

Workshop 4

Reception and Living in Families: experiences of Dutch families with a cultural background in taking care of unaccompanied minors and working with Nidos.

Introduction

There were about 25 participants in this workshop. 5 of them work with families and 3 of them are experienced in working with families with different ethnic backgrounds.

There were 3 different families present.

Mrs. R. from Afghanistan, who explained that she is able to understand the situation of the children she takes care of because of her own experiences in the past. She talked about her motivation to take care of these children.

Mr. and Mrs. K., who origin from Congo. They started working with Nidos by taking care of a family member. Mrs. K. is used to living in an extended family and taking care of other children then your own. Her mother also used to do so, taking care of orphans in Congo.

The last couple, Mr. and Mrs. A., is of mixed origin, the wife is Dutch and her husband is from Iran. He also explained that he understands the fears and uncertainties of the youngsters as he has gone through these as well. They provide accommodation to spend the night for a while.

Discussion

What are the negative aspects of taking care of these children?

Mr. K. explained that you have to be very patient and that all children have their own peculiarities. The elder the children, the more difficult it becomes. Youngsters around 16-17 have a difficult age, but he and Mrs. K. recognize themselves in it. Another negative aspect is the fact that children of this age eat a lot.

Mrs. R. could not mention anything negative. Puberty or psychological problems can be difficult but she has patience and knows how to communicate with the youngsters.

Mr. and Mrs. A. found it difficult to accommodate children for a short period of time as both the children and themselves have to get used to the situation over and over again. All the things that have to be organized cost a lot of energy.

How important is it for the children to be accommodated in families with the same cultural background?

Mrs. R. explained that is important for the child to feel at home. A child who lives in a family with a different background than it's own, will need more time to adjust to the situation. Mrs. R. is more likely to understand a girl who wants to wear a head scarf than a Dutch family or a family who isn't Muslim.

Mr. A. has made an effort to adjust, which was a very difficult process. He can learn a lot from the children he is now responsible for. He can see that they want to adjust themselves as soon as possible. That is a good thing and he tells them not to give up.

Mrs. K. added that it is also important that children from Congo learn more about Congolese culture. These children instantly feel at home with them, for instance because of the Congolese food they are familiar with.

How have you been recruited as foster families?

Mrs. R. worked for the Dutch Refugee Council at the time and met someone who worked at Nidos. She explained that people in Afghanistan are not used to receive help. They grew up with Russian occupancy and the idea that you can't trust anyone and especially immigrants. She noticed that refugees in the Netherlands were afraid for the police etc. She used to tell her own children that they should not trust blond people when they had just arrived in the Netherlands. It was only later that she discovered that you can trust people in the Netherlands. This is an important lesson to learn, as there will be more refugees coming to the Netherlands who are scared of white people. Reception in families with different ethnic backgrounds therefore is very important as these families can take away this fear.

The Dutch foster mother met an employee of Nidos at a party.

What education did you need to be able to become a foster parent with Nidos?

Both Mrs. R. and Mrs. K. only had their own experiences as a mother, they did not have any special training or education. They first were in touch with an employee of the RLF-team within Nidos (recruitment and screening). After placement of a child, they receive guidance from one of the guardians who work for Nidos, who helps and supports them.

Many countries have a shortage of ethnic families and therefore use indigenous families. Do the families present have tips for these indigenous families who take care of unaccompanied minors?

Mr. and Mrs. A. stressed that indigenous families should respect the fact that these children are different.

Mrs. K. explained that she takes an interest in the country and the culture the children origin from. She tries to learn more about it and asks the children about their wishes and thoughts regarding their cultural habits. She makes sure to respect these cultural habits.

Mrs. R. added that there are also a lot of Dutch families with different ethnic backgrounds, such as Turkish and Moroccan, who have been living in the Netherlands for a long time. These communities are also united in organizations that can be contacted to recruit foster families.

Taking care of these children costs money. Who is paying?

The families explained that Nidos pays them an amount of money similar to the amount foster carers in the Dutch childcare system receive. This is not always enough to cover the costs of all the things the children would like to buy. The families see this as an opportunity to teach them to save money.

Mrs. R. added that she has to be an example for the children. When you do not waste money you learn the children to act the same.

What enables you as a French speaking family from Congo to take care of an Eritrean child or children from other African countries with different cultures?

Mr. and Mrs. K. speak several languages and dialects and try to find people who can translate for children who speak a language they do not understand. Food is quite similar in different African countries and therefore is not a problem.

Most important is to help the child to integrate the own culture with the Dutch culture as integration starts with the family you grow up with. It is therefore important that you are receptive for other cultures. That you respect them and are curious about them.

In Germany unaccompanied minors in foster care have to have their own room. Does Nidos always work with this rule?

The families answered that this depends on gender and age and is not an explicit rule. Mrs R. explained that non of the Afghan children has a room of it's own. They are used to share beds and are often not comfortable with sleeping alone once they are staying with her.

Can children stay in touch with family members in the country of origin and what is the role of the foster families in this?

Mrs. R. explained that most of the children she takes care of are in contact with their family members at home and that she of course gives them the opportunity to do so. She herself is also in touch with them, as it offers her the chance to discuss certain matters.

Mr. and Mrs. K. have the same experiences and add that this contact with family members is very important to both the children and themselves. They have the experience that it is often being accomplished with help of Nidos.