff work group report - Oristano, March 7 1997

The analysis also allowed for some situations and requests to come to the surface which are not often adequately met with. Some action guidelines were identified for the group to get involved in addressing them.

"During the meetings many interesting ideas and thoughts came out that made us understand that, maybe, we should reconsider together and redirect some service delivery, and that we had to

be more deeply rooted to the grass-root population's needs." G. Pacetto, professional staff work group report - Cagliari, November 10, 1997.

In broader terms, this activity allowed us to focus on some elements to reorganize the interventions; these synthetically are:

- An increased attention to "the family"; to how the services delivered are combined with the actions that every person in a family unit performs concerning the issues of individual and family life cycle (see, for instance, the proposal to support parents with adolescent kids, and that of promoting a better communication between day care centers and parents.);
- A redefinition of some services offered at particular moments of family life within a system of supporting the family's choices, and assisting them in critical times (see, for instance, the proposal to re-discuss the prevention actions before pregnancy and the after-childbirth assistance);
- Affording a wider flexibility to the modality of offering some services in relation to the families' needs (e.g. opening hours and possibility of access to daycare centers for parents who work only occasionally) or in function of the specific characteristics of some client groups (e.g. adolescents);

- Assessing how families with difficulties use the prevention services offered (e.g. health and pregnancy check ups);
- Identifying the methods that will improve access to the services offered by private institutions that have promotion and preventive contents (such as sports or some recreational or cultural activities) for those families who, for economic or social reasons, cannot use them;
- Creating opportunities for an increased connection-collaboration with other agencies, both public and private, which carry out prevention actions (e.g. the library or the marriage preparation course offered by the parishes);
- The need of thoroughly connecting the interventions carried out on behalf of families with difficulties by public agencies and by those of social private institutions, volunteer organizations, or individual citizens (e.g. Caritas or Parishes material support, and Municipality economic support).

During the first months of 1996, as a consequence of the joint analysis activity, the Municipal Social Services and the Family Consultancy professional staff, considered which possible actions would be jointly experimented on the basis of the indications risen from the first debate with the families. The Resource Families, on their hand, participated to three meetings to thoroughly examine the following issues: the

families' understanding and knowledge; the transformation of knowledge into action; the contribution the families can offer to the professional staff work group; the group's method of work; and how to support families with difficulties.

During the month of April 1996, a work group was set up with the task of implementing some of the indications emerged from the analysis, within the agencies' common areas of action, and throughout the arrangement and accomplishment of concrete actions.

Design, development, assessment of actions jointly defined

The work group, composed of a group of professional staff -- social workers; the psychologist and the educator of the Municipal Social Agencies; the psychologist, the social worker and the nurse of the Family Consultancy-- and of about ten of the families initially involved, identified the areas upon which to start acting in relation to: the budget then available; to the interest of the professional staff and the families; and to the needs assessed in the community.

The experimentation developed in two directions, carried out at the same time and strictly connected:

- a) *support to the families with difficulties and where there are minor kids,*
- b) *prevention of difficulties during adolescence throughout a*

promotion of leisure time activities for kids, and of meeting and discussion opportunities for parents.

Between 1996 and 1997, the group defined and implemented, in each area of the agencies' joint intervention, and according to a work sequence further described in detail, a series of actions which outlined how the agencies and the families can collaborate in order to create more significant opportunities for both single families and for groups of population.

The modality which both professional staff and families jointly operated and operate with was synthetically articulated in the following moments:

1. *Analysis and thorough examination of individual or community situations:* This is the moment when one examines and compares knowledge, and the different perspectives and points of view that the various members of the group have when dealing with an issue or a situation at a given moment. The elements to be further examined, and the strategies to get the necessary information (observations, small inquiries, wide comparisons) are identified; the first tasks that each member will have to carry out according to his/her field of action are defined.
2. *Joint planning:* This is the moment when the different aspects necessary to outline an action or an initiative are organized; when the objectives are defined, and the necessary and available human and material resources are singled out;

3. *Running coordinated interventions*: This is the moment when the different members of the group develop, each in their field of intervention, the actions that were jointly decided, and once in a while establish informal moments of communication and meeting, based on the eventual needs that come up.

4. *Periodic assessment*: It is the moment when the whole group is submitted the work done for discussion; when the way in which the tasks were performed is made explicit; when the difficulties are highlighted, and the results achieved are underlined. It is on the basis of these elements that new interventions are planned.

The acquisition of this method of work is the fruit of a long and complex process, during which many and different difficulties were encountered. In particular, the agencies have a poor level of project work methodology; it is necessary to acknowledge the families specific knowledge and skills; the construction of a relationship of mutual trust between professional staff and families is mandatory.

“. . .although we did acknowledge the theoretical value of the proposed methodology, we had some difficulties when applying it to our work with the families who, until then, had been considered "clients". There was also a certain diffidence towards those whom we considered "outsiders" and non "staff members"" P.C., Professional staff group report,

Oristano, March 7, 1997.

"The initial effort was big, given the difference of competence and knowledge: ours were formal and professional, whereas the families' were informal and hard to give credit to (...) It was not easy to acknowledge that these people, with no professional skills and knowledge whatsoever, could not only give us ideas to think about, but could even work by our side in order to design the services to be delivered to the community in a new way." G. P. Professional staff report, Cagliari, November 10, 1997

The next paragraphs introduce the actions accomplished in the two different areas of work of our group, and the main elements resulting from them. They concern: the contributions of both the families and the professional staff; how the various social, health and education actions were connected; and the cooperation among the private and public agencies in the community.

Work area: support to families with difficulties

During the experimentation the group examined five family situations, some reported by the professional staff, some by the Resource Families. In these families the conditions for an adequate growth and development of minors did not seem, for one

reason or the other, sufficiently guaranteed. On the basis of a common frame of work (the work chart on the cases), each situation was analyzed in relation to the family's economic, housing, working conditions; to the family unit's and its members' social participation; and to their personal skills and resources for coping with their difficulties.

At this stage of the work, the Resource Families offered a significant contribution to identifying those aspects of family life and of parent-children relationship, which hardly ever the agencies are able to identify. They also particularly singled out how necessary it is for the action with the families with difficulties to address recovering both one's abilities of caring for oneself, and parents' skills of care-taking of their children.

The comparison of all elements of knowledge about each situation under exam led to the identification, for each specific case, of different needs to be further thoroughly examined. The Resource Families were assigned the task of regular monitoring the behaviors that parents and children manifest in their daily life (children-youths participation to school life, and to leisure time recreational activities; adults' performance of one's care taking obligations: health care, care of the diet, house keeping, support to their kids' school and social participation). The professional staff, on the other hand, thoroughly examined their understanding of the

situations by asking for advice to other professionals and agencies (pediatrician and gynecologist of Family Consultancies; family doctor, teachers, etc.), and by using other assessment methods that are specific to their profession (interviews, home calls, etc.).

Once the main elements were collected and assessed, the group defined an hypothesis of family unit support, directed to those cases that would allow for a joint commitment.

"The action that we are implementing together with the Resource Families is particularly meant to support the whole family unit. We are getting used to thinking about the whole family and not to supporting a single individual... we try to support the whole family, to understand what is best for each member, and to carry out actions that would converge over the whole unit. (...) The objective we identified together with the Resource Families, who gave an enormous contribution to this phase of problem definition, is that of succeeding in finding useful modalities to help these families' and their children's social participation (...) The Resource Families gave a great contribution . . . for what concerns supporting and helping those parents with difficulties to acquire a more responsible role." P.C., March 7, 1997.

Starting from what seemed relevant in each of the examined situations some objectives were identified. The available

resources, and the resources which could be activated, were singled out together with the actions that the group deemed necessary. On the basis of the agreed project, both the families and the professional staff were committed to:

- *Activating informal networks (relatives, friends and other families) and networks of organizations and groups (volunteers, sports trainers) who had or could have an important role in pursuing the identified goals. In this sense, some collaborations were started in order to, for instance, find adequate housing and finding possible employment; have minors participate to sports activities; enroll the minors in school make up classes and activities offered by volunteers; stimulate neighbor cooperation;*

"There are some problems that cannot be solved only with the intervention of professional staff -for instance by calling mothers at the Family Consultancy for a talk with the Social Worker. There are some practical things, daily things, like taking the kid to school every day, that call for collaboration (....) A problem, like in this case we are following, just like many other problems presented by cases we do not follow, is not a problem only for the agencies, but it is a community problem. Going back to the example of the child who does not go to school, the problem does not

start and end in that family, it has or certainly will have some consequences on society at large. We cannot say that, since the agencies cannot get to it, there isn't really much we can do about it. Why then don't we benefit from the possibilities that are already there in the community; and, even more so, why don't we do it when there are some families who show their interest and are available to take action and be charged with issues like these." L. Bazzoni and A. Nuvoli, professional staff Group report, Cagliari, November 10, 1997.

- Activating resources and actions that the agencies could immediately make use of, and defining the modalities of accessing and delivering services. According to the cases it was a question of: using economic support, the resources of the "right to study", and the contribution of associations; finding employment; enrolling in summer activities of animation and workshops for youths; support in daycare centers participation; social education support at home; psycho-social counseling; health check ups for minors and women;

" In our group there were many instances of families who cannot afford any sports for their children. We do not consider these activities only in terms of sport but,

rather, as opportunities of giving these kids access to a context of normality. Over the past months, in order to face this problem, the Municipal Social Services found the possibility of implementing some form of financial support for the sports societies. We thought that this fund should not be used to cover for the enrolment fares that families cannot afford to pay to the sports societies -the latter being, in fact, all societies willing to be committed to social actions, and having enrolled children for free for a long time. We therefore proposed that the Municipal funding, albeit certainly limited, be proportionally shared by the associations to guarantee the children full participation to the activities (shoes, subscription card, medical check up, or other). The children's access to sports can be justified not only because of financial necessity, but also by social or relational necessity. On this basis the agencies should ask the associations that want to participate to this initiative to enroll the minors. . . ." C.Rum, resource family, Arborea, November 30. 1997.

- Activating some Resource Families' direct support actions on behalf of other families, under the guidance and monitoring of the referral professional staff on the case.

"For what concerns the support work, we supported some

families, for instance the mother of an autistic boy who had quite some psychiatric problems (. . .) Furthermore, another family is helping a lady to recover her abilities: her autonomy in caring for her body, in managing her household, etc.. Another case is that of a mother who does not seem to be managing her mother/child relationship with her twelve year-old son. In this situation, the goal we had as Resource Families was that of helping the lady to recover her parenting role. . " A. Orlando, Resource Families Group Report, Arborea, November 30, 1997.

- The development of intervention addressed to groups of population through which we meant to act in "preventive" terms upon the condition of isolation of minors and families. This aspect is connected to the specific work implemented on behalf of families with difficulties throughout the actions carried out in the specific area of action "prevention of adolescence difficulties " .

"In Porto Torres we felt the need to work not only on single cases, but also on "normality" (...) we -the agencies and others-promoted a series of actions keeping in mind the situation of a given neighborhood, where we tried promoting relations among the neighborhood children, elders, families. Therefore, if the need was felt to support a given situation,

we tried to work within the social and family context." C. Rum, Resource Family, Arborea, November 30, 1997.

The development of certain family situations, together with the results achieved and the difficulties met, were and are periodically analyzed during the monthly meetings of the work group.

Together with the experiences implemented, the group of professional staff carried out a study on this new method for supporting families with difficulties. This analysis, side by side with experimentation, afforded the articulation of an hypothesis of work which, in its main elements, became part of the Municipal Social Services Plan of 1998, and is the point of reference for the joint work among Family Consultancy, Municipal Social Services and the families.

Work area: prevention of adolescent discomfort and difficulties

The activities that the work group carried out in this area of intervention can be presented, according to the work process previously described, in the following way:

1. On the basis of a work of *monitoring, analysis, and thorough examination* carried out between April and October 1996, there emerged: 1st) a framework of the existing initiatives for adolescents and for their families, and the method to use them; 2nd) the many subjects who take action in this field; and 3rd)

the main directions that the initiatives in this field should have had. As a consequence, the first goal of the group was that of creating occasions to meet for all those who offered education, support, recreational, cultural and sports activities for and with young people.

With this action, both the Resource Families and the professional staff meant to:

- Share the thoughts of the group, and the methods the agencies should use to collaborate with various Organizations, Associations, and Agencies which work in the field;
- Increase the exchange of information about various activities by presenting to one another one's methods of action;
- Identify the work methods that would implement a non casual connection among agencies, associations, groups and families, aimed at the periodical assessment and evaluation of both the initiatives and the problems in the field. (From the document of the group of 10/30/96).

Over the first months of 1997, some meetings were organized with some sports, recreational and volunteer associations in collaboration with the Resource Families and the professional staff. It was the first opportunity to get to know one another, to highlight the problems that each was facing, and to tackle possible collaborations. These collaborations were

later activated in the framework of jointly planning the summer activities for children and youths.

"Planning together was possible because during the winter we had some meetings with the different organizations who were dealing with the kids: the scouts, and recreational, sports and volunteer associations. The meetings, which were an opportunity to talk, to think about and analyze the problems together, allowed us to join our forces and to organize initiatives that the families liked and are now asking us to continue." G.P. Professional staff Report, Cagliari November 1997.

2. The joint planning of summer activities for children and youths gave us the opportunity to clarify:

- Some common goals: creating opportunities to meet and to exchange ideas among the children of the different neighborhoods; offering opportunities for the children and the youths to occupy their leisure time in a constructive way, and encouraging parent involvement;
- The various commitments that the agencies and the Resource Families, the different groups and associations, and single volunteers, could make in order to pursue definite objectives;

The availability declared, and the commitments made, were summarized by one of the groups of youths attending the meeting

(Youths Group of the Christ Resurrect Parish of Porto Torres) and disseminated with their monthly publication "Our Opinion" issue of June 1997, whose text follows in the original version:

Attività estive per adolescenti

Il 29/05/1997, presso i locali del Consultorio Familiare, si è svolto un incontro, organizzato dalle operatrici dei Servizi Sociali del Comune e del Consultorio Familiare, allo scopo di programmare attività ludiche, ricreative e culturali per adolescenti e giovani per la prossima estate; erano presenti rappresentanti di varie realtà dell'associazionismo e del volontariato di Porto Torres.

Nella nota introduttiva gli operatori hanno spiegato che Porto Torres, insieme a Nuoro e Villacidro, rientra in un progetto di sperimentazione di un nuovo modo di fare Servizio Sociale nelle realtà locali, progetto che ha come referenti il Consultorio Familiare, il Servizio Sociale Comunale e le Famiglie Risorsa.

Tali strutture hanno sondato i bisogni e le richieste palesi o latenti del territorio, e hanno individuato come particolare terreno di lavoro L'ADOLESCENZA. In tale ambito si sono svolti vari incontri conoscitivi, con l'intento di non disperdere le risorse presenti in città; lo scopo ultimo di tutte le attività è, come è facile immaginare, la prevenzione del disagio.

Riguardo alla prossima Estate, ci si è chiesti cosa si può fare concretamente per coordinare le attività che già ci sono in un programma-calendario complessivo ed organico, in modo che le iniziative non si sovrappongano e non si concentrino solo in alcuni periodi dell'estate; l'idea-moto alla base di tutto è "se ci uniamo ce la facciamo".

Sono emerse 8 proposte principali, su cui ci si ripropone di lavorare nei prossimi giorni; sono tutte attività che non richiedono notevole impegno economico e per le quali sono già stati presi contatti e accordi precisi, approfonditi e arricchiti durante l'incontro.

1) ATTIVITA' SPORTIVE ITINERANTI

E' un'idea nata nell'ambito delle Famiglie Risorsa, in particolare su proposta di Cristina Rum; si tratta di creare attività sportive (a partire dalla pallavolo) con campi allestiti in modo estemporaneo nei vari quartieri, coinvolgendo bambini che non pratichino già lo sport. Vi sarebbero dei giorni fissi per ogni quartiere, creando così delle occasioni di incontro di tutti i bambini turritani, e cercando di superare l'attuale stato di isolamento e disgregazione tra i vari quartieri.

2) CINEMA ALL'APERTO

E' una richiesta che gli operatori dei Servizi si sono sentiti di rivolgere in modo pressante dai ragazzi di Porto Torres. I rappresentanti di "Opposizione Culturale" si sono detti disposti ad attuarla, dato che hanno già fatto qualcosa di analogo in passato, e a mettere a disposizione il materiale necessario (schermo e proiettore). Rimane il problema del luogo in cui farlo e dei necessari adempimenti SIAE. A tale proposito i ragazzi di O.K., sulla base della propria esperienza, consigliano di stabilire un prezzo minimo per i biglietti (anche solo £ 2000), invece che lasciare libero l'ingresso.

3) INFORMATICA

Vi sarebbero alcuni giovani disponibili ad intrattenere un gruppo di ragazzini con attività al computer, a tale scopo il Direttore Didattico di Borgogna si è già detto disponibile ad offrire per le mattinate estive il laboratorio informatico della scuola elementare, che dispone di 5 PC.

4) PERCORSI NATURALISTICI E FOTOGRAFIA

E' una proposta venuta dall'ARCI, con alcuni suoi membri disponibili ad impegnarsi per tutto luglio, concludendo magari le attività con una mostra.

5) PESCHIAMO INSIEME

Consiste nell'incoraggiare e nel coordinare i gruppi di ragazzi che la mattina o la sera durante l'estate si riuniscono per andare a pescare, attività che spesso diventa poco più di un pretesto per socializzare e stare

insieme.

6) CHITARRANDO INSIEME

L'idea è quella di riunire ragazzi che sappiano suonare o strimpellare strumenti "portatili" (in primis le chitarre) per animare le serate di alcuni punti della città come l'area verde di Balai, eventualmente con un concertino finale.

7) ATTIVITA' LUDICHE E RICREATIVE PER BAMBINI NEI LOCALI DEL CENTRO DIURNO ANZIANI

E' una proposta del Gruppo Giovani della Parrocchia dello Spirito Santo (che già è impegnato in attività di dopo-scuola), al quale si aggiunge una educatrice del Comune ed una Pedagogista tirocinante.

7) ATTIVITA' "PROFESSIONALI"

L'idea nasce da una parrucchiera/estetista, che si è offerta ad insegnare alle ragazzine a pettinarsi e a truccarsi, ma potrebbe estendersi ad altri tipi di attività professionale ed artigianale, i locali utili anche in questo caso potrebbero essere quelli del centro anziani.

Chiunque ritenga di poter contribuire ad organizzare e a portare avanti una qualunque di queste attività (come si vede ce n'è per tutti i gusti) è vivamente invitato a rompere gli indugi e ad offrire la propria disponibilità al Servizio Sociale Comunale, nei locali del Comune (Dott.ssa Oggiano, psicologa, tel. 508017), o al Consultorio Familiare, in via Caravaggio (Antonella Nuvoli, assistente sociale, tel. 503792). I nostri parrocchiani possono fare riferimento anche al Centro d'Ascolto, che è aperto tutti i martedì e i giovedì dalle 17,30 alle 19,30 nei locali della Parrocchia.

Nei prossimi giorni si costituiranno dei gruppi di lavoro con il compito di definire nel dettaglio le iniziative succitate; il 16 Giugno, in una riunione collettiva, si stabilirà la calendarizzazione precisa delle attività, e ci si accorderà sui modi migliori per pubblicizzare al meglio le attività, così da coinvolgere realmente tutti gli adolescenti e i ragazzi

interessati.

ALESSANDRO CIGNI

3. Within the framework of the agreed implementation of the planned activities, the professional staff of the agencies performed mainly a function of organizers and coordinators of the various available human resources. With the collaboration of the volunteers, they were also successful in delivering different services compared to the usual ones (such as animation for groups of children coordinated by the educator of the Municipal Social Agencies). The Resource Families offered a contribution to promote the initiatives; to involve parents; and to implement some of the activities, such as the sports in the "piazze".

"Within the activities we had planned, we offered recreational and animation activities for children from 6 to 10 years of age and for youths from 11 to 14, with the collaboration of the volunteers of a parish group, and a group of young people. The Resource Families gave their contribution to advertising the initiative; they singled out those families whose kids had to be invited; and followed with special attention the development of some activities." G. P., Cagliari, 11/10/1998.

4. The assessment and evaluation organized by the group

highlighted the extent to which it had been possible to pursue our goals. It was also possible to identify some more elements useful to continue our work. The assessment was focused on and articulated about :

4.a) The resources and collaborations activated:

- It was an occasion for youths and adults, both available as individuals (e.g. the young guy who gave the course in computer science; the man who taught the kids to fish; the boys who collaborated with the animators in the "play space"; the primary school teacher who offered an hour of reading tales in the library), to be committed together with various people.
- A new possibility for the elderly people was created, who had been until then isolated in their Center and were only interested in activities that concerned their "category".
- The school became accessible: its computer room was opened, and its projecting equipment was offered to collaborate with the agencies, with the youths and the volunteer groups, in order to realizing together some initiatives for young people.
- Thanks to everybody's contribution we could implement many initiatives with very little funding.
- The agencies consider the possibility of discussing and planning together with other groups positively.

4.b) The effectiveness of the activities, which is to say, how meaningful the initiatives were, and how much they involved both youths and families.

- Many kids followed by the Social Services were involved in the "play space" organized in the Old People Center. There were also cases of families who got really interested in the activities of their children, and noticed some change/improvement in their social and learning skills.
- There was a good participation of preadolescent children to the activities of animation and to the computer course, despite what we expected given it was summer time, and because of the schedule of that activity.
- The parents wish to participate in the activities together with their kids was noticed: this is a strong indication to be kept in mind when organizing activities for children.
- We succeeded in stimulating the attention, and increasing the opportunities of the children of one of the most disadvantaged neighborhoods in the city. To a certain extent, there was also some kind of exchange among the children of different neighborhoods.
- The population actually appreciated a lot the activities that we offered, and the experience was positive, especially for what concerns the activities of animation and the outdoor movies.

4. c) The outcomes for the agencies and for the groups and associations for what concerns service delivery and use of resources.

- For the Family Consultancy it was an opportunity to better understand the reality of Porto Torres: reaching out of the Family Consultancy, meeting youths, children, parents, groups, etc. Some of the outcomes were when parents asked to be seen for counseling; and there were outcomes also in other services we deliver.
- The outdoors movies allowed the Municipal Social Services to start a collaboration with a group of young people (Kultural Opposition) and to outline an hypothesis of permanent activity with the Municipality, buying the equipment and building a municipal video library.
- For the Family Consultancy this activity meant starting new collaborations, especially with young people. These collaborations will be developed to carry out other initiatives of prevention for children, especially to discuss how to carry out actions addressed to the youth population. In this sense the cinema, through the proposal of a movie club managed in collaboration with the kids, could be an hypothesis to develop.
- Library use certainly increased (detached branch at the Old People Center); and we noticed a change in how the agencies are perceived.

4.d) *Difficulties encountered*

- *The kind of work we did raised some issues concerning the professional staff working hours. It demanded a wide and flexible availability, particularly on afternoons and evenings.*
- *There were financial difficulties because the activities had not been planned in the agencies annual plan, so none of the necessary material was available. These difficulties were partly solved thanks to the involvement of the business people in town sensitized by the Resource Families. For the next year the Municipal Social Service will be able to cover for the necessary expenses with a quota of its budget.*

4. e.) *The initiative's perspectives: continuity of the opportunities for leisure time activities and new prevention actions.*

- *We could remind once more the existence of a request for information and support on the part of adults, parents. This will have to be taken into account when outlining new prevention actions.*
- *It would be necessary to see how the collaboration with the youths group could be pursued.*

5. Planning a support action on behalf of parents

Starting from the considerations often emerged in the course of the activities, the group decided to pursue an action to define a method for the prevention of difficulty. This should be implemented by defining and implementing a support action for parents who have adolescent children.

"The families who heard about the activities organized on behalf of their children asked us why we do not organize activities for them as well. We realized, mostly thanks to the Resource Families, that parents feel the need to do things with their kids but also among themselves. At this moment we and the Resource Families are thinking about a space and some activities for parents." G.P., Cagliari, November 10 1997.

The first step was that of thoroughly examining, with the help of other families, (some of which had been invited by the Resource Families and others belonging to a discussion group conducted by the psychologist of the Municipal Social Service) what were the aspects upon which the families would have needed support, and which methods were best to implement this support action.

"The families who participated to the "parents space" think that we must help parents to take their own

responsibilities and perform their obligations to educate their children. Special care should be given to sexual education for their children. It is important that the agencies be there to afford support and guidance from outside the family, when one needs it. It is therefore my opinion that the agencies must primarily address adults on these themes (from the meeting minutes, October 1998)

A project was later designed whose main goals are:

- Offering families some elements and useful tools to understand or interpret their children's developmental changes, and how these changes concern the parents;
- Promoting exchange and sharing among families who have adolescent children;
- Increasing the knowledge of the existing agencies that deal with families and youths;
- Identifying the modalities through which families can support one another.

The project defines the actions and the way in which the agencies, the Resource Families, and others can contribute to the promotion of opportunities for parents to meet, share and discuss.

At the end of the experimental phase the group was committed to organize the first activities designed by the project.

6. The main elements acquired through the activities that the group has promoted in this field of work have become part of the Social Welfare Plan of the Municipality, and partly, of the Family Consultancy Plan for 1998. They therefore became the institutional referents for the continuation of the experimented activities.

LE FAMIGLIE



RISORSA

**PROGETTO INTERREGIONALE
SULLE POLITICHE SOCIALI
PER LA FAMIGLIA E L'INFANZIA**

RESOURCE FAMILIES PROJECT

The three –year experimentation process in the Regione Calabria

RS 028580

The three-year experimentation process in the Regione Calabria

Preface

The experimentation of the Resource Families took place in Calabria between 1994 and 1998 in the areas of Cosenza, Lamezia, Palmi, Polistena, Scalea. At the local level it involved: Health Agencies (Family Consultancies, Social Services, Relation Offices with the Public) Municipalities (Social Services), Provincial School Office (schools), and families. At the regional level an interdepartmental reference group was formed by the officers of the Health, Education, and Social Services Department.

The five areas indicated as "interesting for the experimentation" by the regional coordination group were since the very beginning very heterogeneous, especially for what concerned the presence and impact of the services on the territory. This determined the very diverse developments and results of the experimentation which on the one hand was very careful when "penetrating" the local specificity, and on the other hand -by highlighting the common reactions and outcomes (presented in the acts of the different regional meetings)-

allowed for: the opening to the outside of the interlocutors of the single areas; the sharing of "common" problems with a wider perspective and more functional way than they were used to until then.

The following topics, which later had immediate outcomes on the concrete actions of both the professional staff and the families, were thoroughly discussed:

- Attention to the family as potential active and participating interlocutor of the services
- Childhood as a privileged area for prevention actions
- Integration between public the private agencies and subjects
- Forms of collaboration on the cases among various agencies and the services they deliver
- Integrated prevention actions among the various subjects in a community

It should also be kept in mind that in Calabria (2.076.128 residents) the birth rate is still high (more than 10 live born per 1000 inhabitants) and the old age rate highlights a population basically young (about 63 old people by 100 children/adolescents, versus the national average of 109 old people by 100 children). The mortality rate -8 by 1000 inhabitants-is lower than the average national rate, and is due to the younger age structure of the population. Moreover, the

indicator of economic dependency of 51,8% indicates, even though approximately, that the burden of keeping the inactive population is on the active population (15-64 year-old) (<15 and >64 year-old), that and it is higher if compared to the Italian average (46%), and is in line with the significant change that is being highlighted within the economic and social reality of the country.

Impact

We can conceptualize the kind of impact that the experimentation had by these main areas:

- I. the organization of the services
- II. the kind of actions promoted during the experimentation
- III. the families as resource
- IV. the operational proposals and the directions that the groups elaborated and proposed at local level as an application of what they concretely drew from the experimentation

From the overall point of view the work of the groups can be essentially understood as to:

- setting up initiatives of health promotion, and of the improvement of the quality of life
- innovation actions in the community's relations
- support of a network of families and minors with difficulties

I. Designing and realizing the actions carried out during the experimentation meant introducing some novelties in the agencies and the service delivery. These novelties demanded the professional staff to re-think about their way of relating to both other resources in the community and the clients. The consequences on the work modality concerned in particular:

- Setting up concrete collaboration between the health and social agencies, and the social services of the municipalities;
- A different connection with other services delivered by the same agencies they belong to, and with those delivered by other institutions;
- Starting up a relationship with voluntary groups through an exchange of services; the assessment of the visibility and of the effectiveness of the activities carried out by the agencies; the higher capacity of reading the needs of the families;
- Learning a methodology of project design and the sharing responsibilities with the families;
- Setting up a different organization of work within each agency;
- Setting up work tools for designing, planning, documenting and assessing and evaluating the actions;

- Widening the services offered
- Offering coordinated services among all professional staff;

During the experimentation a context of work was built that allowed the various professional staff of the agencies to:

1. Think about what it means being a service and being a service within an Agency and/or and Institution;
2. Starting integrated collaborations;
3. Giving new attention to the clients and the community;

which allowed for the redefinition of the agencies' competencies and for the acknowledgement of the existence of other competencies, such as those of the families, who can orient and support the actions carried out by the agencies at all levels: general work plan, project design and realization. It is interesting to highlight that it is the professional staff themselves who see how the effects of the experimentation are connected to the methodology of work. As the professional staff said at the regional meeting of December 1997:

- *We tried to carry out the spirit of the project, experimenting on the field the importance of networking; in fact, taking charge of some cases by the group of professional staff and resource families had a positive evolution exactly because there was an actual integration between the agencies and the community. A special mention should be given to the families who showed they had*

proposition, organization and constant involvement skills....

(Polistena)

- *This project allowed us to experiment a new modality of work based on the collaboration and integration among various agencies and a group of families that the professional staff singled out, who embody the collectivity and work together with the agencies in planning the common activities on behalf of the Community (Scalea).*
- *The methodology activated to accomplish the goals of the project is the paradigm of networking both with the formal agencies network and the informal resource families network (Cosenza).*
- *The professional staff and the singled out families are today a work group that reflects, discusses and analyzes the community's needs and those of other family units by planning and carrying out activities considered the best and most opportune for each case (Lamezia)*

Within the network of the agencies some operational processes were identified that would: define the taking in charge of some cases; start the collaboration among the various agencies, and the integration of the different competencies and synergies in order to work on common objectives in the area of families with difficulties and minors with difficulties, for what concerns designing and planning. The process was timed by regular

meetings planned in such a way that they would conjugate the needs of the various groups with the objectives of the "The Resource Families" project. In order to exemplify the awareness that was gradually acquired by the groups as to their own specific identity, we hereby relate what the professional staff of Lamezia said at a meeting of synthesis and discussion of regional character:

- *The inter-agencies professional staff group that participates to the project started working in 1994, with periodical meetings, and tried to overcome the reciprocal diffidence among the various services, that previously used to exchange only occasional reports based on the cases on which they were acting at the same time for different or analogous competencies. Through periodical meetings a group feeling was slowly building, the feeling of belonging to a unique work group that shares common social and health objectives. At the same time moments of study and training were developed that included lessons and practice which allowed the professional staff to analyze their own work style, the tools they used and the previous modalities of cooperation on the various cases (Lamezia)*

The experimentation has moreover positively influenced the professional staff's motivation to social work; this aspect too -important for the quality of the service offer and delivery of

the public agencies—allowed for carrying out some initiatives by tackling some bureaucratic and organizational difficulties that often are obstacles to the introduction of any innovative action within the public agencies. In many instances the professional staff highlighted (more with facts -often- than with words) their interest to invest on changing some aspects of their work; as evidence of this renovated vitality in the professional staff that participated to the experimentation we quote here two statements that were later shared by all the groups in a plenary session:

- *By discussing with the other agencies and the resource families, by working together, there came upon the professional staff a stronger motivation towards social commitment, a new enthusiasm for change and the arrangement of a context in which the person-client and the resource families be at the center of the social policies, with their needs and problems.*
- *Through this project the professional staff were given the possibility of experimenting new operating modalities that enriched their professionalism and gave life to a new image of the agencies.*

II. The work of the groups was concretely carried out at the take off of the projects and the actions concerning:

- The reorganization of the actions addressed to adolescents and their families, planned out by involving sports, cultural and recreational associations, the parishes, the volunteer groups and the school institutions, and in cooperation with the Municipality and the ASL;
- The participation of the resource families to the youth space of the family consultancies.
- The support to minors that belong to family units with multiple difficulties
- The support to families in difficult situations, for the retrieval of their parenting skills, of their social relations, and of their resources management skills

Impact on already existing actions and services

A first immediate impact of the Resource Families Project was to be seen in the transfer and application of some of its aspects to some activities the agencies were already running and some of the services they were already delivering. *In Scalea for example:*

- *Some resource families became active to give their contribution to some kids that were attending the municipal center for academic retrieval. They introduced some diversified activities in order to involve the kids and get them used to living with others. After this action the "Climate" at the Center improved and every young carrier of*

school/family difficulties was entered in a network: school - school health-extra school.

- *The self-help parents psychotherapy group -realized at the Family Consultancy-became a resource for other families with difficulties, who seem to like the support of other families to the sole intervention of social workers.*
- *Some resource families collaborated as observers to an "adolescents space" at the Family Consultancy*
- *At the aggregation center there are activities of health education: sexuality, drug use and harm reduction, AIDS run jointly by the Family Consultancy professional staff and the municipal professional staff.*

New actions

The effects of the experimentation can be more fully appreciated in the design and the planning work skills that the groups where learning --as they were acquiring integrated skills.

Each group elaborated projects, thought of and articulated actions, with respect to an area of work more or less specific that had been singled out during the joint meetings about the institutions' competence areas and the proposals of the families.

In order to formulate articulated projects, during the experimentation the groups activated specifically aimed short term partial actions. It was necessary, in fact, to test the institutional and non-institutional relations on the specific cases of families in difficulty or on limited initiatives, before succeeding in writing down and proposing complete projects.

The activation of integrated resources cannot -we clearly observed that- be prescribed or indicated on paper in order to later manage to fully and effectively achieve it; it needs a trial period, based on short and concise actions, that allow the activated resources to progressively acquire those preliminary and fundamental elements for the success of a functional networking fully functional to the set up goals.

In **Scalea**, for instance, in order to get to the proposition and realization of an integrated project on youth, "*Together in Scalea*", the work group organized a first open meeting on "*Being adolescents today*" to which participated the institutional representatives of the ASL, of the Municipality, of the School, and some Volunteer Associations. The meeting was useful to present to others what the agencies do and the services they propose for adolescence. Moreover, the meeting was meant to be a moment of interaction among those who deal with the youths for: a) the creation of a social network (services, territory) in which the adolescent could feel a

"person" and not an object of policies that are imposed upon him/her; b) avoiding waste of economic and professional resources. Another meeting will follow in which young people would be invited for a general discussion (also self-criticism) on the needs and expectations of the services delivered on behalf of adults and youths. In this phase the group is getting in touch with some youth representatives (of secondary schools, Agesci, the youth center, the lower secondary school) to draft a questionnaire that will have the goal of putting adolescents together and review their needs, problems, and expectations.

In **Cosenza** there were many meetings of the group where the discussion was detailed and thorough about setting up an experimental project for daytime support to families with difficulties. Some ideas that had previously been discussed among the professional staff and the resource families were later proposed and re-discussed with some interlocutors from families of the territory, external to the Resource Families project. From this discussion there came a better understanding to outline some basic features of the daytime support project:

In the daytime support the resource families deliver their services through the collaboration and integration with the Agencies, offering help and support during critical phases of the family's vital cycle.

Let's take as an example the most critical problems: the parenting role; birth; marriage; relationship within the

couple; the role of work, of studying; the role of adolescence; these are the natural, normal daily cares, not the pathology. It is the kind of difficulty that most families manage to overcome in the normal process of socialization but that, in some cases, the families do not succeed in overcoming by themselves.

The characteristics of the daytime support in this process of help are: supporting the family who manifests a crisis and difficulty; overcoming the difficulties through forms of listening and sharing in order to adequately answer the needs of the families who ask to be listened to, to be welcomed, to be affectively supported, and ask for extreme flexibility; the mutual-help meant as solidarity, reciprocity, relational skills and exchange.

The support offered to the families has to be understood as a development of the quality of the relations that can be found in the family network, both inside of it and with the outside world, enhancing a higher awareness and autonomy in the control of the relevant aspects of one's life.

*During the development of the resource families project, the work group of **Palmi** identified as a specific field of action (beside the families with difficulties) the adolescent area conceiving the realization of a Youths Space, to be integrated with other actions already planned by the Family Consultancy. The project will be carried out with the cooperation of the*

school, of the structures that are a meeting point for the youths and of the parishes and sports groups.

In order to achieve this kind of project design the Palmi group organized a public meeting for the interlocutors of young people who are present in the territory. From the meeting there arose a remarkable availability both on the side of families and the professional staff of other agencies to operate jointly on behalf of the youths. The positive answer to the initiative stimulated the group (professional staff and resource families) to activate themselves to better understand what and how such a joint action on behalf of the young people of the area could be organized.

Extended meetings

We must also highlight the fact that some groups wanted to reach out to the community and assess the community's effective availability for an integrated work. For this purpose some extended meetings were organized that had a remarkable impact on the territory -in terms of the groups visibility- and were the starting point for the sharing and the institutional and informal support of the further actions carried out by the groups.

III. Impact on the "families as resources"

In the community in which the experimentation took place, some families got in touch with the agencies' professional staff and gave life together with them to some work groups aiming at improving the life conditions of other family units and of the local youths. Such families were identified with the term *Resource Families*. The characteristics of the Resource Families were outlined by the families themselves who gave a precise identity to their action as a community resource. It was not easy --for the families and for the professional staff-- to make clear and to conceptualize a new way of being in the community, even though everybody clearly understood the innovative outcomes and meaning of the network relations that the experimentation was progressively introducing. The differentiation among actions made by recognized volunteer groups; individual actions of solidarity, and the actions made by the resource families eventually became clear to the groups. It is actually the resource families themselves that in the document presented at the regional meeting of December 1997 define their presence in the community as follows:

In synthesis we can say that we are part of local groups in Calabria (constituted by us families and the agencies' professional staff) who --after three years from the experimentation take off-- meet for:

1. Planning activities for single families or for broader groups with the aim of supporting situations of difficulty or of preventing difficulties;
2. Assessing the progress of actions previously started;
3. Discussing specific topics or problems noticed on the territory;
4. Improving the knowledge of the Agencies and the modality with which the citizens make use of them; getting to know the information actions activated in the community by institutions and associations.

As resource families:

- We are *FAMILIES* available to collaborate with the Agencies with "certain modalities"
- We are a community observatory
- We facilitate other citizens' use of agencies and spread information about them
- We participate to actions directed to single family units and we extend the possibility of informal support relations in the community
- We never participate as "islands", but as a part of a social network
- We stimulate the activation of connections among structures and different institutions in order to improve the relationship between institutions and citizens

- *We stimulate and support the agencies' professional staff to start some actions that we consider valuable for the community*

The strength of our joint work lies in the fact that:

- *The resource families do not substitute the agencies*
- *The agencies do not substitute the resource families*
- *The proposals on what to do come from the families and/or the professional staff*
- *The actions are decided upon together on the basis of an actions work plan*

The presence of the resource families in the agencies contributed to the assumption of responsibility; to the intelligibility in the actions; to the outlining of institutional relations functional to the set up goals; to the institution of an assessment process as a tool for improving the services delivered to the public. The orientation service to the clients has been increased since the professional staff pay a major attention to what the clients propose; one is now more open to think that polemical attitudes can be turned into constructive criticism; that some attitudes of refusal are connected to poor reciprocal knowledge (professional staff-families) that can be -through precise actions- turned towards effective information and acknowledgement of the mutual bonds and limitations; that some clients can be a reference for

others, mainly they are a further resource, a different one, for the agencies. A process was activated that facilitates the passage from passive client into competent citizen: a client who, besides participating, being active, and present, also asks for activities and for the presence of his/her institutional interlocutors.

The biggest part of the work done during the resource families project concerned the establishment of a relationship of this kind among (resource) families and the agencies; and the highlighting of its limits and potentialities, via the experimentation.

More than once, the professional staff were underlining the potential introduced by the networking work methodology in which the resource families were introduced. It seems to the groups of the experimentation that:

- It is today easier to start prevention actions: *"The attention of the Services and the resource families is mainly focused on the prevention of eventual indicators of family and/or social risk that is not yet structured in a pathological sense"*.
- It seems more likely to be able realize a social policy that takes off from normality more than from difficulty: *"The resource family can produce in this sense a social support that is the relational cure in which the families with difficulties can be stimulated through activating their*

points of strength rather than highlighting their weaknesses".

- The coherence of roles and functions seems more functional, and it would be opportune to start modalities of work coherent with the shared objectives among the institutions and the diversified resources. "In the course of the experimentation the resource families and the agencies shared experiences of concrete cases that were presented during the group meetings; they started forms of cooperation on equal basis in which the actions carried out by the families, their knowledge and know-how was integrated to the actions and technical professional know-how of the professional staff. "
- It seems evident that the resource families have a twofold role: "...the resource families have a support role, but also one of mediation which is very important, among families and agencies". It is a role that in operational terms can be translated into:
 - "building a bridge of knowledge among the families in need and the social welfare services and health services, trying to integrate such services with those families;
 - personally committing themselves to afford help to families that are undergoing temporary difficulties by following them closely, with periodical meetings, even at home, until they have solved their problems
 - reporting the new cases to the services

- *participating to the planning and management or to restructuring of services for the protection of childhood and adolescence"*

IV. Impact on the institutional policies orientation

Participating to the project produced results of remarkable importance as to the interest of the groups towards the introduction of new modalities of action when operating in synergy in order to achieve the common objectives for youths protection; and for the involvement of new resources in the planning, designing and intervention phases.

The experimentation facilitated the interest of the professional staff towards learning to take a more active position and making proposals to the institutions and the agencies where they work. The tools identified in order to activate an exchange with the local and regional managers were: documents, extended meetings, conferences, work proposals.

The orientation of the social policy and the development of the experimentation were translated into **projects and protocols of intent** aimed at achieving concrete specific actions for every area, which is to say interventions for the family, childhood and/or adolescence.

Among the developments supported at local level, born and/or reinforced by the experimentation, we can identify two levels: some of orientation to the social policies; others of an operational/organization type, meant for the support of the proposed guidelines. On this subject the professional staff (Dec. '97) claim:

- *The integration among different agencies and the cooperation with the resource families will have as an objective the identification of processes aimed at the planning of a new social policy that can be carried out with actions focused on "normality", accessible to all who need them.*

The work groups claim that in order to continue with the work started with the experimentation it is necessary: that the promotion and activation of modalities of networking should have a formal recognition by the different institutions/agencies with the objective of facilitating a real connection among the agencies, the society and the territory.

They furthermore include among the operational perspectives: the realization of more actions on whose basis to come to a protocol of intent among agencies, to be agreed upon in the occasion of a meeting with the political representatives and the decision makers, and extending the operational model of professional staff-families, in the future, to other areas of the territory.

From yet another point of view -concerning the possible impact at **regional level**- we can say that from the local experimentation there came out some indications that can contribute to define a framework for the social policy that the Region could carry out both for the family and for childhood. In particular, these indications could constitute the references to specify how "mother-child protection" could imply actions of preventive nature, that mobilize public and private resources. In this perspective one should be able to count on a major coherence of the activities of the Family Consultancies. The actions carried out are a way to make concrete -as more than once repeated by the regional coordination committee- some of the orientations already endorsed by the Region. In this sense the project can be seen as an experimental moment of the planning action of the Region. The groups made hypothesis as to the involvement of the regional level, preliminary to a mutual agreement on priorities and modalities of action, and respecting the institutional competencies of each agency. The experimentation has in fact activated a dialogue among the local groups and referents of the groups of the regional coordination committee, expressed -among other things- with more voices, in the various documents produced by the groups themselves:

. . . Today, affording its due importance to the role that the Region has in the project, we ask for a major and constant collaboration on the part of the regional professional staff whose contribution is essential for the continuation of the work (Lamezia)

and further . . . concerning the cooperation with the regional coordination committee of Calabria we underline the importance of a constant updating of the legislation, the training of the professional staff, and the periodical assessment meetings. . . (Palmi)

. . . The Regione Calabria that was the promoter of this project, keeping in mind that the experimentation work was carried out at local level, will direct its actions and its planning towards the social policies for the Family and childhood by defining the actions and direction that would orient the Local Agencies towards a new approach when they will be planning their social policies. Therefore we propose that the Regione Calabria: constitute a coordination among the various departments that deal with social policies, that would be formally recognized, and that would give its contribution to the formulation of the directions of the actions.... (Cosenza)

. . . As professional staff of the agencies we propose that in these acts be specifically stated:

1) the redefinition and reorganization of the areas of competence of each Agency or Service. Each Agency and/or

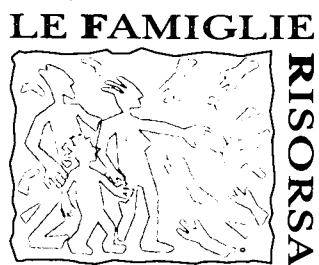
Service, when taking charge of any case, will have to use forms of collaboration and integration while carrying out its own competence on the problems connected to family and childhood.

2) The integration among the services of the various Agencies will have to be formalized in the protocols for action of the Region that will identify common actions and objectives, aimed at planning a new social policy.

3) The activation and the promotion of a process of networking that be formally recognized by the various Agencies and/or services involved in the taking charge of the cases.

4) The clients orientation: correct information on the use of the services through the activation of information circuits such as: social secretariat, Public Relation Offices, etc.

5) The joint training of the professional staff and the resource families meant as experimentation and improvement of their abilities and skills. (Document of the professional staff, Dec. '97).



PROGETTO INTERREGIONALE
SULLE POLITICHE SOCIALI
PER LA FAMIGLIA E L'INFANZIA

RESOURCE FAMILIES PROJET

Work group of Lavello (Basilicata)

Annual Plan

028580

PS

"Resource Families" Group, in Lavello
(Regione Basilicata)

ANNUAL PLAN

INITIATIVE OF COMMUNITY PROMOTION

1. QUALITY OF THE SERVICES

The need was born out of the motivation to get to know and to improve the services delivered by the administration.

- The group can collaborate by delivering services of information, advertisement of the activities, and with actions of assessment through personal contacts based on how well we know the people, and how close they are to us. The group has already dealt with quality assessment activities within the services delivered by the Family Consultancies. More specifically quality assessment was focused on the services delivered to couples --the preparation to marriage course-- out which there emerged the true needs of couples which helped us, therefore, to improve and adjust the services to their needs.
- The Administration is asked to provide a map of all public services delivered on the territory, especially when aiming at acquiring new skills (Social Welfare Service)

2. THE CHART OF SERVICES AND ITS ACHEVEMENT

The group can collaborate in the planning of activities and in the assessment of the services delivered.

The Administration is asked to establish, apply and carry out the Chart of Services; that the latter be advertised and disseminated to all the clients in the malls, supermarkets, newsstands, schools, etc.. Moreover it is asked to establish a Public Relations Office through which to monitor the clients' needs with the purpose of improving the service.

3. VOLUNTEERS TRAINING

The group is committed to promote and sensitize volunteers throughout meetings in schools and personal connections.

The Administration is asked to cover the cost of possible expenses for the training of young volunteers, and to sponsor conferences and round tables with experts and other volunteer associations.

Carmela, Grazia and Emilia

INITIATIVES FOR FAMILIES WITHOUT DIFFICULTIES

We thought of a center for self-responsibilization for parents, where they could share their problems with people who are in

their same situation, report about their difficulties, and, therefore, help one another to cope with various problems.

This center will be managed by the various Resource Family Groups, who will take care of advertisement through posters and brochures. We would like to open this place in a pretty central street so that it would be visible and accessible to all from 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. twice a week.

The Municipality of Lavello will have to give us the premises and whatever will be necessary as to furnishing and equipment.

Objectives

1. In collaboration with the municipal library we would like to create a reading corner with book loan, magazines, cook books, and women's trades manuals.
2. Creating a tea and coffee corner, and possibly board games.
3. Inviting specialists periodically: psychologists, gynecologists, etc., who would discuss and clarify general problems of family life.
4. Organizing trips to involve whole families.

The Resource Families are committed to carry out this project trying to perceive the problems and possible needs of the participating families. They will also set up new goals to be later assessed. Moreover, they will try to structure --later

and if financial resources allow for it-- the Childhood Project.

Dina, Dora, Pia, and Lia

FAMILIES WITH DIFFICULTIES

The Resource Family Group is already involved in many actions for families with difficulties --on behalf of minors and adults as well.

These actions are accomplished in the education/social assistance of children, and by offering support to adults, in daily life actions, so that they may acquire autonomy skills.

Each initiative of this kind is preceded by the analysis of the family upon which to take action. Such analysis, carried out by the operators of the Family Consultancy, examines various features of the family situation in its evolution, their economic condition, relationships and relations, the network with which to realize the actions (possibility of sharing tasks among Family Consultancy - Resource Families, other agencies and/or other subjects), the elements upon which to ground the action.

Every action is followed by periodical assessment of the results obtained, carried out by the operators of the Family Consultancy and the whole group of Resource Families. Assessment is aimed at understanding possible difficulties met in the course of the support action, and possible changes of the family situation upon which to act. Sometimes some members of the Family Consultancy Group are available also for situations of actual foster family.

We consider it necessary to continue working with families in difficulty, through direct contact (home calls), and to extend also to these family units the proposal of the Parents Center, a place where we would like to see training courses for the family held by experts.

Among the various actions on behalf of families with difficulties, we would like to mention the "Children's Summer Camp" project that is at its third edition, and is realized thanks to the collaboration among Municipal Administration, Family Consultancy and Resource Families Group (see the detailed project).

Rossella, Anna, and Elvira

ACTIONS AGAINST SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Families with difficulties

Adolescents in difficult situations

Other situations

We collected information from friends, relatives, acquaintances, inviting them to give us some advice on the subject.

The idea that came out was that of creating a "workshop-center" as a meeting and socializing place for:

- Adolescents in difficult situations
- Adolescents with non serious handicaps
- Elderly people (and not) available to collaborate with passing knowledge down about their trade

The network of involvement, for adolescents in a difficult situation, must start with their own peers, must involve the whole school and, most of all, the teachers.

The Municipality should give the premises and a minimum equipment to set the Center up.

Volunteers, to be found not only in the Resource Families Group, but also in other local associations (cultural, sports), should provide for the center opening hours in afternoon and to animate its activities, on the basis of careful planning.

The Center activities could be the following:

- Carpentry
- Photography
- Mechanics
- Painting
- Ceramics
- Theater and music
- Sports activities
- Cooking (giving value to local dishes)
- Organization of neighborhood parties

In the summer the children could take part in work camps.

"CHILDREN'S SUMMER CAMP" 1997 PROJECT

General Objectives

- Improving the condition of the child's relational life through supporting the family in its care-taking obligations

- Offering children the opportunity to use a space for playing in order to live a meaningful relational experience with peers and adults

Specific Objectives

- Integration of 3 to 6 year-old children, fostering their growth within an affective relation that is built with the group.
- Socialization and recreation through an educational activity, disguised as a structured and guided game that would make use of and stimulate creativity.
- Offering the families with difficulty --mostly working mothers-- the opportunity of making use of an initiative on behalf of their children aiming at fostering social exchange and that would offer them educational models.
- Making this intervention a stable and comprehensive service upon which the children and their families could count on a regular basis.

Modalities of realization

The Resource Families Group, in collaboration with the Family Consultancy, and with a group of Volunteer Youths (which is growing thanks to the promotion of the already existing group), proposes once more the experience of the Children's Summer Camp of the July - August '97 period, with the intention of making

this activity a stable and consistent one, upon which the children and their families can count.

The center is open for a maximum of 25/30 children who are in the 3 to 6 years of age group. We want to continue and give priority to those minors who live in a situation of difficulty. However, since we want to enroll (in smaller numbers) some children belonging to families who are not followed by the Family Consultancy, but who do have the need of trusting their children to a structure for the period of July and August (an experience already started last year), we thought of proposing to such families a kind of exchange: our availability to host their kids in exchange with their parents' availability to collaborate with the Resource Families Group. This hypothesis would also allow to enhance further social exchange.

Since over the past years we have been noticing a remarkable decrease of presence in the month of August, we would like to propose a partial renewal of enrolment over the July-August term, hence giving the opportunity to use this service to more families.

In order to have a meaningful and consistent relationship with the families, the Resource Families Group, proposes once more the "Parents Space", strictly connected to the summer camp and

geared with it, since there were started together. Therefore, in the July - August term, meetings with parents are scheduled every fortnight to share and talk, with the purpose of collecting comments and elements to assess the initiative.

Once again this year, the operators of the Family Consultancy and some members of the Resource Families Group and of the Youths Volunteer Group held some meetings in the secondary schools in Lavello with the purpose of promoting volunteer service and of increasing the Youths Volunteer Group on behalf of the summer camp. The students of the first two years course were also involved, despite their young age, since we thought that some of them could take interest in our initiative. Like for last year, we have planned some meetings with the Volunteer Group, between May and June, during which we can discuss about volunteer work and training in collaboration with the association "The Bridge".

The organization of the summer camp will be granted by the camp counselors and animators.

Each volunteer will be asked to be available for at least seven days in a row.

The camp counselors and animators all share the need that the garden/playground ("green space") of the school premises where the summer camp will be held be taken care of; that shade area be provided to grant the children more time outside, but well protected from the sun.

We would like to suggest to the Municipal Administration to request for snacks at the Barilla Plant of San Nicola di Melfi, and of fruit juices at the Valfrutta Plant di Gaudiano. At the same time, we would like that Barilla were asked to kindly open its plant for a field trip (in July), so that the kids can observe the production cycle of a very familiar product: snacks.

The Family Consultancy will lend its TV set and VCR to the kids of the summer camp.

PARENTS SPACE

The actions of the Resource Families are more and more characterized by preventive measures on behalf of community families. The result of such activities (summer camp, support for minors' families, health education in the schools, training meetings with parents, collaboration to women's tumors

screening) was that of fostering a possibility of exchange, listening, sharing, discussing, helping, on the subject of "how-hard-it-is-to-be-parents", among the group of Resource Families and the "user" families.

Concerning the tendency of families to withdraw in isolation there emerged, and it was clearly said out loud, a strong need to be listened to, a need for sharing and participating. Actually, even in our towns and villages, the extended network of family relations is often insufficient and inadequate, fragmented or problematic. Therefore it is not always easy to use it in a functional way; nor is it easy to use it to integrate or compensate one's own obligations of care-taking and bringing up one's children. Moreover, it is a fact that the family accomplishes a wide number of tasks: it educates, consoles, takes care, protects, nourishes affection and love, etc. It is nonetheless also true that, in order to accomplish these functions, one pays a very high price because of the lack of role models commonly acknowledged to support the members of families during the different phases of the vital cycle, and the inevitable difficulties they meet with.

If then, the family must perform all these functions in a social context that does not always help, support and facilitate its accomplishments, it is fundamental to be active, and build and potentiate informal networks of relations in order to avoid isolation, and to ignite connection mechanisms

with the formal networks of the territory. We must think of the family, even of the "problematic" family as a system of relations in which, next to problematic aspects (leaving, dependency, intransigence), there are other aspects that signify skills, potential, creativity, tolerance.

This perspective allows us to look at the family as a system of relations with which to work, rather than *for which* to work; as an answer in itself to be placed center stage; as a competent subject able to accomplish its own life cycle, supporting its own and its members' development obligations.

The course taken together with the Resource Families allowed for and produced the planning and implementation of initiatives that highlight this logic. The latter acknowledges and gives back to the "Family" its role of active subject, able to have a saying on matters of services that concern it directly, able to plan jointly with the agencies' initiatives that respond to its priority needs. It is in this context that the "Parents Space" was born, an initiative mainly implemented by the families for the families of the community.

Aims

- Supporting the family in its development tasks, and its ability to hold on during moments of transition;
- Fostering listening, sharing, discussing with other families;
- Fostering access to services

Specific Objectives

- Giving information about the services delivered by the agencies, and about all useful initiatives for parents and families;
- Setting out initiatives among parents to respond to the needs of people and childhood;
- Guaranteeing moments of training for parents on recurring and priority themes highlighted by the families themselves.
- Promoting forms of mutual help among families.

The space has been physically found in a room in the Health District which has become the meeting place.

At this stage, it is open once a week on Wednesdays 5:00 to 7:00 p.m.

Opening hours are guaranteed by the presence of two/three Resource Families who will be welcoming people and will foster dialogue and monitor needs, problems, proposals, which will be referred to when implementing training courses and other useful initiatives.

1st Phase: The space was opened on April 15, 1998. The opening phase saw the Families and the Operators of the Agency committed to advertising and involving people; inviting families who had previously participated to the activities provided by the agency (childbirth psycho-prophylaxis, families .

with education difficulties, families invited to health education meetings, summer camp, single parent families, separated people, unmarried mothers, etc...), and families introduced by the Resource Families.

The four meetings held every Wednesday were addressed to parents who were going through various phases of the vital cycle, particularly expecting parents or with newborn babies, parents with children in nursery and primary school, with adolescent and adult children. The meetings, where some 50 parents participated, were characterized as moments to discuss and to advertise the initiative; the latter was perceived with attention, interest, and for some aspects, even with enthusiasm by the families.

2nd Phase: Its objectives are: giving continuity to the initiative, organizing information delivery, starting at least two training sessions, and creating connections also through offering materials.

The Center opening hours will be guaranteed once a week with the presence of at least three/four families, and two training sessions will be organized with experts on the following themes: "Couples and parents, two roles that influence each other?" "Summer nursery school, an experience of solidarity among families."

The participation of the Agency to the initiative concerns:

- The presence of an operator during opening hours of the Space
- Training sessions
- Planning, assessment and analysis of the needs observed
- Supporting and connecting the initiative with other services delivered by the agency.

Expected outcomes and timing of the project

We expect the initiative to be afforded continuity. We expect it to be enriched with the contribution of new families; that initiatives with parents be experimented, as well as exchange of mutual help among families; that the agencies make the services they deliver more accessible to the people, and that the families be our active interlocutors with both planning the activities and identifying priorities.

The operators of the Family Consultancy

1998



*U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
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per
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