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The opinions of foster parents on the personal level of cooperation with teachers in the context of children's special educational needs. A scientific report

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Children from foster families are a specific group of students because they are often disabled, have special needs, difficulties and experienced violence or neglect. Foster parents have to face challenges related to their upbringing. The text is a scientific report presenting the opinions of foster parents on their cooperation with teachers. For this purpose, an interpretative paradigm was adopted and phenomenography was applied. The subjects (21 foster parents of school-age children) participated in three focus group interviews. Qualitative data analysis was used to identify positive and negative aspects of the foster parents' experiences in cooperation with the school. The article is focused on the personal level of this cooperation. The answers provided by the parents in the study reveal predominance of negative experiences and emotions in this respect. The subjects pointed to such problems as: failure to notice and understand children's problems/difficulties, the lack of individualization, maladjusted requirements, incompetence of teachers and the absence of informational feedback from the school. However, some respondents noticed positive elements of cooperation with teachers, such as the ability to recognize the child's needs and problems by teachers and educators, sharing information about the child, taking into account the information provided by parents and adapting requirements

to the child's abilities. The results were used to develop recommendations aimed at improving cooperation between the school and foster parents.

KEY WORDS: children from foster families, special educational needs, foster parents, cooperation between parents and the school

Introduction

Foster families give children deprived of their biological parental care a chance to be brought up in a safe, stable and stimulating family environment.¹ Children with a difficult situation in their biological family may (by court's ruling) be directed to foster families or – if their parents are deprived of parental rights – to adoptive families. Foster parents do not have full custody and biological parents may regain parental rights. There are several types of foster families: relatives, non-professionals and professional (serving as emergency family shelter or professional foster family for a disabled child or a child placed on the basis of the Act on Juvenile Delinquency Proceedings)², all of which can be supported by the foster care coordinator.³ However, despite proper care, developmental

¹ L.K. Leslie, J.N. Gordon, K. Lambros, K. Premji, J. Peoples, K. Gist, *Addressing the developmental and mental health needs of young children in foster care*, "Journal of Developmental and Behavioural Paediatrics: JDBP" 2005, 26(2), pp. 140-151; E.C. Stein-Steele, *Perspectives of foster parents on parental roles and involvement in their foster children's academic work*, "Journal of Ethnographic & Qualitative Research" 2005, 9(4), pp. 317-332; H. Jacobsen, H. Brabrand, S.M.M. Liland, T. Wentzel-Larsen, V. Moe, *Foster parents' emotional investment and their young foster children's socio-emotional functioning*, "Children & Youth Services Review" 2018, 86, pp. 200-208; L. Zajac, M. Dozier, K.L. Raby, *Receptive vocabulary development of children placed in foster care and children who remained with birth parents after involvement with child protective services*, "Child Maltreatment" 2019, 24(1), pp. 107-112.

² Journal of Laws of 8th May 2020, item 821, Announcement of the Marshal of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland of 16th April 2020 on the publication of the uniform text of the Act on supporting the family and the system of foster care, article 39 and article 54.

³ Ibid. article 77.

and adaptation difficulties may persist in children from foster families.⁴ Children directed to foster families often suffer from health problems (somatic diseases, as well as mental health, dental, developmental, behavioural and psychosocial problems) which were not properly diagnosed and treated, usually due to inadequate medical care, poor access to preventive health services and social deprivation experienced in their families of origin.⁵ A comparison of children from foster families and those having biological parents also reveals in the former a greater incidence of disabilities, emotional disorders, behavioural problems⁶, dangerous sexual behaviours and a tendency to commit an offense (e.g. shoplifting).⁷ In Poland, it is estimated that 10.5% of children from foster families have a medical certificate of disability (in biological families, this value amounts to 3%).⁸ It is worth emphasizing that developmental and emotional difficulties, sleep and behavioural problems, etc. do not only in-

⁴ A.M. Maaskant, F.B. Van Rooij, J.M. Hermanns, *Mental health and associated risk factors of Dutch school aged foster children placed in long-term foster care*, "Children and Youth Services Review" 2014, 44, pp. 207-216; A. Goemans, M. Van Geel, P. Vedder, *Over three decades of longitudinal research on the development of foster children: a meta-analysis*, "Child Abuse & Neglect" 2015, 42, pp. 121-134; A. Goemans, M. Van Geel, P. Vedder, P., *Foster children's behavioural development and foster parent stress: testing a transactional model*, "Journal of Child & Family Studies" 2018, 27(3), pp. 990-1001.

⁵ K.L. Hodges, D. Manda, M.L. Nugent, P.M. Simpson, P.M., *A Triage Tool to Assess Unmet Health Needs for Children Entering Foster Care*, "Journal of Child & Family Studies" 2018, 27, pp. 475-482.

⁶ L.B. Silver, *Frequency of Adoption of Children with Learning Disabilities*, "Journal of Learning Disabilities" 1989, 22(5), pp. 325-328; J.A. Rosenthal, V. Groze, G.D. Aguilar, *Adoption Outcomes for Children with Handicaps*, "Child Welfare" 1991, 70(6), pp. 623-636; J.A. Rosenthal, V. Groze, H. Curiel, *Race, Social Class and Special-needs Adoption*, "Social Work" 1990, 35(6), pp. 532-539; H. Minnis, K. Everett, A.J. Pelosi, J. Dunn, M. Knapp, *Children in Foster Care: Mental Health, Service Use and Costs*, "European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry" 2006, 15(2), pp. 63-70.

⁷ J.C. Makhubele, E. Mdhluhi, *Impact of drug-use amongst children in foster care placement: implications for policy considerations and practice*, "Gender & Behaviour" 2018, 16(1), pp. 10902-10916.

⁸ Social assistance, child and family care in 2015, Statistics Poland, Warsaw 2016, https://www.domydziecka.org/uploadUser/files/pomoc_spoleczna_i_opieka_nad_dzieckiem_i_rodzina_w_2015.pdf, 31.07.2018.

volve children with special educational needs, although the percentage in this group is much higher, as shown in particular by qualitative research methods.⁹ The problems of children in foster families may arise, among others, from more frequent problems of previous poor living conditions, neglect, violence or trauma.¹⁰ On the other hand, living in a foster family does not always provide a child with a sense of stability, security¹¹ and increase self-esteem.¹²

All these difficulties along with a frequent need to change schools (due to changes in the educational environment)¹³ cause that children from foster families usually achieve lower educational results than their peers brought up in biological families¹⁴ and they more often quit school before graduation. Meanwhile, adequate education provided to all students, regardless of their abilities and

⁹ U. Bartnikowska, *Special educational needs of children from foster families-scientific report*, „Disability. Discourses of Special Pedagogy” 2018, vol. 31, pp. 11–23.

¹⁰ M. Kolankiewicz, *Children deprived of parental care*, [in:] *Children from risk groups*, ed. J. Szymańczak, „Studia BAS” [Sejm Analysis Office] 2009, 1(17); S.G. Stanley, *Children with disabilities in foster care: the role of the school social worker in the context of special education*, “Children & Schools” 2012, 34(3), pp. 190–192; Bartnikowska U., Ćwirynkało K., *Functioning of a disabled child in an adoptive and foster family in the context of prior experience of child abuse in the opinion of parents*, [in:] *Inclusion – marginalization – exclusion and the quality of life of disabled people. Challenges of the present day*, ed. U. Bartnikowska, A. Zyta, S. Przybyliński, ed. UWM, Olsztyn 2016, pp. 85–100.

¹¹ V. Welch, Ch. Jones, K. Stalker, A. Stewart, *Permanence for disabled children and young people through foster care and adoption: A selective review of international literature*, “Children & Youth Services Review” 2015, 53, pp. 137–146.

¹² J.C. Makhubele, E. Mdhului, E., *Impact of drug-use amongst children in foster care placement: implications for policy considerations and practice*, “Gender & Behaviour” 2018, 16(1), pp. 10902–10916.

¹³ L. Fries, S. Klein, M. Ballantyne, *Are foster children’s schools of origins always best? School quality in birth vs. foster parent neighbourhoods*, “Child & Family Social Work” 2016, 21(3), pp. 317–327.

¹⁴ D.T. Skilbred, A.C. Iversen, B. Moldestad, *Successful academic achievement among foster children: What did the foster parents do?*, “Child Care in Practice” 2017, 23(4), pp. 356–371; J.C. Makhubele, E. Mdhului, *Impact of drug-use amongst children in foster care placement: implications for policy considerations and practice*, “Gender & Behaviour” 2018, 16(1), pp. 10902–10916.

difficulties, is the goal of initiatives and legal solutions in many countries.¹⁵ Polish law also guarantees all students an access to education as well as psychological and pedagogical help – in the event of difficulties such as disability, educational failure, social maladjustment or the risk of social maladjustment, behavioural and emotional problems, crisis or traumatic events, social neglect, adaptation difficulties and others.¹⁶ It should be noted that the risk of these difficulties – as indicated by the analysis described above – is higher in students from foster families than in the general population. The task of the school is to develop a strategy in such a way as to increase the educational success of all students¹⁷, especially those at risk of marginalization. The cooperation with caregivers increases the effectiveness of actions. Integrated activities of parents and teachers can bring benefits to each of the three entities: a child, parent and teacher, improving the quality of didactic and educational work, a more thorough recognition of the student's needs, mutual understanding, strengthening of ties, raising the parent's pedagogical culture and improving the teacher's competences.¹⁸ Collaboration between foster parents and professionals is also crucial to maintaining foster families (avoiding their dissolution) and reducing developmental retardation in children.¹⁹ Given the above, it is im-

¹⁵ UNESCO 1994 The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education. World Conference on Special Needs Education, Access and Quality. Salamanca, Spain, 7-10 June 1994, UNESCO, Paris 1994.

¹⁶ Regulation of the Ministry of National Education of 9th August 2017 on the rules of organization and provision of psychological and pedagogical assistance in state schools, kindergartens and institutions, Journal of Laws of 2017, item 1591.

¹⁷ M. Ainscow, T. Booth, A. Dyson, *Inclusion and the standards agenda: negotiating policy pressures in England*, "International Journal of Inclusive Education" 20016, 10(4-5) pp. 295-308.

¹⁸ M. Loboeki, *Cooperation between teachers and parents in the process of education*, Nasza Księgarnia, Warsaw 1985; Loboeki M., *Out of concern for upbringing at school*, Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, Kraków 2007.

¹⁹ L.K. Leslie, J.N. Gordon, K. Lambros, K. Premji, J. Peoples, K. Gist, *Addressing the developmental and mental health needs of young children in foster care*, "Journal of Developmental and Behavioural Paediatrics: JDBP" 2005, 26(2), pp. 140-151;

portant to conduct research on cooperation between the school and parents, paying attention to the specificity of functioning of certain types of families who may face specific challenges.

Research methodology

The aim of the study was to recognize the opinions of foster parents on cooperation with the school staff (mainly teachers). The main research problem was formulated as follows: how do foster parents raising a school-age child perceive cooperation with school employees? How they understand the meaning of this cooperation?

In order to thoroughly investigate these issues, the research was embedded in an interpretative paradigm²⁰ and carried out with the use of phenomenography which allows to learn about different ways in which people experience and think about phenomena.²¹ In phenomenography, the emphasis is placed on the secondary perspective²², i.e. not necessarily understanding a phenomenon, but recognition how it is experienced by subjects.

The data was collected using focus group interview²³ which allowed for a deeper understanding of the research subject and going beyond the usual description.²⁴ The interviews were conducted in

A. Steenbekkers, I.T. Ellingsen, S. van der Steen, H. Grietens, *Psychosocial Needs of Children in Foster Care and the Impact of Sexual Abuse*, "Journal of Child & Family Studies" 2018, 27, pp. 1324–1335.

²⁰ N.K. Denzin, Y.S. Lincoln, *Introduction. The theory and practice of qualitative research*, [in:] *Methods of qualitative research*, vol. 1, ed. N.K. Denzin, Y.S. Lincoln, PWN, Warsaw 2009.

²¹ R.G. Paulston, *Comparative pedagogy as a field of conceptual maps of paradigm theory*, [in:] *Disputes over education. Dilemmas and controversies in contemporary pedagogues*, edited by Z. Kwieciński, L. Witkowski, IBE, Editor, Warsaw–Torun 1993.

²² A. Assaroudi, A. Heydari, *Phenomenography: A Missed Method in Medical Research*, "Acta Facultatis Medicae Naissensis" 2016, 33(3), pp. 217–225.

²³ D.L. Morgan, *Focus Groups*, "Annual Review of Sociology" 1996, 22, pp. 129–152.

²⁴ R. Barbour, *Focus group studies*, PWN, Warsaw 2011.

2018 in three groups, ranging from 5 to 9 foster parents. They were recorded and transcribed. The analysis was based on coding and categorization according to U. Flick²⁵ and G. Gibbs.²⁶

The following study inclusion criteria were adopted:

- being an adult,
- being a foster parent,
- bringing up at least one school-age child in a foster family,
- consent to participate in the research (including, a consent to recording of the interview, transcription and being quoted during research).²⁷

Ultimately, 21 parents participated in the interviews, including 12 mothers and 9 fathers. The age of the subjects ranged from 34 to 64 years old. Most subjects (14 people) were related foster parents (grandmothers/grandfathers, aunts/uncles of a child in foster care). The rest (7 people) were unrelated families, including 2 - professional foster families for a disabled child. Most of the respondents also had biological children (usually adult) and 2 people had adopted children. Some parents brought up foster children with special educational needs (6 people) or with the opinion from a psychological and pedagogical counselling centre (6 people).

The research was carried out in places appropriately prepared in cooperation with district family support centres located in two district towns and in one capital of province located in north-eastern Poland.

In the analysis, the method of identification of the respondents was adopted, in which gender was marked with the letter M (male) and K (female), the type of foster family with the symbol RZS (related foster family) and RZN (unrelated foster family: professional or non-professional), the number of the person participating in the focus group interview was also given.

²⁵ U. Flick, *Designing a qualitative research*, PWN, Warsaw 2010.

²⁶ G. Gibbs, *Analyzing qualitative data*, PWN, Warsaw 2011.

²⁷ T. Rapley, *Analysis of discourse conversations and documents*, PWN, Warsaw 2010.

Results

The data analysis allowed to distinguish two levels of experience in cooperation between foster parents and the school: personal (relating to teachers and educators – their activities, attitudes, characteristics and skills) and organizational (relating to functioning and structure of the school/facility). This article focuses on the personal level.

Table 1. Positive and negative aspects of cooperation between foster parents and school/teachers at the personal level

Positive aspects	Negative aspects
Recognition of the child's needs/problems	Failure to notice and/or understand the problems/difficulties of a child
Setting common goals with parents	Ignoring individuality
Sharing information about the child	Maladjusted requirements
Taking into account parents' knowledge about the child	Applying "double standards"
Adapting the requirements to the child's abilities	The lack of competence/knowledge among the school staff
Teacher training	The absence of informational feedback from the school
	Teachers' reluctance to change the way they work

Source: own research.

The negative aspects of cooperation dominated the opinions of a large group of respondents which were suffused with violent emotions. At the personal level, the negative opinions concerned an inappropriate – according to the respondents – approach of some school employees: teachers, headmaster or educator. The parents considered the lack of empathy on the part of the school staff to be a significant problem. This was expressed by not recognizing child's problems or ignoring its difficulties:

The teachers have serious problems ... They have problems with acceptance, with ... They prefer very good conduct in students. I realized

that at the parents' evening. [...] I can see that she is trying very hard, but nobody cares ... It is a catastrophe for teachers when a problematic student appears in the school, just like here, children who have an individual teaching program. K7, RZN

Another problem noticed by parents is ignoring child's individuality. This is failure to respect individual needs of the child and the use of the same teaching methods, requirements and assessment system, including rewarding, for all students, as evidenced by e.g. K4, a professional foster mother of four children, the woman has a daughter with Asperger's syndrome:

I am telling you that you need to explain to her that there is a break in the school, during which we eat our meals, she will remember that. To no avail. There were terrible incidents ... [...] I couldn't sleep at night! It was unimaginable for me that she did not go to the toilet for so long ... [...] We moved the child to another school ... K4, RZN

On the other hand, according to the focus group, some teachers overly focused on otherness or situation of the child (resulting from being in a foster family and the need to cooperate with the district family support centre), which influenced the requirements applied to the child (they were underestimated or overstated), and controlled material and living conditions (double standards used for students from biological and foster families). Rigid standards in assessment involved, for example, the lack of flexibility in giving students the option of a written or oral form of answering questions, or strict adherence to the evaluation criteria without taking into account individual abilities (hence overstating or underestimating of the requirements):

They kept telling me "she will not adapt". I say that she will not adapt because she is disabled [moderate intellectual disability – author's note] and she has to learn less. I asked many times to give her a better grade, just for her willingness to learn ... No! F, F, F, F! I saw her falling, falling ... Always the last one ... K2, RZN

Here [in the state school – author’s note] the requirements were too high, the teachers did not want to lower them a bit, and there [in a special needs school – author’s note] they are too low and they do not want to raise them a bit ... But when we brought her and talked to the headmaster, we were assured that she would have a higher level and that she would be in a class with less handicapped children ... When we arrived, she was with boys with whom she had no contact [...] I am so dissatisfied that she could have learnt at school with healthy children, because here the level is too low for her [...] She had and still has private lessons at home, because the level here is too low ... K3, RZN

Unfortunately, reporting problems to teachers did not improve the situation, sometimes caused even greater conflict, because we felt like rebels and completely helpless. Such a situation was described by M5, a professional foster father raising three children with his wife:

She suffers from FAS, she failed in adding ... When we found out that she had difficulty with addition we told the teachers about that, but they said that they knew better. We had a meeting in the district family support centre on this matter, the school was invited – but nobody appeared. We say that she can not add, the school claims that she can. M5, RZN

An interesting issue highlighted by the subjects was the use of double standards with respect to students from biological and foster families. As K3, K7 and M5 described:

When our biological child and foster child went to the same class, everything was fine – the same trips, everything. When they stayed in the day-care room, they always stayed together, so nobody bothered that “our” biological child stayed there, but they asked questions “why does your foster child stay in the day-care room?” I said, “You know, because sometimes I can not be in two places at the same time, with two children at home, and take these two quickly from school” K7, RZN

In our school, the teacher looked into our daughter’s sandwiches. Three [2 adopted children, 1 foster child – author’s note] went to the same

school, but the teacher always looked into the sandwiches of our foster daughter. What does she have sandwiches with? And she had them with butter, one slice was smaller, the other bigger, because they were preparing sandwiches themselves, one after another. The teacher asked "Why do these sandwiches look like that?" "Because we did them ourselves ..." "Do you prepare sandwiches yourself? Your aunt does not prepare them for you?" K3, RZN

They control how we fulfil our duties as foster parents ... M5, RZN

Such situations do not have a positive impact on the quality of relationship between teachers and parents who feel controlled. The point is not to negate any control, but it seems that – if it occurs – it should equally apply to children from biological families as much as to foster children and be used to constructively solve problems. Meanwhile, as K7 argued, the cooperation between schools and district family support centres (in the case of foster families) is limited to the teachers passing the information only about "things that they do not like", e.g. the lack of school equipment, staying in the day-care room or "inappropriate" sandwiches.

Some respondents also mentioned the absence of informational feedback from the school as a negative aspect of cooperation. For example, this is the way in which one of the focus group couples described how an individual teaching program for their disabled child was developed:

We were there and we signed the program – all the things to be done at school and outside it – the fact that we ride horses, go to a psychologist – all this was lumped together in this one program, but we did not know what it going on, so we signed it all [...] It has been presented to us on so many pages ... I have read it all ... nothing was done at school. The information that I travelled to Olsztyn, about Rehabilitation and Educational Center we attend, all this was lumped together. It was me who realized the individual educational and therapeutic program, not the school. K5, RZN

We didn't know anything about preparing the program ... [...] They included all the things we do with our child! M2, RZN

Some of the respondents also mentioned incompetence of some teachers and the lack of knowledge about disorders.

Besides, in the teacher's opinion, Asperger's syndrome is not a disease. "What kind of illness is that?" says M3, RZN

Some of the foster parents also indicated the rigidity in the teaching style and reluctance to introduce changes that are necessary in children with special educational needs:

The teacher straight out said that the person sitting in the classroom [supporting teacher, for whom the parents asked – author's note] will disturb her lessons. [...] "I have 30 years of experience, and here some-one questions my competences" [ironically]. M3, RZN

Some descriptions of school incidents were particularly critical, showed violence and unprofessional methods of punishment used by the school staff.

[...] there were two ladies ... for whom this [working with a disabled child – author's note] was a very heavy burden ... They made fun of her in the classroom during lessons and breaks ... Because she has epilepsy, her movements are slow, she needs more time, it is difficult for her ... She was always the last one, the last one, the last one. The teachers did not understand it ... [...] The kids copy teachers when he/she says "Now for Ola, I have to ... Wait, I have to ... because she has a different teaching mode ..." They make fun of her, these kids. They always make fun of such a child. K9, RZN

Some of the respondents indicated positive aspects of cooperation with the school. In this case, the personal level is understood as a highly empathic approach or activities (recognizing/understanding child's problems and needs), adherence to the principle of individualisation (adapting the requirements to individual abilities) and treating parents as partners whose knowledge is valuable for the process of education and who participate in setting educational goals.

An example of model and constructive cooperation can be the situation described by K10 – a woman, who together with her husband, creates a foster family for her eight-year-old granddaughter, whose biological mother has limited custody due to her alcohol addiction. From the moment the woman was granted foster care of the child, K10 regularly met the school educator who step by step showed her how to react to child's problems:

I am very satisfied with cooperation with the school, with my granddaughter's class tutor, and the school educator in particular. She helped us a lot. She led both Ola and me by hand. [...] It was the educator who taught us to talk to the child in this way. Mrs. A. taught us how to rebuild trust, so that Ola would not be afraid that we would leave her and simply disappear, like her mother. Ola was as regular as clockwork and it was the educator who told me: When you hear "no" for the first time, it means that Ola is finally recovering. We were so much waiting for this "no". After 3 months I said, "Come on, let's tidy up the room", and Ola said "I don't feel like it now, wait a minute, please" and I said "Oh Jesus, finally!" I would never have thought that such a trifle ... can make me happy, and we were happy, both of us.
K10, RZS

According to the respondents, acceptance is the key value which foster parents expect from the school staff – acceptance both for the parent and the child who should feel safe at school. As described by e.g. K8:

The first day was the most important, when I took her to school, the headmaster went with us to the classroom, the children circled her so nicely, "Oh, Ania, you came back to us". One or two girls cried with happiness, and the class tutor came up, introduced herself and said "Well, Aneczka, we don't know each other, but we'll get to know each other". It was so nice and Ania grew fond of her right away. K8, RZS

According to the respondents, a positive aspect of cooperation is also sharing information about children by teachers and taking into

account knowledge and opinions of parents. This allows to set common goals (e.g. when preparing an individual educational and therapeutic program) and gives parents the feeling of being equal partners. It is worth noting that receiving information from school was easier for related foster parents who tried to cooperate with the school before they were legally granted with childcare. An example can be the case of K11, who was a foster mother for her 8-year-old grandson for several months, but earlier – being aware of her daughter’s alcoholism and the consequent difficult situation of her grandson – tried to obtain the information about the child from the school:

They said "Mrs. Iwona, you are doing everything to take this child from the mother". And that was enough for me [...] because I knew what to do. That this is an alarming situation and that it needs to be pushed further. K11, RZS

The respondents who positively described their relationships with school employees pointed to the readiness of teachers to minimize the requirements (taking into account the child’s abilities):

Their approach was as follows "You have to understand that you demand too much from him, you have to go down. Daniel won't get a C in math, because he doesn't deserve it, he just can't do it. He will never learn the multiplication table. He will never learn ... He has serious problems with science. I liked the teacher's attitude. I had to explain to my husband that, unfortunately, he cannot demand math from the boy ... K6, RZS

The respondents, for example M8, also appreciated the involvement of school employees in improving their own knowledge and skills in order to prepare themselves for work with their children:

He has a class tutor, a lady who finished postgraduate studies especially for my son, so that she knew how to work with him. M8, RZS

The research shows that for the respondents cooperation with the school had different meanings. According to the respondents, cooperation is:

- a mission of telling the truth about their child (its needs, the specificity of development and functioning);
- fight (for equal treatment of a child from a foster family, for the unification of standards applied to children from foster families and other children, for understanding child's situation by others);
- pseudo-cooperation where parents actually experience non-cooperation;
- a satisfying experience of working together on a common cause of supporting a child.

Discussion and implications

The collaboration between foster families, teachers and other school staff is extremely important. Educational staff may be part of interdisciplinary teams established under the Act on Counteracting Domestic Violence.²⁸ Due to the frequent contact with children, their opinion can be relevant to seeking the best support for children. Therefore, cooperation between school staff and foster parents is important. The opinions of the foster parents on the personal level of cooperation with school staff present a complex, multi-faceted picture of this problem. The positive aspects of cooperation with teachers included recognition of the child's needs and problems by teachers and educators, sharing information about the child, taking into account the information obtained from parents and adapting the requirements to the child's abilities. On the other hand, the negative elements are ignoring or misunderstanding child's problems/difficulties, the lack of individualization, maladjusted re-

²⁸ Journal of Laws 2020, item 218, Announcement of the Marshal of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland of 9th January 2020 on the publication of the uniform text of the Act on counteracting domestic violence, art. 9.

quirements, teachers' incompetence and the lack of informational feedback from the school. Unfortunately, the analysis of parents' opinions suggests predominance of negative experiences and emotions. It is worth mentioning that the previously analyzed²⁹ fragment from the same research project, but concerning cooperation at the organizational level also showed the prevalence of negative experiences. However, the results of other studies are not consistent with the outcomes of our study. For example, the results of quantitative research³⁰ – conducted among parents of children with special educational needs – indicate high satisfaction with the support received from the school. On the other hand, the results of qualitative research³¹ suggest the existence of two types of relationships between foster parents and the school staff: positive (active participation of the parent in the process of education) and negative (suffused with a sense of anger, the lack of trust, hostility or related to parents who are passive and do not engage in cooperation with the school). The results of this research allow to extend this typology, because also foster parents committed to (or at least declare commitment in the research) education and rehabilitation of their children experience negative relationships in cooperation with the school. It seems that in this case, care and responsibility for the child's welfare forces parents to demand a lot from themselves and others so as to the greatest possible extent meet the needs of a disadvantaged child. These parents feel that school staff (mainly teachers) do not perform their duties properly or are not empathic.

The research indicates the need for training of teachers in order to bring them closer to the specificity of functioning of children

²⁹ K. Ćwirynkało, U. Bartnikowska, *Children from foster families at school. Report on the cooperation between foster parents and the school staff*, "Problems of Early Education" 2018, vol. 43, No. 3, pp. 77–85.

³⁰ K. Ćwirynkało, M. Włodarczyk-Dudka, A. Arciszewska, *Parents' satisfaction with the support provided by schools to disabled children*, „Every day upbringing” 2015, No. 3 (252), pp. 47–55.

³¹ C.B. Mires, D.L. Lee, *Every child that is a foster child is marked from the beginning: The home-school communication experiences of foster parents of children with disabilities*, „Child Abuse & Neglect” 2018, No. 75, pp. 61–72.

from foster families and specific difficulties (e.g. post-traumatic disorders, attachment disorders, FAS) that such a child may have to deal with. Such training would help not only understand the child's situation, but also the situation of foster parents. Secondly, if a child from a foster family appears at school, it would be worth launching a support system dedicated not only to the child, but also to caregivers. It may include – depending on the needs – for instance, individual and group counselling (e.g. in order to facilitate contacts between the child and peers, and develop a sense of self-confidence), establishing close cooperation with the family through individual meetings or telephone calls (in order to work out ways to support the child, but also parents in coping with difficulties – preparation of a booklist for parents would be useful), as well as consultation for teachers and other school staff (in order to raise awareness of the special needs of children in foster care). We are aware that the intention of the school should be (is) the best interest of the child, however, we believe that control exercised by the school should equally apply to biological and foster parents. Meanwhile, as shown by the study results, it is much more severe over foster parents, in particular professional foster families. Parental empathy plays a key role in successful foster parenting: empathy with the child, with biological parents and with social workers.³² In our opinion, also people cooperating with foster parents (e.g. school employees) should be empathic, both with children and foster parents.

The conditions necessary for effective cooperation between foster family and the school include: (1) conviction of both parties about the need for cooperation, (2) systematic exchange of information about the child, its progress, difficulties and ways of overcoming difficulties, (3) commitment of both parties to create a friendly atmosphere in the class, at school and in the peer group, (4) joint care for ensuring optimal material conditions for learning.³³ Good coop-

³² J. Geiger, M. Piel, C. Lietz, F. Julien-Chinn, *Empathy as an essential foundation to successful foster parenting*, "Journal of Child & Family Studies" 2016, 25(12), pp. 3771–3779.

³³ M. Banasiak, *Cooperation between parents and school in the context of education reform in Poland*, UMK, Toruń 2013.

eration is possible thanks to appropriate teachers' competences³⁴, among which communication skills³⁵ are of particular importance. The inspiration may come from descriptions of good practices in cooperation between teachers and parents presented in the scientific literature.³⁶ School staff should initiate good cooperation with a foster family and create a friendly atmosphere in contact with parents, as well as a climate of sharing by refraining from judgment, adapting requirements to the abilities of the child and the foster family and respecting other (non-educational) needs of the child, which – often – may be more important than school achievements (e.g. good adaptation in the peer group, well-being and a sense of security at school, taking into account emotional instability resulting from contacts with the biological family or the necessity of changing place of residence and school).

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³⁴ E. Westergård, *Teacher Competencies and Parental Cooperation*, "International Journal about Parents in Education" 2013, 7(2), pp. 91-99.

³⁵ F. Ozmen, C. Akuzum, M. Zincirli, G. Selcuk, *The communication barriers between teachers and parents in primary schools*, "Eurasian Journal of Educational Research" 2016, 66, pp. 26-46.

³⁶ E.g. Rasfeld M., Bredendach S., *The Awakening School*, ed. Dobra Literatura, Slupsk 2015.

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