

# Reviews and short reports

## Workshop on the Amendment to the Act on Social and Legal Protection of Children

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On 16th April 2013 the Faculty of Education, Palacký University, Olomouc held the workshop Amendment to the Act on Social and Legal Protection of Children No. 359/1999 Coll. As Amended, with Effect from 1 January 2013 under the auspices of Dagmar Pitnerová. The workshop participants reflected the benefits and negatives of the application of the amendment in practice. The interpretation of the innovation of the Act on Social and Legal Protection of Children was presented by Zdeňka Šindelářová, head of the social department in Jindřichův Hradec.

The act is important for the practice of social work, especially for work with children and families of the department of social and legal protection of children. The participants of the workshop dealt mainly with changes in Act No. 359, which have significantly influenced the content of work of social workers. The change of assessment of a child's living situation is substantial for social workers and their outreach work. It covers the areas of housing, finance, education of parents, family and social situation or behaviour of the children or their state of health.

Zdeňka Šindelářová presented the modifications in individual child protection plans, focusing on the assessment of the situation of each child, not the family as a whole. The number of plans corresponds to the number of children in the family. Nevertheless the number of social workers has not been increased with the increase of administrative work.

A novelty in the act is Section 10 allowing organizing of case conferences to resolve specific situations of vulnerable children and their families, with partnership with parents, school representatives, law enforcement authorities in the social sector, police, prosecutors, professionals in the field of foster care and others.

Educational measures in Section 13 are complemented by imposing an obligation to use professional counselling or attend a 3-hours meeting with a mediator for the child, parent or person who has custody of the child. If the educational measure fails, the court may suspend a child from the custody of parents or others responsible for the child's upbringing for a period of up to three months; the total duration of the educational measure shall not exceed six months.

Another important point of the workshop was the submission of a proposal for removal of a child from the family. Before the execution, the municipality with extended powers is obliged to discuss the situation with parents and others responsible for the child's upbringing, organize a case conference, carry out actions arising from the evaluation of the child's situation and possibly impose an obligation to utilize vocational counselling. The reason for removal of the child must not be merely the inadequate housing or financial status of the parents of the child. But it is possible that a child lives in an appalling housing conditions and the social worker still does not have a valid reason for applying for the removal of the child from the family.

What was mentioned in the next part of the lecture was the time limit for ordering institutional care; it is imposed for the period of three years and can be extended, even repeatedly. Mgr. Zdeňka Šindelářová dealt with changes in foster care. This area is not only about the Act on Social and Legal Protection of Children, but also the Family Act. Among others, there are changes in the field of foster care; a newly established allowance at the end of foster care is the amount of CZK 48,000. Terminology is currently different – a “foster parent” is the caring person, and foster parents providing care for a transitional period of time are referred to as registered persons by the law.

Students and lecturers took part in a final discussion about positive and negative changes in the Amendment of the Act from the perspective of future social workers studying the Faculty of Education, Palacký University, Olomouc. The lecturer provided students with the view of a professional worker, and so they left the workshop enriched with much knowledge and mainly with knowledge from practice, which encouraged their further development in the field of social work.

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