

From the Tigris to the Tisza river- the story of a refugee family

Case study

By Andrea Podina

Bicske

I have met Khalid and his two sons on several occasions during the last few years. I first met them at the end of 2010 in the Reception Centre of Bicske where I worked as a social worker. This family had already waited for a long time in the centres of Békéscsaba and Debrecen for the Immigration and Asylum Office to reach a decision about their request for asylum. They had spent over a year in complete insecurity, not knowing if they would receive a refugee or subsidiary protected status¹, which equals permanent safety, or would be deported from the country. After a long time spent waiting, they were awarded the status of subsidiary protection by the Office, and thus could spend a year at the Reception Centre in Bicske, supposedly to prepare them for living in Hungary.

Khalid had already been in a very unstable mental state when we first met. In the time spent in various camps he had received psychological and psychiatric treatment on and off, his doctors diagnosed him with a paranoid personality disorder, schizophrenia and posttraumatic syndromes on the side. He did his best taking care of his children, but any conflict, negative or incomprehensible event would upset him and cause unexpected bursts of anger. The long time spent waiting for their claim to be processed also did not help his state of health, and upon first meeting him he seemed like a broken, unwell person, constantly under the influence of some medicine. He spoke in a very slow, halting way, which could only partially be explained by his difficulties with the language. Weeks had gone by before he finally acknowledged that they had arrived to a safe place – even if only temporary, their status could not be taken away for a while at least, and he could start making long-term plans.

1) „Refugee status may be granted to a person whose life and liberty are threatened in his/her country of origin on account of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, or whose fear of being subject to persecution is well founded, and who currently resides in the territory of Hungary and submits an application for asylum.”

„ A person may be admitted for subsidiary protection if he/she does not qualify as a refugee but in respect of whom there is reason to believe that the person concerned, if returned to his/her country of origin would face a real risk of suffering serious harm, and in unable, or owing to such risk, unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country.”

I had gradually found out more of the story of Khalid: when the war broke out between Iraq and Iran in 1980, he was one of the first soldiers from Iraq to be sent to Iran. Soon he was captured by the Iranian army, and was imprisoned for almost 15 years, to be released in the mid-90'-ies. During his military imprisonment, he was treated in a cruel, inhuman, humiliating way, which has effected his physical and mental state – most likely his psychological problems also originate from this period.

On returning to Iraq he got married and started to work as a carpenter. He had two sons, Omar and Hassan, who were 9 and 8 when we first met. According to his story, he did not get along his wife's family, so he moved to Syria with his sons and lived there for many years. We do not know what has happened to his wife. Khalid shared several versions of this story. The boys presume her dead, but most likely Khalid told them this because he did not want to admit that his wife had left them.

After the chaos in the aftermath of the war in Iraq, the family left for Europe. They did not intend to come to Hungary, but they ended up here.

After getting “cosy” at the reception centre, we acquired the basic documents for all family members and set further goals: learning Hungarian, enrolling the children in school, stabilizing his mental state, employment. The first two were quite easy to start: the children started attending school and Khalid attended the language course organized inside the camp. However, he did not take his medication regularly (if at all), and his mental health had remained unstable, so we did not make progress in helping them start their independent life outside of the camp. I have known Khalid for a long time now, and although many things have changed in their lives, one thing has not: he has never become conscious of his mental problems and could never be convinced to ask for help.

Budapest

After I changed jobs, I did not see Khalid and his family for about a year, when we met again in Budapest. By then I was working for an NGO, and as I had known Khalid already, it seemed best that I would be their social worker again. Khalid agreed.

By then they had an exact deadline to leave the camp (the legal framework back then allowed people to stay in a reception centre for the maximum duration of a year). Their situation was difficult, but not hopeless: they were entitled to several social financial and in-kind benefits, such as regular life subsistence, housing benefit, a onetime settlement benefit, schooling benefit etc.² With the help of an interpreter we had spent hours talking, trying to help Khalid sort out various possibilities, entitlements, prospects and help him understand what is often too complicated even for Hungarian citizens.

2) According to the 301/2007. (XI. 9.) Governmental Decree on the execution of the 2007:LXXX. Act on Refugees, valid in 2011.

Khalid had frequent mood swings, sometimes he was more optimistic, at other times he would rant on about the system, the reception centre, the country, everything and everyone. He often complained about being discriminated against because of his origins – which is not too likely in a reception centre receiving several dozens of ethnic groups. This complaint turned up again and again in various situations. Khalid was likely to suspect racism and prejudice behind all of his conflicts and could not see his responsibility in any of them.

Before moving out from the refugee camp, he applied to take part in the supported housing program of an NGO, who would subsidize his rental fees for two years – this would have offered a permanent solution to their housing need. He had been to several interviews and was feeling hopeful of being chosen to take part in the program, and told me that the staff there confirmed his optimism. He was very disappointed when he found out he did not get accepted finally. The staff of the NGO said they refused him because of his unpredictable, sometimes aggressive behaviour and bursts of anger.

Khalid did not get over this disappointment for years, he kept bringing it up through our talks, even when it seemed completely unrelated to the topic of conversation. This experience is likely to have reassured him that he could never feel secure and trust anyone, had to be ready to jump any time, because the false sense of security could turn to hopelessness and despair again.

After he had calmed down somewhat, we started to think about a plan B: renting an apartment without any financial support. We added up all the income Khalid was likely to have and felt that it was not impossible. Through a rental agency we found a somewhat dilapidated two room apartment in Buda, with excellent public transport, and a rent of 65 000 HUF + bills, which seems funnily low today. The landlords even gave permission for the official registration of the address.

We contacted the local social welfare office and asked for their help in enrolling the children in school. This was not an easy task, and only partially due to the fact that the boys did not speak Hungarian well. The local school was a prestigious one with high expectations, and the director was not enthusiastic at all to accept two poor brothers from Iraq, who hardly spoke Hungarian – and said so openly at a personal meeting. The other possibility would have been a Christian school, but the father, being a Muslim, quite understandably rejected this option. As it was important that the children started school as soon as possible, the first school seemed the only choice. Luckily, after the faculty saw that there was no way to avoid teaching the boys, they started to offer constructive support. Both kids received a tutor who helped them outside classes to catch up, especially with the Hungarian language. The other NGO (who had rejected their application to the supported housing program) also decided to step in and offer free tutorials and some pocket money for the children.

Khalid seemed to have an increasing number of supporting organizations, so we decided to call for a case conference. It took place in the building of the local social service, 13 people from 6 different organizations were present, and, as it turned out, we hardly knew about what the others did, who could help in what field and what had already been taken care of.

The high number of professionals and volunteers supporting Khalid was thanks to his great capability to get what he wanted: if he felt incapable of solving a problem, he could efficiently find the right people and organizations to involve, who, despite of often totally being unaware of the legal framework and possibilities available for refugees, helped him enthusiastically. I feel that they had solved several problems that Khalid would have been capable of handling himself, and thus hindered his real empowerment.

During this time we helped him apply for all the financial aid that we thought he had been eligible for, but due to bureaucracy and often conflicting legal setting it took some time to actually receive these.

In the beginning, the whole income of the family was 29 600 HUF. Immediately after leaving the camp he applied for the onetime settlement benefit available for refugees and people under subsidiary protection then. When he received 130 000 HUF, he repaid the loan he had received for the deposit of the apartment. He also applied for regular life subsistence, which the Immigration and Asylum Office granted, he started to receive an additional 55 575 HUF (7 125 HUF/month for Khalid and 24 225 HUF/child/month). Together with child allowance, the income of the family per capita was 28 391 HUF, which was just 200 HUF below the eligibility threshold for social support. The Office decided on the amount of support. According to the legal framework, the regular life subsistence was to be considered an income, and the income of beneficiaries could not surpass the eligibility threshold.

In the meantime, Khalid registered in the Job Centre and we were intensely looking for a job. The job centre soon referred him to the local supported employment program of the municipality as a full time unskilled worker. His salary before taxes was 71 800 HUF, and he received about 50 000 HUF after paying taxes. As their income had increased slightly, and exceeded the eligibility threshold, 28 500 HUF per capita, they lost their entitlement to the regular life subsistence. This resulted in a strange situation: Khalid would have been financially better off unemployed, because then he could have kept the regular subsistence benefit and would have had 5000 HUF more to spend every month!

Khalid several times stressed that he wanted to work and not live on benefits and support. At the same time, starting working not only meant that he was losing money, but he also had less time to spend with his children. He enrolled in a language school (this was a condition for receiving the benefit posed by the Immigration and Asylum Office), but the lessons were most often during the day, which meant he had to ask for leave during work hours, and then work later hours in the evenings.

Obviously the support system set up like this did not motivate our client to find work.

Apart from the anomalies of the benefit system, Khalid faced additional barriers in employment: hard physical labour (gardening, hoeing, chopping wood, occasionally moving furniture) worsened his spinal problems, which sometimes cause him so much pain that he could not even get out of bed.

In the meantime, his children struggled in school. Although teachers agreed that both boys were motivated and trying hard in their classes (while they only understood about half of what was said), from time to time they got into conflicts, especially Omar, the older boy. He got into physical fights with his classmates on several occasions; he reacted with violence to any supposed or real provocation. The father treated all these instances as attacks on the family because of their origins, and thus reacted through bursts of anger, and several times threatened the school with going to court or the police (who most likely did not really react well to the conflicts between children).

They had some problems with their housing. Khalid felt angry at the agency they had rented the apartment from for neglecting the place and for failing to repair certain things already broken when moving in (a broken window, a door that could only be closed with difficulty, a dripping faucet). When trying to mediate between the two parties it became apparent that Khalid on his end got into significant arrears with the rent, the common costs of the building as well as the utilities. Neither side was willing to make amends: Khalid thought that the broken windows were to blame for the high heating bills, which he did not want to pay until the repairs had been done. The agency, on the other hand, threatened with eviction if Khalid kept postponing payment. As Khalid stopped paying, he also could not access the housing benefit paid by the Immigration and Asylum Office, which would have required to see the paid bills. Fortunately, after some time both parties gave in: the agency had the problems repaired, and Khalid paid some of his debt. Although this bought us some time, it was obvious that Khalid could not sustain his independent living in the long term even with the benefits and his salary.

All these problems related to finances, employment and school had resulted in the deterioration of the psychological state of our client: after a few months of relative stability he again started to have outbursts of anger on a regular basis. On these occasions it was impossible to calm him, not even with the involvement of several colleagues. He would continue to blame everyone, present or absent. Once the situation escalated so far that he threatened to cut the throat of all those present at the reception – including me and my colleagues. We were considering cutting him off our support as threatening staff is something we could not tolerate, and his behaviour had ruined the trust between us. However, mostly because we did not want to abandon the children, we decided to keep working with him, but his case was transferred to another member of the team.

My colleague struggled with the same issues I had earlier: unsolved housing and employment issues, double or multiple case management, frequent mood swings on behalf of our client, and the problems in school. Omar, the older boy would get into a fight at school at least once a month or every two months, his own PTSD symptoms probably made worse by the patterns he had observed at home. Interestingly enough, his brother did not have similar difficulties, according to his teachers he quickly and easily adapted to his class. Despite this, it was obvious that both children needed psychological support, and even Khalid agreed with us on this. The boys started seeing a therapist individually, but it did not last long, as they kept cancelling their appointment – because of an illness, wrong timing, oversleeping, etc. The school referred Omar to be examined by a team of experts as they had suspected he might have dyslexia. Khalid was suspicious, he wanted to talk about this several times, which involved an interpreter so he could understand what was suggested (that this was in the interest of his son). It took him months to finally consent to the examination and Omar could get personalized support.

Khalid changed jobs and started to work as a carpenter for someone he knew. As eviction was still looming above their head, various organizations and support people kept trying to find other forms of accommodation (for example in a temporary hostel for families), but Khalid rejected all their proposals. The employer of Khalid offered a small house outside Budapest for free for Khalid and his kids as long as he worked for him. Unfortunately, they could not register it as their official address, so Khalid still had to travel to Budapest to take care of official business, and the boys also stayed in the same school (the local school was not willing to enrol them without a registered local address).

It seemed like Khalid liked his workplace and he was happy to work in his trade. His bosses were satisfied with him. Unfortunately, his health problems grew more acute in a few months, and the doctors thought he should be operated as soon as possible. As the surgery required a two-week stay in hospital, Khalid's main worry was who would take care of his children during this time. One of the volunteers supporting the family invited the children to stay with them while their father was in hospital. The surgery worked well, but Khalid's state improved very slowly, for several months he could only walk with a cane – and lots of painkillers.

He often spoke about wanting to find a permanent housing solution. He visited several farms and houses that he was interested in buying, he checked out mortgages and state support. A friend recommended a derelict house in a small town by the Tisza river that could be bought for a low price and even in several payments. Khalid took the offer and in the middle of 2014 moved to the countryside with his children.

Tisza

After their move, I had not heard about Khalid for years. I left my job, and I started to work with refugees again in the summer of 2016 in the housing support program of BMSZKI. I was responsible for coordinating the work of the social workers in the project. In the program we supported refugees and people under subsidiary protection in finding and sustaining housing (help in paying the rent and bills) for a maximum of 12 months. Khalid and his family were referred to us by a colleague. I found out that the family still lived in the derelict house in poverty. Khalid had been paying for the house in smaller sums, with more or less success. As his health was still not very good, he could only work occasionally, so the family mainly lived on child allowance and various social benefits. Khalid tried to support his family by creating a small garden, keeping animals (goats, rabbits) and selling surplus vegetables, milk at the local market.

The family obviously needed support both financially and socially, but we were not sure how we could keep working with them – their town was about 200 km from Budapest. I did not work as a social worker in the program, and in any case, our former history would not have allowed me to play that role in his life again. Finally, one of my colleagues agreed to take their case – her family lived in that town, and she was willing to visit Khalid once a month, and even more frequently if needed. She could also keep in touch with the various helpers of the father and the children (professionals and laic people as well), including the school. The family asked to help with the payment of their bills, especially buying wood they used to heat the house as well as their water. This was their biggest expense. They had suffered the winter before as they could not buy enough wood and heating the badly insulated house required a lot of wood.

When we reconnected with the family, the boys were teenagers finishing the last grade of elementary school, needing to decide how to continue their studies. Both had bad grades, it was difficult to find a school that would take them. The teachers thought the circumstances of the boys were responsible – for example they had no table in the house to sit down and write their homework, they often did not have enough good quality food to eat. The mental state of their father kept deteriorating, he was behaving in an unpredictable way, often shouted with the boys and sometimes he threw bricks or other hard objects at them. Furthermore he started to collect things, garbage and waste materials were piling up inside and around the house. As a consequence, the hygienic conditions in the house had become appalling, there were rats and other rodents, the boys grew rashes that turned out to be scabies.

After researching their background, we had found that several people supported the family (teachers, a psychologist), and sometimes the boys spent the whole weekend at their house, even sleeping over. The local social services also kept in touch with the family more or less regularly, they were aware of their circumstances, but said that Khalid had refused medical treatment and they could not commit him against his will.

It turned out that not only Khalid, but also Omar, his older son, struggled with his mental health, he often felt downcast and had “dark thoughts”. Apart from their circumstances at home, everyday atrocities and conflicts in school, together with the results of the official government propaganda all played a part in Omar getting worse: both boys complained about a growth of conflicts with strangers in their small town – several times a week they would get yelled at on the streets, be called terrorists or something obscene, or encouraged to “go back home”. The negative feelings brought by these conflicts together with their shame for their

housing circumstances, on top of the turmoil that comes from being a teenager – all these completely justify the depressive mood Omar struggled with.

The supporters around the family agreed that the most urgent task was the improvement of the physical and mental state of the children, together with their social circumstances. Thanks to their joint effort, in the spring of 2017 both boys were admitted to the dormitory of the school, where they enjoyed normal everyday comforts and had quality food on a regular basis. An NGO provided tutorials in the afternoons, as well as replaced their missing school supplies from donations. The grades of both Omar and Hassan improved dramatically, it did not seem impossible that they would continue with their studies. Although the boys felt somewhat guilty for leaving their father alone during the weekdays, their supporters convinced them that it was very important to focus on their studies, as their whole adult life could depend on which high school they got accepted to.

In the meantime, Khalid found work at a local businessman as a carpenter, his original trade. Feeling useful again improved his mood temporarily. He threw himself in work above his strength, often signed up for additional hours in the evening or on weekends, and proudly showed people the photos of what he had built. In a particularly cheerful mood he accepted that a team of volunteers clean up his house and yard and remove the garbage piled up. However, Khalid could not keep on doing such a hard physical job: he developed pain in his back again, and had to be operated on with hernia of the spine. Although his doctors told him to rest and take it easy, he went back to work in a few days. He was not willing to see his part in not getting better and kept blaming doctors for “not treating him the same way as they treat Hungarians” and “not operating him well”.

During the school year, the boys visited their father during the weekends, but when the dormitory closed down for the winter holidays, they moved back home. Even though the financial difficulties of the family had decreased – thanks to the housing support and Khalid’s permanent job, he still suffered from mental problems and any small thing could result in a sudden burst of anger. During the months spent apart, family members got unused to being in such close proximity, and the stress increased to such an extent that Khalid chased both boys out of the house the night before Christmas. They boys called their supporters in a panic, who picked them up and brought them home with them. The next day they tried to speak with Khalid who was still very upset, kept insulting everyone – supporters, teachers, social service workers, even the voluntary interpreter, so the boys ended up spending Christmas and the whole remaining winter holiday at their teacher’s house.

The two boys had always reacted very differently to their father's behaviour and life circumstances. Omar was hard-bitten by the events of recent years, he had always been more susceptible to depression, while Hassan seemed not to be affected by it all. However, after Christmas, Hassan was no longer coping so well and started to also show signs of depression.

It was becoming apparent for all the supporters of the family that the children had to be removed from their father. Starting high school seemed like a good opportunity for this and both boys decided to apply to study in the capital and live in dormitories.

Hassan had turned out to be a talented football player, he had been playing as a registered player for the local youth club. He thus applied to a football academy in Budapest, where he proved so gifted through the several rounds of entrance exam that the school did not even wait for him to finish elementary school, but asked that he be transferred to their high school through the spring term already, and start training with the academy. He has been transferred and now lives in Budapest in a dormitory.

Omar wants to study ecology in Budapest, his application is being processed. He still lives in the dormitory of the small town and visits his father for the weekends.

Khalid is most likely facing another surgery for hernia, and, according to his doctors, his state will deteriorate unless he takes it easy and rests more.

Despite the several positive changes in the life of the family, their struggles are far from being over. The moving of the boys to Budapest, their becoming more independent will bring about difficulties as well, and most likely they will continue to need intense support in the future.

Dilemmas and questions regarding the case

The story of this family is a perfect example of dilemmas in social work with families. Here are some thoughts about them.

How should we choose the clients to work with – should they be the “best” or the “most problematic” ones?

It is a continuous dilemma in social work whom we should choose to work with when given the choice to enrol people in a project (for example in a housing project with well-defined goals). Often it is not only the helping relationship which is at stake. When working in a project, most often we have to reach certain indicators, which means that choosing the right clients is vital for the project's success.

It is also important to consider how much social workers are capable of, how many “difficult” clients they can work with efficiently without the danger of burnout or even leaving the job.

Clients who “work well”, who “deserve support”, who are motivated in working for improving their lives have a positive effect on their social worker as well, who feels that their efforts are worth it. This does not only prevent burnout but also inspires them when working with other clients. When working with “difficult”, uncooperative clients, however, we often go around in circles for years without a hint of long lasting positive change. On top of this, clients can often be aggressive, blame the social worker for failing and refuse to take any responsibility. Most “difficult” clients struggle with mental and/or physical problems, diseases. Unfortunately, at the same time they are the most vulnerable and needy from all aspects.

There is no clear answer. One has to consider all aspects in order to gain a complex picture, and gather as much information as possible to facilitate a decision. Some factors to consider:

- We have to be aware of the human resources available, the work load of social workers, the types of problems our clients already have, and also if for some reason a support person cannot or will not work with a potential new client, whom they can be transferred to.
- We should consider the types of services we can offer, and whether they are a good match for the needs of our client. If we do not accept them for our program, is there any other possibility for them, can they receive support from someone else?
- We should think about the possible long term consequences of being supported in the project, and also what happens if they are not accepted.
- When choosing participants, we have to be aware of the life story of clients: even in the most hopeless cases there are moments in one’s life where they were strong and victorious, even if only in surviving a crisis or overcoming a small difficulty.

Above all of these, we should always give priority to families where children might be endangered. In Khalid’s case we chose to continue supporting him because of his children on several occasions.

Removing a child from their family, the involvement of child welfare services – how long can we wait?

This dilemma reflects the questions of the efficiency of the child welfare system. In the case of Khalid, although the kids were continuously neglected, endangered, child protection and social services had not once considered the possibility to removing them from their father’s care.³

3) 1997: XXXI. Act on the Protection of Children and Foster Services, Chapter VIII., 68. §

I want to emphasize that I am not an advocate of removing children from their families, especially not for financial reasons, and in my experience, neither are child protection workers. However, it seems to me that professionals – maybe because of the criticism they continuously face when the reason for removal is suspected to be a financial one – often are so cautious that they go on the other extreme and do not intervene when a child is in physical and psychological danger, or their basic physical needs are not met. This is what happened with Khalid's family: the boys had been subjected to the volatile behaviour of their father for years, they had lived under horrible circumstances, in extreme poverty, at times even at risk of infections, they often starved, and when their father chased them out of their home, they were literally homeless.

Removing teenagers from their families is always the most problematic and the less likely to bring positive results. Because of their age, they are not likely to be placed with foster parents (friends and acquaintances of the family who might be ready to take them in usually do not have the qualifications needed), so they go into group homes, which in most cases are just as bad, if not worse, than if they had stayed with their families.

Putting children under protected care is not a favourite task of the social worker who is often overburdened already, as it means that they have to visit the family more frequently, put up with the often abusive and non-cooperative parent, who is hostile because of the intrusion into his private space. We are aware of the little support our colleagues in child protection services get, that they do not always have the possibility to work in a reflective way with their colleagues, and that they are often threatened by clients who do not agree with them – like in the case of Khalid. Protected care often does not seem an effective way of prevention in any case, as the parent already burdened by financial and in some cases, psychological problems, feels more pressure and fears losing custody of their children.

On the other hand, in our case, had the children received protected care earlier, the level of their neglect would have been detected much earlier, the connection between their performance at school and the circumstances of their home would have been identified and maybe they could have been admitted to the dormitory, bringing temporary security and peace earlier. From knowing their story, it is obvious that it was by pure chance that Khalid did not cause serious damage to his sons, for example when throwing bricks at Omar, or when chasing both of them out of the house in a night with sub-zero temperatures.

Over-care – how does too much help/support influence the life skills of clients?

As I have already mentioned, Khalid has always proved good at mobilizing various support people around him – which was essential for him to keep going, so when a problem arose he always had someone to turn to. His support network included organizations working with refugees and people under subsidiary protection as well as private individuals. Some of these latter were laic helpers, who often enthusiastically threw themselves in the life of the family without being aware of the legal framework or even the basic facts regarding the case.

For this reason Khalid often received contradictory information about his rights and possibilities, for example, and it is indeed not easy to find one's way in the labyrinth of asylum law. We held several case conferences to discuss who was helping in what, who had what expertise, but this had only helped partially. In several occasions we found out that several helpers were working on the same issue (for example when applying for the regular child benefit) or support people performed tasks that Khalid would have been capable of doing on his own (for example personally handing in an application already prepared).

The relationship between social workers and their client is always a hierarchical one, no matter how hard we try. It makes perfect sense that vulnerable, marginalized people – especially if they are refugees – need less formalized support from people who are not their social worker as well – mentors, family friends, neighbours. In a less formal relationship, however, there are also less boundaries, and it is easy to slide into offering laic support out of mere goodwill. When suspecting that someone is over-caring in supporting a client – usually contrary to their original intention – we try to signal this and explain why this is harmful – and then hope that they will understand. While over-care might make the life of the client easier, it keeps them in a childlike state in the long term as they are not required to mobilize their own resources.

In a family with such intense and multiple problems as Khalid and his children, social workers welcome additional support by sharing responsibilities with various organizations. At the same time, we might ask ourselves what benefits sharing the support of a client might have, and whether it is possible to manage a case where we only have insight into one particular aspect of a person's life, and leave the rest for others? For example, we help them look for a job, but we do not deal with their financial benefits, enrolling the kids in school or their housing need? As we have seen in Khalid's case, all of these difficulties were interconnected, so it would not make sense to deal with them individually (for example, the problems the children had in school were directly connected by their circumstances at home, involving teachers to tutor them after school in itself would not have resulted in the improvement of their grades).

There is no easy answer to this dilemma, either. As the current system of social care does not allow for one support workers to concentrate a big portion of their time on one single family (most case managers work with more than 30 clients simultaneously), they often cannot not involve other social workers to give additional support. However, if several organizations are working with one client, it is essential that they continuously share information so that all stakeholders are aware of what is happening in the client's life. (This, of course, also requires a lot of time.) For the success of our work as well as to serve our clients well it is indispensable to be congruent and consistent, and that no-one promises or does anything contradictory to the activities of the others, as this would be counterproductive in the long run.

Epilogue

The above study was written from a social worker's perspective. I have tried to stick to the facts and remain objective, but as I was deeply affected both on the professional as well as the personal level by becoming so involved with the family, I could not stay as objective as I would have liked to.

My colleague – the present social worker of the family – made two separate interviews with the boys. From the interviews we can find out how they, through their children's eyes have interpreted these year, what the effects of having left their home behind and having to search for a new home have been, how they experienced their difficulties of integration and the shame of their life circumstances. What hopes, dreams and desires they have, and what they expect from their lives in Hungary.

This study and the two interviews form a whole, complete story together.

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