

Setting objectives: the importance of asking questions

The newly developed application form is meant to provide you as mediator with a tool in your contacts with the children and the families. When the child and the parents give a clear reply to all questions, then the main problem will become transparent. Then it will be possible to make a common plan for the future. By working step by step and regularly evaluating the development of the child, we can make our assistance as effective as possible. The new application form will serve as a tool in this process. The following texts may serve as examples.

Name: ERNEST
Age: 5 years
Handicap: due to brain damage Ernest cannot sit, walk or speak.

The first step:

Getting acquainted with the family and diagnosing the problem.

Our mediator encounters a lot of hustle and bustle when he visits Ernest. This family has five children. The parents are young and poor. They possess a piece of land for cultivation. The profit hardly suffices to feed the children. Unfortunately their cow died. Ernst is lying on a mat in the only room of the house. He is clean and looks well. The parents are happy that the mediator is lending them an ear, so they tell their story. When Ernest was born, he was brain damaged. Now aged five, he is retarded in his development. He cannot sit, walk or speak. Most of the time he just lies on the ground or is carried by someone. It is obvious that his parents don't really know how to cope with his situation. The replies to the questions in the social field on the application form give the mediator a clear view of the family situation.

The second step:

Support of the parents

The mediator understands that his first concern is for the parents themselves. It turns out that they have big problems, emotionally as well as financially. They are eager to help Ernest, but they don't know how.

In order to make a start, the mediator invites them for the next parent meeting. This is meant specifically for parents who have a child to care for at home who has the same handicap as Ernest. During this meeting they can share their worries with other parents and learn from others' suggestions.

The third step:

Making a plan for Ernest

Ernest is an example of a child severely handicapped by brain damage. In his case the mediator finds it important to involve professional help and to arrange for specialists to examine the boy. For instance, it is not clear why Ernest cannot speak. There may be an unexpected reason for it, for instance maybe his hearing does not function properly. An extensive physical check-up can then help to establish a rehabilitation plan for Ernest. As to activities in daily life, Ernest relies in every way on his mother's care. This care is very time-consuming. Housekeeping, working on the land and looking after the other children leaves little time for Ernest. The mediator explains that Ernest can learn some daily-life activities himself, but only if the parents can offer much patience and follow-up.



After the visit of the paediatrician it will become clearer what is feasible in Ernest's situation, so that a first objective may be set.

It is important, and also enjoyable, to involve Ernest more within the family. The father is handy enough that he can make an adapted chair with the help from the specialist's instructions. This gives Ernest a fixed place among the other children and he can look around at everything that is going on. Should it turn out that his hearing is intact, then the parents will be briefed on how to teach him words. The other children may be involved too.

The father is handy enough that he can make an adapted chair with the help from the specialist's instructions.

The fourth step:

Long-term objectives

By their replies in the social, ADL and physical field, the parents have sketched a true image of their situation. In deliberation with the doctor, concrete and feasible short-term objectives will be set in the individual rehabilitation plan.

As to the financial situation of the family, a new pregnant cow would benefit them no end. Since this request is in line with their daily activities, the mediator will take the necessary steps after the paediatrician has been consulted. The parents are grateful for the assistance offered. They intend to help Ernest with his rehabilitation to the best of their ability. In due time the mediator will assess the family situation with the parents. After that, further plans will be made.

The visits of the mediator have done the parents a lot of good. There is hope for a better future for the whole family. The mediator will continue to go and see them on a regular basis.

In the next two examples the mediator evaluates Stephanie's and Afzal's current situation with the help of the, also revised, justification form.

Name: STEPHANIE
Age: 10
Handicap: mentally retarded by microcephaly

Stephanie is about 10 years old. Her mother cannot exactly remember when she was born. Due to microcephaly, Stephanie is retarded in her development. For four years now the Liliane Foundation has been funding her day treatment. This day care has done Stephanie a lot of good. Her social skills have improved. She is able to properly greet people and play with other children without quarrelling. The mediator can ascertain that the objective set at the social level, namely to improve her social skills, has been achieved for a great part. Attending the day care has also added to Stephanie's self-confidence with regard to the activities of daily life, which she can perform without being supervised. And yet the mediator is not quite satisfied. It is now mainly Stephanie's mother he is concerned about.

Next step:

Evaluating

With the help of a social worker, the mediator has so far made several attempts to help the mother to cope with her social problems. Being an alcoholic, she is not able to keep her word. She does not take Stephanie to the day care in time and does not come to fetch her in time either. It has even been decided to keep Stephanie at home for three months to see how she is developing at home. Then it turns out her development has come to a standstill. Also, there is no point in helping the mother with an income-generating project.

New phase:

Future plan

It appears from the evaluation that for the coming period, priority should be given to the social field and now particularly to the mother.

The mediator and the social worker have decided to visit Stephanie and her mother more often at home in order to acquire an optimal understanding of the home situation. They also wish to provide better guidance to the mother to cope with her problems. Only if this strategy works, are they ready to continue to help Stephanie. Attempts will also be made to involve other family members with the care of Stephanie. In Stephanie's interest the mediator wants to keep working on an adequate solution.

Name: AFZAL

Age: 7

Handicap: due to polio Afzal's knees are deformed and he cannot walk.

Afzal is 7 years old, with an older and younger brother. His parents take good care of him, he gets along well with his parents and brothers. At the age of 18 months Afzal contracted polio, leaving his knees seriously deformed. It has been a hard time for the mother to see her son disabled without knowing if he would ever be able to walk again.

After meeting our mediator, Afzal was referred for treatment in a centre for children with physical disabilities. When he first came there, he was not able to stand without help.

Next step:

Evaluating and planning for the future

Much progress has been achieved in five months time. He can now stand with callipers and adapted shoes. His mobility is now being given full attention. Because a walking frame is now also available at home, Afzal could be dismissed from the centre. It was arranged that he will continue his exercises day after day. His parents and brothers play an important part in this process. Afzal needs encouragement and support so that he won't give up exercising. There are days when he finds it hard, but also days that he is managing nicely. In due time he will go back to the centre for a check-up. Then it will be assessed whether he is making progress.

Evaluation shows that only Afzal's physical condition is affected. In terms of his social contacts and his daily activities, he is functioning well. Afzal turns out to be an intelligent child. In due time he is also supposed to attend school. His parents hope that he will be able to work one day, just like everyone else.

Due to the good co-operation between the mediator, the parents and the centre, the rehabilitation is going according to plan and Afzal's future is looking bright.

We hope these forms will be a tool for you in the daily practice of your work. Your experiences in this respect will be most welcome.