

A close-up photograph of a woman with blonde hair tied back, holding a young child with light brown hair. The woman is looking towards the camera with a gentle expression. The child is looking slightly to the side. The background is softly blurred, suggesting an indoor setting.

# Working together

Family supporters

EUSUMH Leuven

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Kind & Gezin

## Kind en Gezin (Child and Family)

Governmental Flemish Agency

'Public Health, Welfare and Family' policy area.

Enable children to achieve their full developmental potential, physically, mentally, emotionally and socially, with respect for diversity and children's rights:

**MISSION: Kind en Gezin, together with its partners, aims to create as many opportunities as possible for every child, regardless of where he or she was born or where and how he or she is growing up.**

# Assignment

**Contribution to the well-being of young children and their families in an active way**

Through 3 policy areas:

- Preventive family support
- Childcare
- Adoption



## Preventive support to families

- Organized in regional teams (63), imbedded in local networks (House of Child)
- Future parents and families with children from 0 to 3 years
- Home visits and counselling offices (physicians and volunteers)
- Preventive medical program (development, vaccination, hearing and eye test)
- Psycho-social support and parental support according their needs
- Reaching 98% of the newborns

## Proportionate and Universal approach

- For all families and young children
- Poverty and social exclusion
- Policy of diversity, on 5 tracks:
  - Vision statement
  - Multidisciplinarité: different perspectives
  - Strategies and methodology
  - Competences
  - Monitoring and evaluation / reflexion

## The number of children, in socially vulnerable situations

- Methodology to encounter the socially vulnerable families
- A definition
- Six criterias:
  - Employment of the parents
  - Housing of the family.
  - Educational level of the parents
  - The family income
  - The physical and psychological child development, the state of health of the family members and how they use the medical facilities
  - Interaction between the parent and the child
- Increasing number: from 11,38 % in 2014 to 12,08% in 2016

# The family supporter

key task "to connect"

## Family supporters WHO are they ?



- Men/women who have experienced living in social exclusion (by poverty and/or migration) and who experience(d) exclusion from the inside.
- Each share of his own individuality and its experiences.
- Knows the feelings of pain, anxiety, uncertainty.
- Knows the meaning of the language, attitudes, strategies to survive.
- Managed to get (partially) out of poverty.

## Why working with family supporters (experts by experience on social exclusion) ?

- Point of view of the Agency
  - Increase the **accessibility** of service
  - Bring in the **perspective** of social exclusion
- Point of view of families
  - Recognition
- Point of view of family supporters
  - Valorisation of experiences
  - Recognition of the willingness to help each other
- General
  - Bridging the gap – looking for the connection



My school life was very short. I liked going to school. It was a revelation and an opportunity to develop and to explore. I have been authorized to the 1st year secondary school. After talking with my brother, my father came to the conclusion that I shouldn't go to school no longer. My world collapsed: I did not understand...

It was a turning point in my life. I could not resist my parents and brothers. For no good reason, I stopped. I could read and write and it seemed apparently sufficient for a girl.

Today I like to explain and encourage all parents to stimulate their child(ren) to go to school as soon as possible.

## Family supporters HISTORY?

- Horizonproject 1993-1995 (pilot)
- Strategic planning 1996:
  - intercultural mediators and experts by experience
- Training 1997-1998
  - 17 experts by experience in house training
- Evaluation (2002) and renewed 'profile' and methodology since 2004
- 2017: 70 family supporters, working in teams with doctors, nurses, volunteers
  - Intervision, supervision

I was very aggressive, destructive and rebellious. That was my self-protection and a way of survival. One of the things I've learned is that the life that I lived in poverty was not my fault, neither I have to blame my parents or people out of my close environment.

My way of looking at myself, others, and society is expanded and it decreased my anger.



## The Family supporter Core function

**Bridging the gaps and make the connection for socially vulnerable families with:**

- The organisation
- The service providers
- The society
  - Formal and informale network
  - Other services (concerning housing, employment, educational training, health, administration...)

## The Family supporter Core function

### **Bridging the different gaps:**

- A structural and participation gap
- A gap in terms of 'emotions'
- A gap in terms of 'knowledge'
- A gap in terms of 'competences'
- A gap concerning resources

BY Building a bridge, linking the different worlds, supporting the family project, keeping the perspective of the experience of poverty and social exclusion in mind...

I learned not to be a rescuer of the family, but to engage me in "a traject" with the family. I sincerely listen to better understand the 'inside' of poverty. I'm more attentive to their feelings, their thoughts and their meanings.



## Family supporters Tasks and methodology

Tasks to do, methods to use:

Draw attention to, reflect on and recognize existing mechanisms and patterns of social exclusion

Redefining the meaning of verbal and non-verbal communication; Being present; Mirroring; “excusing” people or situations; Mediating; Offering practical support; Referring; Translating (language)

Challenges:

Determine own limits; always balancing; communication with other service provider

## Family supporters ADDED VALUE

- For the organisation and professionals:  
« experts hold the organization vigilante when it risks to forget or overlook the socially vulnerable people in the development and implementation of the service »
- For the families: « I recognized that a family supporter might make 'a connection' much faster and more profound. »

## Family supporter ADDED VALUE

- For the other services: « Trough working together with the family supporter, I became aware of the experience of social exclusion. It became very visible how I looked from my own perspective and how I judged people regarding my own norm and values.»
- For the family supporter: « I feel recognized in my expertise.»

## Contact

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