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ORGANISATION OF THE ACTIVITY OF THE GROUP FOR PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD IN A NEIGHBOURHOOD

Introduction

Changes in the public social and economic conditions determined the changes in a family. It has to adapt to new circumstances, change its lifestyle, functions and behaviour. Family reflects and accumulates all progressive and negative changes of social and economic life. The National Family Policy Concept (Official Gazette, 2008-06-17, No 69-2624) stipulates the main objective of the national family policy: to anticipate and execute the common policy supporting and strengthening the family institute with a view to ensuring common conditions in providing diverse assistance of the state and public institutions to family in order to create conditions for a family to become an autonomic, responsible, stable, active and independent institute capable of efficient execution of its functions. However, not all families are capable of adapting to new circumstances, changing lifestyle and executing relevant family functions. Since family is a system having major impact on the behaviour of an individual, it is impossible to meet individual needs and solve its behavioural problems without changing the system. Therefore, in order to help children, social assistance to the entire family is instrumental.

The importance of this assistance to families at risk is defined in many regulatory enactments within the national policy strategy on welfare of the child (Official Gazette, 2005, No 25-802). Its purpose is to create the prerequisites for well-being of children of the Republic of Lithuania, which is perceived as the creation of relevant conditions for a full-fledged life of children, and the assurance of the right of the child to protection, well-being and participation in public life. Provisions of the National Education Strategy for 2003-2012 (Official Gazette, 2005, No 12-391) stipulate the provision of pedagogical and cultural assistance to all families raising children.

According to the European and global experience, children from social risk or socially excluded families need complex and long-term assistance. For such an assistance, inter-institutional co-operation and transparent co-ordination of activities are of a special importance. However, inter-institutional co-operation is under-developed in the country in providing services to children and families. Although relevant legal acts oblige the persons rendering educational, social and health care services to provide information on the cases of violations of the rights of the child, and municipalities shall have operating councils for protection of the rights of the child, usually a child who experienced violence, neglect etc. is provided with short-term care or, if needed, health care services; thus, family problems are still unresolved. In view of the above, in the future it is necessary to ensure high-quality social assistance to social risk families.

According to the Law on Social Services (Official Gazette, 2006, No 17-589), social services shall be provided to a person or his/her family in a community. Pursuant to the Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania „On the Approval of the Plan of Measures for 2007-2010 for the Implementation of the Concept of Internal Decentralisation of Municipalities”, the focus in organising social services would be given to communities. Following the above Resolution councils for protection of the rights of the child in municipal communities were established in 2003. Their purpose is to submit (within the Council's competences) proposals to a municipal council on formation of the strategy and policy for

protection of the rights of the child, establishment of community priorities, as well as elaboration and implementation of measures for protection of the rights of the child and prevention measures against violation of the child's rights in a community (Official Gazette, No 2002, No <http://192.168.133.239/Litlex/ll.dll?Tekstas=1&Id=58930&BF=1110-4866>). Although the establishment of the above groups is one of the major steps in ensuring and strengthening the protection of the rights of the child, it has exceptionally an advisory function; therefore, with a view to approximating services to beneficiaries, child assistance groups are instrumental at the level of neighbourhoods for the assurance of complex assistance to child. This assistance is perceived as a co-ordinated provision of education programmes, social assistance, health care services and education to a child and his/her family at the request of parents (adoptive parents, guardians) or upon a request of relevant institutions responsible for the protection of the rights of the child.

Pursuant to the results of the interview with members of Working Groups for Protection of the Rights of the Child (further referred to as GPRC), the presentation analyses practical operational aspects of GPRC at community level: principles for establishment of the above groups, organisation and coordination of activities.