



Il Melograno: the welcome network

Year 4th - Number 14th - August 2009

Summary:

- Kenya: the first care-leavers' network is born;
- Bolivia: the second national meeting of Melograno's groups;
- The adoption and its difficulties: experiences from Brazil;
- The successes of the adoptive parents association APA in Moldova;
- Introducing "il Melograno": the Kenya Network of care-leavers.

Kenya

The first care-leavers' network is born



One of the youths affirms *"We want to be the change and to be the ambassadors of the Kenyan young people who lived in the institutions and we want to advocacy for adequate policies in favour of this category"*.

So has ended the meeting which took place on Saturday June 20th in Kenya, in the Nairobi's suburb, with young people who lived in different institutions of the city until the age of eighteen. 16 young care-leavers and 2 young girls, who at the age 18-19 are going to leave the institutions where they have been living for years, have participated at the one-day meeting.

Those young people, coming from at least 8 different institutions of Nairobi, have had the same sad story. They have been taken to an institution where they grew up until the age of 18-19, when someone told them that it was time to "go" and so, alone, they have to build up a new life and be independent without being prepared.

During the day two workshops were held. The first one was focused on the analysis of life in institutions and on problems and difficulties that they have to face with. The second workshop was focused on difficulties which they have to meet once leaving care.



The youths underlined the lack of preparation to deal with the daily life, the lack of a place to go, the will to go on with the studies but the lack of the economical resources to do it, the feeling of being alone and discriminated by everybody, even by their biological family with which they have often lost the contact. They also admitted that the system and the government have lot of gaps and that there are no programs for young people coming from the institutions, and also that no specific services are available because at the age of eighteen you need to manage by yourself.

They emphasized also their worry for the others young people who felt down and were involved in prostitution, small criminality and abuse of drugs and alcohol.

They think that the government and the institutions should implement programs in order to prepare them to leave the institutions, as job guidance, professional training courses, legal advice and to guarantee an economic support for their studies. At the end of the meeting, the youths expressed the wish to create a network of young people (that was formalized in a specific meeting on the past July 25th) and to take part of our international network.

Indeed, they confirmed the importance of fighting against institutionalization and of promoting different way of "welcome a child".

At the end one of the youths said *"There are two kinds of people: the ordinary and the extraordinary ones. To be extraordinary you need to do something extra. We can tell us: today, my friends, we are extraordinary people because we are here and we want to do something useful and, together, we can make it!"*

Bolivia

The second national meeting of Melograno's groups

The second national meeting of the groups of Bolivian young people and families that belong to the network **"Il Melograno"** will take place in **Cochabamba** (Bolivia) on next **October 24th – 25th**. It will be an important event that follows the previous one which took place in Potosí last year.

At the meeting four groups of care-leavers from all over the country (Cuentas Conmigo, ASCA, Jovisdeibi, Ajuca) and some young people from Oruro and Santa Cruz, as well as two groups of adoptive families (Familias del Corazon and CBBA) will participate to discuss all together on how to welcome and create awareness on children and young people out of family care.

It will consist of two days to deepen the main issues. During the first day the groups will exchange their experiences with local experts. On the second day there will be a specific workshop with the aim of defining some guide lines on adoption and on the topic of *leaving care* in Bolivia starting from the direct experience of the young people and the families. The objective is to improve the protection system of the local childhood and to realize a leaflet "Il Melograno Bolivia" aiming at sensitizing the public opinion on those issues.



Brasil

The adoption and its difficulties: experiences from Brazil

Luiz, 12 years old, arrived to one of the Children Services in São Paulo only with his backpack on. He didn't bring any toy, any book and besides he looked to be sad. Really sad. He was there to go back in the institution. After he became part of a new family, the mother who has adopted him didn't want him anymore. "He has been sent back as a sack of potatoes", said the psychologist of the Children Service, Mônica Barros Rezende.

What to do? Luiz went back to the institution and so he had to live again the experience of abandonment. Luiz, the imaginary name used in this article, has lived a sorrowful story. The trauma and consequences of going back to the institution is an extreme phenomenon which is not very discussed: the other side of adoption with its unexpected problems and conflicts. People don't use to discuss much on the problems that the adoptive families have to face because it is a very delicate issue.

The concrete problems that exist between parents and adoptive children concern their relationship. The psychoanalyst Maria Luiza, who gave the support to the Association of the Brazilian Magistrates for the campaign *Mude um destino* [Change a destiny] which objective was to spread adoption, has identified various risk's factors with the aim of "improving the relationship between parents and adoptive children in order to avoid a second abandonment" of children in the institutions.

The first problem is about the difficulties of living together. It is necessary to make the parents aware of the conflicts that can happen. Indeed, if this can occur with the biological son, it will not be different with the adoptive one. Those problems can happen in different moments, whether in an initial adaptation situation, or when the child becomes an adolescent. In this period it is necessary to offer a support's service whether from the government (social services) or from family self help groups.

The second problem concerns the origin of the child. In the initial step, the adoptive parents have to understand that the past life of the child is linked with his future and that his past has not to be denied, never. Sometimes the parents used to change the first name of their child. It often happens that the family does not tell the child about the adoption because they are worried that the child could find out the identity of his biological parents and therefore, he can decide to refuse his adoptive family.

Other common problems are that, by facing a conflict, the parents could take out the negative memories of the child's origin or have too high expectations about their adoptive son.

However, the majority of the adoption's cases has a happy end but in order to not make the dream turning into a nightmare, it is needed above all to make the parents conscious of the fact that they are not the ones who have the right to have a son, but it is the child who has the right to have parents, a family.

It is also necessary for those who want to adopt to make them better known this universe of adoption through a specific training. "The feeling for the adopted child can be the same of the one for a biological child, but the situation is never the same", says the Brazilian psychoanalyst Maria Luiza Assis Ghirardi. The preparation of the child is also necessary. Before being inserted in a new family, it is important to make him aware that he will get a new home, really different from the institution. A new home for



example can involve new rules. But this preparation is not always done due to the instability of the institutions.

However, with the approved new National Law on the Adoption, Brazil has done another step to face the problems concerning adoption and abandoned children.

The main change that this law has imposed is about the term of the stay of the child in the institution that can be up to two years without the removal of the legal parental responsibility, procedure that is required to make the child available for adoption. With this new law, the process of removing the legal parental responsibility will be easier and the child could be enrolled in the national register for adoption.

In Brazil there are around 22,000 couples looking for an adoptive child and around 43,000 children waiting for adoption.

Nevertheless, the number of the children registered for the adoption represents only a minimum quote of children who are in institutions in the country. It is estimated that there are between 80,000 and 100,000 institutionalized children.

Others changes about adoption are going on through the Justice. Last month, the promoter of justice of the city of Uberlândia in Minas Gerais, Mr. Epaminondas Costa, decided to take steps against a couple of civil servants who had decided to adopt Ligia, 8 years old, but sent her back 8 months after the foster care period and a bit before the declaration of adoption without any explanation. The decision of the promoter is relevant because he has obliged the couple to pay part of the food support until Ligia will be 24. The promoter of justice says that this action was the right duty towards the big traumas the young girl has suffered.

By Kátia Mello and Liuca Yonaha, magazine *Época*, July 20th 2009. Translated and adapted by Amici dei Bambini.

Moldova

The successes of the adoptive parents Association APA in Moldova



Almost 9 years have passed from the foundation of the local association of adoptive parents APA in 2002. Since then, the goals reached are many and relevant for many children who have some difficulties in their families.

During this years APA has developed a collaborative relationship both with national and international associations, actives in the field of the children abandonment. Furthermore, it has participated to international events such as the one called 'Senza figli Senza'

[Without Children Without] organized by Ai.Bi. in Bellaria in 2006 and during which "Il Melograno" network was born.

At present, APA is carrying out a training course for couples who want to adopt and some psychological meetings for groups of couples who have already adopted. Since 2008, the association has widened its range on the territory by opening 2 other centers in the northern and in the southern part of the country and by spreading in that way the awareness on adoption.

Numbers can give the right idea of the success of the association's activities:

- Around 90 adoptive parents have took benefit of one specific training (pre and post-adoption courses);
- 28 children have been adopted thanks to the support of APA;
- 72 people (included 18 couples) are today members of APA as well as 2 non-governmental organizations.



Introducing Il Melograno:

It is going on the presentation of the groups that take part of the international network “il Melograno”; in this number, we introduce to you the new Kenyan group, the **Kenya Network of Care-Leavers**:

NAME OF THE ASSOCIATION	Kenya Network of Care-Leavers
N° ASSOCIATES/PARTICIPANTS	Around 20 Young people
MISSION	To promote the well-being of the care-leavers and to lobby for the rights of institutionalized children
MAIN ACTIVITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To address young people who are leaving the institutions (informative campaign about the risks of the world outside);• To visit the institutions and to organize recreational/sensitizations events in and outside them;• To fundraise to go on with their education (grants based on merit);• To keep on a work of mutual assistance inside the group;• To organize workshops on specific topics concerning children in institutions and young people out of the family;• To promote sport's activities among young care-leavers;• To promote income generating activities;• To promote the contact with disabled children and youths in the institutions and with the street children
TERRITORIAL DIFFUSION	In particular Nairobi and at a national level in general
SHORT STORY OF THE ASSOCIATION	The group was born this year after a specific workshop organized in June with the guys who has experienced it. The objective was to analyze the difficulties that the young people are meeting once leaving institutional care.
REFERENCE'S PERSON AND CONTACTS	sucembe@yahoo.com Stephen Ucembe