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When the family suffers. Assistance, support and guiding

Vancáková, Soňa
*Keď rodina trpí. Pomoc, podpora
a sprevádzanie*

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The author of the book is PaedDr. Mgr. Soňa Vancáková, PhD. – the founder and director of the civic association Maják nádeje (Lighthouse of hope) (Košice, Slovakia, www.majak-nadeje.eu), in which she has been helping families with the material and social need for over ten years. She is the author of several scientific and professional publications focused on people in need – Families in Need (2014), Church activities aimed at helping families (2015), Family and state help... reality or utopia? (2015). I am going crazy over you! Parents and raising children with ADHD (2019), Enough! Teacher and education of students with ADHD (2019). She has also published several joint monographs: Mercy Against the Sufferers (2016), Suffering Hurts but Makes Sense (2017), Crisis – What to Do with It? Stories written by life and solved by experts (2020). She also publishes informative fairy tales for children, each containing a specific value to develop in the child: The Tale of the Brave Ant (2018), The Tale of the Ladybug (2019), The Tale of the Sunflowers (2019), The Tale of the Toadstools (2019), The Tale of Elinka the Sheep (2020), A Tale of Miško the Bear (2020), A Tale of the Žofka the Giraffe (2020). In 2018, she began publishing the magazine Maják nádeje – a magazine about families in need, published twice a year and provides the views and recommendations of experts and the families in need themselves.

In our lives, we encounter situations that are often very demanding and extremely tough. These include, for example, a severe disability of a family member, divorce, addiction of a family member, loss of housing, dying or the death of a loved one. In many cases, a suffering person needs help from outside – it is beneficial in being guided by someone. Anyone can be guided on this journey. Someone who walks a long way with a suffering person will be his support, „a weeping willow“, he provides the comfort, help, or “just” listens to that person. This publication offers opportunities to develop the skills needed for guiding. Simultaneously, through practical demonstrations in case studies, it offers an insight into the lives of families in need and methods of significant help.

The book is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter describes families in crisis – it clarifies the dysfunction of the family, unemployment in families, family poverty and analyzes stress as a stressful situation. *“In practice, when working with families in need, we most often use the possibility of ventilation when we allow single mothers to talk about stressful situations that they encounter daily. We also use other methods, such as drawing – in art therapy, which we offer to children and single mothers”* (p. 29).

The second chapter is devoted to guiding in crisis – it describes the types of guiding, specifies social guiding, and laic and professional guiding. *“Some people stop on our way only for a short time, while others walk next to us for a longer period. However, the important thing is that they notice us and do not bypass us when we need help and support. Sometimes a new overview is enough, a different angle from which we can look at our difficult situation – and our suffering will diminish, it will subside”* (p. 30).

The third chapter is devoted to volunteering – the typology of volunteering, the motivation and benefits of volunteering, and then the author describes the areas of volunteering in *Maják nádeje*, with practical examples. *“Maják nádeje has been working with several volunteers to help families in need for years. These volunteers work full time in various fields and provide their skills available to the poor. They have already helped hundreds of families in need. In their darkness, Maják nádeje shines like a light and its team of dedicated volunteers trying to shine on them, too. Volunteers help these families in need many times a day in various ways. Whether it is food aid, where they try to collect food as food support collections, they distribute to families every month. Similarly, as well as drugstore and hygiene supplies. They are looking for furniture donors to furnish modest family homes or write projects to buy new furniture or essential household appliances. They organize collections in schools and parishes so they can pay for the rent or medicine to families. Every week they organize several creative workshops where mothers learn to live, crochet, make gift soaps. They teach children to improve their well-being, so they have hope for a better future. ...”*(p. 43–44).

The fourth chapter presents the civic association Maják nádeje – its focus, the helping team and the beneficiaries. *“Following the example of Pope Benedict XVI. we have chosen the motto of our association: Let us have a heart that sees, ‘Such a heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly’”* (p. 47).

The fifth chapter presents the activities of the civic association Maják nádeje – specific forms of assistance to families in need, as well as publishing and research activities focused on families in need. *“In Maják nádeje, we provide comprehensive assistance to families in need: counseling, educational, creative workshops, job placement, medical, cultural, spiritual, summer camps, food, material, financial”* (p. 53).

The sixth chapter, entitled “Good Practice”, describes the centers for families in need that Maják nádeje has, in particular, Nízkoprahové centrum pre rodiny a Centrum pre rodiny v núdzi – Relax, as well as other positive results. *“We are pleased to have created a space where we can help families in need effectively and efficiently”* (p. 88).

The last chapter presents the research results focused on the ten-year practice of Maják nádeje with families in need. The research aimed to identify families living in crisis life situations and process the individual features characterizing them. Simultaneously, the aim was to assess families’ situations in need and assess whether assistance from the state and the non-profit sector is necessary. *“Research shows that families in need are growing. It is clear from these families’ current situation that without the help of others, it will be challenging for them to overcome difficult periods of life”* (p. 112).

The book has a very nicely processed theory about guiding and managing stressful situations, beneficial and educational for the reader. A great benefit of the book is its practical examples in short case studies, which the author presents from her own experience. In particular, the results of the research illustrate the crisis of families in need.

The book is suitable for the professional public (social workers, psychologists, teachers, representatives of local governments, etc.) and the general public, as it offers both a theoretical and practical basis for helping and guiding.

