



A European network to:

- *promote quality stays* for children in family foster care,
- *learn and be enriched* by diversity of approaches to foster care through international exchanges and collaboration,
- *gather, evaluate and diffuse* best practices
- *build bridges* between practitioners, researchers as well as children and their families

Economic, social and familial changes threaten vulnerable people, especially children and their families. These changes also influence traditional family support mechanisms such as family foster care. These facts lead us to conduct a review that is based on scientific research and to propose new approaches that reflect the diversity of practices in Europe, so that family foster care may respond in an optimal way to the children who are deprived of parental care, now and in the future.

We envision a future in which family foster care responds in the best possible way to the children and youth that it serves.

Why we exist?

- To *develop family foster care* designed to better meet the needs of children and youth whose parents do not possess the ability to fulfil their parental responsibilities in the short, intermediate or long term.
- To *empower children* to develop experience of stable and secure relationships with their foster families while at the same time respecting their children's need for belonging and the diversity of their interpersonal relationships. To take into account children's experiences of instability and insecurity whatever their social, physical or psychological situation.
- To *ensure the quality of care* given by the foster parents and emphasize the importance of foster parents role during the family foster care process.
- To *examine the role of the parents of origin* with respect to their child and to develop practices specifically designed to support their capacities as parents.
- To *promote the quality of services* for children who stay in family foster care using multidisciplinary teams that simultaneously offer:
 - individualized support to foster youth, incorporating the child voice into the design of each child's individual secure care plan
 - support to foster youths' families of origin in overcoming difficulties and enabling new parenting capabilities,
 - appropriate settings for contact parents/children
 - ongoing support to foster families .

Work Methodology

APFEL is composed of 3 permanent working groups that gather and share their practical and theoretical knowledge of issues concerning children in family foster care.

The Child's Voice

This group is concerned with the voice of the child in the foster family experience: how we listen to the child's voice and how we acknowledge and incorporate each child's individual lived experience. The group explores various methodologies by which information about the child's situation may be shared with the child and that the degree to which these same methodologies promote the child's participation in decisions that affect him or her. The group studies the manner in which each child's fundamental rights are respected as appropriate to the child's age and degree of vulnerability, notably concerning especially in view of the child's need for personal development and protection.

The Quality of Treatment and Care:

This group is focused on the quality of care offered by foster families. It serves as a resource for news, documentation, tools and research that provide support to foster families. It tackles questions concerning recruitment, evaluation of competencies, certification as well as initial training and continuing education. The group examines how family foster care is carried out in each country and how the rights and duties of individuals responsible for the welfare of the child are clarified on an ongoing basis from a social and judicial standpoint. The group explores the professionalization and the organization of the relationship between those caring for the child the foster parents and the medical, psychological and social professionals and the other relationships important to the child (family of origin, for example).

The group also considers the existence and recognition of emotional bonds between the different families and the children .

Pluri-parenting:

This group conducts an in-depth exploration of the concept of « parenting » where shared parenting is at the heart of the foster care process. Group members reflect upon the notion of “family” from the standpoint of the foster child. The group examines the question of multiple attachments and the coexistence of several families who are simultaneously involved with the child in foster care. It brings new insight to the question of substitute parenting. The group's objective is to clarify and to highlight the value of the specific relational dynamic of foster care.

APFEL'S work is based on

- The need to link research and practice in diverse groups composed of practitioners, researchers and fostered youth.
 - Multilingual exchanges in order to provide access to the work done and expertise provided across Europe (at minimum, in English and French)
- The collection and dissemination of innovative practice and research outcomes.
- The organization of themed seminars in the different member countries.
- The organization of training that integrates the most recent and relevant European scientific data, at minimum in English and French to start, with the goal of adding more languages as resources and personnel permit.

Our tools and our core values

- The CIDE (ICRC) The International Convention on the Rights of Children and the UN Guidelines for the alternative care for children.
- The definition of the fundamental needs of the child French ONPE (Oct. 2016) https://www.onpe.gouv.fr/system/files/publication/notedactu_besoins_de_lenfant.pdf
- Quality4children (European standards for the placement of children outside of the family home)
- The foster care clinic at the European level (work on attachment and the life project of the child)
- An Ethical foundation based on the recognition of each actor and the search for balanced and collaborative solutions with the interest of the child at its center.

Our accomplishments until now

- 5 themed life books seminars: Paris 2014 (biographic work and life book, Leiden 20143 (Matching), Geneva 2015 (foster parent training), Milan 2015 (Two families, One Child), Lille 2016 (On the Edge of Parenting)
- Collaboration to implement the life book for the fostered child in France.
- Translations of texts about research and conceptual approaches in French and English.
- Establishment of best practice trainings.
- A work on the theme of parenting that will soon be published.
- A web site in English and in French (www.apfelnetwork.eu and www.fr.apfelnetwork.eu)

Apfel in the future

Our meetings and seminars:

Barcelona 16 & 17 Nov. 2017 : international meetings between professionals and researchers on 3 themes :

- The question of professionalisation : Should a universal model be developed ?
The pros and cons.
- Foster carers training
- Foster care in extended families and kinship care
- Information campaigns for foster parents' recruitment

Torino Italy Nov.2018: Issue theme still to be defined

Our legal frame

Apfel, acting for the promotion of fostering at the European Level/Agir pour la Promotion de l'Accueil familial au Niveau Européen is a « Belgian international nonprofit association » (AISBL) created in 2013. Currently 10 countries are represented, either through individual members or through associations or research groups acting in the interests of the protection of children.

Becoming a member of APFEL

- Become an associate member to be informed, participate in themed workgroups, support APFEL, broaden the vision of foster parenting through exposure to the diversity of practices and cultural backgrounds that exist throughout Europe
- Become a full member by applying to actively participate in the association's activities

How to reach Apfel :

By email: apfel@apfelnetwork.eu and/or via the web site: www.fr.apfelnetwork.eu (English) or (French).

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