

# THE EXPERIENCE OF SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES ASSOCIATION HUNGARY

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It was winter and snow when we arrived in Bethlehem in 2003 — five colleagues from the SOS Children's Villages Association Hungary, everybody full of expectations. One week was enough to understand that this was not just a study visit but a life-changing experience.

In Hungary our association works with 140 employees, and maintains three foster parent networks (called Children's Villages) and four youth facilities. We have 300 children and youths in care; nearly 30 per cent of them have behavioural problems.

During the visit at Community Service Foundation and Buxmont Academy we found very nice and open people who truly wanted to give us something that we couldn't read from a book or learn in a training. This was a high respect for emotions and a constructive way of expressing them.

We all had been working for long years in the child-protection field



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and had somehow come to express our emotions less and less. Of course we had also accumulated more and more unresolved problems.

We realized that restorative practices was something that we really needed.

We were able to visit the school and the group homes, participate in trainings, share experiences with colleagues, and hear about research results. Everything was clear and we were devoted to this cause. The only question was how to start at home.

In autumn of 2003 with the help of CSF we organized a basic restorative practices training for the coworkers of the three Children's Villages in Battonya, Kecskemét, and Kőszeg. In 2004 the next step was a presentation for group homes in Kecskemét and the same presentation in a National Conference in Kőszeg.

We were in the process of opening a new youth facility in Szombathely (Sé), a chance to start with new staff and new concepts. The youth facility started to work smoothly after a basic restorative practices training. CSF provided regular consultation possibilities for the staff members. Since that time Sé Youth Facility has become one of our best working facilities.

In the same year we started a pilot project with foster parents, specializing in youth with behavioural disorders. This was something completely new in Hungary at that time. CSF of Hungary offered training and an internship possibility for two foster parent candidates, the first foster parent couple that began the work in Budapest with two behaviourally problematic girls. They still work with us. We consider their results to be among our greatest successes, and we are proud of them. We made mistakes during the selection process and the preparatory phase with the other couple in Szeged. We did not recognize many of their weaknesses, and their contact ended after one year.

We plan to improve our activity with implementing restorative practices in the management field, but this has not been realized yet.

In 2007 Children's Villages Association Hungary had changes in the management field and our future expectations are very positive.

We are an organization where coworkers are not only employees but also everyday models for children on how to solve conflicts and how to express emotions properly. I am convinced that restorative practices is an indispensable support to this type of work.