

## ***Friday Stories from the Czech Republic***

### **When I saw the little one, I knew she was ours!**

When I help families prepare their family council and we reach a difficult point where we can't expand the circle of important people, I think of Sarah.

At the age of four, due to poor care and subsequent health problems, she was removed from her mother and placed in foster care for a temporary period of time. However, the family was encouraged to find a long-term solution. However, neither the mother nor the grandmother wanted to hear about family group conference with the fractious extended family. The coordinator patiently responded to concerns about the meeting and allowed the family the time they needed.

Eventually, the family did meet. During a stormy discussion in the smoking room, where the adults had shut themselves in, it was agreed that a distant maternal aunt would care for Sarah.

The aunt later recounted, "When I saw the little one, I knew she was ours, I wasn't going to let her go to an orphanage."

The transfer of Sarah from her foster parents to the care of her aunt went very smoothly. Sarah is happy with her aunt and sometimes her mother visits her. Her health has improved a lot, so that it is hardly noticeable that she had to fight many health problems.

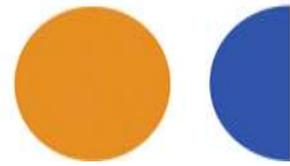
### **Daddy is Daddy**

"That video is the only thing we have left of my dad. He died last month, and I wanted to tell you and thank you for going to see him then." The now grown woman called the coordinator.

"A few years ago, when she was living with her brother in the Children's Home, I helped this family organize family group conference (FGC). Her father was ill, homeless, and residing on the other side of the country, and so he was unable to attend FGC. I went to see him and we made a video - a kind of message for the children, who then watched it during FGC."

In the end, although there was no one to take the children from the Children's Home, plans were made to connect the children with extended family.

The most powerful moment for me, however, was the phone call years later. I was touched by how important the message from Dad was to the children, there is only one Dad after all.



Even when seemingly nothing big happens at the conference and nothing seems to change for the children, I know this work is meaningful, it helps to connect people." concludes the coordinator. In addition, after 2 years, the coordinator happened to meet one of the sisters of the children for whom she was helping to organize a family group conference and was told that the mother had finally managed to get a flat and the children had returned home from the Children's Home before they reached the age of majority. The whole extended family is in close contact.

## **When family is missing...**

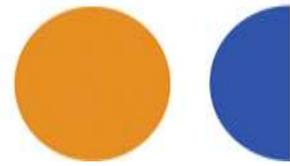
Eva was born when her mother was no longer able to take care of her 2 older siblings and was placed in an institutional care. She celebrated her first birthday in a foster family where she spent 10 years. After the death of her foster mother, short-term foster parents were found for Eva, to whom she confided that she would like to meet her biological family. The social worker thought of using FGC. The coordinator gradually visited Eva's siblings and prepared them to meet together. The older brother and sister lived in children's home, unfortunately separated. The younger sister grew up in kinship care. The coordinator also managed to contact the mother of the children and meet with her.

Eva was accompanied to FGC by her new long-term foster parents. Mom of children did not attend the meeting after all, she was struggling with illness and loss of her home. However, during the preparation process, the coordinator made a video with her for the children and several photos were also taken, which were given to the children with their mother's consent.

The meeting of the siblings was very touching. They planned regular contacts, exchanged addresses, started a Facebook group, and a joint video and photos were taken at the meeting. But it also raised one big question. How is it possible that Eva had to wait 11 years to meet her family?

## **When the phone rings from the hospice...**

A mother of two teenage daughters had a few hours to live when the coordinator received a call from a social worker at the hospice where the mother had spent the last month of her life.



Shortly after the call, the coordinator met with mom's siblings. The idea of meeting at the same table, including the children, appealed to them. The question for the family meeting (FGC) was how care would be provided for the children who had also lost their dad 5 years ago.

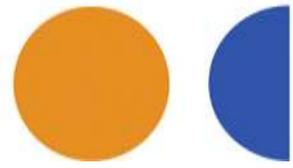
Since it was necessary to establish a guardian for the children in the next few days, the date for FGC was set for the following weekend, leaving only 8 days for FGC to prepare. In the evening, a few hours after the first contact with the family, the coordinator received a list of contacts. During the preparation of the meeting, she added a few more people. Particularly emotional was the meeting with the children (unfortunately the sisters were orphans by then) who had been living with family friends for the last month. Together they prepared the invitations for the meeting, the sisters chose the meeting place, the music and refreshments, and expressed their wish to invite their closest friends.

Everyone invited to the meeting came, even the children's uncle, who was staying in Germany for work, came. There were 17 adults and 10 children. The meeting was very touching. It was also time-consuming. The family agreed on a guardian for the children. Offers were made to provide care for the sisters. It was agreed that all those who wanted to be involved would meet again in the next few days, including the children, and the outcome of the meeting will be communicated directly to the social worker.

The coordinator received feedback from the family a few days after FGC. They very much appreciated her help with the organisation, especially the preparation of the children for the meeting and the presence of a social worker specialised in inheritance law.

## **What will happen to Peter or if the plan from FGC doesn't come true...**

Until the age of three, five-year-old Peter grew up with his parents who were struggling with drug addiction. After his father died, his mother was unable to care for him on her own and took him to the institutional facility, where after a few months he was placed in the care of temporary foster parents. The social worker tried to contact his family. She was able to contact his grandmother on his mother's side. She repeatedly expressed that she was under a lot of pressure and needed more time to adjust the conditions for taking her grandson into her care. The time allocated for Peter's stay with the temporary foster parents was running out, and the grandmother still had not filed the Petition for Peter's custody. Peter's social worker had



an unanswered question as to whether there was anyone in the family outside of the grandmother who could care for Peter. She asked for FGC, which Peter's grandmother did not agree to and did not attend for fear of meeting people with whom she had a complicated relationship. The coordinator was able to reach a wide range of people, including Peter's mother, who was still struggling with drug addiction and loss of her home, and eventually came to the family group conference, along with 13 relatives. The plan that was made did not ultimately come to fruition. The mother did not adjust the conditions for taking her son into her care. And what happened to Peter? He grew up with his grandmother, who eventually filed the Petition for custody of Peter very soon after FGC took place. She also reconciled with her daughter, Peter's mother, who visits them regularly. Peter's mother even found an flat in the same town and takes care of Peter 2 days a week in agreement with his grandmother and social worker. A miracle? We're clear...

## Old hurts or let the children talk

"I haven't seen my kids in 7 months, I miss them. They say my daughter has started walking, the older boys are in kindergarten. They live with my ex-partner. We communicate only by email", the father told the coordinator during the personal meeting.

The mother described her situation in the following words: "The father is not interested in the children. I have offered him several times that he can come to see us. He has not come even once. The best thing would be for him to give up fatherhood. He's been angry to us. The children are afraid of him and don't want to see him. Neither do I anymore. I have a new partner who loves us."

The social worker offered the parents the possibility of an out-of-court agreement about the father's contact with the children at FGC. Both agreed but were sceptical.

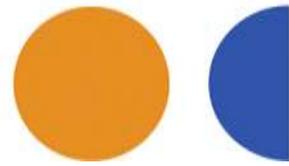
"There is no way my ex-partner's mother will be there, she hurt me a lot. I can't stand the sight of her. And not to be at the same table with her. And his friend definitely won't be there either. That's my final word," the mother argued. When asked by the coordinator about the mother's parents' attendance, she was told that they were busy and would definitely not come.

The father, however, insisted on his mother's participation. However, he agreed not to invite his friend.

The coordinator relayed the children's mother's concerns about the father's mother's presence with the children's great-grandmother.

"But I think she should be there, I'll explain it to my granddaughter," the great-grandmother offered to help.

"I'm afraid of the children's reaction when they see the father and his family. They don't like them. They don't want to see them. We'll be



shouting at each other, they shouldn't hear that," the mother worried about the children's presence at FGC.

„It's important for me to see how they will react, after all the aim of the FGC is to plan their future contacts," supported children's presence their social worker.

The conference was attended by 12 adults, including the mother's parents. Despite the initial tense atmosphere and the children's aunt very emotional reaction to children's father, FGC took place in a calm atmosphere. The children played and ran around, during break time they played with their father in the outdoor playground, The participants had lively discussions and agreed that parent's new partners would be present during the father-child contacts during the adaptation period.