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TRAINING SPECIALISTS TO WORK WITH FOSTER FAMILIES IN MODERN SOCIAL CONDITIONS

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Abstract

The paper presents the ways to increase the effectiveness of raising an orphaned child in foster families. One aspect of this problem is personnel training to work with foster families. The paper proposes a model to improve the competence of specialists in various areas of training and qualifications. The purpose of the educational program is to form the students of advanced training courses for professional competences to psychological and pedagogical support for foster families. In the process of training, various methods of active social and psychological training were used, involving the actualization of all professional knowledge and skills of students of advanced training courses with different basic training, such as group discussion, brainstorming, inversion, analysis of real situations, analysis of moral choice situations, etc.; game methods: business and role-playing games; trainings. The use of methods to enhance training based on cognitive-motivating motives initiates the assimilation of knowledge not only in these courses, but also stimulates further professional self-education. The proposed training model to work with foster families enables to see a complete picture of the problem of substitute families in several aspects - social, practice-oriented and research, as well as to organize a more constructive interaction of various services and foster families. The work efficiency of a specialist in such a three-dimensional understanding and application in practice of various tools to work with foster families makes the interaction of various services and a replacement family more constructive.

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1. Introduction

Social orphanhood exists in human communities at different times and ages. Willingness to protect the child's rights to life, health and family, provide compensating resources to it is largely an indicator of the level of sociocultural development in the society as a whole (Animitsa, Novikova, & Sukhikh, 2009; Schelkunov, Mironov, Kirabaev, Grebennikova, & Nikitina, 2018; Suar & Khuntia, 2004). In the modern world, such professional teachers, psychologists, as well as social services are needed that can productively solve professional tasks in dynamically changing conditions. Currently, in our country, the most promising form of life arrangement for orphans and children left without parental care is recognized as a foster family.

2. Problem Statement

In this regard, it is necessary to carry out such professional training and retraining for teachers and psychologists who would be able to provide constructive support for a foster family, aimed at the continuous development of its functional effectiveness.

3. Research Questions

The functional effectiveness of a foster family is considered as the transformation of a foster family into a small social group with a favorable environment for the development of an orphaned child. Such family ideally ensures the adoption of a child to the basic human values, moral and cultural norms of socially approved behavior. Foster families face with various difficulties that are typical of most families. However, it is experiencing specific problem situations. Problems common to all families are associated with the age crises of the adopted child, changes in family structure, problems of material nature, etc. Specific problems are caused by the peculiarities of living conditions of the adopted child in a blood family and institution, the lack of blood ties between the adopted child and foster parents, the peculiarities of perception of the surrounding reality by the adopted child, the specifics of his behavior.

Like any family, foster families interact with various social institutions, primarily with the representatives of the guardianship and trusteeship bodies, teachers, psychologists working with a foster child and a foster family. Not all specialists who interact with a foster family adequately represent the development specifics of orphans; understand the behavioral patterns of adopted children, and underlying problems of foster families. When they replace parents, they do not always adequately assess the current situation of raising an adopted child. They are afraid to state the problems and they mask or hush up about the negative manifestations of family relationships. The lack of mutual understanding of teachers and other specialists with members of a foster family often provokes and /or aggravates the conflict situations of the adopted child with foster parents, provides difficult situations in communication in children's teams. A specialist who accompanies a foster family must be prepared for the diverse unpredictable specific peculiarities of a foster family to the same extent as for its typical characteristics, difficulties in functioning, and interaction with foster parents. In this regard, it is necessary to increase the competence of specialists who work with foster families. It is a condition to optimize the life activity of foster families.

4. Purpose of the Study

In this regard, the purpose of our paper is to identify the substantive-procedural components of teacher training to work with foster families in dynamically changing social conditions. We take into account that a large number of social, sometimes oppositely directed, factors affect the substitute family: the development and improvement of the child protection system - the deepening crisis of the family as an institution of the primary socialization for a child; constantly increasing demands on the quality of education and upbringing of children - the uncertainty of these requirements, intense information richness of our society - the low quality and accuracy of this information prevails, etc.

5. Research Methods

To study the stated problem, we used the following groups of research methods. Research methods for foster families - surveys and questionnaires, analysis of documentation of social teachers of educational institutions and guardianship and custody services, analysis of diary observations of foster parents. Methods to study the needs of specialists who work with a foster family - studying the sheets of self-certification of specialists, conducting surveys on the main difficulties in a foster family. Methods to study the current practice of training personnel working with a foster family are the study of curricula and programs, training of personnel at a pedagogical university, study of materials for educational, industrial, pre-diploma practice of students, future social educators. Methods to improve the existing practice of personnel training - experimental work in the center of additional education in training and retraining of personnel working with a foster family.

6. Findings

The development of a training model to work with a foster family is associated with the study of the object specifics of personnel work. The main peculiarity of a foster family is a wider, in comparison with the family raising a child, field of various difficulties. Thus, the problems of age crises of the child and parents, the need to adapt to changes in the family structure, problems of a material nature, employment, health, professional self-determination, etc. are peculiar to all families, and supplemented by specific problems. These include peculiarities of the perception by the adopted child of the surrounding reality, in connection with the complex life events experienced by him (ignoring his parents, illness, asocial behavior of parents, death of parents, cruel treatment, etc.) and the specifics of his behavior. The programs on pedagogical, psychological, and social areas of student preparation include the study of this information. In the process of educational and practical training, students become familiar with certain aspects of working with a foster family.

A special attention should be paid to the fact that a change in the child's living arrangement in the line "native family - social institution (boarding school, orphanage, orphanage) - foster family" in its various variations influences the results of education of the child. The relation between academic success and the quality of family relationships was noted by various researchers, including Sakk, Veisson, and Lukk (2009). According to the research results, the success of the foster child's training is not only related to the peculiarities of the pedagogical position of foster parents, the qualifications of school teachers, but also the

help of support services for foster families in the child's school adaptation, compensation for existing gaps in the pre-school and foster child's education (Solomatina & Sumenko, 2016).

To increase the efficiency of a foster family, schools of adoptive parents have been established in our country, which, as part of preparing candidates for foster parents, not only provide legal knowledge, conduct psychological and educational counseling, but also develop the stress tolerance of parents for future foster families.

As a survey result by university graduates enrolled in "social teacher" and "social work" fields, there was no readiness of future specialists to work in foster parents' schools, as well as independently accompanying families, to ensure optimal interaction of a foster family with various social institutions. Readiness for relevant work is demonstrated only by those graduates (mostly correspondence courses) who have worked for some time in various structures related to the interaction with this contingent. However, such specialists are only 2.5%. Therefore, specialist training to work with foster families requires a systematic and planned approach; such work should be based on practice-oriented teaching methods.

The interaction of a foster family with various social institutions and institutions of social purpose is an obligatory part of its life activity. At the same time, not all of these interactions are evaluated by a foster family itself as constructive and productive. In particular, the families surveyed for 10 years, assess their contacts with the representatives of the guardianship and trusteeship bodies, with teachers, psychologists, mainly as control and supervision by the state. Parents in a foster family tend to hide certain minor flaws and interact only formally. Specialists who work with a foster family do not fully understand the social and psychological characteristics of orphan children; they do not understand the underlying problems of a foster family. This means that vocational training is in dire need of improvement, since the lack of mutual understanding between specialists and members of a foster family provokes and aggravates the conflicts of the adopted child with foster parents and peers in the children's team. Therefore, the increase of specialist competences who work with a foster family is prerequisite for their professional training (Vodenko, Ponomarev, Vergun, Zritneva, & Volkova, 2018).

Our results indirectly confirm other studies. In particular, Gaysina (2017) named the following reasons to decrease work effectiveness of specialists in guardianship and trusteeship with foster families:

- insufficiently clear definition of criteria to evaluate activities in the legislation that regulate the work of these specialists;
- unpreparedness and staff turnover;
- discrepancy between the number of staff members and the number and complexity of the tasks assigned to them (for example, load on one guardianship officer, which can reach 240 families);
- tendency to expand responsibility areas of specialists;
- increase in categories of citizens with whom specialists work;
- low wages of specialists, etc.

In addition, studying at a university does not always implement the most relevant information - training lasts so long that some of the information loses its relevance. Thus, the demand for a systematic professional development of specialists in various fields at the stages of higher education and postgraduate education was designated. Zakharova (2007) proposes to introduce special courses, study visits to institutional institutions for orphans and children left without parental care, conduct joint classes with the

experts of the adoptive club. These ideas were adopted by us as a means to update professional training for students. At the same time, in such joint classes and conducting excursions for students, we see a means of accumulating the theoretical knowledge of future specialists, increasing the motivation for self-education and self-development.

Kolesnikova (2015) notes that modern conditions for institution development of a foster family from each specialist who works with a foster family require an understanding of his professional goals and values, development of the ability to interpret the content in relation to the requests of a foster family. The author emphasizes the importance of refresher courses for social workers in the system of continuing education of social specialists who work with a foster family. The advantages of this form of training specialists. Kolesnikova (2015) considers the flexibility of forms and the speed of the structure of advanced training courses, dynamism and mobility, which ensures professional and personal dynamics of a specialist.

In our studies, the main problems that pedagogical workers face when teaching foster children, who most often have a social and psychological nature, were identified (Solomatina & Sumenko, 2016):

- adaptation of foster children in the children's team;
- psychological barriers to the interaction of foster children with peers and teachers;
- lack of tolerance among teachers and peers towards foster children. These problems are a destructive factor in the interaction of teachers of educational institutions with a foster family and require great professionalism from the teaching staff, which directly depends on the quality of preparation to work with this category of children.

Thus, the scientific literature highlights the issues of training social professionals to work with foster families. The success of educational work with foster families directly depends on the professionalism of specialists who work with them. The higher the level of professional competence of a specialist who works with a foster child in groups of different age and composition, and the more he is aware of the life characteristics of a foster family, the more qualitatively the interaction of various services with a foster family will be carried out.

Taking into account a high demand for continuous professional development of specialists accompanying the development of foster families, pedagogical universities are called upon to take an active part in systematic professional development of teachers, psychologists, and social teachers. In particular, in 2011-2012, State Budgetary Educational Institution of Higher Professional Education "Stavropol Pedagogical Institute" under the subprogramme "A child's right to a family in Stavropol Krai for 2011-2013" regional target program "Development of education in Stavropol Krai in 2010-2013" conducted a cycle of advanced training courses with the support of the Foundation for Children in Difficult Life Situations. It was focused on specialists who work in the system of education, health care and social protection to increase the effectiveness of prevention of social orphanhood and the development of family forms of upbringing of children without parental care.

The target audience was represented by the heads of preschool and school educational institutions, social educators, psychologists, educators of preschool educational institutions, including a combined and compensating type, specialists in child's rights protection of local government bodies, specialists of the commission on juvenile affairs, teachers, defectologists, speech therapists, representatives of medical institutions, specialists of educational authorities, specialists of legal services with education systems.

In 2014, the Ministry of Education and Youth Policy of Stavropol Krai adopted the “New Family” subprogramme of the educational program “Development of Education for 2014” state program, and it was implemented on the basis of Stavropol Pedagogical Institute for specialists of the education system, health care and social protection.

During 2011-2018, 2298 people were trained under the advanced training program “Support for Foster Families”. There were: social teachers - 48%; psychologists - 16%; heads of guardianship services - 1.8%; head sectors - 0.7%; guardianship inspectors - 2%; specialists of guardianship and guardianship - 17.4%; deputy the minister of education — 0.2%; specialists of education departments - 6%; sociologists - 1.6%; school principals - 0.2%; deputy directors for water resources management - 0.3%; teachers - 2.4%; organizing teachers - 0.5%; managers of additional educational institutions - 0.2%; teachers of additional educational institutions - 1.3%; methodists - 0.2%; senior counselors - 0.5%; consultants - 0.5%; lawyers of social institutions - 0.2%.

The main educational program of advanced training courses “Modern technologies to support foster families” is implemented in full-time tuition during 2 weeks. The purpose of the educational program is to form students' professional competencies in the organization of psychological and pedagogical support of foster families.

The objectives of the program are:

- peculiarities of life activities of foster families;
- familiarization with diagnostic technologies to identify the educational potential of foster parents;
- disclosure of the main approaches to the organization and content of the process of integrated support of foster families;
- formation of students' ideas about the specifics of social, psychological and pedagogical conditions of life of a foster family;
- developing students' professional skills and abilities to determine ways and means of organizing social, psychological and educational assistance to various categories of foster families;
- conditions to enhance the cognitive activity of students in practical and independent work.

During the developing of the program, we were guided by the fact that specialists who work with a foster family may face a wide variety of problems that are impossible to predict. For this reason, their competence should be the ability to navigate in the current problems, make informed, thoughtful decisions, and understand the responsibility to the family and society. In this regard, the following sections are included in the advanced training program “Support for Foster Families”:

1. Features of life of a foster family.
2. Diagnostics of the educational potential of foster parents and their psychological compatibility with the adopted child.
3. Organization and maintenance of psychological and pedagogical support of foster families.

In form the skills of specialists, indicated above, it is not enough to simply transmit the content of theoretical material. It is necessary to use various methods of active social and psychological training, which imply the actualization of all professional knowledge and skills of students of advanced training courses with different basic training. In the selection of forms of training for students, we relied on methods to enhance learning based on cognitive-motivating motives that initiate the assimilation of knowledge not

only on these courses, but also stimulate further professional self-education. In the conditions of such training, self-control processes are actively taking place, “failures” and “doubtful places” (those parts of the material that none of the participants of the lesson can reproduce) are clearly understood. In the process of direct interaction of the teacher and students, empathy develops to the problems of a foster family, fostering a culture of emotional response to the events of the lives of the members of the foster family.

When conducting refresher courses for specialists who work with foster families, the whole arsenal of active learning methods was used: discussion methods (group discussion, brainstorming, inversion, analysis of real situations, analysis of moral choice situations, etc.); game methods: business and role-playing games; trainings.

The use of active learning methods required a revision of the forms of organization of work with students. These include reports, round tables, preparation and protection of projects, preparation and participation in case studies, work in problem groups.

Let us present some results of a specialist survey on the main issues of the questionnaire concerning their readiness to interact with foster families, which we offered them before and after the course (Tab.01).

Table 01. Changes dynamics in students' self-assessment indicators on readiness to interact with a foster family (%)

Questions	Number of students (%)	
	Before the course	After the course
Knowledge of psychological and pedagogical peculiarities of orphans	15%	83%
Knowledge of the legal basis to regulate the activities of a substitute family	16%	100%
Willingness to interact with a foster family	10%	90%
Readiness for pedagogical support of orphans	6%	65%

The positive results dynamics of advanced training courses for specialists (trainees) who work with foster families enables to talk about the work effectiveness.

7. Conclusion

Preparation to work with foster families through advanced training courses for specialists in various fields is currently the most effective. The organized courses help specialists of different areas of training and qualification level to see a complete picture of the state of the problem of foster families in several aspects: social aspect (significance of the problem of its resolution), practice-oriented aspect (organization of interaction of specialists, specific social-pedagogical and socio-psychological programs), research (actual research, new ideas and approaches to solve the problem). The efficiency of such a three-dimensional understanding and application in practice of various tools to work with a foster family makes the interaction of various services and a foster family more constructive.

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