



Findings and recommendations from a research study on foster parents' experiences of fostering children with disabilities in Bulgaria

Research Approach



Interviews with foster parents who have already fostered children with disabilities.



Analysis of foster parents' experiences.



Sharing the research, making recommendations and opening up discussions.

Key Findings

Expertise and commitment

Foster parents show expertise and commitment through:

- Observing specialists
- Learning from experience
- Advocating for children
- Providing special care

Navigating relationships and services

Foster parents rely on support networks

They feel:

- More supported by family, friends and NGOs than by social workers
- Disappointed by the support professionals give them

Foster parents lack voice

- Regarding their job security, employment rights and transitions
- Despite knowing foster children intimately and having suggestions to make, they feel unheard

Personal impact

Fostering was life-changing

- Changed mindsets
- New interests
- Brought richness and purpose
- Caring as a privilege

Fostering is emotionally and practically challenging

- Separating from children is hard
- Receiving new children can feel overwhelming

...but...

Guidance and support from professionals alleviates the feeling of being overwhelmed.



Findings and recommendations from a research study on foster parents' experiences of fostering children with disabilities in Bulgaria

Recommendations based on the research

The experiences of foster parents who took part in this study informed the following suggestions for changes to services and practices in foster care for children with disabilities in Bulgaria:

1

Increase access to foster care for children with disabilities as a matter of urgency

- Life in a foster family gives children opportunities not afforded in residential care.
- Foster parents are committed to children and have intimate knowledge about them which isn't replicated in residential care.
- Foster care should therefore be intentionally developed as a form of family-based alternative care, reducing reliance on residential care for children with disabilities.
- The understanding that family-based care is important for all children, including children with disabilities should be developed across services.

2

Address public perception of foster parents

- Recognition of the important and often sacrificial work of foster parents is needed in both public and professional spheres.
- Foster parents are all too aware of the negative image they have, particularly in the media, and work needs to be done to address these misconceptions about their motivation and lifestyle.
- The positive aspects of fostering should be communicated, not only the problems.
- Through changing the narrative on fostering, foster parents will feel more comfortable in pursuing their role and more individuals will become foster parents.

3

Develop services for effective support of foster parents

- The strength of support foster parents receive directly impacts the care they are able to give.
- Therefore, foster parents need positive, co-operative relationships with social workers and other professionals and specialists.
- Improving relationships between these parties will result in better-quality foster care. This involves creating opportunities for foster parents to have their voices heard and experience recognition for the meaningful contribution they are making to children's lives.
- Ongoing psychological and emotional support is needed in a variety of forms to prevent burnout.