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A Befriended Family as a Form of Support for an Orphaned Child

SUMMARY

It is a common belief that a family is the best environment for child care. If a home, however, becomes a threatening environment for the child and remaining there may lead to disorders, it is necessary to change the environment. Most frequently, Family Courts decide to place children in residential care facilities, which take over functions of a family. This entails the problem of social orphanhood and searching for ways to compensate for care.

In this article, the author outlines the issue of social orphanhood and its consequences. She draws attention to difficulties experienced by children who have been deprived of a permanent emotional bond. Also, one of the possible ways of supporting these children through establishing a relationship with a "positive adult figure" is analysed. The role of a befriended family seems of particular importance here.

→ **KEYWORDS** – Orphaned child, "Positive adult figure", Family befriended

STRESZCZENIE

Rodzina zaprzyjaźniona jedną z form wsparcia dziecka osieroconego

Powszechnie uważa się, że rodzina jest najlepszym środowiskiem opiekuńczo-wychowawczym dla dziecka. Jeżeli jednak rodzina staje się dla dziecka miejscem zagrażającym, a przebywanie w niej może doprowadzić do wielu zaburzeń – zachodzi konieczność zmiany środowiska. Najczęściej decyzją Sądu Rodzinnego dzieci umieszczane są w placówkach opieki całodobowej, które przejmują funkcje właściwe rodzinie. Pojawia się wówczas problem sieroctwa społecznego i szukania dróg jego kompensacji.

W artykule autorka nakreśla problem sieroctwa społecznego, uwzględniając jego konsekwencje. Zwraca uwagę na trudności

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w funkcjonowaniu dzieci pozbawionych trwałej więzi uczuciowej. Jednocześnie analizuje jedną z możliwych dróg wsparcia tychże dzieci, poprzez nawiązanie relacji z "pozytywnym dorosłym." Szczególna w tym miejscu wydaje się rola rodziny zaprzyjaźnionej.

→ **SŁOWA KLUCZOWE** – DZIECKO OSIEROCONE, „POZYTYWNY" DOROSŁY, RODZINA ZAPRZYJAŹNIONA

"A child belongs to a family irrespective of the place s/he takes inside it and of what the family is like."[1] If a home, however, becomes a threatening environment for the child and remaining there may adversely affect the child's development, it is necessary to change the environment.[2] In such situations, based on the decision of the Family Court, children are usually placed in foster care facilities.

On being placed in a facility, children are not only deprived of genuine parental care but they also experience a sense of rejection by relatives and a sense of loneliness combined with anxiety and aggression.[3] In such situations, the problem of social orphanhood and the looking for ways to compensate for it emerges.

Social orphanhood is defined as a situation when both parents are alive but for various reasons they have insufficiently fulfilled their care and educational functions, which is why it is necessary for other people or institutions to take over the care.[4]

For most children, a stay in a foster care facility entails not only with an absence of direct contact with their parents but also of any care on their part, which leads to mental orphanhood. This brings serious consequences, evidenced in all facets of a child's

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[1] I. Obuchowska, *Dziecko poza rodziną: wychowanie instytucjonalne*, in: M. Sajkowska, *Dziecko krzywdzone*, Warszawa 2006, p. 87.

[2] M. Kolankiewicz, *Porzuceni i powierzeni trosce*, Katowice 2002.

[3] A. Bałandynowicz, *Adopcja formą kompensacji sieroctwa społecznego*, in: *Prawne i psychologiczne problemy adopcji*, eds. K. Ostrowska, E. Milewska, Warszawa 1999, pp. 7-22.

[4] S. Kozak, *Sieroctwo społeczne: psychologiczna analiza zaburzeń w zachowaniu się wychowanków domów dziecka*, Warszawa 1986; S. Badora, *Teoretyczne aspekty sieroctwa i jego opiekuńczej kompensacji*, in: *System opieki kompensacyjnej w zjednoczonej Europie*, eds. S. Badora and D. Marzec, Kraków 2002, pp. 55-94.

life. Once the emotional familial bonds are broken, the child is left in an emotional void.[5] According to numerous studies, orphaned children differ from their peers in almost all areas. Parental rejection and the deprivation of the basic need for love and safety leads to the development of aggression, quarrelsomeness and disobedience.[6] Abandoned children experience feelings of fear, confusion and loneliness.[7] Their emotionality is "blunted."[8] They do not experience extreme emotions. Those children are less responsible and independent.[9] They are characterised by a distrustful attitude towards others. They have clearly lowered self-esteem, with an emerging lack of acceptance of themselves and fear of the future.[10] Many scientists have noted the school problems of such students in foster care.[11] Those children frequently have to repeat a year and if they advance, their results are poor. This is most frequently characterised by a low motivation to learn and the lack of a positive attitude to knowledge acquisition.

Children brought up in foster care facilities require compensation for their deficits in care and education, but especially in the mental (emotional) sphere. The staff of such facilities give care in the areas of health, education, society or culture to compensate for the deficits resulting from family negligence. Thanks to the systematically planned educational work, it is possible to stabilise the health of children in foster care and to catch up at

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[5] K. Radecka, *Sieroctwo społeczne*, "Praca Socjalna" 2007, issue 4, pp. 75-85.

[6] B. Czeredrecka, *Potrzeby psychiczne sierot społecznych*, Warszawa 1988; B. Gumienny, *Funkcjonowanie domu dziecka na przykładzie Domu dla Dzieci „Nasza Chata"*, Rzeszów 2005; M. Kolankiewicz, *Zagrożone dzieciństwo*, 2005.

[7] T. Rongińska, *Obraz własnego „Ja" dziecka osieroconego*, in: *Sieroctwo społeczne i jego kompensacja*, eds. M. Heine, G. Gajewska, Zielona Góra 1999, pp. 57-60.

[8] E. Trubiłowicz, *Emocje w rysunku dzieci wychowujących się w placówkach socjalizacyjnych i rodzinach własnych. Badania porównawcze*, in: *Rysunek projekcyjny w badaniach nad rodziną i wychowankiem*, eds. B. Kostrubiec-Wojtachnio, E. Trubiłowicz, Lublin 2012, p. 214.

[9] A. Kwak, *Kreatorzy procesu usamodzielnienia*, in: *Z opieki zastępczej w dorosłe życie. Założenia a rzeczywistość*, ed. A. Kwak, ISP, Warszawa 2006.

[10] M. Bieńsko, *Wychowanek domu dziecka jako odbiorca procesu usamodzielnienia*, in: *Z opieki zastępczej w dorosłe życie*, op. cit.

[11] B. Gumienny, *Funkcjonowanie domu dziecka na przykładzie Domu dla Dzieci „Nasza Chata"*, op. cit.

school in certain aspects. It is much more difficult to compensate for the mental deficiencies and neglect.

The emotional needs of children are of supra-subjective nature and they cannot be satisfied without other people.[12] This leads to the question of whether such deficits can be corrected. For a child placed in foster care, it would be best to keep a regular, close relationship with their parents but this is, unfortunately, not always possible. Frequently, on being placed in a foster care facility, the child loses contact with parents or contact is insufficient. In extreme cases when contact with the biological family is a threat to the child, the Family Court can decide to prohibit such contact.

Pursuant to the Act on Supporting Families and the Foster Care System of 9 June 2011,[13] the duties of the foster care facilities include working with the biological family to improve the family situation and to enable the child's return home from the foster care facility. Employees of such facilities ensure the regular and systematic contact of children with their parents and significant others. If the child is unable to keep in touch with their natural family or the contact is insufficient, the facilities should try to offer the child support in the form of close relations with other people. One of the options seems to be establishing contact with a befriended family.

The concept of a befriended family is not broadly discussed in reference papers. Only a few authors dealing with the orphanhood problem mention it.[14] Contact with a befriended family as a form of support for children in foster care is, however, well-known to educators, pedagogues and practicing psychologists who work in such facilities.

A befriended family is a person or persons who visit the child in foster care regularly, spend time with the child as much as possible and invite him/her to their home. Members of the befriended family must be accepted by the child and they also have to

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[12] A. Maciarz, *Psychoemocjonalne stany wychowanków domów dziecka*, "Problemy Opiekuńczo-Wychowawcze" 1990, issue 5/5, pp. 17-19.

[13] The Act on Supporting Families and the Foster Care System of 9 June 2011 (Journal of Laws [Dz.U.], as amended).

[14] H. Święcicka, *Dom wreszcie własny*, Warszawa 1970; M. Braun-Gałkowska, *Psychologia domowa*, Olsztyn 1990; M. Turos, *Sytuacje życiowe byłych wychowanków domów dziecka*, Warszawa 1990; A. Maciarz, *Psychoemocjonalne stany wychowanków domów dziecka*, op. cit., pp. 17-19; I. Obuchowska, *Dziecko poza rodziną: wychowanie instytucjonalne*, op. cit, pp. 87-94.

accept the child. The befriended family has no legal obligations towards the child, but it has a moral responsibility to establish and maintain an emotional bond. The primary task of the befriended family is to offer emotional support to the child. The care offered by people who decide to perform such a function involves satisfying intellectual, social and, primarily, emotional needs (www.nasz-bocian.pl). A befriended family may be a step to becoming a foster family for older children (where adoption is impossible). It can also precede the initiation of the adoption procedure.

The importance of a befriended family as a form of support for children brought up in foster care was stressed by H. Święcicka.[15] At that time, such families invited children from foster care facilities home for holidays. The families could not take the child home permanently but they had regular contact with him or her, were interested in his/her educational progress and needs. H. Święcicka advised that befriended families should focus on the care primarily of older children, who had fewer chances for adoption or placement in a foster family, and especially those who are able to understand the unique nature of the situation. She also emphasised that in the case of younger children, great caution should be exercised when establishing contact with the befriended family. For a small child, it can be too emotionally stressful to leave the facility on a Sunday or for holidays as they have already become accustomed to the institution and to the educators. It can be even more difficult to leave the home of the befriended family where the child experienced care. This statement should be acknowledged as important also today when a decision is made to support a child through contact with a befriended family.

People/families who choose to become a befriended family maintain regular contact with the child. They visit the child in the facility, phone him/her, ask about the school progress, help in difficult situations, take them for weekends and holidays when the Family Court allows, and "they remember, which is the most important."[16] A befriended aunt or uncle teaches them basic household duties and family customs, and protects the child's future.[17]

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[15] H. Święcicka, *Dom wreszcie własny*, op. cit.

[16] M. Braun-Gałkowska, *Psychologia domowa*, op. cit., p. 121.

[17] Ibidem.

The positive influence of a relationship with a befriended family was noted by M. Turos (1990).[18] Studies devoted to children who finally became independent people, revealed that young people who had regular contact with a befriended family more often declared that they had been well prepared for adult life. Moreover, according to A. Maciarz (1990),[19] for children deprived of permanent and systematic contact with their parents, a relationship with a befriended family partially compensated for their sense of loneliness and insecurity.

Historically, the Ordinance of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy on Foster Care Facilities of 19 October 2007[20] had been the legal basis for cooperation with befriended families. Those regulations were repealed by the Act on Supporting Family and Foster Care of 9 June 2011.[21] People who wished to befriend a child had to contact a selected foster care facility. They had an initial interview with a head of the institution, during which they were informed of the responsibilities of a befriended family. The candidates for befriended families were referred to the adoption and foster care centre for a suitability assessment. They could also contact such a centre themselves in order to be qualified. Upon receiving a favourable assessment, contact with the child in foster care was initiated and maintained.

The first contact of the child with the befriended family took place in the facility under the supervision of an educator. The befriended family was observed by the educators from the facility where the child resided. Another aspect considered was the child's opinion of a given family. The child could be taken to the befriended family for holidays only with the consent of the Family Court.

The regulations currently in force do not stipulate the befriended family option. This should be considered a serious oversight in the legislation. The concept of the befriended family is not regulated nowadays by law which gives rise to fears that this form of support may be abandoned or that the criteria related to the

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[18] M. Turos, *Sytuacje życiowe byłych wychowanków domów dziecka*, op. cit.

[19] A. Maciarz, *Psychoemocjonalne stany wychowanków domów dziecka*, op. cit., pp. 17-19.

[20] The Ordinance of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy on Foster Care Facilities of 19 October 2007 (Journal of Laws [Dz. U.] no. 201, item 1455).

[21] The Act on Supporting Family and Foster Care of 9 June 2011 (uniform text: Journal of Laws [Dz. U.] of 2013 item 135).

suitability for becoming a befriended family are not consistent. According to the facilities' employees, contact with the befriended family, a permanent relationship with a "positive adult," can be one of the forms of supporting an orphaned child, compensating for the effects of social orphanhood. Some foster care facilities still use this form of aid with children, especially with the ones deprived of regular contact with their parents.

Author's own studies

Considering the fact that there have not been many studies devoted to the influence of the relationship with a befriended family on the life of an orphaned child, it was decided that this issue required exploration. The analyses presented in this article are a fraction of more extensive studies on the role of a significant other in on the process of self-image formation in an orphaned child. The studies were devoted to finding an answer to two basic questions: Who is a significant other for children in foster care facilities? and, Is there any link between the self-image of children in foster care facilities and their relationship with various significant others? (particularly with a befriended family).

The research was carried out among 110 children residing in foster care. All the respondents were abandoned children (social orphans). It was an individual study with 92 people qualified to take part in the final analyses.

The respondents are characterised in the table below.

Table 1. Characteristics of the subjects

	Subjects	
	Frequency	Percentage
Gender: girls	56	60.9
Boys	36	39.1
Total	92	100
Age: 13	14	15.2
14	23	25.0
15	29	31.5
16	26	28.3
Total	92	100
Duration of the stay in the facility: under 1 year	16	17.4

1 to 3 years	34	37.0
3 to 5 years	24	26.1
Longer than 5 years	18	19.6
Total	92	100

The studies were conducted on children aged 13-16 (lower secondary school students). The majority of respondents were girls as they were more willing to participate in the study. Boys usually refused to participate or submitted incomplete forms. Most respondents were children who had been staying in the facility for over one year.

The study programme was based on the assumptions of C. Rogers' (1959)[22] according to which, in spite of being relatively constant, self-image can change under the influence of external forces (especially as a result of interactions with significant others). A disturbed relationship of a child with a significant other/ significant others or the absence of contact with such people can result in incorrect functioning and translate into a deteriorated self-image. At the same time, it can be taken that a healthy relationship with selected significant others will also be reflected in the improved functioning of a child and his/her more positive self-image.

A Social Relations Test was used to determine who was a significant other for the children in the foster care facilities. This is a modified version of the Family Relations Test by E. Bene and J. Anthony (1978).[23] In this method, sixty items are used which refer to the emotional involvement of an orphaned child with the indicated significant others. Information obtained using this method enabled the author to answer the first of the two main research questions.

The children in the foster care facility remarked that the significant others liked by them were their mother 76%, father 53%, siblings 78%, peers 43%, other adults (educator from the facility, coach, further relatives) 33% and a person from a befriended family 19.6%. It should be stressed here that eighteen out of

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[22] C. Rogers, *A theory of therapy, personality and interpersonal relationship, as developed in the client – centered framework*, in: *Psychology: A Study of a science*, vol. 3: *Formulations of the person and the social context*, ed. S. Koch, New York 1959.

[23] E. Bene, J. Anthony, *Podręcznik do Testu Stosunków Rodzinnych*, Centralny Ośrodek Metodycznego Poradnictwa Wychowawczo-Zawodowego, Warszawa 1978.

nineteen respondents having contact with a befriended family mentioned a person from this family as being very important to them. This accounts for 94.7% of subjects having contact with a befriended family. The Social Relations Test also allowed for the describing of the quality of relationships with selected significant others. Although the mother was relatively often indicated as a significant other, the respondents frequently stated their relationship with her was negative. Relationships with the father, similarly, were considered negative by respondents. Relations with siblings were defined as ambivalent with a low level of emotional involvement. The respondents' attitudes towards other adults, including those from befriended families, were more frequently positive. This relationship was perceived as the one offering a sense of security, based on trust and acceptance.

The Social Relations Test offered plenty of invaluable information on who the significant others are for children in foster care facilities and what the children's attitude towards these people is. The children usually indicated two or three significant others. With such an abundance of data, it was necessary to collect all the significant information and create a single coherent picture. The Family Map turned out invaluable for that purpose. Family Maps were drawn for every respondent. The next step was to look for common features in the distinguished maps with the help of competent judges. The maps were divided into three groups. As a result, three groups of subjects were distinguished, with significant relationships with various types of families.

Type I "with a biological family" (N = 53) – the children assigned to this group were characterised by having contact with their biological family (parents and siblings) and the absence of contact with a befriended family. These respondents did not indicate any other adults as significant others. They described their relations with parents as negative, not offering support or sense of security.

Type II "with a parent and another adult" (N = 21) – the children assigned to this group were characterised by contact with a parent (usually the mother), with a simultaneous close positive relationship with another adult (educator, coach).

Type III "with a befriended family" (N = 18) – the children assigned to this group were characterised by a permanent positive relation with a befriended family, with rare contact with parents or an absence of such contact.

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The groups were compared according to their self-image, which was tested by means of a projective drawing of "Me and Others." For statistical analysis, the indices important for the respondents' relationships with others were considered.

The markers highlighted by M. Braun-Gałkowska (2007)[24] and her co-researchers I. Ulfik- Jaworska (2003)[25] and M. Łaguna (1996)[26] were used when interpreting the drawings in terms of the self-image. The markers in the drawings were interpreted by competent judges.

The following markers of the self-image in the drawing were taken into consideration:
– self-presentation;
   • valuation (the person drawn as the most significant, placed in the centre, taking the best position, drawn with utmost care, using many colours);
   • devaluation (the person drawn in an insignificant way, at the sheet edge, the smallest person, drawn using a small number of colours or exclusion of the person who drew the picture);
   • myself, like others (the creator of the drawing depicted in a way similar to other people);
– presentation of the relationship between myself and others;
   • myself apart (the child depicted far from others, lonely or separated from others);
   • myself in a group (the child depicted in the company of known people);
   • myself in a crowd (the child depicted among unknown people);
   • the presence of a significant other in the drawing;
– the presentation of the social world;
   • the degree of closeness (the people closer to the author are presented differently from those less close);

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[24] M. Braun-Gałkowska, *Poznanie systemu rodzinnego*, Lublin 2007.

[25] I. Ulfik-Jaworska, *Rysunek Ja wśród ludzi w badaniach dzieci zajmujących się grami komputerowymi zawierającymi przemoc*, in: *Rysunek projekcyjny jako metoda badań psychologicznych*, eds. M. Łaguna, B. Lachowska, Lublin 2003, pp. 165-182.

[26] M. Łaguna, *Budować obraz siebie*, Lublin 1996.

- subgroups (those figures, which are the child's creations, can be distinguished from among the presented people);
- good communication (the people presented have hands, faces, cooperation between them is marked);
- disturbed communication (no hands or faces of the drawn figures, exclusion of the child that drew the picture or his/her isolation);

– the emotional sphere;

- vivid emotionality (multicoloured drawing, drawn with long lines, the people interact, the presence of added positive objects in the drawing);
- emotional inhibition (few colours, straight lines, stereotypical figures, no added objects);
- aggression (using black and red, drawing made with heavily pressed lines, aggressive content of the drawing);
- anxiety (the drawing has large white areas, few colours, drawn with lightly pressed lines, the bodies are incomplete or schematic, no added objects, the content suggests fear);
- anxiety combined with aggression (markers of anxiety and aggression are visible in the same drawing);
- insecurity (the people drawn are not supported, incomplete bodies).

Analysis of the results

Groups of children in foster care facilities were based on the type of family the child has an important relationship with. Those groups were compared according to their self-image (measured by the "Myself and Others" drawing). The statistical methods applied enabled the author to find differences between the compared groups.

Table 2. A comparison of markers related to the self-image in the "Myself and Others" drawing for respondents with various family types

Projective drawing "Myself and Others"		Group III "with a biological family" N=53		Group II "with another adult" N=21		Group I "with a befriended family" N=18		x^2	P
		N	%	N	%	N	%		
SELF-PRESENTATION	Valuation	18	34.4	6	28.6	8	44.4	1.087	n.i.
	Devaluation	7	13.2	4	19.0	1	5.6	1.559	n.i.
	myself like others	28	52.8	11	52.4	9	50.0	0.044	n.i.
PRESENTATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MYSELF AND OTHERS	myself separately	9	17.0	3	14.3	0	0	3.453	n.i.
	myself in group	33	62.3	16	76.2	16	88.9	4.996	**0.082ten**
	myself in crowd	11	20.8	2	9.5	1	5.6	3.090	n.i.
	presence of a significant other	23	43.4	5	23.8	6	33.3	2.603	n.i.
PRESENTATION OF THE SOCIAL WORLD	degree of closeness	19	35.8	5	23.8	6	33.3	0.997	n.i.
	Subgroups	7	13.2	3	14.3	3	16.7	0.133	n.i.
	good communication	14	26.4	11	52.4	15	83.3	18.591	**0.001**
	disturbed communication	38	71.7	10	47.6	3	16.6	17.144	**0.001**
EMOTIONAL SPHERE	vivid emotionality	20	37.7	11	52.4	15	83.3	11.236	**0.004**
	emotional inhibition	33	62.3	10	47.6	3	16.7	11.236	**0.004**
	Aggression	28	52.8	1	4.8	1	5.6	3.745	n.i.
	Anxiety	49	92.5	13	61.9	7	38.9	23.049	**0.001**
	anxiety and aggression	9	17.0	1	4.8	2	11.1	2.054	n.i.
	insecurity	39	73.6	10	47.6	5	27.8	13.006	**0.001**

The drawings of the compared groups display high similarity in terms of markers related to the method of self-depiction. About half of the respondents from all the groups draw themselves in

a way similar to others (not better or worse) which can be interpreted as the best way to present oneself. Respondents with close relationships in a befriended family present themselves in the drawings in groups with the people known and close to them (myself in a group, p < 0.082ten) as opposed to other children.

The method applied showed considerable differences between respondents with respect to communication. The groups differ in terms of "good communication" (x^2 = 18.591, p < 0.01) and "disturbed communication" (x^2 = 17.144, p < 0.001). In the drawings of children with a "befriended family," communication is usually good (83.3%), expressed by the hands and faces of the drawn people, as well as by cooperation. The drawings made by children with a "biological family" most frequently include markers of disturbed communication, that is the people have no hands or faces, or the faces may show no expression and the creator is isolated.

Also the emotional sphere differentiates the children. The drawings of the respondents having contact with their biological family more often include emotional inhibition markers (x^2 = 11.236, p < 0.004). People from the group with a "biological family" usually use few colours, the figures are stereotypical, and there are no added objects in the drawings. Drawings by children having close relationships with a befriended family are usually colourful, with added objects with positive connotations, e.g. the sun, the people drawn interact (help one another, go for a walk, share the same goals, which is visible in the graphic form of the drawing). The above-mentioned markers make for a vivid emotionality.

The compared groups differ in terms of the anxiety experienced by them (x^2 = 23.049, p < 0.001). More than 90% of the drawings made by the children from the group with a "biological family" are characterised by the tendency to experience anxiety. The works are drawn with a limited number of colours, there is no movement, the figures are small and there are no added objects. At the same time, anxiety is present in 60% of drawings "with another adult" and less than 40% "with a befriended family." Moreover, children who have a relationship with their parents only experience insecurity.

To sum up, it can be said that children who have regular contact with their biological family are characterised by disturbed

communication, emotional inhibition and increased anxiety. Their drawings are not very colourful, the people are drawn schematically, the space is not fully used. Over 90% of the drawings have markers indicating anxiety and insecurity (sample drawing – attachment 1).

The results for children who have contact with their biological family and a close relationship with another adult are equivocal. Half of the respondents' drawings display good communication (50%) and vivid emotionality (50%). A similar percentage of works are characterised by disturbed communication and emotional inhibition. These drawings most frequently exhibit anxiety (60%) and insecurity.

The children who have regular contact with a befriended family are more frequently characterised by good communications, vivid emotionality and much lower anxiety levels. Their drawings are more colourful, drawn with long lines, and they include added objects. The people drawn are usually complete figures (with a face and hands). The anxiety and insecurity markers are rarer in these drawings (sample drawing – attachment 2).

The psychological situation of all children in foster care facilities is very difficult. However, according to the study, the children who have a close relationship with a befriended family have a better image of themselves, especially with respect to communication and their emotional range. Anxiety, insecurity and loneliness are less common.

Discussion of the results

In studies of children and adolescents it has been proven on numerous occasions that a healthy relationship with a parent/guardian is an important factor which affects the healthy development of the child. The experiencing of appropriate physical care and emotional accessibility seems to be of fundamental importance. Positive caring relations contribute to the proper development of the child but may also constitute a protective factor, fostering the child's immunity, especially in the case of one brought up in a dysfunctional environment. This issue is broadly discussed as part of "resilience" theory, which explains the phenomenon of the healthy functioning of an individual despite unfavourable living conditions, adversities and traumatic

experiences. It refers to the factors and mechanisms protecting and alleviating risk factors such as poverty, divorce, mental illness of a parent or placement in a foster care facility.[27]

The life experience of children brought up in foster care facilities (social orphans) can surely be analysed in the category of risk factors, with an expectation of consequences in the form of incorrect functioning or having various disorders. Although children in foster care facilities have experienced many problems and long-lasting stress, some of them are able to cope with their emotions and do not experience serious problems in social functioning. These children are able to establish satisfactory relationships with adults and peers, and they are good students. What was the determining factor here? What was the protective factor? Referring to the presented studies, it can be claimed that the protective factor is a close relationship with a befriended family. Regular contact with a "positive adult figure" can create a positive self-image and even change a negative one that had developed in the dysfunctional family. A close relationship with an adult (befriended family) ensures a sense of belonging, facilitates the creation of a good self-image, and strengthens social and psychological competences.

The obtained results agree with the results of studies by E. Werner (1994)[28] devoted to the functioning of children in difficult conditions caused by poverty, conflict or a hostile family atmosphere. The author noticed that the fate of these children is not equally adverse for all, as might be expected. She found that protective factors foster positive adaptation despite exposure to risk factors. According to E. Werner, apart from positive disposition, abilities or the style of parental care, the protective factors include contact with a supportive adult other than their parents.

The results obtained do not suggest an unambiguous conclusion that regular contact of a child in a foster care facility with

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[27] N. Garmezy, *Stress-Resistant Children: The Search for Protective Factors*, in: Recent *Research in Developmental Psychopathology*, ed. J. Stevenson, Oxford – New York – Toronto – Sydney – Paris – Frankfurt 1985, pp. 213-234; E. Werner, *Overcoming the odds*, "Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics" 1994, 15, (2), pp. 131-136; A.S. Masten, J.L. Powell, *A Resilience Framework for Research Policy and Practice*, in: *Resilience and Vulnerability*, ed. S. Luthar, Cambridge 2003, pp. 1-28.

[28] E. Werner, *Overcoming the odds*, op. cit., pp. 131-136.

a befriended family will definitely influence positively self-image and improved functioning. They, however, offer a direction for further studies of protective factors, especially in the context of a befriended family which may be an effective method of compensating for the effects of social orphanhood.

As can be presumed, some facilities will still support children by establishing contact with befriended families. With respect to this, it seems crucial to have sufficient legal regulation of the issues related to the function of a befriended family and to ensure consistent criteria for the assessment of such families.

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Attachment no. 1
Drawing of "Myself and Others", Adrian, 15; a sample work of a respondent having regular contact with a biological family
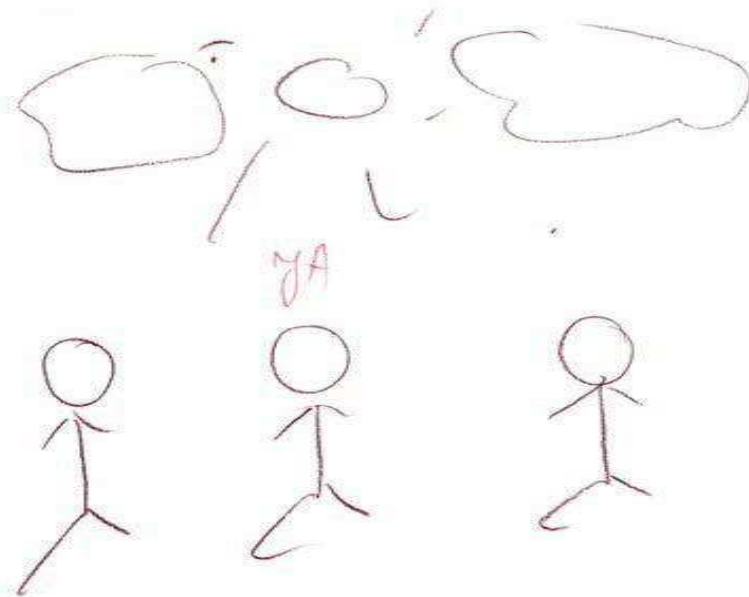
Attachment no. 2
Drawing of "Myself and Others", Paulina, 14; a sample work of a respondent having regular contact with a befriended family