

MATILDE PROJECT

Family mediation in the social service network: a network to be constructed?

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Area One

Family mediation

A service that focuses on couples who are undergoing separation, already separated, or divorced, aimed at helping them to contain their conflict and to finalize the end of their union, eliminating resentments and rivalries in regard to one another in the interest of the children. The parents, assisted by qualified mediators, develop a plan which is satisfactory for the children.

Area Two

Educational support

At-home educational support for minor children, a privileged instrument that is based on the conviction that the family, even when in difficulty, represents the natural environment for the development and the growth of the child. It is a network of interventions that tend to reduce situations of risk, with the aim of improving rapport between the individual and the environment, to help parents to take responsibility for children's problems, to prevent institutionalization, and gradually to facilitate the re-entry of minors into the family unit. The intervention plan is activated to support all members of the family in producing change.

An integral part of educational support is supporting the family. Along with the educator assuming parental tasks, this should become a working tool, an opportunity to stimulate identification and to obtain cooperation in the aim of progressively restoring to adults the competencies and functions that are properly theirs.

Family custody

Following law 184/83, a new intervention was introduced, custody.¹ This is a service of social volunteerism through which minors from families with grave economic, socio-relational or educational difficulties are received and given hospitality. The custodial family bears an important supporting role, coordinated with and parallel to that of the natural family, for a limited period of time. This allows the avoidance of placement in residential facilities. It can be residential or diurnal, and can involve parents, relatives and even singles. Family custody can be consensual or adjudicated by the Tribunal for Minors.

Placement in facilities for minors

This is a service for minors in difficulty, which involves full-time or part-time distancing of the minor from his own original nuclear family because of a crisis or a need for educational support.

It involves minors who for a determined period of time need to be supported in educative work. Later, they can re-enter the family.

To receive this service, a request should be made to the District Social Service that evaluates the timeliness of such an intervention, in consideration of the minors who are already in its charge, and in collaboration with other institutional services (Operating Units of Psychology, Infant Neuropsychiatry, etc.).

¹ The concept of time gives sense to family custody: the period in which the minor "changes home" should allow the original family to enact these changes effectively, and then to regroup in a more functional way. Change is possible insofar as the family's internal resources are recognized. Viewed as a system in evolution with internal resources, the family can then transform itself into a "service." It can anticipate and "cure" its own dysfunction.

Home assistance

Interventions to support families in temporary situations of difficulty in carrying out their educative and health functions: domestic help, accompanying children to school, family organization, health, hygiene. The intervention is directed at minors and the object is to favor their personal development.

Welcoming facilities for mothers and babies

Residential facilities that offer temporary hospitality to pregnant women and/or mothers with minor children in situations of difficulty and/or emergency.

Area Three

Family houses

These are family structures centered around a nucleus of adults residing or living together. There can be couples living together (male and female, married or not, linked by affective relationships aimed at living together and at biological or sociological paternity or maternity) or family homes with two or more co-habiting adults who share a custody plan and who make an effort for a determined period of time to assume the typical functions of parental figures in a nuclear family.

Welcoming communities

These can be communities with operators residing there permanently, with operators sharing the times and spaces of the community, based on a system of rotation, or with non-characteristic services (such as emergency admission of children, observation, orientation).

Centers for emergency intervention

These operate within a network of services and are aimed at containment, depending on the emergency and the specific problem (for example, criminal, mental disorder, etc.). The services provided are characterized by a rapid turnover of those received (max. 60 to 90 per day). For those received, an individualized educative project should be created, which through other services will allow long-term experiences with significant residential care.

Open-family networks

This is a service that organizes families in the same neighborhood who decide to share the task of responding to problems of babies and children from families that are experiencing situations of temporary difficulty. This might require the temporary distancing of the child, with decisions about forms of custody such as of residential, temporary semi-residential, or accompaniment towards autonomy. The network promotes sensitizing the neighborhood, permanently training member families, assisting in the management of welcoming facilities, establishing relationships with public authorities, and providing psychological supervision of families.

It is composed of families within the area who are identified by appropriate Social Service agencies as suitable for family custody.