

Practices of child participation in European programmes for children and families - My Visits Book. A tool for improving contact visits in foster care

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The purpose of this communication is to present *My Visits Book*, an educational tool used as part of our psychoeducational intervention program *Visits: A space for family development*. The program is aimed at birth families and non-kinship foster families, although children in foster care and their social workers are indirect beneficiaries. This study was funded through the research project *Application of a psychoeducational intervention program to improve visits between foster children and their biological families* (Reference EDU2016 77094-P).

My Visits Book is designed to be used by children in foster care. It offers them an opportunity to share with their birth family information about their day-to-day life with the foster family. Likewise, they may use the book to share with their foster family, memories and experiences from their life before being taken into care. The child is helped by both families in this process. Thus, during contact visits, the biological parent helps the child to remember things from when they lived together, and also brings news about other family members who the child knows. For their part, the foster family is encouraged to help the child put into words the things that he or she would like to tell the birth family regarding what has happened since the last visit. This information can be shared in various ways, such as through photographs, drawings or letters.

As an educational tool, *My Visits Book* is a means of achieving goals related to all parties involved in the foster care process. For children, the book is a way of organizing their personal and family story into a coherent narrative. For the birth family, it is an opportunity to keep track of their child's daily life in foster care. As for the foster family, the book serves as an aid to communication both before and after visits, and thus it can help to prepare the child for contact with the birth family. In this respect, the book also encourages collaboration between the two families. Indeed, some of the families who are participating in the program have got to know one another through the photographs and drawings shared using the book.

In conclusion, *My Visits Book* can provide researchers and social workers with a better understanding of the child's perspective on contact visits and foster care, since all those involved in the process, and especially the child, contribute to its content. As a result, this educational tool may also be used to evaluate the psychoeducational intervention program of which it forms a part.