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Dialogues with young women, family home mothers and professionals on collaborative working processes with adolescents separated from their families.

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DIALOGUES WITH YOUNG WOMEN, FAMILY HOME MOTHERS AND PROFESSIONALS ON COLLABORATIVE WORKING PROCESSES WITH ADOLESCENTS SEPARATED FROM THEIR FAMILIES

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Psychology and Education

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Abstract

ENFOQUE Niñez is a Paraguayan non-governmental organisation created with the mission of providing a concrete response to protect children and adolescents who have been or are at risk of being separated from their families as the result of judicial orders. The organisation developed a method for working collaboratively with children, adolescents and their families that are referred to them. The aim of this study was twofold. First, to explore if and how collaborative work practices, as developed by ENFOQUE Niñez, can be helpful for adolescents involved. Second, to explore the lived experiences and challenges as encountered in collaborative practices by adolescents, family homes members, and professionals.

Starting from social constructionism as the philosophical and epistemological orientation, a study was performed in which the voices of three protagonist groups of actors involved in the therapeutic and social work process, were included: young women, family home mothers, and members of the professional team of ENFOQUE Niñez. Besides the researcher, which is also part of the ENFOQUE Niñez's team, 19 other persons participated in the study. The data consisted of transcribed (individual and group) dialogues, which were analysed using Constructionist Grounded Theory as a methodological framework.

The protagonists considered that the relationships developed during the collaborative work processes were helpful when characterised by participation, support, co-responsibility, relational ethics, love and trust. However, these characteristics are regularly under pressure, due to a number of challenges, which appear in the complexity of these situations. Within the meaning the working processes have had, the experience of living with a family home, team working and collaborating in a responsive and dialogical way to the uniqueness, became relevant.

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[1] The preference of using the expression 'family home' (instead of foster family), family home placement (instead foster care) is related to the specific work of ENFOQUE Niñez and will be explained in the Language Considerations in the Prologue.

Prologue

Research is a personal journey exploring unanswered questions, new possibilities and untold stories. This thesis is 'the result' of the journey I have taken during the last three years. The process prior to the work that is presented in this thesis, proved to be more complex than anticipated: it forced me in a continuous inquiry, during which decisions had to be made regarding concepts, methods and language. Regularly, I had to confront myself as both researcher and human, in terms of my beliefs, fears, insecurities, and passion for my work. The following account details some of the thought processes I engaged during my journey.

Conceptual considerations

Besides considering my multiple roles in this research process (amongst others: a researcher, a therapist of the young women involved in this research, a member of the NGO's technical team and coordinator of ENFOQUE Niñez -the organization in which the study was performed-, a mother, ...), it was also important to include a broader view on the work that is done in ENFOQUE Niñez. In order to get closer to the understanding of this topic -that has not yet been studied in Paraguay- the social, political, economic, and cultural context of the country, needed to be explained.

This first step already confronted me with some challenges of *how* to speak about the children, adolescents and families ENFOQUE Niñez is working with - usually called 'poor families', or 'vulnerable families' which have to face several socio-economic challenges. A vast body of (international) scholars refer to them as 'multi-problem families' (Linares, 1997); 'neglectful families' (Colapinto,1995); or 'excluded families' (Thierny, 1976, quoted in Cancrini et. al 1997). However, taking into consideration the social and political-economic situation of Paraguay, I opted to use the expression '*families living in situations of social injustice'*. This decision is also grounded on the belief that categorization of families should be avoided. Instead, the focus is put on the family's context.

The families referred to in this thesis are living in conditions of poverty and social exclusion; they are experiencing difficulties to access basic services such as housing, education, health, identity, and justice, among others. In most situations the presence of some or all these features can be observed.

Additionally, factors such as gender or domestic violence and discrimination can be present.

The work done at ENFOQUE Niñez[2] in trying to help families in the situations they are confronted with, starts from the basic assumption that relationships are vital and that working processes are co-constructed. While several (often) normative bodies (both national and international) make recommendations about what people living in these situations 'need' and what professionals 'should do' or 'what works', the joint construction of knowledge is prioritized in ENFOQUE Niñez's work. Hence, when I decided to do some research on the work we do, it seemed essential to me that co-construction was also a feature of the research process. Consequently, the social constructionist vision was considered as the best to capture the fundamental spirit of my approach, as it embraced the joint work, the subjective realities and lived experiences of participants in this study.

In this thesis I have tried to include the process-oriented nature of the topic, as well as the positioning of myself as an *insider* within the research setting and as a social-political actor. In a national context marked by the judicialization of social problems and institutionalization as a priority response, this doctoral research calls for professional practices that consider persons, and relationships as the most important over manuals, diagnosis and theories with an individualistic view of human problems. The thesis starts from the assumption that there is a need to develop alternative understandings that enable the professionals who work in this field, to accompany and collaborate from a humanizing and dignifying relationship, and above all, WITH the people, their desires, world views and projects, as well as their feelings and transforming experiences.

Considering the power that society and the system gives professionals in processes that involve children and adolescents separated from their families for various reasons, it is essential to visualize and assume the political impact of their interventions, and the type of relationships that they generate with the people they work for, as well as an ethics which is sensitive to context, the latter being one of the central themes addressed in this study.

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[2] In the remainder of this work I will use the first-person singular "I" to refer to my inner dialogues, experiences, questions, ideas or when I am describing my specific role in the work of the organization. When I use the first-person plural "we" my intention is to bring forward ideas of the Organization ENFOQUE Niñez (including the philosophical stance, methodological or agreed practices, goals, concepts, etc)

Language considerations

Language is a crucial aspect in social constructionism. From a social constructionist perspective, language is more than just a way of connecting people. People 'exist' in language. Consequently, the focus is not on the individual person but rather on the social interaction, in which language is generated, sustained, and abandoned (Gergen & Gergen, 1991). The social constructionist approach thus emphasizes the ability to create realities through language stimulating a process of continuous creation (Cojocaru & others, 2012, Anderson, 1999, Gergen, 2006). However, writing this dissertation in English has been a challenging endeavour for me: considering that my native language is Spanish and all the conversations for this study thus were held in Spanish, all material needed to be translated. This was especially hard because of some cultural connotations and local contexts.

Being aware of the terms commonly used worldwide in the field (and in international publications), a sensitive choice of some terms used in this thesis was made. Closeness to the Spanish language and local context was preferred above internationally used English terms. That is the reason why we preferred to use the expression *'adolescents separated from their families'* instead of others like 'adolescents deprived from parental care' or 'adolescents living without familiar environmental care' that also provides a set of meanings regarding the kind of work derived from those terms.

In relation to the term *'family homes'*, my thesis supervisors and I have had several discussions whether this is the best English expression to use. Commonly used terms to refer to a formal and family-type alternative care program are 'foster care' and 'foster mother/father'. Additionally, the term 'foster carer' is advised to be used instead of '(foster) mother' or '(foster) father'. Carer is considered to be preferred, because it conserves 'parent' to refer uniquely to the biological parents - unless the child prefers something different -. The term 'carer' is also promoted because of gender sensitivity issues. However, the other side of the coin is that the term 'carer' coincides with the hierarchical view that we are talking about a relation in which one person is in need of being cared for and another one is giving care. This vision is much closer to medical or assistencialist approaches, which does not fit well with the spirit and the kind of work is intended by ENFOQUE Niñez. As such, we follow the argumentation of Håkansson (2009) who discusses that for these families "the main task is not to 'foster' the client, but to share their life and experiences" (Håkansson, 2009, preface). Consequently, we preferred to use the expression 'family homes' as the closest translation of the Spanish 'Familias Acogedoras',

an expression that is used within the new regulatory frameworks in Paraguay as well. Here it is worth mentioning that even in Paraguay and other Spanish-speaking countries there have been some debates about what would be the best way of referring to this practice, resulting in consensus about the widespread use of 'Acogimiento Familiar'. The word 'Acogimiento' could be translated literally as 'to welcome' someone.

Overview

This thesis is presented as a monograph of which all chapters are closely related to each other. In **Chapter 1**, the introductory chapter, the reader will find a short story in relation to my journey to start this research process, my background and training and some questions as a psychologist and therapist within the specific work to be studied. Further, the national context in which this study was performed, is described. I will present some general data as well as data regarding childhood and adolescence. Additionally, I explain how the protection system in Paraguay works and what the traditional responses to situations in which children are separated from their families are. I share some reflections on the perspective from which these interventions and practices are carried out. Subsequently, the work of the non-governmental organization ENFOQUE Niñez, in which this study was performed, is presented. A short history of this organisation and a description of its goals and working areas is given. The type of social and therapeutic approach it develops, in the context of collaborative and dialogical practices, human rights and family home placement.

In **Chapter 2:** Philosophical Orientation, the reader is offered the philosophical and epistemological stance of Social Constructionism as a framework from which this study was developed. Also, the theoretical frame of Collaborative and Dialogic Practices, which offers the basics for the therapeutic work as developed in ENFOQUE Niñez, is explained.

Chapter 3, Methods, contains information on the research objectives and research questions. The procedure used for this study, building on the ideas of dialogic social research, is described. I discuss my position as a researcher as well as the position of my conversational partners. All participants invited in the study (19 in total) are presented by means of a short personal presentation. Finally, the procedure for analysis used in this study, namely the constructionist grounded theory, is explained.

The analytical process led to three categories of themes: Challenges, Relational

Aspects and Meanings of the work. These themes are elaborated in detail in **Chapter 4**, which in turn includes three subsections. Section 1 (Challenges identified in the social and therapeutic work) includes social context issues, the protection system, relationships among the main actors as well as complexity at different levels and their dilemmas. In section 2 Relational Aspects are described and deepened as fundamental elements in the undergone experience. In addition to the importance of the *type* of relationships described, the place and relevance of living in a family home as such (including the relational aspects of that experience) proved to be fundamental for all of the young women and family home mothers in this study. This experience showed how to be included in a familiar, community and 'ordinary' context; in the meantime, it represented a 'therapeutic' value, transcending the techniques, methods and theoretical / psychotherapeutic viewpoints of 'professional interventions'. Finally, section 3 (meanings of the work) includes the themes that correspond to what this joint experience represented for each of the participants, describing what they found most significant.

Last, in **Chapter 5**, Reflections…, the reader will find some of my reflections on the Themes generated in the conversations. My learnings and new questions, that are useful to continue the conversations are presented. Some reflections related to the research process, my own experiences, challenges and learnings throughout this process, as well as some thoughts on future research conclude this chapter.

Acknowledgements

Almost at the end of this project, I feel privileged for having special persons around me with tons of caring, supportive and encouraging words for me. Some of these persons are very close and others I have got to know over the last years. What their support meant for me is also a reminder of how important it becomes to count on others when you are challenged in life.

I would especially like to thank all the women that accepted the invitation to have conversations with me and to be part of this research. Their trust, willingness to contribute, generosity and openness deserves my utmost admiration and respect.

Also, my deepest thanks goes to:

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ENFOQUE Niñez for allowing me to carry out this research, collaborating and supporting from the beginning. With this research, my wish is to contribute with its institutional mission.

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My family and dear friends, for their unconditional love, comprehension and support.

All my conversational partners along these years, whom through texts, emails, and presence transformed me and will continue to do so.

Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

The training I received as a psychologist had a strong emphasis in a prevailing biological and medical model which meant that it was principally focused on diagnosis, psychopathology, symptoms and a mental illness approach. Since college, my internships in the field of mental health have been mainly in psychiatric hospitals and my training in therapy, though emerging from systemic theory, was carried out with a positivist view of human complexity.

After I encountered the ideas of Social Constructionism, philosophy, epistemology and postmodern therapies, I began questioning myself (specifically my training environment and professional practice) about the presuppositions that until then had positioned me as a mental health professional and therapist.

In the year 2005, I started working in the interdisciplinary team of the non-governmental organization ENFOQUE Niñez[3] in Paraguay. There, I was challenged to develop a methodology aiming to collaborate therapeutically with families living in situations of 'social injustice'.

Years of experience allowed us to develop a work methodology that was different from traditional professional practices in this field (this work was and still remains innovative in the Paraguayan context). The research reported in this PhD thesis aims to give voice to the protagonists[4] involved with regard to their lived experiences and the joint learning generated within this collaborative work.

Country context

Social and political-economic situation

Although Paraguay is experiencing a fast economic growth, in terms of human development the country is the least developed country in South America and among the least developed of the Americas. As a result, the child and adolescent population experience the harshest consequences of this reality according to

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[3] www.enfoque.org.py

[4] Whom I will describe later on.

human development data (PNUD, 2016).

In 2017 Paraguay had an approximate population of 7 million inhabitants; 40% were under 18 years of age and 45% of these children and adolescents lived in conditions of poverty[5]. The low human development index supplemented with situations of systematic human rights violations, has led to the country receiving several international sanctions in various areas regarding childhood and adolescent issues, mental health care, or the situation of the indigenous populations. There is a high need to install and consolidate effective social policies for all citizens (Scaglia & others, 2018).

The current situation finds its roots in a 35-year long dictatorship, which ended in the year 1989. Almost 29 years have gone by since the country has become a presidential representative democratic republic and there is evidence that democracy in Paraguay is still in its incipient stages. The Economist Intelligence Unit (2017) rates Paraguay as a 'flawed democracy', which means that the elections are considered fair and free and basic civil liberties in the country are honoured, but that there are significant faults in the democratic system as well, including an underdeveloped political culture (Paraguay gets a score of 4.38 out of 10), low levels of political participation (score of 5.00) and issues in the functioning of governance (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2017). This practicing of democracy at all levels is sensible in several aspects of daily life and has huge socio-economic consequences: various other analyses show that current poverty in the country is the result of several factors that strengthen each other: "an excluding economic model, a limited development of human and social capital, marked institutional inefficiency, a conspicuous absence of reformed policies, and an unfavourable geographical location." (Mendonca, 2007, p. 76).

It is thus essential to take into consideration that, in addition to poverty, the social situation in Latin America is characterized by terrible inequities; as such the continent represents the greatest social polarization of the world (Mendonca, 2007). Paraguay specifically has one of the lowest social investment in the region (CEPAL, 2015; Serafini, 2015). The impact of this social inequity cannot be overrated, as has been illustrated by a number of Latin-American authors

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[5]

http://www.unicef.org/paraguay/spanish/Presentacion_Ninez_Urbana_Paraguay__definti va_2404201 2(1).pdf

discussing the challenges of living in poverty. Freire (2005) for example, emphasized the impact of the subjective experience of oppression: "The oppressed suffer from the duality which has established itself in their innermost being[6]." (Freire, 2005, p.46). More recently, Macedo (2017) highlighted the experience of chronic frustration that accompanies social stigma. These authors in se refer to poverty as a social construct, an idea that was also stressed by Nelson Mandela (1993) saying that poverty is a human creation. As he expressed: "Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It's an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right: the right to dignity and a decent life." (Nelson Mandela, 1993, in Mendonca, 2007, p.3). This idea of poverty as a social construct is also one of the premises of this thesis. The theoretical underpinnings of social constructionism will be explained in the next chapter.

Parenting in situations of poverty in Paraguay

Poverty is known as a major barrier to human development and is associated with a wide array of negative outcomes for children, which accumulate across the life cycle. The negative outcomes present themselves in the realms of physical, mental and social health, language and cognitive development, psychosocial development, and academic achievement and educational attainment (see e.g. Egba & Ngakwe, 2015 for an overview). The fact that poverty is also socially constructed, unavoidably creates different pathways through which poverty operates (Egba & Ngakwe, 2015). Specifically, for the Paraguayan situation, the elevated levels of social inequity and the fragile social policies that could guarantee minimal child care and protective conditions in families of children growing up in poverty, generate social situations where families could be seen (and called) as 'vulnerable', or 'fragmented'. Most of these families are not only confronted with challenges in different socio-economic areas, such as limited access to economic resources, labour, health, or education, they are also challenged by some personal matters and issues in the family system itself, which interrelate with their socio-economic position. Very often, parents have their own histories of abuse (family or contextual) and they have lost their connections with their own most important familial relationships. Parents are in need of psychiatric services (needs which remain unmet), have a

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[6] My own translation

history of using psychoactive substances (but don't have access to proper treatment), have had problems with the law, or have even been incarcerated. Parents are forced by these social situations to leave their children in the hands of third parties. Consequently, situations are created in which children have to grow up far away from their families and communities. There are, for example, 46.993 children and adolescents in Paraguay living in situations called *Criadazgo*[7]. Usually it concerns countryside children[8] coming to and living in the big cities with unfamiliar families, made to do domestic work in exchange for a home, food, and education.

Leaving the children in the hands of third parties, creates additional risk situations, such as child labour, sexual and labour exploitation, trafficking, negligence, maltreatment or migration (Fernández & Bachero 2015; Cabrera & others, 2015; CDIA Observa, 2105), which in turn have huge impact on child development.

Living conditions and the child protection system in Paraguay

However mostly created by social inequities, situations of contextual vulnerability are classified by the justice system in Paraguay as "abandonment" or 'maltreatment', as such constituting the justification for the precautionary juridical measure of shelter (which should be strictly limited in time). In many cases even the loss of parental authority is imposed as a child protection measure. Currently about 2.000 children and adolescents in Paraguay are growing up in shelter institutions, staying there an average of four years[9] or more, in most cases without any contact with their families during that time.

Interestingly, it is important to consider that the Paraguayan National Constitution clearly establishes the responsibility of the state to guarantee (by generating the conditions) that poverty can never be a motive to separate children from their families[10]. Also, more recent Paraguayan laws and the official

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[7]

https://www.unicef.org/paraguay/spanish/Datos_sobre_trabajo_infantil_en_Paraguay.pdf

[8] I should mention that for the English version of this research the word "children" is used, although in Spanish it is important, for a gender-conscious perspective and for the sake of a doctrinaire look, to refer to "boys, girls and adolescents."

[9] Source: Paraguay, National Secretariat for Children and Adolescents, DIPROE (Dirección de Protección Especial/ DIRECTORATE of Special Protection), 2015

[10] As mentioned in articles 49, 53, 54, 55, 60, 61.

discourse in Paraguay reveal a clear political willingness to accomplish the UN Child's Rights Convention[11]. However, this is not yet palpable in the lives of thousands of children that grow up far away from their families and their communities. At present, the traditional response to situations in which the child protection system usually intervenes, is to separate the child from his or her family, placing him or her in an institution, without performing any kind of work with the family in which the "problem" was generated. This institutionalization is theoretically intended to be a protective, precautionary measure of temporary duration. Although it is assumed that the necessary work resolving the child´s or family's situation is performed during the time of institutionalization, this is not what usually happens. Instead, it is often perceived (see e.g. Delap & Wedge 2016; Epstein, 2014; Gómez, Muñoz & Haz 2007; Sluzki, 1996) that families are blamed for some of the risks and challenges that appear in these families, but that these challenges actually are intensified -at least partly- by the child protection system itself or by other people and organisations involved. Examples include criminalization of poverty, excessive medicalization of problems, stigmatization of people through the abuse of psychiatric diagnoses, and the use of negative and limited 'descriptive categories'.

Certain characteristics of institutional or residential care (e.g. overcrowded institutions, frequent staff shift changes, caregivers in charge of a large number of children and adolescents, a lack of training for caregivers or professionals, so-called 'revolving door' issues (namely: constant admissions and dropouts of children and adolescents in and out of the system), the pressure and unpredictability of schedules and routines) hinder the development of a physical, relational and emotional environment that ensures compliance with the rights of children and adolescents so that they may develop to their full potential (Goffman 1961; Relaf, 2010, Relaf & UNICEF 2013; Palau, 2013; Delap & Wedge, 2016). Research on child development (see, amongst others, Williamson & Greenberg, 2010; Palumbo, 2012) has shown that, in some cases -specifically in cases of long-term institutionalization- damage caused by the institutions in children is to be expected. Issues discussed in literature concern: a detrimental impact on psychological and physical health, severe developmental delays, and disability (Pinheiro, 2006). Beside the length of the

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[11] http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx

institutionalisation period, the age at which the children concerned are institutionalised, is also important: "the risk of psychological harm and development is particularly acute in children under 4 years of age; this is a critical period for children to establish ties with their parents or caregivers[12]." (RELAF, Red Latinoamericana de Acogimiento Familiar [Latin American Foster Care Network] & UNICEF, 2013, p.8)

Several authors have made a call to change the situation and have plead for initiatives that strengthen family bonds and promote family reunification. Palau (2013), for example, states that "Support for a child's biological family must be carried out in a better way to avoid unnecessary ruptures or separations, [and] the process of maintaining family bonds should be accelerated with a goal of aiming towards family reintegration, [and] the types of family and residential placements should be extended[13]". (Palau, 2013, p.13).

Marta Santos Pais (2016) confirms:

> (…) among the millions of children who are already being left behind are those pushed apart from their families by poverty, conflict or lack of access to schooling close to home. These children may be forced to migrate for work, or live alone on the streets, and many languish for years in institutional care. The protection of separated children from the violence and abuse they often face in these difficult situations can be strengthened by reintegration back into their families. (in Delap & Wedge, 2016, p.ii Foreword)

The existing situation in Paraguay is not only criticised because of institutionalisation-issues in se, but also because of the prejudices that guide the work done with families and children entering the system. The system (e.g. court records) often refers to parents as "negligent family", "abusers", or "abusive" and to children and adolescents as "victims", "mistreated", "abused" or alike. Looking at families and children through the lens of these descriptions and prejudices- as Gergen calls a "language of deficit" (Gergen, 2006)- not only drastically limits our ability to know the people with whom we are working (and their stories, resources and possibilities) but also carries a number of ethical

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[12] My own translation

[13] Idem

and moral issues by which the professional can end up assessing others from a distant or removed perspective and in doing so, fulfil an "educational, corrective or punitive" function. (McNamee, 2015).

In daily working practice, there are numerous examples of how the traditional 'solution' -saturated with prejudices- creates more problems than it solves: the judicial protection measures separate, blame and are highly demanding to families. Such a measure puts more pressure on the family and diminishes the confidence that the family has in its ability to resolve their 'problems'. Not only are the families frequently living in situations that are both precarious and involve 'social exclusion' but, additionally, once the judicial protection measure is initiated, family members are also constantly observed by the child protection system through the lens of a judicial record. Often, they are "multi-intervened". The child protection system requires them to live up to norms and living standards that are drastically different from their own. When they 'fail' to adapt to these norms and standards, children and teenagers can't return back home, or they can't get rid of the child protection system from their lives.

Looking for alternatives

Although there already is increased recognition in Paraguay about the importance for children to live in their families and to consolidate a foster care model as a protection measure when needed, few alternative options are yet available. An important transformation movement has been initiated though, trying to change the existing child protection system that fails to offer required family care and trying to create space for Alternative Care in Paraguay. Some actions performed in the context of this transformation are: the adoption of a foster family presidential decree (2010)[14], the installation of a national policy of special protection (PONAPROE, 2012)[15], the ratification of the Call for Action to eradicate the internment of children under 3 years old (UNICEF/Relaf, 2014)[16], the approval of the new regulation for Alternative Care for children living in foster care and shelters (2015).[17] The role of civil society as an important agent in this transition movement -by denouncing, promoting research and stimulating

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[14] http://www.sipi.siteal.iipe.unesco.org/normativas/881/decreto-no-51962010-por-el-cual-se-establece-el-programa-de-acogimiento-familiar-de

[15] http://www.minna.gov.py/pagina/788-direccion-de-proteccion-especial-diproe.html

[16] https://www.relaf.org/llamados-a-la-accion/view/?id=121

[17] http://www.minna.gov.py/pagina/788-direccion-de-proteccion-especial-diproe.html

networking-, can't be overrated.

Still, there remains a bunch of work to be done by the government and civil society in terms of family reintegration processes, the eradication of the institutionalization of children, and the implementation of family home placement. These gaps become clear in Paraguayan daily practice: the 'deinstitutionalization' of children and adolescents in Paraguay is only in its initial stages, while there is hardly any alternative care available. To-date, there is only one governmental family home placement program and two programs in civil society (one only for babies and children under 5 years old. The other is ENFOQUE Niñez's program, for children and adolescents under 18 years old.)

The transition work to be done includes different aspects. First, a substantial improvement of the quality of existing programs from the child protection system is needed. Low program quality is caused by the absence of comprehensive approaches and, related to that, the weakness of public institutions to coordinate joint and timely actions (CDIA Observa, 2015).

Second, alternative, innovative practices for working with families in the child protection system are needed and should fill the existing gaps. Such practices should address both the conditions that generated the separation of children and their family, as well as the impact of this separation. This implies that they need to guarantee a *safe and effective reintegration* to children and families, which means that profound work to address violence, abuse and neglect within families is done, and that the economic position of families is strengthened as well (Delap & Wedge, 2016).

Third, one of the most important challenges is also to find what is called 'radical presence' (McNamee, 2015)[18]: an effort to understand and look at the families from an alternative perspective (open to multiples possibilities of living), instead of the dominant 'psi' perspective. Additionally, as already discussed in the previous paragraph, a professional model assuming that the "expert" knows what the "non-expert" needs, has led to interventions that set aside both human rights, as well families' possibility to be co-participant in making the necessary changes for resolving what both (expert and non-expert) would call the

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[18] Radical presence is a concept introduced by Sheila McNamee (2015) p.379

"problem". What is needed is what Anderson and Goolishian (1996; Anderson, 1999) -in their approach to "language systems collaboration"- called a 'partnership with the client', where the therapist is a person that 'does not know'. This is based on the recognition of the impossibility to access privileged information and to completely understand the other person. For this reason, it is required that a person is constantly informed by the other, without interpreting from theoretical narratives (Anderson, 1999).

It is this kind of approach that is intended to be developed by ENFOQUE Niñez. While agreeing that children and adolescents have lived in situations of vulnerability (including breaches, violence and social exclusion of several generations), "we have also found that there were significant emotional ties that were not respected or promoted" (Rodriguez, 2010, p.12). Also, families often misunderstand the purpose of the judicial protection implied to them: they easily experience the order of "protection" as a punishment and don't see the juridical order as a leverage for transforming the child's life situation. Looking for a working model including a partnership with the family system is therefore a prerequisite to start changing this situation.

In the following paragraphs, a more detailed description of the working model and the collaborative practices in ENFOQUE Niñez is given.

About ENFOQUE Niñez[19]

Contextualisation

ENFOQUE Niñez is a non-governmental non-profit organization established with the mission to provide protection to children and adolescents who have been or are at risk of being separated from their families as the result of judicial orders.

The organization operates in close partnership with a number of governmental bodies which are involved in the referral of children and adolescents within the Paraguayan child protection system: the Ministry for Children and Adolescents (Ministerio de la Niñez y Adolescencia), the Directorate of Special Protection (DIPROE), the Adoption Centre and the Courts for Children and Adolescents. While the largest number of referrals come from these state agencies, children

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[19] The translation of ENFOQUE Niñez is "Focus on Childhood".

and adolescents are also referred to ENFOQUE Niñez by other non-governmental organizations as well as public mental health care institutions.

History

ENFOQUE Niñez started its activities in 2005. At that time, there was in Paraguay only one governmental family home placement program (part of the adoption centre) and one other NGO working in family home placement only for babies. Consequently, family home placement was quite new as a model and there was limited expertise, neither many examples of good practices available. Some experiences in other countries in the region were explored (Relaf & Unicef, 2015). This particular situation created an opportunity to develop our own local model, which specifically fitted the country context.

As one of the founders of ENFOQUE Niñez and psychologist in the professional team, I have been involved intensively in the development of our working model. About two years after the start of our family home placement program, I had the opportunity to meet Tom Andersen[20] in Trömso. He, in turn, introduced me to Carina Håkansson[21], from Gothenburg, Sweden, who was the director of Family Care Foundation[22], and had over 20 years of experience with working with family homes for different groups of people (children, adolescents, families, especially coming from psychiatry or social services), becoming an important mentoring.

The aforementioned enormously influenced our practice, the reflection on our practice and the design of our own model-in-development. Personnel of ENFOQUE Niñez were offered the opportunity to receive reflective supervision, to visit family homes in Gothenburg, to meet professionals and to participate in seminars and meetings they organized, making us firmly believe that this working model was possible and worth striving for. Additionally, the exchange process in itself (which has lasted for more than ten years), is a good example of developing a collaborative network, especially when taking into consideration -amongst others- the huge cultural differences, the distance, and the languages.

Those experiences convinced us that working with a Family Home program

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[20] Norwegian psychiatrist and doctor in social medicine.

[21] http://extendedroom.org/sv/home/

[22] http://www.familjevardsstiftelsen.se

couldn't only be useful from a social work or therapeutic perspective, but also could have added value on a broader societal level (political, social, economic, etc). This was a crucial element, given the specific social-economic situation in Paraguay. It was not the intention to imitate a foreign model though; rather we wanted to use the learnings and working ingredients from foreign examples and include these specific elements in a model that fits the Paraguayan society.

It became clear in these initial stages that most Paraguayan actors, (governmental authorities, media, institutions, academia, etc.) had not yet heard nor had had the chance to learn about foster care or a family home model. The possibility to invite experienced professionals from Sweden, in combination with our own first experiences with this model in ENFOQUE Niñez, had a positive impact and inspired these actors to welcome such a model in Paraguay. Space and mandate were created to proceed with this model.

Also important for the NGO pioneering work was the initiation of our partnership and alliance with the Latin american foster care network (Relaf). They were involved in different conversations and (planning) discussions in the inception phase of the organisation (including the analysis of multiple issues relating to, amongst others, direct work with the children and their families, collaboration with shelters, judges, or colleagues in the administrative governmental offices and authorities, human rights, media and even international evolutions).

Target population
ENFOQUE Niñez works with children and adolescents between 0 and 18 years of age. Many of the children and adolescents referred to the organisation, live in shelter institutions at the moment of referral[23]. In some cases, it concerns groups of siblings or teenage mothers with their babies or little children who have been in these shelters for many years.

The intervention grounds (c.q. the reasons why the child protective system intervenes in the lives of the children and families with whom we collaborate) are diverse. Generally, a certain abusive situation[24], in the broadest sense, is

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[23] "Shelter Institutions" also refer to group homes, shelters and residential or institutional care facilities (the latter according to definitions of the UN Guidelines for alternative child care, children and adolescents deprived of family care, 2009: http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A%2FRES%2F64%2F142)

[24] Abusive situations refer to situations of physical maltreatment, verbal abuse, psychological abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, and abandonment, among others.

characteristic for the situation.

Aims

The organization aims to work within different areas:

(1) Taking an advocate role and trying to influence public policy. The focus of this work is to raise policy awareness about the rights of children, adolescents and their families and to ensure policy makers to comply with these rights. In order to reach this goal, ENFOQUE Niñez actively participates in different human rights' networks, which take a central role in the design and revision of children's laws.

(2) Knowledge dissemination: we offer training for professionals from different institutions and organizations in this field. During these training processes our philosophy, work experience and vision is shared. Additionally, we organize international seminars, an international master's degree, we participate in diploma courses, congresses and all kinds of training in alliances with national and international educational institutions.

(3) Offering social and therapeutic work to children, adolescents and their families that are referred to the organisation by the juridical system. This work, which takes the central position in ENFOQUE Niñez, consists of different aspects: to initiate and promote reintegration (family searching and promote bonding); to develop and run a family home placement program and to work collaboratively with children, adolescents and their families, for the fulfilment of their rights.

In order to reach these goals a considerable number of people are involved in the work. Specifically to perform the social and therapeutic work, an interdisciplinary team, composed of clinical psychologists, social workers, lawyers and community psychologists is composed. Additionally, there is a network of independent professionals with whom work is done collaboratively to cover the needs of each child or adolescent and its family. Other actors involved in the work done by ENFOQUE Niñez include the children or adolescents, their families, family homes members, advocates, judges, prosecutors, and professionals from all the child protection offices, the health sector in all fields,

and the community.

ENFOQUE Niñez is expected to raise and accumulate its own funds to carry out the necessary work. We have a team of fundraisers who perform activities to ensure the economic sustainability of our organization through such avenues as donations, strategic alliances, agreements, ...

Juridical context of the work

In all cases, the social and therapeutic work in ENFOQUE Niñez is done in the context of legal proceedings. This implies that the juridical system expects a written report from us, that elaborates on the 'real and concrete' possibilities that the family has to take care of (e.g. social and environmental possibilities, living conditions, emotional availability). When one witnesses the general precariousness and the social and living conditions in which many families live (including the lack of access to a variety of resources) it becomes clear that these possibilities are scarce and that striving for a 'normalisation' of this situation is a real challenge. Also, families are 'supposed' to address this challenge with emotional resources that few of us could probably muster if we had to raise our children in such conditions.

A referral from the child protection system is received by way of an official notification. Once this notification is accepted by the organisation and the working process has started, the Child Secretariat expects a recommendation about with whom the child should live with and about the different steps to be taken in the process (what is needed to be done and how long the entire process will take). Of course this proposal needs to respect existing laws and official judicial proceedings[25]. Additionally, a monthly or bi-monthly report from us concerning the work being done and the work plan, is written. These reports are reviewed by personnel of the Child Secretariat, who subsequently asks us to send these reports to the judge. Based on these reports the judge stays informed about the situation and makes his or her decision regarding the final recommendation.

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[25] The Paraguayan Child's law establishes the timing for work with children separated from their parents: (Articles 21 and 22 of Adoption Law)
http://www.sipi.siteal.iipe.unesco.org/sites/default/files/sipi_normativa/ley_no_1136_de_1997_ley_de_adopciones.pdf

As ordained by the law, both the Child Secretariat and the professional team of the judicial system are obliged to supervise our work. This includes that they are supposed to visit the child, the family, as well as to attend team meetings with professionals from ENFOQUE Niñez. The limited number of professionals employed by the state, in combination with the huge number of referrals, makes it extremely difficult for the Child Secretariat and the judicial system to visit all the children or all the families. Sometimes it becomes even difficult to schedule meetings with our team to discuss the work plan together. Consequently, the number of contacts the protection system professionals have with the child or the family are very limited. Often, there are only two moments of contact: at the very beginning of the process (c.q. the referral moment) and at the end of the process, when steps to follow-up the situation are taken. This implies that the main information the child protection system obtains about the families is based on written reports.

In this respect, it is important to highlight the power position occupied by professionals at the moment they make, within their formal reports, recommendations about the lives of children and adolescents to the authorities. These reports also comprise a description of the family, that becomes part of the family identity and history. It is of fundamental importance that both the recommendations and the family description require careful consideration regarding the complexity of the situation.

Both as a psychologist and therapist, the experiences I had with this power position and the responsibilities related to that, regularly confronted me with questions, such as: how would the social context these families live in, have been discussed in our training? I felt challenged to rethink the social role of the therapist considering multiple questions: Who and how many of them can access the psychological services for which university prepares us? What kinds of services are these? What do they really offer in relation to the context in which people live? Who are the ones that are excluded by these services available? How often do we speak about human rights during our training? How does psychotherapy go in hand with poverty and malnutrition?

Trying to answer these questions, I became convinced of the need for a clinical psychology that is both sensitive to local realities and flexible in its vision, practice and social role in this scenario. Also, such a psychology should develop

a broader vision (beyond pathology), in which collaboration is applied to identify resources and to dignify people, to promote health and to search constantly for new possibilities. Such a vision invites its therapists, with irreverence, to put down the manual and to question their training and dominant paradigms in relation to their culture and local context.

On the other hand, despite this legal straight jacket and contextual limitations, I still can be marvelled by all the things that can be developed. The resources and possibilities that sprout when dedicated people meet, co-create and organize, are impressive. I feel inspired each time I experience this space for solidarity, creativity and joint actions.

Collaborative working processes with children, adolescents and their families

As this study focuses on ENFOQUE Niñez's social and therapeutic working processes with adolescents and their family, the different aspects of these processes are explained more detailed within the following paragraphs.

To initiate and promote reintegration

One of the first steps in of the social and therapeutic work, after a child is referred to ENFOQUE Niñez, consists of searching for family members (either nuclear or extended family). Once these family members are located, a process is started to jointly try to understand the situation that led to a separation. Additionally, an assessment is made whether both the child or adolescent and the family member(s) have the desire and the potential to reconnect. In some cases, this process involves actions / activities that allow to get to know each other for the first time; in other cases, the focus is more on working towards (permanent) reintegration[26] of the child or group of siblings into the family. In several cases the child and the relatives live in the same city. However, in most cases, nationwide and overseas searches are needed: as a lot of families are living precariously, their limited access to opportunities to improve their lives in Paraguay have led them to the decision to migrate to neighbouring countries or

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[26] "The process of a separated child making what is anticipated to be a permanent transition back to his or her immediate or extended family and community (usually of origin), in order to receive protection and care and to find a sense of belonging and purpose in all spheres of life (BCN et al. 2013)". (Delap & Wedge, 2016, p.46)

even beyond.

Starting this process of reconstructing the life history of children, adolescents and their families, first and foremost, the underlying possibilities and resources for collaboration that are available, -both in the family and in the team- need to be explored. During this process, it is also fundamental to strive for rapprochement, mutual understanding and set agreements for joint work. In the meantime, the challenges and difficulties that might result from this complex approach have to be acknowledged (Ness, Borg, Semb & Karlsson, 2014). This way of working enables us to assess, together, any potential risks and informs us about how to ensure the care and protection of those with whom we work.

Because each family has its own subjective background, the joint work designed is unique. Consequently, it is not possible to generalize actions, nor to set goals or plans in advance: the roadmap for our work is developed gradually by the input of each interaction and each new relationship that grows between professionals of the team, family members, and other system actors, making us as Fuks (2004) would say "artisans of context".

It might be needed -at a later stage in the process- to work with the family to look for additional support in community/state services/programs. This additional support can help the families to find answers to their (mainly socio-economic) needs, which are jointly defined as priorities for family reintegration (e.g. housing, employment, education, health, and identity, among others).

Thus, it is necessary that -parallel to individual therapeutic work performed with the child or adolescent (see further)- the relationship between the child and his or her family is stimulated, so that external environmental conditions do not impede their familial bonding. Even if the judge finally determines that a family has not met the conditions for reintegration, the work of nurturing mutual understanding and collaboration will be described in our formal reports. These reports will be included in the court record, which, in due time, can give each child a detailed understanding of his or her origins, situation and history. It is therefore essential that, when reports are written, careful consideration of both words and the way in which the story of the children and their families is told, is required. One needs to bear in mind that what was written can be read by them later. It is crucial to remember "that we are not judges in the process, but simple facilitators, who share with the judicial system the realities of the lives

of each family group that create the history of each child with whom we work".
(Rodríguez, Rodriguez, Pérez & Encina, 2013) (in RELAF & UNICEF, 2013, p.23)

To develop and run a Family Home Placement program

Another part of our work involves the creation and consolidation of a group of *family homes*. These families can provide a home, as well as care and affection for the children or teenagers with whom we work. As described in the previous paragraph, we work simultaneously to explore and develop possibilities for reintegration within their own families.

Family homes are families that could be called "common" within the society. While they may already have the informal practice to receive people from outside the family within their lives and their homes, family homes are only credited after a process of "evaluation and training." It is the task of ENFOQUE Niñez to offer this training and accreditation to families that are interested in becoming a family home. Professionals of the organisation and several families move together along this process, offering opportunities to mutually learn to know each other.

Family homes in Paraguay are run on a voluntary basis: they do not receive any payment. They receive the support of ENFOQUE Niñez's team in the form of therapeutic accompaniment during the hosting process. Costs involving child or adolescent needs in all other life domains (such as physical and mental health, psychological support, education) are covered by the organization, unless the family is able to cover these costs itself and opts to do so. The family homes aim to support the families of children and adolescents they welcome in their home; and in no way seek to replace this family.

Family homes legally have the responsibility to care for children and adolescents; this responsibility is assumed jointly with our organization. The duration of placement in a family home varies, depending on the needs of the child on the one hand and the family home on the other. In some cases, the judiciary procedure to legally resolve the permanent situation of the child or adolescent is very time consuming. Family homes both *support* the therapeutic process and *witness* it; above all they are vital collaborators in the joint task to take care of a child or adolescent.

Not all children and adolescents with whom we work need the transitional care of family homes. However, when they do, the range of people involved in these situations, increases. The process involves a variety of tasks and expands the complexity of the work.

To work collaboratively with children, adolescents and their families

In our organization's practice, family therapy and a community approach (counselling and psychotherapy) are integrated. This implies that there is no distinction between the role of a clinical psychologist on the one hand and the community psychologist or the social workers on the other. While the work that needs to be done by each staff member is agreed upon at case level, generally there is an intention to work in an integrated way. In some situations, a different setting with one of the therapists (from the organization or from the professional network) could be offered to the family or one of their members. The relationship and the conversations between the therapists and child or adolescent, are the most important tools within a therapeutic and social work.

The process initiated with families differs from the traditional framework used in clinical private practice. Meetings are usually held where families live: although sometimes families can come to our office for meetings or conversations, they often take place in their homes and communities. Psychological or psychiatric diagnoses are not used when referring to families or while speaking with them. The language that the families themselves use in our conversations and narratives about their stories, is prioritized. Forensic tests or psychometric assessments (which are very common in psychological practice and in the Paraguayan judiciary) are not used. Instead, the meetings and the open and democratic conversations in se are the principal ways of working.

Both in the meetings with families, as well as meetings with the professional team, descriptions and concepts are explored systematically and consciously so that "psi" language does not dominate the discourse. Similarly, "making our prejudices public" (Anderson, 1999), goes hand in hand with our constant effort to deconstruct ideas and judgments that are socially prescribed about poverty, violence and social inequalities.

As noticed by Gergen (2014a), the way of living that was developed in Western

culture, comes with a great expectation to predict and control everything that we find chaotic. It has led to the creation of all kinds of devices; in language - for example- we use diagnostic and reductionist descriptions. However, prioritizing this rational thinking maintains a social order and ultimately excludes, pathologizes, discriminates and reduces chaos, life itself, as well as the human being. "In every attempt to create order, we create the multiplication of disorder" Gergen says (2014a), referring to how the imposition of rules impacts our lives. For instance, if our language about 'mental health' comes from pathology and medical diagnostic models, this transcendentally impacts the way we think about human complexity, the way we relate to each other and the way we 'intervene' with those users of our 'therapeutic interventions'. Similarly, when approaching families with accusation and blame, this attitude can easily generate rejection and distrust. It prevents the initiation of a complex process of mutual collaboration (between family and professionals) that creates opportunities for reuniting and strengthening families.

Within the work we perform at ENFOQUE Niñez, the therapist is also challenged to be "included" in the different environments where the meetings are held, whether it be an urban or rural setting, respecting the language and local traditions of each family and community.

Consequently, the arrival of the professional team into the lives of the 'negligent' or 'abusive' family, creates the opportunity for the family to recognize and rewrite their own story of abandonment and abuse. It allows them "to have one or more witnesses for their story — perhaps silenced for too long— which can now be put central on the stage and be recognized, valued, and listened to in a context of respect" (Rodríguez, 2013). This is in line with the reflections of John Shotter (2014), that one can have much power yet have no awareness of that power, much less the knowledge of how to stop having that power. As a therapist and activist[27] in this context, I considered this as an ethical call to give back a part of that power to the family. Psychotherapeutic practice is undoubtedly a political practice – not from a political party, but from a politics of social transformation, of civic commitment. This implies that, as therapists, we have a political position while working in contexts that lack social justice. We

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[27] Meaning actively participating in direct action in the struggle for social or public policy changes.

also develop such political practices by creating collaborative networks- including the authorities. It is therefore important, from my point of view to develop less hierarchical and more inclusive therapeutic processes, where therapists "can also include ourselves, showing, revealing, and sharing the same commitment in the joint therapeutic work" (Håkansson, 2014).

This recalls the notion of 'networks of solidarity' that enable increased social bonds between the child and the family, the family and the community, the community and services, and between professionals. From my perspective, the creation of networking and respect for the existing networks hinders the permanence of external labels and categories that define people and box them in. By taking part in the system or network, we allow ourselves to know the human being, the person, and to live with him or her rather than "treating" him or her from an independent, external system. And as Robert Whitaker (2014) expresses, alternative projects to psychology and traditional psychiatry should be able to include a broader vision of humanity (unlike the viewpoint provided by diagnostic labels on the complexity of human beings) that respond to the question of what is good for society as a whole.

In my view, it is therefore necessary to dissolve the professional role, in the sense that the professional is the expert (Anderson & Goolishian 1996, Anderson 1999, 2012a), the one who knows what the other needs and has the expertise to find the solution for the other. Instead, the situation itself imposes the need to work jointly and collaboratively on both the professional and family, allowing the creation of the "dissolution" together.

Will the expert then become a facilitator, a companion and a witness to what people can do, a "helper" in the lives of our clients rather than an expert in their problems? In the words of Carina Håkansson (2014): "What is most important in my work as a psychotherapist (…) does not primarily concern different therapeutic doctrines or schools, but rather the importance of a personal stance and to utilize lived experience in an organization that enables people to be authentic and include themselves in vital meetings". (Håkansson, 2014, p.148)

I wonder how we can take responsibility, from the place of power held by a professional of mental health and contribute to what Kenneth Gergen (2014a) called the *alternative* dialogue to *terminal* dialogue. The *terminal* dialogue is described as one that is closed, with limits, one which generates the idea of

knowledge and "knowing" about someone or something (e.g. labelling people in ways such as "abusive" families, "abused" children, and "abused" teenagers). The *alternative* dialogue, on the other hand, generates a conversation in which curiosity persists and welcomes the other, one which lives with what we cannot control. It is one where, in the words of Harlene Anderson (1999), we should be good hosts and good guests; understanding that when there is a potential to continue the conversation, it's when new practices and cultural changes emerge.

The hostility of the context described (e.g. the justice system with penal consequences) does not lend itself to the development of the bonds of trust necessary for the emergence of these possibilities (Vega, 1997; Colapinto,1995; Gómez, Muñoz & Haz, 2007). It calls to mind those constructionist ideas of irreverence to professional practice which become urgent and necessary to generate a therapeutic process with families and children, in which a co-responsibility based on respect for the circumstances of their situation arise, and where the experience of the need of social justice challenges the professional looking for a therapeutic work that dignifies the other.

All the work described could only be possibly performed thanks to an enormous commitment of all the people involved who take daily responsibility for creating a better place for all to live.

Today, the diagnostic classification systems are in question due to their impact on the 'creation' of mental disorders (which, in the case of the families with whom I work, simply adds one more problem). It is time to look at our practices and worldview of what we define as "problems" and, consequently, the possibilities for collaboration while considering how the language of individual mental deficit avoid the inclusion of the social context, in which those problems are created. "The language of mental illness precludes a useful examination of family, professional and sociocultural conditions. (...) These are problems and they all deserve our utmost attention[28]." (Gergen, 2006, p. 147).

Questioning this practice requires that the therapists avoids obedience. Instead, he or she inspires institutions to become more flexible and less hegemonic, through creativity and by generating new *systems of meanings*. (Cecchin, Lane & Ray, 2002)

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[28] My own translation.

Chapter 2: Philosophical Orientation

Socio Constructionism

Collaborative approaches as implemented in ENFOQUE Niñez have their roots in social constructionists' ideas. According to Burr (2003) social constructionism is a movement which has arisen from many disciplines and intellectual traditions. It is influenced by sociology, social psychology, the humanities, literary criticism, and philosophy. Its cultural backdrop is postmodernism (Burr, 2003). The philosophical orientation of both the collaborative work at ENFOQUE Niñez and this research we will perform, are situated in the postmodern movement of social and human sciences and the arts. Initially, as Harlene Anderson (2013) describes, postmodernity radically questions modernity values: "the legitimization of authoritarian, scientific-universal, social and cultural narratives". (Anderson, 2013, p. 61). Postmodernism rejects the idea of grand theories or metanarratives, by which we could achieve an understanding of the world (Burr, 2003). In the postmodern epistemological and philosophical tradition, the generation of reality and knowledge are based on coordination and actions formed on language (Anderson,1999; Gergen, 1996). The language then is of vital importance in those generative processes.

Social constructionism, as a philosophical and hermeneutical movement, has its origins in "sociologists PL Berger and T. Luckmann (1966) [...] and is more recently associated with Jerome Bruner (1986), Nelson Goodman (1978), Kenneth Gergen (1982, 1985, 1994), Rom Harre (1979, 1983), John Shotter (1984, 1993a, 1994), Donald Polkinghorne (1988, 1991), Theodore Sarbin (1986), Clifford Geertz (1983), and Charles Taylor (1989), each of whom offers his own interpretation". (Anderson, 1999, p.76).

This perspective challenges many of the basic existing ideas about life, ethics and social institutions, and postulates that the reality we perceive and in which we live arises from a social convention built from the same socialization process that begins at everyone's birth and depends on each culture and historical moment.

It proposes that the ideas and beliefs developed by each person are the result of human coordinations. That is why in social constructionism, as a meta-theory, relying on social change means introducing cultural languages and seeking their

transformation not as isolated desires but within the relational processes (McNamee & Gergen,1996; McNamee and Hosking, 2012).

Social constructionist theorists believe that ideas, concepts, and memories arise in social exchange and express themselves in language and dialogue (Schnitman, 1994). Social constructionists support that it is in the interpersonal spaces and relationships where all knowledge -from the world and themselves- is co-created.

I will briefly describe some basic ideas of social constructionism, from my paraphrasing of Barnett Pearce (1994):

- The social world consists of activities, mostly conversations, which in general can be understood as *games* in which we participate and engage from birth thanks to the language that is embedded as the main tool of interchange and construction.

- All human beings have an innate ability to integrate into conversations or social activities that are related to our vision of reality. Through participating in those human activities, multiples social *games* and narratives, we develop our personal and social identity, containing our values, knowledges and the power that derive from them. (Ibáñez & others, 2009)

- These activities are organized according to certain rules about what we should or should not do. It would seem then that our first approach to the social world has to do with knowing these rules and from there to build ideas about what and how to do it and what to expect from our environment.

- To understand these pre-existing activities, it is necessary to know the 'producing' and the 'doing'; these *games* do not exist by themselves but are produced and played by someone within a given context.

- When we joined in the patterns of social interaction, we were never incorporated into a single activity; that is to say, we are permanently included in multiple activities and simultaneous social roles (sister, mother, daughter, professional, etc.) that make up the complexity of the human being.

- Social constructionism is more concerned with network relationships than

with separate individuals.

How is the subject defined in social constructionism?

"The subject is a quality that comprises an intertwining of multiple components." (Morin, 1994, p. 80).

According to Barnett Pearce (1994), the notion of individual or "self" in which we can recognize ourselves and from which we take responsibility for our actions is part of a theoretical convention arising from social interaction and allows us to have an identity.

Often this raises the idea that there really is an individual 'subject' and this blinds us, as with all theories, in other respects, like considering the individual in a context of complex patterns of relationships.

This conception of the subject generates a radical change in the ways to diagnose a 'mental disease', for instance, when setting therapeutic goals for change - since isolating the 'sick' person or 'problem' neglects basic issues such as where the problem arises from, what it indicates in the context, and the rules governing it.

A constructionist perspective conceives that every act is co-constructed, that is, it arises only in social interaction and hence its meaning starts from there. To understand an event or subject from this perspective it is necessary to know the context, or the surrounding events, of what happened before and what happens next; instead of being an analysis unit, they are distinct units which lead to understanding the event.

In the definition of Kenneth Gergen,

> "social constructionism is a set of conversations that take place all over the world and engage all of them, in a process that tends to generate meanings, understandings, knowledge and collective values. [These] (...) incite us to consider ourselves intrinsically interdependent and to think that our future depends not only on how we manage these interdependencies, but also our collective capacity to transform the

constructions we have done[29] (…)" (Gergen, 2006, p.34).

Efran, Lukens & Lukens (1993) propose, from a constructionist position, that language is the former of pathology and propose the need for restructuring it, to change the ideas that we build in the communicational exchange with our environment.

In this regard, the importance of language and communication about the events that happen to a person or that occur in his or her life and the 'reading' that he or she makes from them. This reading could be from the deficits or from the resources and possibilities, but either way will be part of the personal history and identity generated from conversations with others.

Considering that the beliefs held by individuals construct realities and these are maintained through social interaction, which in turn confirms the belief that they are then socially originated, Fruggeri (1996) proposes that from the epistemological change and redefinition of therapy as a process of interpersonal construction, the reconceptualization of what might be called the 'disease' arises because it does not give much importance to the etiology of symptoms but to social and interpersonal processes and the dynamics that maintain what could be called 'symptoms'.

Then, the therapist is also responsible within the creation of a dialogical context where new stories and meanings could be built, by introducing differences and alternative descriptions in an interactive process (Fruggeri, 1996).

It is from this conception of the subject and the way in which reality is created that the issues and stories of adolescents, family homes and the professionals will try to be described and understood; and how this does or does not contribute to the generation of new possibilities. The theoretical framework proposed for the development of the research is based on Social Construction, collaborative and dialogic practices.

Since the specific therapeutic and social work performed at ENFOQUE Niñez, with every person referred, is designed with the persons involved in every story and from the collaborative and dialogical stance which is why it seems adequate to focus this research within this frame. As the descriptions, questions and

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[29] My own translation.

reflections come from my own prejudices and far from being presented as 'the reality' of the participants in this research it is so important that they are invited into the conversations which is the main source of this study.

Collaborative and dialogical practices

When referring to Collaborative Practices, in the present study, we refer to concepts and ideas of a perspective that is grounded in reflective processes. The participants in these processes (conversations or work processes) actively and jointly design concepts, based on experiences that are significant in every encounter. Collaborative Practices thus assume a philosophical stance coherent with a postmodern discourse.

According to this *collaborative* stance, developed by Harlene Anderson and Harry Goolishian (Anderson, 1999; Anderson & Gehart, 2007; Anderson & Goolishian, 1996), there is a change of perspective that goes from the individual to the *relational* and from the content to the *process*. As the value of the conversation or encounter enables transformations that cannot be planned nor formulated in advance, each conversation is *unique*.

I would like to describe some of the ideas I consider fundamental to be able to comprehend what is described as 'collaborative practices' for this study.

Firstly, Anderson (2017) considers three guiding presuppositions:

1. Maintain scepticism, referring to the importance to remain critical to any kind of knowledge as definitive (universal truths, dogmas, dominant discourses in our culture - including professional culture). As the author mentions, it is necessary to question discourses presented as 'truth', the postmodern discourse included. More than the questioning per se, I consider it as an invitation to be in the constant exercise of confirming the local meanings that we co-create together with the participants.

2. Avoiding generalizations: when we listen and relate without recognizing our own prejudices and previous knowledge, the attempt to classify both

people, their stories, problems and solutions could easily appear; this "may inhibit our ability to learn about the singularities and novelties of each person or group of people" [30] (Anderson, 2017, p.23).

3. Privilege local knowledge: everything that will be valuable in the process of collaboration must include the client's customs, ideas, values, practices of daily life, which we should not assume we know beforehand or are the same between professional and client, family members or a community. Much less should we try to "colonize" the people with whom we work, but rather to respect them, considering that this local knowledge "may be more relevant, more pragmatic and more adequate" (Anderson, 2017, p. 24). The author clarifies that this does not mean giving up our own knowledge, values or ideas, but that they will be offered as a possibility but not as "the one".

Anderson and Goolishian (1996, Anderson, 1999, 2007, 2017) introduce us to the idea of the client as an "expert" in his / her life and to the therapist as a learner who will be guided by the client to know about his/her life. For this, it is necessary that the therapist invite the client to participate in a partnership from a position of genuine curiosity, and with an open, honest and respectful attitude.

In addition, the therapist can deploy his/her experience in facilitating a meeting and a conversation in which new meanings can be generated together in a dialogical "dance" that will arise from the encounter in the present moment.

It is essential, above all to maintain the curiosity that allows novelty to arise, that the therapist be able to leave aside their prejudices about the person, situation or story that the client offers, and that also the therapist's ideas can be openly known by the client (in other words, be public).

Thereby, it is assumed that a shared responsibility returns to the client part of the power that could have been "lost" in the traditional view of the professional expert, and at the same time frees the therapist from the obligation to know what is "best", or "correct" for each client.

The client and therapist become conversational partners where the way of being

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[30] My own translation.

becomes more relevant than the methods and techniques, or the static descriptions (diagnoses) of the clients. As Harlene Anderson (2007) expressed, "the philosophical stance is the 'tone' of collaborative relationships and dialogical conversations" (Anderson, 2007, p.54).

Collaborative practices do not represent a set of techniques that the professional should follow, but rather value the enormous creative possibilities found in the unique moment of each conversation and implies that the therapist has the capacity and the predisposition to meet the other and to be transformed by that encounter.

From this philosophical position, language - as a generator of meanings - occupies a fundamental place. And the relationship between language and meaning, widely studied and described (Shotter 1993; Gergen, 1996; Bakhtin, 1993, Anderson 1999, Andersen 1996, 2007), constitutes the basis of the generation and transformation that can occur in the conversation, in the dialogue.

In this sense, in the process of a collaborative relationship and a dialogical conversation, -in the attempt to understand each other- the participants in the conversation are formed and transformed continuously.

This leads us to the postmodern idea of language, of a relational and generative nature. It is in language (including all forms of language) where and through which "we construct our worlds, we give order and meaning to our life, and we relate to others" (Anderson, 1999, p. 264). As Gergen & Gergen (2011) already pointed out, it is in the relationships we participate in, and through language, within a particular culture, where we will co-construct what we are going to call our reality. Hence the generative potential of conversations, as well as the innumerable possibilities of de-constructing meanings (realities) and re-signifying them.

Developing collaborative research on collaborative practices

The interest in developing this study arises from my professional practice in ENFOQUE Niñez and the social context in which I work, where there is no research yet done on this issue.

Taking into account the collaborative nature of this work, it was clear to me that my research, should also be done in a collaborative way. Nevertheless, this kind of approach is scarce. While recently, there is growing attention for studying the experiences of family members in social work or in therapy, there have also been some calls for more research on professionals' views of this work. However, there have been very few attempts yet to combine these two views (Rautiainen, 2010). The limited number of existing studies Rautiainen (2010) refers to, were all performed within a therapeutic context (e.g. couple therapy) in a Western-European cultural setting. No other studies could be found that combine the views of family members and professionals regarding collaborative practices in a child protection framework.

It can be concluded that there is need for more systematic research that includes the voices of the main actors involved in therapeutic collaborative processes. Such studies can explore and understand the challenges experienced by all actors and to provide more knowledge on how such programs can be improved.

It is in line with the previous conclusion that the following objectives have been defined for our own study:

- To comprehend if and how collaborative work practices, as developed by ENFOQUE Niñez can be helpful for adolescents, referred by the child protection system, who have been separated from their families
- To explore the lived experiences and challenges as encountered in collaborative practices by adolescents, family homes members, and professionals from the team of ENFOQUE Niñez from their voices.

In order to reach these objectives, following research questions were formulated:
- From the perspective of the adolescents, the family home members and the professionals involved from ENFOQUE Niñez, what are the challenges experienced in the joint work?
- Which working ingredients are identified by adolescents, family home

members and the professionals involved from ENFOQUE Niñez in the collaborative practices with adolescents, who have been separated from their families?

- How do adolescents, family home members and the professionals involved from ENFOQUE Niñez describe what was helpful in the collaboration?

Chapter 3: Methods

Methodological framework

The methodological approach used as a framework for this study goes back to dialogic social research. More specifically, Anderson (2014) states that "the creation of knowledge is a social process, dialogic and relational (...)" (p.66), and through dialogue, each participant will contribute their local knowledge to the process. It is through the exchange and exploration of what each person offers that a new creation of understandings and meanings arises. Knowledge is then comprised within an interactional social activity among people.

Besides generating knowledge, dialogical research seeks to actively involve the voices that could otherwise be silenced in the academic field. In that sense, and in relation to the subject studied, it has a clear intention of social transformation. As Ghiso (2009) suggests, the encounter of equally important voices, -without having privileges over the other- generates the critical reflection and the advance of knowledge in the dialogical investigation. "Because this research proposal does not intend to talk about others, their contexts and their texts; but instead with the others, their contexts and texts ". (Ghiso, 2009, pp.18-19)

Bray, Lee, Smith, and Yorks (2004) define a collaborative inquiry process as one "consisting of repeated episodes of reflection and action through which a group of peers (researcher and participants) strive to answer a question of importance to them" (in Gehart, Tarragona & Bava, 2007, pp. 371- 372).

In a permanent attempt to "be collaborative" both as a philosophy (Anderson, 1999, 2014) and a stance that accompanies the process; during the research process I found myself with a close reflection on how to remain available for relational or dialogical stance, without being "swallowed" by the learned format of 'analysis and interpretation' (repeatable and consistent as Sisto (2008) would say).

In the research process, there was a constant internal conversation between the researcher I learned to be and the researcher that I was trying to become every day. This was reflected during all project stages. The research questions that were developed in the conceptualisation phase, bear "personal, social and political stories" (DeFehr, 2016, p.8). Hence, in the collaborative inquiry the

questions that engage the participants are central.

During the data collection phase, I challenged myself to try to comprehend/participate in a dialogical way more than an analytical or interpretive manner. The focus was on understanding the relevance of responding vividly in dialogue, prioritizing the respect for what emerged in each conversation and what it required of me as a researcher, and not on prioritizing the response to the requirements established outside, such as the learned research methodology formats (DeFehr, 2008). "Ignoring the continuously changing requirements of the conversation, moment to moment, and inserting in it our own external theoretical requirements, is reclaiming a legitimacy (status, authority) for ourselves which we are denying them." (Katz & Shotter, 2004, p.75 in DeFehr, 2016 p.12)

Participants

In order to attain the study goals, we created spaces for conversation with major actors involved in the adolescents' lives after being referred by the child protection system. The actors are: adolescents, professionals (from ENFOQUE Niñez teamwork), and family homes members, forming a so called '*convenient sampling'* (Patton, 2002).

"The logic that guides this type of sampling - and what determines its power - resides in selected cases to provide the greatest wealth of information possible to study in depth the question of research" (Patton, 2002, p.616 in: Martinez-Salgado, 2012, p.616)[31]. More specifically, sampling was guided by selecting 'critical cases' (Patton, 2002), according to previously defined dimensions or criteria that make the situations critical.

The main selection criterium was to look for processes characterized as '*challenging situations'*. It concerns referrals and processes which were experienced 'paradigmatic', by the group of professionals involved, and/or the organisation were challenged in a way they had never been before.

These 'challenges' were revealed to the professionals, or to the organization in different ways:

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[31] My own translation.

a) The situation carried ethical dilemmas (to the professionals, to the organization, to the protection system)

b) The situation created very divergent, sometimes opposite positions within the professional team related to the situation as such or how to 'go on'/ proceed with the work process

c) The situation was new or unusual for the professionals and for the protection   system -considering common cultural practices-.

d) The process itself or the outcome of the process was experienced as 'unsatisfying' or 'unsuccessful' by (some professionals in) the team or the family home members.

Secondly, several other more pragmatic selection criteria were implemented, such as: distance, age, language.

Distance

Families, children and adolescents with whom ENFOQUE Niñez works with live in different parts of Paraguay.

For the purpose of this study, those who are living in neighbourhoods or towns near the capital were prioritized, to facilitate the encounters in terms of travel time and expenses.

Age

Only young people that were at least adolescents[32] (11+) at the time of referral were included in the study.

Language

Knowledge of Spanish was a prerequisite. In Paraguay, there are two official languages, Spanish and Guarani. A large percentage of the population uses Guarani language as their main language. While most can speak Spanish, when they have to express their emotions or talk about their feelings, they prefer to do it in Guarani. Although because of my limitations in communicating with this language, the conversations needed to be undertaken in Spanish; no

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[32] For this study 'adolescence' is considered as the period from 10 to 19 years old, as per the World Health Organization (WHO).

adolescents selected by distance' criteria spoke Guarani as their first language.

Taking previous selection criteria into account, all files of children and adolescents referred to ENFOQUE Niñez since 2005 were carefully screened by the researcher (L.R.), which was also a team member (either the psychologist in the team doing the direct work with the families, the therapist, or the coordinator of the organization). Since the establishment of ENFOQUE Niñez in 2005 a total of 537 children and adolescents were referred by the protection system. 210 of those cases were finished processes or in follow up stages at the time the study was initiated (2014).

Based on this list of 210 children and adolescents, eligible cases were selected and discussed with the team coordinator (currently the general coordinator).

A total of five critical cases / clusters were finally selected to be included in the study. In relation to these five clusters, five young people, ten professionals and five family home-members entered the study. Table 1 gives an overview of the participants invited per cluster.

Table 1:

Overview of participants invited for the study

CLUSTER	Young women	Professionals	Family homes
CLUSTER 1	1. Beatriz	6. Alejandra	16. Silvia
		7.Amalia	
		8.Myriam	
		9. Marcela	
CLUSTER 2	2.Jessica	10. Rosalba	17.Lupe
		11. Patricia	18. Rosa
		Myriam	
		Alejandra	

		Amalia	
CLUSTER 3	3.Lidia	12.Evelyn	Magui
		13. Magui	19. Lucy
		Alejandra	
CLUSTER 4	4.Verónica	14. Nidia	Silvia
		Alejandra	
CLUSTER 5	5.Ximena	15. Livia	
		Alejandra	
		Nidia	

Note: The names used in this study are the ones each of the participants chose in the informed consent letter that all of them signed.

In the following paragraphs some general information of each group of actors (c.q. young women, professionals, family home-members) will be given, as well as a more in-depth story or personal presentation of every single study participant.

Specifically, the stories of the **young women** give insight in the context of the situation in which the protection system intervened in their lives. Also, these stories reveal some of the dilemmas and challenges that formed the basis of selection for the present study. Even though the intention is not to write *about* the young women's life, the stories reflect also why I, as professional in the team and as researcher, found it important to include these young women into the study. Consequently, the voices of the women and the researcher are mixed in the presented stories.

It was extremely difficult for me to write these stories, specially to choose what might be relevant to depict the *context*, in the sense of McNamee's concept of Radical Presence (2015). I was aware that what I've chosen to describe might tell more about what is important to me than to them. For this reason, the young women were invited to read what was written about them and to re-write it together with the researcher - what Gergen (2000) calls a *Conjoint*

Representation: *"accounts of 'experience' seem more adequately understood as the outcome of a particular textual/cultural history in which people learn to tell stories of their lives to themselves and others. Such narratives are embedded within the sense-making processes of historically and culturally situated communities* (Gergen, 2000, p.1028). After the conversations, the young women had the chance to read the descriptions very carefully and to decide together with the researcher whatever needed to be changed, adapted or described in a different way.

The **professionals** wrote their own short presentations. After the group conversations in which the professionals participated, all of them were invited (by email) to write whatever they would like to present themselves to the readers of this research. The text of the email was:

> *"I would like to ask you if you could please write some paragraphs about yourself and in first person (name, profession, interests, history or link to the subject, motivation, working time on the subject, any other information you would like to add). You do not need to use a specific format. The extension, style and content (text, images, poetry, whatever you want) depends on what you want to use.*

> *Thank you very much and please let me know if I can collaborate on anything. For example, if any of you prefer to record an audio instead of writing you can also do it. I can transcribe it and then send it to you for review".*

The procedure to obtain the presentations of the **family home-members**, is comparable to the procedure followed with the young women. I wrote some paragraphs describing each family home (how many members are living in the home, what they do for living, how and when they decided to become a family home and some ideas related to the experiences they expressed during the conversation we had). After writing this, the participating family home members were contacted again by phone and asked to read the initial text and re-write it as they wanted. They were asked to re-write it in first person -if they preferred- (some of the family home mothers did but not all of them) and choose to change whatever they wanted.

Actor group 1: the young people in this study

Five young women participated in the study (Ximena, Jessica, Beatriz, Lidia and Verónica).

When they were referred to ENFOQUE Niñez, the girls were between 11 and 19 years and their process at ENFOQUE Niñez lasted between 2 and 3 years. Four of them lived in different *family homes* during the work process and one of them lived with her family while we worked together.

At the time of the conversations, the participating young women were between 17 and 27 years of age. All of them are mothers.

The fact that all the participants in the selected clusters are women corresponds to a random factor, while in my experience I learnt that the field of childhood in Paraguay, has a marked feminization both in regard to professionals working with children and youth populations in mental health and social fields[33], as well as a significant percentage of girls and female adolescents referred by the child protection system.

At the organization ENFOQUE Niñez, 60% of the referrals are female and 40% of the referrals are male. However, focusing on cases where the children are referred at adolescent age this percentage changes from 83% for women to 17% for men (2016).

The in-depth stories of the young women:

1. Beatriz

> *I was 13 years old when I was referred to ENFOQUE Niñez. At*
> *that moment, I was using another name that I chose, to hide the*

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[33] According to the National Direction of professional records of the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare, for the year 2017, the number of registered women psychologists is 4.949, and male Psychologists 584. https://www.mspbs.gov.py/drcps/12818/listado-de-profesionales-de-la-salud.html

For its part, the National University of Asunción (main academic centre for the career of Social Work in Paraguay) shows 796 female graduates, versus 87 male graduates from 1963 till December 2017. This data was provided by Nidia Battilana, the Academic Director of the Social Work Institute in July 2018.

Judicially speaking, the Supreme Court of Justice appointed 52 female and 22 male judges , for Children and Adolescents Courts.http://www.pj.gov.py/contenido/943-nomina-de-magistrados-y-funcionarios/943

name my parents gave to me. I called myself with another name. I was at a pediatric hospital, where professionals asked the protection system to intervene because I was found in the street in bad health conditions. When I was asked about my family, I mentioned that I had no family.

When two psychologists of ENFOQUE Niñez visited me for the first time and offered help, I mentioned that I used to go to school. With the name of the school and my photo the professionals found out that I was using another name and that I had family (when the director of the school recognized me).

This fact was learned by the psychologists while I was living in a family home (since I accepted to go there instead of the institution in which I had lived for some months in the past). I asked for help, specifically for "psychological help".

Leticia

My colleagues, who were working with her, asked me to meet her to determine if she accepted me as a therapist. And she did.

One of the things that we discussed at that time was that the team should not visit her family until she was able (and decided) to talk about her family and what had happened leading to her to hiding her past with her family.

It wasn't until after some weeks that she spontaneously started to tell me some things about her past, for example how she discovered she was adopted and her parents denied it, the possible sexual abuse from her adoptive father, and the physical and psychological abuse from her adoptive grandmother, among many other things.

It was a challenge for her to include this part of her story with the people that were taking care of her at that moment (the family home for example) without having to explain to everyone why she wasn't Lisandry and at the same time continue being a trustworthy person.

After a process of about a year, which included her family into the conversations; it was possible for her parents to tell her how they adopted her. In said conversations, they could express how much they loved and wanted her back home. She decided to move back home. She was hesitant, but she wanted to

make a clean start. After some months, she discovered that she got pregnant by her boyfriend. She was 14 years old at that moment. The day after she found out about her pregnancy, she decided to run away from home again.

We lost all contact with her. For several months, we were looking for her in the places she used to go. We had many fears and ideas about the bad things she could be going through alone in the streets. A mix of feelings appeared between us: the team, the family home, the defender, her family…confusion, impotence, anger, sadness…

Suddenly she appeared on Facebook. She showed herself as a happy and proud mother of a boy.

We contacted her, and she wanted to visit us again. She asked me to talk as we used to do. Then she told me that when she found out that her parents wanted her to abort, she decided to run away from home again.

When she came, she was happy, and she was pregnant again with a new partner with whom she was in love. They were living together for some time. She said that she was trying not to get pregnant, she even asked a gynaecologist at the public hospital to put in an intrauterine contraceptive (because she could not take any pills) but he said he was not allowed because she was under 18 years old and she was there without her parents.

After running away the last time, her parents went to the police to ask them to find her. So, since searching for her was a legal procedure (the same as is used for persons that have committed a crime and are escaping from the justice system) she was not able to use her identity again. Her son was not officially registered, and she used her 'Lisandry' name at the hospital when she gave birth. Legal papers were a total mess in the system; and inside the system nobody was looking for her anymore…

She only had a little contact with her family but even though she did not want to live with them, she wanted to have some relationship with them. She was living in pretty precarious conditions and did not finish school. She also wanted to have some contact with the family home where she used to live.

Many ethical and legal discussions were on the table at that moment. Nowadays she is 18 years old, mother of two children. She lives with her partner and his family; and keeps on fighting day by day to move forward.

2. Jessica

When I was referred to ENFOQUE Niñez, I was 16 years old and had a 3-month-old baby. I lived with my parents (mother and father). My mother denounced me saying that I was mistreating my little baby. The judge asked ENFOQUE Niñez to evaluate the 'real' situation and to report whether he should take the baby away from me, and if my parents were able to take care of her. At the same time, he decided to put me in home imprisonment. I could leave home only to go to school.

After the first visits of the professional team, it become obvious very early that it was very tense at my home. We were having lots of fights. The judge decided to oblige me to go to psychological therapy.

I was angry. Towards my parents (especially my mother), towards the judge and towards anyone that got involved in the situation.

Leticia:

With Jessica, we had the first referral coming from the Penal Judicial court. I was asked to work with her as a therapist. I was told that she did not want to talk to me. The first time we met, she came to my office, sat on the couch and said, "I don't want any therapy, I won't talk to you". And I said, "that is okay, I understand your position, if I was forced to go to therapy I might feel the same. Can you stay here for a while without talking to me, so at least I can inform the judge that you came?" She said, "ok…"

That was the way our relationship started…

In the work process, she accepted to move to a family home with her baby. She was taking care of her daughter properly and did not want to live together with her parents anymore. They did not want her to continue her relationship with the father of the baby.

After a while, a rumour started at the school that she was earning money and that her parents asked her for money to pay the bills at home. Her mother did not work at that time and her father was retired from the police force. They lived only from the father's pension, and the father of the baby, a 33-year-old man coming from a very well-positioned family (economically), didn't assume his

financial responsibilities for his daughter. He did not want to talk to us. The case was the same for her mother.

When Jessica stayed in the first family home she could receive visits from her parents and continued in home imprisonment. She started to learn some handcrafts, taught by the family home mother, and she sold them to earn some money. She wanted to have her own money, as she used to.

After a while, it was necessary to change the family home. She stayed for another time with Rosa and her family.

She started to plan to live by herself with her daughter. At that time, she was 16 and her daughter was more than one year old. She was 'desperate' to get rid of the home imprisonment, since it was never possible to prove that she could hurt her daughter.

She continued meeting me every week. Besides that, sometimes we talked on the phone many times a day, and we usually chat.

In the team of professionals there were various positions related to many issues (and prejudices): whether to denounce her parents for making her work and how to prove it; whether to denounce the father of her baby who did not assume any responsibility for his daughter (and if so, and because of the age that she was pregnant and his age, justice should see it as sexual abuse). If her daughter was in danger, because of the life she had. And what about us, as an organization, that is not denouncing a situation in which an adolescent could be considered as exploited by her parents? And like these, many other aspects of the work and the relationship with her.

Jessica

I did not want them to file any reports. I was totally opposed. At that moment I finished school and was making plans to go to university. I bought a little piece of land to build a small house for the future and was looking for a job.

One of the things I asked for was the possibility to travel with them (the NGO team) to visit a man that contacted me saying he was my real father. He lived far away from the capital city and my mother denied that story. The man lived in the same city where my

extended family lived. I went there to visit them and talked to this man. While I was there, I found out many things about my mother's life and her origins, and my mother was very upset by that.

Leticia

The judge decided to stop the home imprisonment with the condition that she continue the therapy, and that ENFOQUE Niñez share the responsibility for her. It was the first time that we were in that position, and we accepted.

She never talked openly about what she did to earn money until more than a year after. After a while she decided to move to her own place, with her own material resources. She did not receive any help from her parents, the government or any agency. We supported her with diapers, milk, some food and medicines. She talked to a friend to share the expenses for renting a place. After a while she became a family home for a friend of another girl that was pregnant and had no place to live.

She continues being in contact with both family homes where she lived. She has another baby with the same father and continues living independently. She is 21 years old now.

3. Lidia

I was 16 years old when I was referred to ENFOQUE Niñez. For several reasons in my family, I was left under my father's custody since I was seven years old, living in Asuncion and other cities while losing contact with my mother and siblings who stayed in the countryside. Very soon my father stopped sending me to school and I had little contact with other people.

Leticia

Lidia's father abused her and when she turned fifteen, she became pregnant for her first daughter. When her daughter was born her father gave her away to a family saying she was his niece and that he could not take care of her; her baby was three months old and she was welcomed into this new family as their daughter. Nobody else other than Lidia and her father knew what was going on.

After almost 2 years, a person that perceived Lidia asking for help, called the

police who intervened at that moment and were witnesses of the situation. Her father was taken directly to jail and Lidia was left in custody of her aunt for some months.

Lidia

Then, due to legal procedures regarding my father, I asked the protection system to move me to another place. They found the family where my daughter (2 years old at that moment) was living and when this family learned the story they offered to receive me until I had a stable place to live. Living there I found out I was pregnant again.

Unfortunately, I could only stay there for a brief time. After giving birth, another place had to be found for me since there was no physical space in that house.

Leticia

I was part of the professional team in charge of working together with her. Most of our conversations were related to her life plans, her wishes, needs and dreams for the future. Until that time, we had never had a family home willing to receive a young mother with a baby.

Since Lidia has only attended school up to the third grade, she was very willing to study. She signed up for some courses until it was time to give birth. At the same time, we worked trying to contact some of her relatives that could receive and support Lidia. It wasn't possible to find someone for her. She found herself with the limitations that her maternity represented. She was 17 years old and had no kind of support from her family, or any public policy. She needed to work, earn money and be able to live independently.

Lidia

At the same time, my father found the way to continue threatening me through text messages from jail. He did not want me to testify in trial. I was dreadfully frightened of him.

My second daughter was born and when she turned two months old, I found a job in a supermarket. This brought great happiness but also fear and insecurity since not only was it my first job but it also meant being left to face an unknown world for me.

My first idea and given the experience with my elder daughter (who was very well cared for) was that both sisters could live together and that I could have the chance to visit them (while I was not working or studying) to maintain the bond with them. I would need a few months to be able to organize and assume my independent living expenses.

The family that cared for my elder daughter could not assume the care of both, but they helped me to find another known family that lived very close and could assume the care in the same way they had done with my eldest daughter. This seemed a convenient solution for me, although the judicial system did not agree.

The judge asked me to choose, either to take care of my daughter myself or to give her into adoption, which meant losing contact with her if the adoptive family did not want me to remain in contact.

Leticia

Since we had no family home for her at that moment, the general coordinator of the organization offered to include Lidia and her daughter into her own family until we could figure out what to do together.

This situation was very hard to go through, with many voices around saying what she should do, questioning, judging, placing enormous pressure on her to make a 'good decision'.

Lidia lived in various places, while adapting to her work. She lived in two family homes. There she could continue with her psychotherapy process, to learn about the city, to have a medical check-up for herself and her daughter, to look for a place of her own where she could live with her daughter and find somebody to look after her while she was working.

The meetings and conversations with Lidia, which took place during her break time at work, while she washed her baby clothes or prepared a meal, were from the most trivial to the most profound. She would wonder how she would manage to administrate her money (that she had for the first time ever) or what she would say to her daughters when they asked who their father was, or what she would answer when people would question her having had two daughters at such early age.

One of the difficult issues was about giving her youngest daughter into adoption so that another family could take care of her and provide her with a healthy environment and the emotional security that she desired as a mother for her daughters.

This topic was delicately tackled. On the one hand, Lidia had fears and doubts mainly about what the people who helped her would say (us, judiciary system, family homes etc.) and on the other hand she was sure of the future she wanted to build for her and of all the things she was capable of.

Lidia continued with her studies with some rapid courses and improved very fast at work. Lidia managed to testify and be there in court, which resulted in her father's sentence of 13 years in prison.

A few months after her file was closed, since she had turned 18 years old, she decided to give her younger daughter to some relatives of the family that looked after the older one and lived very close to them, so that the sisters could grow up together and consolidate their emotional bond. She visits them whenever she has the chance and they have a very close relationship. Nowadays she has a beautiful family.

4. Verónica

> *When I was referred to ENFOQUE Niñez I was 11 years old. I was living with Marta, my father's neighbour, and who had been my legal guardian for four years, after a report of mistreatment she had made against my father's wife. The physical marks of the mistreatment I had received, after almost six years, were still visible on my body.*

> *Marta approached the child protection system because she could not continue taking care of me for several reasons. She was also worried about me, because I had run away twice with the intention of finding my grandmother who lived in another city. On both occasions, I had been found and taken to the police station and then to Marta, who requested them to resolve my definitive situation.*

> *At that moment, I expressed that my wish was to find my paternal grandmother, of whom I had vague memories, to relate again with*

my father (which I was not allowed until then and with whom I had good memories), to find my mother whom I never knew and meet with my sister again of whom I had not known anything about for at least 6 or 7 years.

I lived with a family home for 9 months, while the family search and re-composition work was done. The work with my family involved a search of all the relatives from the references and memories that I had, thus reaching my father, my paternal grandmother, and my sister. After 9 months of living with the family home and after a process of visits, conversations, reunions and the accompaniment of the family home in that relationship, I went to live with my father (by that time, his wife had died) and my little step brother.

Leticia

During the period of our work, Veronica met her sister (who lived in a nearby city with another family), and visited her several times, as well as her paternal grandmother, her other brothers and sisters whom she did not know about, and her nephews and other members of her paternal family, since it was not possible for us to reach her maternal family.

The work with Veronica was done by reunions and recognitions as part of the construction of identity and the history of family belonging. It was moving and exhilarating how Veronica took part in all the work. She guided and enlightened us throughout the process. With whom to go, where, in the difficulties, who to ask for help, her active collaboration allowed us to cooperate with her easily.

The fact that Veronica stayed in the family home allowed us (to everyone, not only the team but also Veronica and her family) to have enough time and space for things to happen spontaneously and gradually; while Veronica was in a family that accepted her, respected her, gave her attention and care. We had already reached all possible relatives of Veronica and all had stated that they could not take care of her, except her father. However, he was living with the person who had mistreated Veronica, so that solution was not possible.

Something unexpected was that at the point when it seemed that the possibilities of reintegration for her were impossible, her father's spouse

committed suicide. It was a very confusing situation for everyone, (for us, for the judicial system) but from which emerged the possibility for Veronica to live with her father. This situation generated many contradictory feelings in all members of the family: sadness and happiness; loss and possibility, among others.

Some of the challenges and questions that appeared when proposing the protection system that Veronica could live with her father had to do with: prejudice in our cultural context in relation to a single man taking care of a 12 year old woman; the economic and labour stability that the system expects to ensure that its needs are covered (Veronica's father did not have a job and although it was not openly discussed it was not possible to prove how he earned a living; something very common in his community); The neighbourhood in which he lived (it was an area of the city considered dangerous). It is also important to mention that in Paraguay there is no economic support program for families and children in this situation.

During all these situations experienced, both by Veronica's family as well as her, the family home fulfilled a fundamental role of containment and of interlocutor for the meticulous and detailed analysis that resulted in the reintegration of Veronica with her father and step-brother.

I would like to add that after having the conversation with her (10 years after the work we did together) is that besides getting to know that she became a proud mother of four children, she told me that after some years she could meet with her mother and other siblings which she had had no idea existed. During the conversation, she shared with me many stories in which she learnt to take care of her little brother, her own children and later on even her father that went to jail for some time and had problems with alcohol. It was clear to me that she had plenty of resources that put her in a situation of facilitating many things to her family.

One thing that made me feel very touched was when one day, (some weeks after we met for the conversation) she phoned me saying that she realized she had a sister of 17 years of age that had two little children. One of them was a new born baby. She described the situation (that was very difficult) and then she said that she would like to take care of her sister's baby, since she had no possibility of doing it. She said to me that she experienced the same situation

when she was a little girl and her mother disappeared (mainly because of drug use) and she could not allow to make her little niece experience the things she had. She wanted to be her 'family home'.

5. Ximena

I was 19 years old and I was the oldest of a group of five siblings. We were referred after an anonymous disclosure of familial violence. We were living with our parents and a grandfather.

We were all going to school and neither of my parents had formal jobs. With economic difficulties and denying that something wrong was going on in the family, it was very difficult from the very beginning to generate joint work with ENFOQUE Niñez.

My parents had been married for nineteen years. During all these years of coexistence, my mother denounced my father on two occasions for physical and psychological aggression. We, sons and daughters, witnessed several aggressions from our father to our mother and, as we became teenagers, we were also targets of psychological aggression.

Leticia

This work lasted about two years, during which we approached a therapeutic process with regular individual and group meetings with the family. The father had refused to participate in them from the beginning.

During this time, the family repeatedly faced crisis, to the point that the father was expelled from the house by court order, a measure promoted by the mother and siblings. However, on all those occasions, the mother again received the father to the home.

In the last judicial expulsion, the adolescents of the family stood firm, and proposed not to accept any further mistreatment by the father either to them or their mother and demanded that the mother also stay firm in her decision.

When we had started our work, the father was the breadwinner in the house and all the family members depended on him to meet their needs. At the end of the work, the mother and the eldest daughter had become financially independent. Ximena left the home and it was possible for her to take care of some of her younger siblings when it was necessary.

Ximena was always very clear about her future goals. She wanted to leave the country, study a university degree, specialize, and start a family. Objectives that she managed to achieve over the years.

Actor group 2: the professionals in this study

The professionals to be involved in the study, were identified throughout the conversations with the young women. All of ENFOQUE Niñez's professional teams involved in the work with each of the young women was included, meaning between two and five professionals for each of the participating young women. Four of these professionals were involved in the work process of multiple cases in this study. Consequently, 10 unique professionals, all women, were identified.

All ten (three clinical psychologists, a community psychologist, two lawyers, four social workers) participated in the study. They were connected to the interdisciplinary team of ENFOQUE Niñez at the time the adolescents were referred by the child protection system, but at the time of the conversations four of them had left the organisation and continue working in the field from other different institutions.

At the moment of the conversations, the professionals were between 35 and 58 years old and had from 7 to 20 years of experience with youth care work.

Personal presentation of the professionals

Eight out of 10 professionals answered the request of sending a personal presentation; two persons that have already left ENFOQUE Niñez didn't respond. All eight responders choose to send a written text by email. The following passages reflect their own words.

6. Alejandra

I am a lawyer. I have experience as a practitioner in a criminal court, assistant in a criminal prosecution office and practice of the profession in the field of litigation with greater emphasis in the field of family for 10 years.

I have worked in ENFOQUE Niñez since its creation in 2005 and since 2009, I am part of it exclusively. Initially as a lawyer of the technical team, later as coordinator of the technical team and currently I am the general coordinator of the organization.

From its beginning, I transited the different areas in which ENFOQUE Niñez acts:

- *Direct attention (therapeutic work with children, adolescents and their families as well as with familiy homes); interacting pro-positively and collaboratively with diverse actors of the justice system, both in the processes of each of the children and adolescents, as well as in the proposals of procedures and good practices;*
- *Representing the organization and its mission and objectives in national and international networks, occupying advocacy spaces in discussion of projects, drafting regulations and protocols,*
- *Contributing from the experience of direct care work performed by the technical team of the organization, with the intention of bringing the voices of the people who are part of the target population of these regulatory bodies.*

7. Amalia

My name is Amalia, "I am" a clinical psychologist, I put "I am" in quotation marks because it is not all that I am, it is what I do today. I studied and continued studying various things. I studied law at the beginning, but I did not like it, after two years I decided to study psychology, since I remembered that it was one of the subjects that I liked the most at school. There are many things that interest me, but I had to think in terms of "profession" as "something that can give me a job" "to live."

For example, I have always liked Music, but I am a disaster at singing and playing instruments hahaha. Also, History (but what would I live off if I studied history?!), Archaeology (but in Paraguay?) Astronomy, stars, observing the

universe, Literature, movies, clothes, make-up, languages, drawing and painting, graphic design, decoration, chocolate, kitchen, in the end I am interested in too many things.

How do I connect myself to the topic? For me it was like a "non-casual" accident. When I studied psychology, I wanted to work with children. While I finished my thesis, I began to think about where I could work, what places existed, what organizations and institutions. And less than a month after presenting my final thesis and obtaining my degree, I participated in a public contest to work at the National Secretariat of Childhood and Adolescence. I went to take the psychometric tests and have the interviews and without waiting a month, they called me to tell me that I had the highest score. I worked for almost 3 years in this institution. There, I was trained in Human Rights of Childhood and Adolescence, participating in all trainings, but it was the interventions themselves the ones that educated me the most. And they were the ones that impacted me the most. It was very different between what I saw from the outside and to be "inside". The life stories of the children and adolescents were very painful, and they were our daily bread.

I changed the way I see things, before I used to ask "How come nobody does anything?! Where are our rulers, our authorities?! Afterwards, it became: "this is very complex, it is not as easy as people think, it is not a question of one or two people who can solve it". It was very frustrating to have very limited resources and realize how difficult it was to articulate among all (the actors).

I have been working with this topic from 2009 to 2017, (3 years in the National Secretariat of Childhood and Adolescence and 5 years and a few months in ENFOQUE Niñez) in total 8 years of direct work with children, adolescents and their families living in situation of extreme vulnerability. Since 2009 and during these 8 years of doing this, I can say that I experienced almost all the emotions (I cried a lot, I laughed a lot, I get tired, I get sick, I took risks, I learned, I taught, and more). I did not think it was going to be so difficult when I made the decision to study psychology, to be a professional and then to work in the area of Childhood and Adolescence. There were moments when I regretted it and I thought to myself: Why didn't I choose another career?! Why didn't I marry a millionaire?!, But when I ask myself that, I think that's what made me who I am today, and modesty aside, I'm proud to be the person I have become.

Today, I am a more critical person, more reflective, less prejudiced, less judgmental, freer, more transparent and I think, fairer and more sensitive to the needs of others. Qualities that I believe, contribute "a little" to our society, and serves to show the people around me a different way of looking at our reality.

8. Myriam

My name is Myriam, I am 59 years old, I have two daughters, I am a grandmother and I am a lawyer.

The relationship I have with teenagers is through the work I do in the organization ENFOQUE Niñez, I am part of the technical team, along with a psychologist and another who is a social worker.

It is up to me to take action in the courts, have interviews with the actors of the Judicial Branch, representing the children or adolescent that we are accompanying and the technical team.

I also accompany the professionals on visits to the family homes or families of origin. Interviews to families applying for family home placement, training and other activities.

For almost 5 years, I have been exclusively working on the topic of children and adolescents, who have been separated from their family. Nevertheless, during the practice of my profession, before working in the organization, I always tried to work in the family area.

When accompanying children who are separated from their biological families because their life histories are taken to court; I personally commit myself to my morals, my ethics and my feelings. It commits me to carry out all the actions that are necessary to look for exits, to try to contribute so that those stories take a different course; so that judicial intervention is not the stigma of their lives.

Accompanying adolescents also means what I mentioned in the previous paragraph, but there are also more surprises; pleasant and not so pleasant, sometimes anxiety, vertigo, joys and sorrows; I experienced all those feelings with the teenagers who are part of Leticia's research.

11. Patricia

My name is Patricia, I am a social worker, single and I am forty years old. I studied social work motivated to help and work with children who present school and family difficulties; Since I, as a child, personally went through difficult situations in these two areas, this awakened in me the interest of collaborating with other children who could be going through similar circumstances.

My work relationship with the childhood area began when I started working in the area of systematization and accompaniment to children, adolescents, teachers and parents whithin community projects in rural and urban schools.

Then I worked with two very different populations, on the one hand; Girls, adolescent mothers, in situations of sexual exploitation, with whom I developed a training program, internship and labour insertion; And on the other hand, children with different physical abilities whose parents sought inclusion for their care within a rehabilitation program.

For seven years, I have been linked to the Family Care Program from the Organization ENFOQUE Niñez, working with children, adolescents, families of origin and family homes throughout the process of accompanying children and adolescents separated from their families of origin or at risk of being so.

The work itself is challenging, with experiences that are both rewarding and not so rewarding at times, but I am convinced that a suitable family environment is the best place for every child or adolescent to grow, develop, recompose and reinvent a new life story, which in fact, corresponds to him/her by right.

This last idea mentioned, is what continues to push me to keep working in this area. I am especially encouraged when visualizing the progress that has been generated in terms of public policies in relation to the proposal of a new approach for children and adolescents separated from their families. The process of change is slow, but the desinstitutionalization to which it is aimed, day by day demands a greater commitment from all actors of civil society to reverse the

high degree of institutionalized children and adolescents that we reach at country level.

If I had the chance to change the population with whom I work, I would not do it. I think that I would directly change the subject (ha ha ha). Working with children and adolescents is what I like and with whom I feel more comfortable.

12. Evelyn

I'm Evelyn, social worker. I am 45 years old and for 10 years I had to work with the issue of alternative care, developing the program from the State through to the Adoption Centre. I was also a family home of a child for 3 years.

During that time, I had to work the story of Lidia. For me the work experience, accompanying her situation was something very inspiring and which brought a lot of learning.

Today I am working in Public Health, in other subjects related to adolescent health.

However, family home placement somehow marked my career and also my professional training. Actually, it was that experience which encouraged me to do a master's degree in systemic approach, family therapy and collaborative practices.

Therefore, I am currently pursuing my professional career but with what 10 years of working with families and with stories of children and adolescents separated from their biological environment meant. And in this sense, the impact of family home placement programs as valid answers and even as therapeutic resources for these children living in difficult situations. This is what I can say from where I am and from the place where I am today and in relation to the story I accompanied with the teenager.

13. Magui

I have a degree in clinical psychology from the Universidad Católica de Asunción (1995) and as a systemic family therapist from the Asociación de Psicología y Psicoterapia Sistémica Paraguaya (Paraguayan Association of Psychology and Systemic Psychology) -APPSIPA (1998) with an emphasis in social constructionism.

I completed a postgraduate degree in Network Generation and Collaborative Relations, under the coordination of Tom Andersen from the Lanús University of Buenos Aires in Argentina and Trömso University College of Norway (2006).

I have a master's degree in social policies and human rights for children and adolescents from Columbia University of Asunción (2013).

Since 1996 I have worked as a therapist for children, adolescents and families. Since the late 90s I have ventured into the social field taking the clinical view of therapeutic work with children and families.

I have been part of teams of direct attention to children separated from their families, family of origin, family home placement and adoption.

Since 2000 I have written independently and co-authored theoretical-technical materials on alternative care, family home placement, adoption and work with families in situations of social difficulty. During this last period, I have focused very much on materials that affect public policies related to the care of children separated from their families.

I am a fellowship of the network of social entrepreneurs of the international organization Ashoka since 2001.

I am a founding member of the organization ENFOQUE Niñez (2005) and I was its coordinator for the first 5 years. I am also a founding member of the Paraguayan Foster Care Network (2007). I was a member of the Board of Directors of the Adoption Centre between 2007 and 2008.

I served as director of the Adoption Centre between 2009 and 2012, and last year I was also director of the General Directorate of Special Protection for separated children (DIPROE), both dependent on the governing body for children and adolescents in Paraguay, the National Secretariat for Children and Adolescents (SNNA).

In recent years, I have been involved in the research area and have collaborated and advised the SNNA in the elaboration of materials and regulations for the implementation of public policies in children separated from their families.

14. Nidia

I am Nidia, social worker.

I was a volunteer in the catholic pastoral social program and we carried out recreational activities with children of the "bañados" (the slums) and in the rural school "Pa'i Puku" in the Chaco. It is from this experience that my interest in working in the social sector arises.

I studied the degree in social work in the 90's and, during the degree, I did internships in institutions that worked with children.

I have been working in "Callescuela" ("Street School") since 1999, an NGO working within the framework of the promotion of human rights and in particular child rights, accompanying the organizational process and strengthening of children's social and political participation.

The work in Callescuela allowed me to have a different way of working with children, since I learned to listen to them, to respect them and to learn from them from their daily lives and struggles.

I have been working with the team of ENFOQUE Niñez since 2006, specifically in the program of care for children who are separated from their families by court order. This work allowed me to better understand the bureaucracy of justice and the situation of lack of protection in which children are found when they enter the judicial system; sharing with them and their families, recognizing the place family occupies for the child, and what we hope society and institutions do to consolidate family bonds in societies where this is increasingly diluted.

The work in ENFOQUE allowed me to consolidate my view on children as subjects of rights, and that the effort, either from my profession and the institution where I work, do not lose this perspective and approach towards them.

15. Livia

My name is Livia, I am 38 years old, I have 2 daughters and a husband, I work as a psychologist and family therapist. I studied Psychology at the University of La Habana, Cuba, and in Paraguay I was trained as a therapist with an emphasis on social constructionism. For the last 12 years I've been working in social organizations related with vulnerable populations. I am currently working with children with disabilities and their families.

For approximately 5 years, I accompanied children separated from their families and family homes. It was a job that I enjoyed a lot and that also made me feel

a lot of pain. The joy was related to being facilitators of experiences that positively impact people's lives such as being able to listen to the stories of families, bring their voice to the courts or write so that in a few years the child who was given in Adoption has the opportunity to know about their origin and their family.

Also, to feel the joy of the children and the family homes in their first encounter as well as the encounter of the children with their biological families. The pain had to do with being observers of so much suffering, the time the Court takes to decide about the children's lives, the solitude of the children and the exclusion of the families.

My motivation with this work and what I am doing today has to do with what I am in love with, which is, to be with people, to listen and to create from the bonds and relationships, to feel each other in our humanity.

Actor group 3: the family home members in the study

After selection of the critical cases to be included in the study, the family homes that were involved in the process of the young women, were contacted. Five family homes were identified: in one cluster, the adolescent stayed in her family, and no family home was involved. In two other study clusters, the adolescents resided in two different family homes throughout the process. One family home received two adolescents involved in the study.

Despite the explicit invitation for several members of the family home to participate in the study, only one person of each of the family homes finally participated in the study. In all cases is was the family home mother; thus, five family home mothers are included in the study. The other family members were either not interested or not available during the study period.

The family home mothers in the study were between 36 and 55 years of age when they received the young women in their homes. Three of whom are married, while one is widowed and one a single mother; all have children of their own. All family homes already had experiences with family home placement before starting up the processes this study focuses on: family mothers mention experiences with receiving two children to 30 different people in their homes. The way all these family homes started as a 'family home', were different as

well: some of them had a long informal experience of receiving people (children and adults) in their homes and some of them had their first experiences within the formal system (NGO and Child Secretariat).

Personal presentation of the family homes mothers

16. Silvia

I am Silvia and I have been married for more than 30 years. I am Argentinian, and my husband is Paraguayan. My family lives in Argentina and that's why we usually travel there several times a year. My husband and I have 5 children and 3 grandchildren.

We became a family home at ENFOQUE Niñez in 2007 after receiving a phone call from the fundraising team of the NGO to ask for support. In that phone call, I expressed that I would like to take care of children in need. After that, Evelyn and Leticia visited me and my family to initiate the evaluation and training process.

Over the past ten years we have received 7 children and adolescents. From babies to teenagers, and for different periods of time (months to years). Some of the children we took care of went into adoption and some went to reintegration with their families. We keep in contact with some of them (especially those who went back with their families). Veronica was the second adolescent we received in our lives in 2006 and Bea was the fourth in 2012.

I knew about family home placement since I lived in Argentina and I mentioned how happy I felt when I realized that it was possible to do the same in Paraguay. I am a university professional and by my own choice I do not practice my profession in order to dedicate myself full time to the care and upbringing of my children. I am a housewife and my husband is retired now after working for more than 30 years at the same place. He is an engineer. Since we are a big family, it was easy for us to share our home and life and to include a new member in the family. I firmly believe that family home placement is important, complex and challenging but worthwhile. I believe that we must contain the adolescents lovingly, without neglecting the limits and particularities of this vulnerable stage.

Something important that has also happened during all these years is that my husband was severely ill in some periods. He had cancer and needed to travel to Brazil many times for his treatment. This was not a reason for us to stop receiving children in our homes, although we did have some pauses during those difficult moments.

17. Lupe

I am 60 years old and I am a single mother of one son. I am a hairdresser and I have my own shop at home in a neighbourhood of Asunción. I come from a big family with several siblings and I heard about the Family home Placement Program through my sister when she received a little girl in her home that lived with her for more than a year before returning with her mother. I used to spend some spare time with them and wanted to have a similar experience in my own home.

My son was also supportive, we had several different experiences with little children and with young mothers and their children.

As a family home, we received 6 children and adolescents, 5 of them with ENFOQUE Niñez. Two of the adolescents that lived with us had their babies with them. For several years now, they received nephews and nieces from our own family into our home to support them through school or university.

We received Jessica and her daughter for some months in 2012. Although it was a difficult experience for both, we continue keeping in touch and have some positive and nice memories of the time we lived together. The "difficulties" were related to our differences in the way of living.

18. Rosa

Rosa is a social worker and mother of 4 children. She has been married for more than 30 years. Their older daughter, an administrator, lives with them and at the moment they received Jessica and her baby in their home. Their son is a psychologist, married and he has a baby. Rosa's youngest daughter is 10 years old.

Rosa and her husband have a small business in entertainment and organizing birthday parties for children; and Rosa works as an educator in an institution that supports children that are living in the streets in the National Secretariat of

Childhood.

They received more than 30 people at their home and they never took part in a family home placement program before collaborating with Jessica through ENFOQUE Niñez. They always did it in a spontaneous way, by receiving people from different parts (always young people and adults).

Jessica and her baby lived with them for a couple of months after living at Lupe's home. It was their first time having the legal responsibility of an adolescent and a baby. This experience was in 2012 and they are still in contact.

19. Lucy

I am the mother of four children and the grandmother of two. My husband died in a work accident some years ago. We started as a family home in 2003 receiving a baby for some months. After a while we received a little girl for another couple of months and when my husband died we stopped receiving children for a period. Lidia (and her daughter) was the first adolescent we received after that, in 2007. We had some other experiences of family home placement after this; receiving in total 5 children and adolescents in our lives.

My husband was a technician working for the police force. I used to have a small restaurant at our home. I was in charge of cooking and serving the meals to my clients. When my husband died (after being some months in hospital), my life changed completely. Continuing to work at home was not enough to take care of all the expenses of the family. After a while, I decided to move to another city, build a new home and work in different places. Also, my children went to work, and we help each other until now.

When I was a child, my family lived in the countryside. I wanted to go to school, and although I did not speak Spanish (only Guaraní) I came to the capital city to live with another family when I was 9 years old. Although this was very hard for me, I am so grateful to the family that took care of me. That was an inspiration for me to do the same with other children and adolescents that needed a family where to live, learn from my experience and receive love.

My children were always supporting the children and adolescents living with us at home. In fact, it was my son who suggested to continue fostering when their father died. Nowadays I am working out of home again, cooking and I also have green fingers. My son is a police officer, and has his own family (that live in the

same house with me, besides one daughter and her son. My older daughter is also married and left the house.

20. Magui

When Magui and her family became the family home of Lidia she was the general coordinator of the organization ENFOQUE Niñez. Although she always wanted to be a family home and they already had the experience before with a boy. It was not planned for her and her family to receive Lidia and her baby at the time they did. It was a response to a critical situation in Lidia's legal process, because she had planned to live by herself when she was 17 and the judge did not allow her. That day she had no place where to go and since Magui was there at the audience in Court with her, she offered herself to assume the legal responsibility and receive her at her home.

Lidia agreed since she knew Magui and did not want to go to a place with people she did not know. She was scared at that moment and Magui's offer was a relief for her, as she mentioned. So, she did for a couple of months until she moved to Lucy's house, after a process of knowing each other.

Magui, her husband and daughter of 5 years old became Lidia and her baby's family home in 2007. They continued in contact for some years and nowadays they usually see each other at the supermarket where Lidia has worked for the last 10 years.

Materials

In line with the dialogical-collaborative stance this study starts from, all materials collected were based on unstructured, open conversations. The intention was to participate in a *relational*, *reactive and spontaneously* (Shotter, 2009) way with all the actors, whom were the protagonists of the main work and – as Anderson & Goolishian (1996) would say - the *experts* in their lives.

As Gadamer (2004, p.385) expresses,

> We say that we "conduct" a conversation, but the more genuine a conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner. Thus, a genuine conversation is never the one that we wanted to conduct.

Rather it is generally more correct to say that we fall into conversation, or even that we become involved in it…. The partners conversing are far less the leaders of it than the led. No one knows in advance what will "come out" of a conversation…. A conversation has a spirit of its own… (in: De Fehr, 2008, p. 29).

With the **young women** the first conversations were one-on-one, as were the conversations with the **family home mothers**. All of these conversations started with the same open question: What do you remember of the joint work?

As the family home mothers had experiences with several family home placements, it proved to be hard for them to talk about the work we did together with some specific adolescents. It was sometimes not possible to separate the reflections, feelings or stories of the many people they received in their lives throughout the years. One of the families, for example, had in their home two of the adolescents invited to take part in this research. With all of them, we flowed along the conversation guided more by the issue or topic instead of dividing the conversation in relation to which adolescent' placement we were remembering.

The group conversations with the **professionals** were also open and with no pre-designed questions or topics. The invitation was to talk about the joint work with "XX" and the opening question here was: What do you remember of the work we did with xx? What would you like to share in relation to that? In each group conversation, the way each of the participants joined the conversation was spontaneous.

In the final group conversation with the young women I entered the conversation as co-responsive (DeFehr, 2016). I started the meeting by sharing how the previous conversations with the young women, the professionals and the family home members had touched me. Next, the young women were invited to include how they were touched, with the intention of going beyond the traditional data "analysis". This was one way to continue the conversation, be able to transform through it and not assume the analysis and interpretation of what is expressed. As Ghiso explains:

"For its part, the methodology used is generated by relating three associated concepts: dialogue, interaction, critical communication where the people involved in the process participate in unveiling the facts,

negotiating understandings, expanding explanations and proposing practices capable of transforming". (Ghiso, 2009, p.12)

Procedure and data collection

After the selection of the five critical cases for this study (October 2014), the **young women** in each of the study clusters were located and invited to participate using their phone number in the organization's files. The initial invitations were made firstly through a phone conversation, in which the general aim of the study was explained, and where and when to meet was agreed on. All the young women chose to have the conversations at ENFOQUE Niñez's office.

During the first meeting, the aim of the study was explained again, supported by an invitation letter to guarantee the person understood the context of the study. If the young women agreed to participate, they were asked to sing an informed consent form. They were also asked to choose whether to participate anonymously in the study and offer the name they would prefer to use.

Throughout the conversations with the young women, which professionals and family homes should be included in the study was discussed. Once clarified, selected professionals and family homes were approached.

The **professionals** were invited by e-mail and having responded, phone conversations were made to arrange where and when to meet. Both the young women, and the professionals chose ENFOQUE Niñez's office.

During the first group meeting, the same procedure was developed as with the young women. Having explained the aim of the study, the professionals were asked to sign an informed consent form, in which they were asked to choose if they would like to participate anonymously or use another name for the study.

Family homes were initially contacted by phone. After the group conversation with the professionals, each family home that received the young women, in the present study were contacted and the aim of the research explained, and all of the family homes accepted to participate. The same procedure was used as in the process with the young women. After planning the meeting, participating family home members could choose where to meet, so as to make them feel as

comfortable as possible. All the meetings with the mothers were held in their homes, except for one that asked to meet me in a coffee shop.

At each meeting the family home mothers were asked to sign the informed consent letter in which they were requested to select a chosen name for the study.

It was the intention to have as many conversations as are needed with the participants until we have defined the saturation for this research.

As Martinez-Salgado (2012) explains,

> "(…) the researcher must continue investigating not until perhaps unattainable saturation point, but as far as he/she can consider that is possible to say something important and novel about the phenomenon that occupies it. Once he/she has arrived there, surely what will have to be said won't be all, neither the only, nor last thing you can say about it. (Martinez-Salgado, 2012, p.617)[34]

Throughout the research process, it became more and more clear that this quest for saturation probably required the different stories 'to meet'. While this was less needed for the professionals and the family home mothers (as they already have met several children and adolescents, each with their own stories), a group conversation bringing the young women together, seemed an important next step.

Each of the young women had, during the individual conversations, expressed (in different ways) some need to know more about how other young people in the same situation were experiencing their own: *'sometimes I wonder if I am the only one who had to struggle with all this stuff'*. So, in a very spontaneous way, following what they expressed during our first conversations, I asked to each of them if they would be able and if they would like to meet with all the other young women involved in this research. In this meeting they would have the chance to reflect all together about the topics that emerged from each conversation (with them, the professionals and with the family homes).

The aim of the meeting was not to reach consensus: "Openness, participation and response, rather than consensus or agreements are crucial factors in each

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[34] Idem

dialogical situation" (De Fehr, 2008, p.26).

All of the young women were very enthusiastic about a joint conversation and agreed to participate. The meeting took place at the ENFOQUE Niñez office (December 2017).

Lidia, Jessica, Ximena and Verónica attended, but Beatriz was unable to. Her son had had a minor accident and were at the hospital at that moment, therefore we arranged a new conversation with her later on. During this last conversation the young women received their printed personal stories, in order to be read carefully and rewritten together with the researcher.

In total, 17 conversations including 20 people (individual and group conversations) were performed. Figure 1 gives an overview of the data collection process.
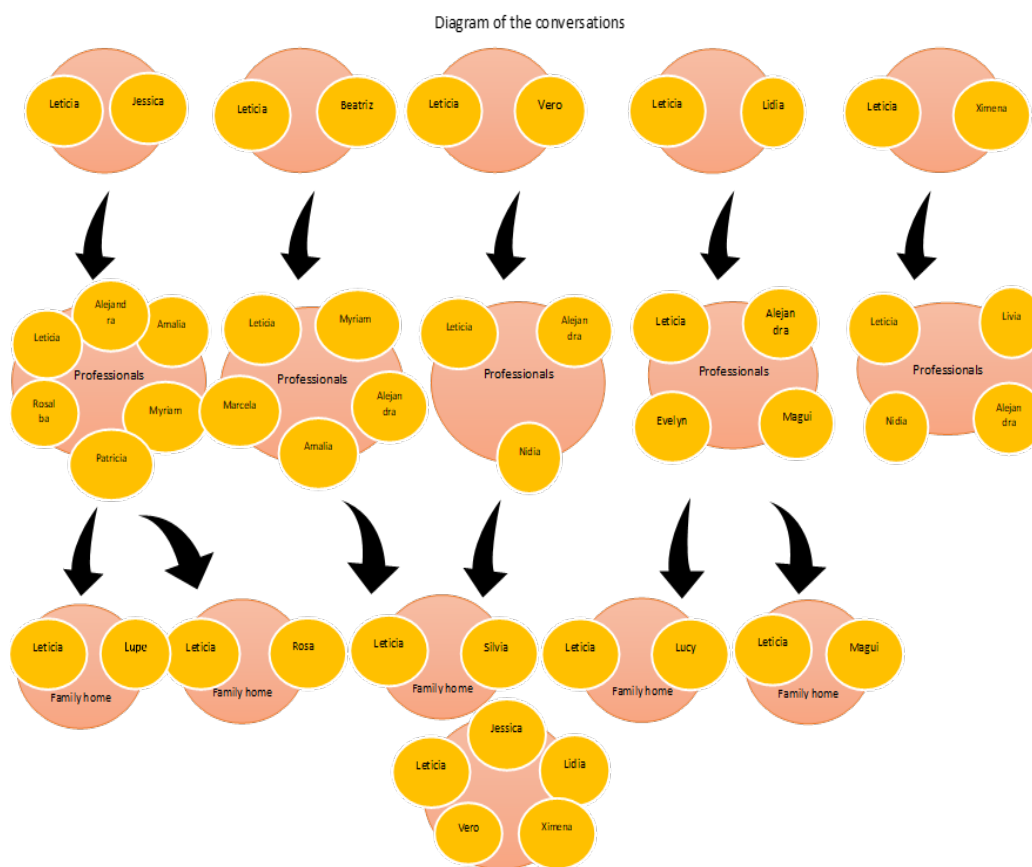

Figure 1: Diagram of the Conversations

All conversations were held between December 2015 and December 2017. How

long the conversations should last was not decided beforehand, though each individual conversation lasted between 32 to 76 minutes. The group conversations lasted between 58 to 75 minutes.

All conversations were recorded digitally, literally transcribed afterwards and in a textual format. Transcripts have been read in their entirety, providing a series of impressions and new questions that were included in the subsequent work.

Analysis

In search of an analysis framework

Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT)

Understanding that the main source of data proceeds from the conversations with participants of the therapeutic work, a process of inductive analysis, based on constructivist grounded theory, was chosen for this study.

As it was originally defined by Glaser & Strauss (1967), the grounded theory proposes a rigorous approach and a series of qualitative analysis techniques which generate theoretical insights. Although this original proposal allowed the strengthening of qualitative investigation and its exponential growth, it was also intensively criticized. Despite its strongly inductive nature, which draws it near a constructionist approach, according to Charmaz (2017) grounded theory still continues to be recognized as a modernist methodology because of the use the researchers give it.

One of the best-known critiques on the original grounded theory approach, has probably been formulated by Strauss and Corbin, and it was published in their book Basics of Qualitative Research (1990). In their proposal, grounded theory foresees concepts created after grouping data. These categories created in turn can result in a theory developed from the categories properties and dimensions. Although the information may proceed from diverse sources (interviews, audios, observation, memos, among other things), the result of said process can become a description grounded in well-developed concepts.

Strauss and Corbin mention three types of possible coding:

1) The *Open coding* emerges from the interpretative process, where the data is

divided analytically with the objective of thinking or interpreting the phenomena from the reflection of data.

2) The *Axial coding*, which happens with the relationship between the categories with their own sub-categories, establishing multiple relations.

3) The *Selective coding*, through the organization of categories according to one central category.

Despite the changes proposed by Strauss and Corbin, the procedure still leans too close to modernist traditions. Because of this, Charmaz (2008) has suggested an epistemological turn to grounded theory drawing it nearer to a postmodern methodology. This *"inductive approach with its openness to new ideas and critical self-awareness may also be a fitting procedure for postmodern enquiry"* (in Bloor & Wood, 2011, p.98).

This postmodern version of the grounded theory, which Charmaz (2008) calls Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT)

> uses the methodological strategies of the original version but builds on its pragmatist heritage, shifts its epistemological foundations, and resolves contradictions in earlier versions of the method. The result means placing grounded theory in the social constructionist tradition, viewing data as co-constructed with research participants, puncturing deeply held methodological preconceptions, and subsequently fostering a heightened methodological self-consciousness. (Charmaz, 2017, p.1)

Within CGT it is understood that theory is constructed and not discovered. As explained by Charmaz (2008) *"the grounded theory method begins with inductive strategies for collecting and analyzing qualitative data for the purpose of developing middle-range theories"* (p.397).

As main principles of the use of grounded theory in general and CGT specifically, researchers assess the possibility of generating a theory beyond description, and of the application of received theories. On the other hand, they prefer the development of new concepts of the processes instead of assuming stable structures, understanding that the context and situations make them change constantly. A positive aspect of this methodology, Charmaz highlights also the interactive nature that the researchers can adopt throughout the whole investigation.

Charmaz (2017) describes coding as a way of proposing questions that broaden our knowledge and vision, since the codes themselves do not represent 'truths', but better what we can see and define in a specific moment (and therefore is subject to change). In her words,

> Rather than assuming that theory emerges from data, constructionists assume that researchers construct categories of the data. Instead of aiming to achieve parsimonious explanations and generalizations devoid of context, constructionists aim for an interpretive understanding of the studied phenomenon that accounts for context. As opposed to giving priority to the researcher's views, constructionists see participants' views and voices as integral to the analysis—and its presentation. (Charmaz, 2008, p. 402)

Lastly, this author, in understanding the differences between the CGT and an objectivist one, defends the careful examination of the following: the relativity of perspectives, stances and practices of the researcher, his/her reflection and how the social constructions of the studied world are presented.

The use of the Qualitative Analysis Software, ATLAS.ti 7

Given the large amount of data collected, the analysis was performed using ATLAS.ti Analysis Software. ATLAS.ti is a computer program for the content analysis of texts, audios, images, videos and geodata. Originally created in Germany, its first official version dates back to 1993. Version 7 of the program was used for this research. Said version was launched in 2013 in its first version in Spanish. (Rodríguez & Calderón, 2014)

The Atlas.ti program can be considered as an auxiliary tool in the systematization of a large volume of information in the process of creating codes (from emerging themes in each conversation), categories and groups of categories, which are basic processes within CGT. Although it provides a valuable and agile way to organize data, the analysis depends exclusively on the skills that the researcher has developed in doing so. In other words, the use of the software reflects the decisions that the researcher has made throughout the process of coding and analysing the data, from their own interpretation (considering participant's voices and context) and being aware that the way

chosen to create and organize codes is not 'the only possible way' to do so.

The main concept is exploratory, constituting it as a support to carry out a qualitative analysis better organized and more rigorous, guaranteeing the necessary flexibility for this type of research.

After having collected all the conversations, I read the transcripts several times at different moments of the process. Using Atlas.ti, the first process of coding for all the seventeen conversations was performed. The coding is an essential part of the first analysis, which is possible to do using the software (textual level), to identify the themes, significant moments in the conversations and also some concepts that would be an important part of the second analysis. Nonetheless, it was also useful to write memos with my reflections, and inner dialogues while reading and coding.

Within Atlas.ti, the conversations were organized in the following order: the first group of conversations with the 5 young women, then the second group of conversations with the 5 professional teams, the third group of conversations with the 5 family home mothers and finally, the conversation with the group of young women and the last one with Beatriz (the young women that could not participate with the group).

As a result of the first coding, 95 codes popped up. After reviewing those codes, the following step I took was to write the description of each of them. During this process it was possible to decide when it was necessary to fuse some of the initial codes, (because they were too similar) or to relate and cluster them until it was not possible to continue. After this process was done, **55** codes remained, with **821** quotes related to these codes. As a result of several readings of all the quotes from each code which I was evaluating to make the necessary connections, Atlas.ti. became a significant and helpful tool.

In the next level of analysis, codes were clustered within Families of codes, making it possible to organize them in order to invite all the voices to answer the research questions. Four Families of codes were created: Challenges, Relational Aspects, Family Home Placement and Meaning of the work.

Even though the constructionist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2008) was decided on as the chosen methodological proposal, taking into consideration the importance of recognizing which language games (Wittgenstein, 1953 in

McNamee, 2014) are present in this particular research, I have decided to refer to the "codes" as emerging themes of the conversations and the "family of codes" as categories from which these themes will be grouped and described.

This grouping into categories, which are part of the understandings and decisions, intend to describe themselves as one of the possible ways of generation within the multiple possibilities (McNamee, 2014), assuming the risk of offering a version – in the search of being coherent with the local, particular, historical knowledge of this thesis – which can answer the questions that will allow us a way to, as McNamee would put it, 'continue together'.

> In other words, the constructionist researcher is invited into a reflexive space where deliberation and curiosity are features. We want to explore which inquiry process will help us know "how to go on together," to paraphrase Wittgenstein (1953). (McNamee, 2014, p.82)

As McNamee explains, within the relational investigation, we assume the premise that the social world can be understood and defined in multiple ways. This process is, therefore, subjective and will be delimited by the vision, cosmovision, historicity and locality of the researcher.

Even though the emerging themes of the conversations will be presented based on the organization of the created categories, it is important to highlight a transversal thread in the questions and in the categories. This has to do with the *relational aspects* of all the therapeutic work done throughout the experiences included in this research. The 'Relational' aspect could be seen as a great umbrella in which the categories, and themes can be located. Each of the categories of themes is described below.

In the following sections, the themes within these categories will be discussed in detail related to the research questions that were formulated.

In section 1 of **Themes emerged from the conversations** chapter, to answer the research question: "*What are the challenges of the collaborative and dialogical practices in the work process between all actors?"* is addressed by describing the Category of themes named **Challenges**.

1. Challenges, with 14 themes, one of them as an "Overarching theme" composed by 3 other themes.

> Complexity
>
> Time
>
> Expectations (Overarching theme): Expectations + Frustration + "Failure"
>
> Professional challenges
>
> Different stances in the team
>
> Forced therapy
>
> Prejudices & Adultcentrism
>
> Adolescent Pregnancy
>
> Gender perspective
>
> 'Vulnerability' & need for familiar support
>
> Institutional Fragility (system)
>
> Need for more follow up and articulated networks

In section 2 of **Themes emerged from the conversations** chapter, with the intention of answering the research question: *Which working elements are identified by the main actors (adolescents, family home members and the professionals involved from ENFOQUE Niñez) in the collaborative practices with adolescents (referred by the child protection system) who have been separated from their families?* two Categories of themes will be described, namely **Relational Aspects** and **Family Home Placements**.

2. Relational Aspects, with 12 themes:

> Relational Ethics,
>
> Relational responsibility
>
> Trust
>
> Empathy
>
> Cluster of themes: Close relational bond, treat and love received in the Family Home & Tenderness
>
> Care
>
> Joint work
>
> Participation & dialogue
>
> Professional's emotions
>
> Importance of having conversations

Family Home Placement, with 11 themes

Meanings of living in family home placement for their life

Treat and love received in the Family Home

Adaptation process to the Family home

To be included as part of the family

Maintenance of the bond with the family home

Stay in the Family Home

Meaning of family home placement for the Family Home mother,

Daily difficulties in the family home placement

Concerns in the family home placement

Family home placement and spirituality

Previous experience of family home placement

In section 3 of the **Themes emerged from the conversations** chapter, with the intention to address the last research question: *From the perspective of the adolescents, the family home members and the professionals involved from ENFOQUE Niñez, how do they describe what was helpful in the collaboration with adolescents (referred from the child protective system) who have been separated from their families?* the Category of theme '**Meaning of the Work**' will be described This category comprises 13 themes.

3. Meaning of the Work with 13 themes:

    Meaning of the work done within their lives

    Meaning of the therapy

    Meanings of living in family home placement for their life

    Meaning of family home placement for the Family Home mother,

    Help

    Emotional support

    Force for change, innovation,

    Recommendations to others

    Autonomy

    Resilience & Moving on

    Responsible motherhood

    Learnings

    Helping others

In the following chapter, I will describe how these themes were co-constructed, providing some ideas about how each theme was defined, and which aspects were considered during the conversations. By doing this, I invited the voices of the young women, family home mothers and professionals to 'dialogue' about each of these themes. Occasionally, reflections of other scholars will be brought into the discussion, with whom I had my own inner dialogues reflecting on that theme.

Although I decided to include as many themes that emerged during the conversations; on some occasions, the reader will find many extracts of the conversations and in others, just one or a couple voices for each theme. On other occasions some of the themes that are very closely connected will be clustered in the description, to facilitate the fluidity.

In the **Themes emerged from the conversations** chapter, I use the first-person singular "I" to refer to my inner dialogues, experiences, questions, ideas from my role as researcher, or when I am describing my specific role in the work process. When I use the first-person plural "we" my intention is to bring forward ideas of the Organization ENFOQUE Niñez (including the philosophical stance, methodological or agreed practices, goals, concepts, etc) from my role as professional team member.

Chapter 4: Themes emerged from the conversations

Section 1.   Challenges

To answer the research question: 'What are the challenges of the collaborative and dialogical practices in the work process between all actors?' the Category of theme named **Challenges,** will be described.

This category is composed of 14 themes. One of them was created as an overarching theme: Expectations, composed by 3 themes (expectations, frustration and 'failure').

Complexity

One of the concurrent themes that came up during the reflections, especially with the professionals, was related to the **complexity** of every situation we experienced with the families we work with. Within the complexity, chaos, unusual, unknown and many other descriptions that made us think about how to collaborate while feeling in a constant movement as, ironically, is life.

What is included in this theme could be related to the context (country, living conditions, protection system, cultural practices, among others) or related to the difficulties presented in one situation (e.g. because of opposite stances from the various people included in the decisions) or in general. The complexity could also be related to the various aspects, risks and amount of people involved. Partly, elements of the conversation about the complexity that is described not only have to do with the understanding of the situation but also with the work that was needed to be done. This topic remains very close to the ethical and relational responsibility and the challenges that each of the actors faced during the joint work.

I would like to bring the voices of the professionals that worked with Jessica, reflecting on different aspects of that **complexity**. Patricia describes her experiences about the complexity in terms of different stances and many actors involved in the joint work.

I'm always marvelled by...the complexity, you know? and how one stands from the complexity perspective (…) And not looking for the pair's consensus, because it is not possible. Sometimes, it was about working among the difference. Um...with a system (referring to the public system) *that didn't contribute much.*

And, then, each family home had their own complexity, their own style, their expectations…

She describes the "marvellous" of complexity in terms of challenge and how to position oneself in it. On the one hand the number of actors involved, with their individualities, belief system, values, even particular expectations; coexisting simultaneously with a specific situation (each with its roles, desires and responsibilities in relation to the latter) within a larger system that is often "insensitive" to this particular ethic and position necessary to include complexity, valuing the possibilities that emerge from it, and avoiding the attempt of homogenization, generalization or simplification (Ravazzola, 2002, Gergen, 2014a, McNamee, 2015).

Amalia delves into another level of complexity, the internal one:

[this work] *Is super challenging, and it is super complex... I think that this kind of bond that we generate...because you want to put yourself in the position of ... expert, professional. You also want to put yourself in the position of ... the adult. You want to put yourself in the position of 'the mother' as well. You want to put yourself... in that place... with good intentions, right? ... I mean, it's difficult to break away from ... all those places. And, you do not know - ... You meet with ... and you follow your instinct. ... what your common sense tells you.*

Here Amalia, introduces another aspect of the different roles, indicating the 'multiples selfs' (Gergen, 2006) that each of us 'play', all the internal voices (Seikkula, 2014) and how those (from each of us) talk amongst themselves. Especially when we have to 'choose' one of them that would generate 'possibilities' (in the conversation, in the relationship) and not the contrary. Then she continued, moving to another aspect of working within that internal and external **complexity**, the uncertainty:

> *You put yourself out there and ... you do not know what is coming! I mean, no ... You meet the unknown, but ...like there is no recipe, right? And it's not safe either. That is, what dictates you that if I tell her what to do in this life? ...*
> *Alejandra: ... you're not going to be wrong.*
> *Amalia: Yes*

In Alejandra's last comment, when she *moved* the conversation to the possibility of being 'wrong', Marcela joined in the conversation with her reflections about the importance of 'being there' (that will be deepened in the 'relational ethics' section, later on) and the internal 'fight' between being there with a 'static' position or with the flexibility enough to include the **complexity** and distinctiveness of each family and their situation (Anderson, 2012b).

> *And how to maintain that. And be constantly there...* [she made a brief pause, and all the participants gave her the space to continue] *With our, with our own stories, right? Because it's like a constant fight, you know? On one side you have your moral which says, "this is what it should be, this is how it should be". But on the other side you have the rest: time, understanding, checking, analyzing. And with the family home as well. And there is like several things at the same time: family home, adolescent, um... family of origin*. *(Marcela)*

At the end of her reflection, again the **complexity** related to the number of actors involved simultaneously in this joint work, is introduced, together with the inner ethical questions and the different roles and actions professionals should have considered while performing this work. Regarding this latter aspect, I think of the need of being aware of the type of structures and relationships we collaborate in creating from an inevitably power position from the professional role (Pakman, 2002).

Within the **challenges** faced and considering the **complexity** described, another recurrent theme that emerged in the conversations was **time** and its presence was related to different issues.

Time

The different aspects of ***Time,*** outlined below, were crucial both for professionals, to be able to carry out "quality" work with relational and professional ethics. Here, the "thoroughness" with which the work is done is also mentioned. Besides, ***time*** appears also as a key factor for young women in relation to staying in the family home and having the organization's support.

When discussing time, I have recognized its relationship with various aspects:

- The length of time the protection system establishes and would accept as "good enough" for a proposal.
- The length of time that the family "needs" to live whatever is necessary to live to be able to decide, to change their mind once, or twice…
- The length of time needed by the adolescent to live in a family home, or stay in their own family, and the time the family homes find feasible to include a person in their lives.
- The length of time that we – as an organization- have the financial resources to accompany each family
- The time that each professional can continue working with a family or an adolescent regarding the situation and how the relationship affects their own life.
- How time allows the creation of a special type of relationship

In one of the conversations I had with the professionals, talking of what they remember about the work with Beatriz, this was how Marcela reflected upon:

> *For me, 'the **time**' was fundamental when working with Bea, both for her and me, for my learning. When I worked with her, even though I had worked at ENFOQUE for some time, it was my first experience with family home placement, before that as I was more on the periphery.*

> *Another very important thing for me is that I believe that we, thanks to that **time** we dedicate to the process, other types of bonds are created, we come to love the people with whom we work, (...) and we do not lose the ties. (Marcela)*

Marcela introduced ***time*** considering the 'learning' aspect within the process, then she reflected on how the 'time' collaborates with a special kind of

relationship and feelings (that will be delved into in the following section). Alejandra enters the conversation,

> *Alejandra: They* (referring to Beatriz's family) *had **time** to do the things they had to do to make Beatriz be back in the family. She* (Beatriz) *did what she had to do.*
>
> *Marcela: It seems to me that the different thing is to take the **time** in ... letting the story to continue unfolding. I mean, it's still happening, right? Because it's the only way ... it's giving the other person the time to tell what she wants to tell from her story.*
> *I think that's what makes ENFOQUE different and our work. That **tiiiiiiiime** we see, analyse, review, review our practices, ... That continuum glance, right?*
> *[Time] to me is ... the biggest portrait, right? That encompasses everything. Give yourself that time to ... Let things continue.*

Marcela emphasized how she considered time as vital for the process and the work. As Håkansson (2009) pointed, **time** is an essential concept, "time to do wrong. Time to gain trust, both in yourself and in the other. Time to doubt and misunderstand and to put things right. (...) Time to dare to hope for what has yet not happened and is not yet known, but that might provide a new opportunity" (p.22). This concept continues to be part of the reflections in the conversation with the professionals,

> ***Time*** *also allows, uh ... allows a family to have the interactions as they do in families, right? That people give what they can give in that interaction. And not go in* (the professionals)*, stay a little while, set the stage: "you stand here, you stand here, you do this, you do the other." And get out, take a snapshot, and leave saying, "we solved the problem". When in reality afterwards people must keep breathing, they must move, they must feel uncomfortable.*
> *Time also allows us to be able to, by accompanying the family, understand the interaction, how it works, and collaborate depending on how that interaction works.*

And that is what, we also saw ourselves with, when interacting with other (professionals) *teams. That is, when you go and force the stage, eh ... the photo is very beautiful, but, there is a responsibility with what is left after. Or with the decisions that are made depending on the photograph. (Alejandra)*

Now Alejandra mentions another theme: 'responsibility' besides an *ethical - political concern* (Rasera, 2015), that will be deepened in another section of this writing (2.Relational Aspects), the importance of *accompanying* the family into a *process* that cannot be guided in a 'results' logic (like the snapshot she mentioned) and to be aware that we (professionals) are entering into the evolving family history life, the story didn't start when we entered (Pakman, 2002).

I find it also important to reflect on another aspect of Alejandra's comment. When she referred that families "must keep breathing, they must move, they must feel uncomfortable" inviting the idea of allowing the natural people's responses, accepting them as they are instead of putting our professional **expectations** that could be oriented by the idea of success, "fast solutions to problems and a product-oriented type of intervention" (Camargo-Borges, 2015, p.72), not chaotic (McNamee, 2015), or linearly progressive in a 'positive' way.

I would like to introduce these themes that were mentioned in the overarching theme:

Expectations: Expectations + Frustration + "Failure"

In all the conversations these topics emerged in one way or another. Each of the women I had conversations with, expressed something that they expected to happen differently and how the fact that did not occur like that made them feel.

In many of the conversations with the professionals the idea of "success" emerged; the tension between what the professionals think is expected from their role (Anderson, 2012), the institutions (Cecchin, Lane & Ray 2002), the system and what happens in their work with the families.

Efran, Lukens & Lukens (1993) explain that we (professionals) were trained for consensus and therefore we developed similar expectations and frustration

when things do not go as we would have liked. This is how we tend to let the families we work with, "waiting" or "wanting" what we think is desirable for them and we feel disappointed when they do not. By adopting this position, we diminish generating many feasible possibilities to go on. As these authors pointed, "in these contexts, which support (*and promote*) consensus, the interesting thing happens in disputes and not agreements" (p.63)

As we can see below, in the conversation with the professionals, talking about the work done with Beatriz, they expressed:

> *Amalia: Eh... Of the very high expectation that we put on* [ourselves related to the others]. *And, when we put that aside, it's like ... we do not have that ...*
> *Myriam: Frustration.*
> *Amalia: Yes. That feeling ...*

Now, it seems that Amalia invited to a significant topic for all those present in the conversation, since they start talking simultaneously...

> *Myriam: ... of not getting results.*
> *Amalia: ... of not getting that.*
> *Leticia: Or how we internally* (in the organization) *define the purpose of the work.*
> *Amalia: So ... When you put that aside. That is, abandon your high goals, your expectations ... Then, there, you will be different ... in the approach, in the joint work. Not so frustrated and ...*
> *Leticia: And you're going to relate differently with the other?*
> *Myriam: Yes, because it is to embark on a journey with the other ...*
> *Amalia: And I kept that, Right? ...I think that helps me a lot, with these processes. With Beatriz, and with other processes with adolescents, for example. Because, if not, you get that feeling that "it did not go well." (...) And because we have those expectations, right? expectations... of having the other person listen to you. "How is it that she doesn't listen to you if you are telling her to do so?", Right?*

Now Alejandra and Myriam joined in the conversation again, with intensity and louder tone:

Ale: "How come...If I'm willing to help you."
Myriam: "How come you don't understand?".

At this point there is a silence, it seems that what was expressed strongly impacted on each of us,

Amalia: Yes indeed.
We put our expectations, a lot of expectations on people.
Because I think the richness, precisely, of the joint work, is the process. And yes, some escaped from their families, some went to an institution, others went to live with their partner, had children when they were 15 years old, right? That is not within the 'parameters of success', within a joint work.

Myriam: I just wanted to say that I stayed on that. I believe that, many times, we will not be able to see 'the result'. But I believe, within Beatriz's story, yes! We can see 'results': she was able to ... make decisions, eh ... to form a family, to love her children, to have a partner, ... to keep fighting for that, being that she did not have those tools of affection, of love, of family, of ... being loved…and nevertheless she is doing so.

Marcela: I mean, what I value from our work at ENFOQUE is that ... we're still here for what's coming, right? Because the stories do not always end pretty, with a happy ending.

This situation of **expectations** arose in the conversations with the team when they referred to several adolescents. Although it manifested itself in different ways: for example, in the conversation before, related to the work done with Beatriz, professionals were referring to how the fact of having 'expectations' could not help them regarding the situation the family was living and the decisions that the adolescent made were not into 'those parameters'. In the following excerpt, the professionals referred to the same topic but considering another aspect. They were talking about the **expectations** that other professional teams had on our work with Verónica and her family:

Alejandra:... and then, ... there is also all the **expectations** *in the other team with which we worked, about what was our role in the maintenance of the relational bonds, when a judgment came about "Why we did not avoid a suicide?", how did we not do the work we had to do to prevent this lady* (Verónica's stepmother) *from making that decision?"*

The silence covers the space, and Alejandra continues after a pause,

I have that in mind, what are the expectations of other people that maybe do not do this work to reach the family, to have conversations and ... to also understand that people's lives go far beyond the conversations they can have with you, although the conversations at some point can be transformative, they will not always prevent misfortunes or decisions that are far beyond the topic that you were talking about.

While reading this part of the transcription and remembering that conversation, I found the memo I wrote about it. I reflected on how to balance between our 'dreams' and 'wishes' for the other to be able to experience and the trap that we can easily fall making them more 'our desires' than from the others. This not only puts us in a 'frustration' position, it also puts the other into the 'failing' position by making use of their freedom. In the conversation with one of the young women, Ximena, we were discussing about something close to the latest. She was describing her 'frustration' regarding the work done:

Ximena: (...) For me it did not work, and it was annoying to tell everything that happened to me and that my mother did not see it that way. I mean, I'm sorry and I'm really grateful to you, because that really helped us. To come here and tell what was happening to us, to be able to trust someone, but ... from their part (referring to her parents)*, it could not be completed because they were not 100% predisposed, right? (...) And we lived a long time badly, because of that, but ... that just what I felt ... that you could not do your job well because of that ...*

Leticia: What would it have been for you to "do our job well"? what do you imagine it would have been like? What should have happened? (Asking about her expectations)

> *Ximena: if they had had a little more openness towards you, I think they would have achieved the goal of what ENFOQUE is, which is to help put the family in conditions so that it will be good again, right?*

I found it interesting that when Ximena expressed her expectations, she incorporated the 'goal' of the organization, also as part of her 'frustration' (from the professional's point of view) I wonder how this is related to the fact that after years she became a psychologist and family therapist. The professionals that worked with Ximena and her family, shared '***frustration***' about the same. I would like to move into what Livia expressed in the conversation with them:

> *For me working with families in situations of violence is a very interesting experience (In Ximena's case) we never expected to separate the mother from the father. Right? That was not the intention. (...) Our intention was for the children to be well... They knew that the mom was not going to separate at that time from the dad. Because that was not the fight, right? The fight was for him to stop mistreating, to stop bothering, to be like eh ... neutralized in some way. right?*

> *Eh ... And I think we were trying to do that, right. I mean, it was not insisting and working with the mom about ... She knew the way.*

> *He* (the father) *never talked to us. But, something happened ... That has nothing to do with our intervention. I think it has to do with the intention of the Judiciary, right, and other bodies that are watching what happens inside the house.... Some things moved. In other words, the dynamic was more between the parents .... The couple moved further away from the big children, right? And they* (the adolescents) *also had another power, right?*

> *Eh ... Today I'm sad about this story because of what happened to the oldest brother. Eh ... And my thought stays there... It's the first time I'm crying. (Livia)*

At this point the conversation became very emotional, the reconnection with the situations that happened after the work process ended, emerged in this part of the conversation with strong feelings of sadness, especially for Livia, whom stayed in contact with the family through the years.

When talking with the group of young women, they were referring to how they understood what the 'main goal' of the joint work was. While sharing reflections on that, **expectations**, **frustration** and the feeling of **failure** came out within some of their expressions:

> *Lidia: Even though it does not have a happy ending as they* (the professionals) *say, I believe that in the end it is partly a happy ending because what you do is to set back on track, help that person to find his/her way forward; they* (the professionals) *are not going to solve everything either, right?*

> *Ximena: For example, I think that the* **expectation** *when they say they could have done more is also part of the factor of our parents who did not give that opening as she says* (referring to Jessica), *who did not want to talk, did not want to participate, did not want to collaborate .(...) because Livia for example went to my house, rang the bell and my dad did not want to answer, did not want to talk, did not want to know anything, so I went out and said "Livia, just leave, because nothing in the world will make him talk to you", and I also knew that I was going to have implications afterwards,* [but] *she was quite understanding. Then I came to speak here, but that, I think they could have reached further if they* (professionals) *had something better, I don't know, like a requirement* (from the judge) *that the person must collaborate, I think that could be.*

> *I also felt that my parents, for example, were not sincere at all, and I think my mom was not as honest because the way they came, as she says, how they approached her. She for example believed that all of us siblings were going to be separated and that they were going to take us all to different places, so she was not honest with you because of that, the manner she was approached* (referring to the court team), *because they focused on saying "we are going to take your children away, your children are going to go and they are going to be in a place ...", it is that ... I do not know if error, but the way they* (the judicial actors) *approached her.*

Ximena reflects on some factors that, from her perspective, did not allow many of her expectations (and professionals') to be fulfilled: the non-participation,

considering how they were invited from the justice system. This leads me to think about the metaphor that Harlene Anderson (1999) makes about how to be *good hosts* and *guests* in the lives of people. Also, the importance of *being public* with our ideas inviting others to be in the same way. At this point I find the latest topic very close to another of the themes that emerged in the conversations.

Professional challenges

Although this is a topic that emerged in relation to many of the other themes within the big theme of 'Challenges', here it refers to when professionals explicitly acknowledge what they found challenging at a personal level. Sometimes it is closely related to the 'prejudices' (that will be described later on) that each of the actors had about the persons or about the situations.

I would like to include here, an excerpt of the conversation with the professionals in relation to working with Veronica:

> *Alejandra: There was her desire to be with her dad...We had the other team* (from the justice system) *on the other side too, with a lot of suspicion about what could be the intention of this dad or herself to go to live with her dad.*

> *Nidia: ... a lot of fear related to issues of abuse, mistreatment.*

> *Alejandra: And also for me it was a **challenge** as part of the team to be in favour of the father, for me it was very enriching when Nidia and you brought this idea "Yes, but that is the job of her father, we are not here to judge what her father does for living, we are here to see what lies in that relationship and to make sure the justice system does what it has to do."*

In this conversation, we can see the ***professional challenge*** identified by Alejandra had to do with how to recognize the great amount of prejudices and fears in relation to Veronica's request to live with her father: his way of living, the stories of mistreatment and the cultural practices of the neighborhood, the 'unusual' in terms of gender (the father assuming the care of a female teenager); and how these prejudices could be 'suspended' during the work of

family reintegration, listening and recognizing the affection and mutual desire of both (father and daughter) in both, a responsible and respectful manner.

In the following conversation, related to the work with Jessica, the **challenges** had to do with the difficulties of working with an adolescent and a family that refuse the professional work:

> *Alejandra: ... the refusal to receive support, to receive help. It was like... we had to be searching for alternatives all the time to, uh, to be closer to help. And, on the other hand, we saw the ... giant monster* (referring to the system) *she was in (…) So, for me, the joint work with Jessica was **challenging** from many points of view.*

In the last part of her comment, Alejandra identified another **challenge**: the complexity (giant monster) of the system in which Jessica was involved: her way of living, the people around her, the penal court, among others; and how to *move* inside that.

> *Patricia: For me, the accompaniment was a **challenge** ..., the situation of Jessica. (...) so young, already with a baby, right? And everything that her situation implied. Mainly, the relationship with her parents ... and because of this (judicial) restriction that she had, we started accompanying her with her family, right? And the visits there, ... that was quite complicated, ... So, the conversations, uh, at the beginning, like ..., they were a little hard.*

Here Patricia continues describing the challenging inside the situation and adds the difficulties of creating space for the conversations and collaboration in a very tense environment (before Jessica moved to live in a family home). Now Patricia is referring to the relationship with Jessica and how challenging it was for her in terms of the different roles she identified that were needed to be *performed:*

> *... for my part, I tried to be, more embracing, you know? More affectionate... and on the other hand, I knew I also had to be strict and draw the line, because Jessi challenges you, she went over your head, she... she would manipulate you* [between laughs]. *Because she is very clever, you know? She is very intelligent; And so, it was about backing off sometimes, in pointing things out and letting her go*

through her tantrums and everything. And it was not easy at all, you know?

At this moment, the conversation changed our mood, we found ourselves laughing at our own limitations and experiences during the joint work. Now Evelyn joined the conversation with another reflection about the **professional challenges** she faced while performing the work with Lidia:

Evelyn: Well ... about Lidia, firstly, I think how challenging it was, for me her story. And ... how creative one had to be to respond to, what it was identified as her needs.

Evelyn was referring to another aspect of the professional challenges many shared in the conversations that was how the stories of the children, adolescents and families impact us and what we do to move from pain to collaboration. Or how Peggy Penn (2007) would suggest, moving from empathy to compassion[35].

Another theme related to complexity, expectations, prejudices and that is considered as part of the **professional challenges**, is to have different stances in the team.

Different stances in the team

In the conversations with the professionals, exchanges arose about how the fact of having different (sometimes opposite) viewpoints, ideas about various aspects of the work, was experienced. Experiences could be related to dilemmas or ethical issues, different proposals for action or different ways of understanding the situation, among others.

In the following, Amalia gives us an example of this, in the conversation with the team involved in the work with Jessica:

From the team's perspective, from the coordinator's perspective... um... from the therapist's. There were like opposing opinions and we had to reach a consensus (to give a recommendation)*, right?*

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[35] "Empathy is the understanding of someone's suffering, but it differs from compassion where you 'feel' the person's suffering. (…) when we feel compassion, it means we look carefully at our own beliefs that are present in the act of suffering." (Penn, 2007, pp.106-107)

And the team also. We also had... our point of view, of how we saw it…it felt sort of very overwhelming…very much like... a feeling of drowning (...) Always from a point of view, of trying to... the part about not agreeing with the other's opinion, at least leaving some room... (Amalia)

Definitely, given all the actors (not only the professionals) that take part in each of the situations, and given the complexity that was previously described, it is expected that as many points of view as people involved can arise. In this context, the challenges professionals mentioned had to do with how to enable the coordination and coexistence of the differences and how to sustain the relationship and collaboration between professionals (both inside and outside the organization), as well as with the members of the families. This point will be taken up again later when I delve on relational ethics and responsibility.

On this matter, it is important to reflect on how power positions (especially in decision-making processes (e.g. the expert must 'know')- evolve: the type of relationships that is established (e.g. trust or competence), can facilitate to accept different stances within a team and even to value them.

Considering that the referrals are made from the protection or justice system, this implies that the adolescents (or their families) themselves, aren't the ones who request the intervention of the team of ENFOQUE Niñez. In some situations, the space of 'therapy' is a judicial provision in the first place. In those cases there is an additional challenge to build a bond of trust within a compulsory framework. Thus, **forced therapy** constitutes another challenge beyond complying with the judicial order, being able to create a 'useful' therapeutic space.

Forced therapy

Before entering the conversations related to this theme, and since I was the therapist in many of the referrals mentioned, I find it necessary to clarify the idea of therapy, therapeutic processes or being a therapist in the framework of this study.

Although it is not the intention to offer a static or unique concept, I consider Andersen's (2005) words "being a therapist is first of all being with others and

it is difficult to be with others when being together makes the other as uncomfortable as I am[36]" (p.39), as a starting point to describe the base of the present challenge.

As it was widely described in the introduction of this research, my personal and professional stance as a therapist, commune with collaborative and dialogical philosophical perspective (Anderson 1999, 2007). From that point, when the therapeutic relationship is obliged, I consider the main task, what Hoffman (2007) wrote in the following excerpt on Andersen words, "my wish is at this moment that we stop talking about therapy and rather talk of it as human art; the art to participate in the bonds with others". (Hoffman, 2007, p.77)

I would like to bring an excerpt of the conversation with Jessica about this topic:

> *Leticia: Can you imagine? You say you were coming against your will...*

Jessica starts to laugh with brightened eyes and a big smile….

> *Jessica: Yes! and now I come willingly!*

> *Leticia: Yes, how? I am curious about that moment... I mean, of course it would have been better that you came willingly, right?* (from the beginning)

Jessica answers vehemently

> *Jessica: Yes! but the Judge had sentenced that I had to go to therapy, so it was not voluntary... You can't... well, you are going because you must, not because you want to*

Now, there is a silence, like both of us are remembering that difficult beginning. Jessica continues saying:

> *Jessica: And you win people's trust step by step... not forcing them...*

> *Leticia: Yes, that's for sure. He made it harder by forcing you... He made it harder for you and made it harder for me...hahaha*

Again, we found ourselves laughing loudly...

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[36] My own translation.

Jessica: Yes! that's for sure, hahaha

As seen in the conversation, the challenge of the forced therapy was dealt by what Hoffman (2007) called a "withness practice"; the idea of therapy as a conversation based on love (Efran, Lukens & Lukens, 1993). Far from it being in a romantic sense and not without struggling and difficult moments. (Håkansson, 2014).

I would like to reflect on my experience as a therapist in the context described above. The main challenge for me was not to do with the generation of a bond of trust with the adolescent or with the family, but rather with the responsibility that I assumed within the system created from the judicial intervention and their expectations regarding my role as a therapist. In that sense, one of the most important challenges has meant for me the expectation (and pressure) that I sometimes felt from the various actors involved. On the one hand, given the idea of the therapist as someone who can 'convince', 'educate' or 'correct' the other and clearly act as a mean of social control. Many times, I found myself in the situation of receiving the request: "convince her not to do this or that", "make her understand that this is for her own good", "you should work on the trauma", or even the request of the famous "psychological evaluations" with their respective "results reports". Those are examples of a long list of situations, requests and expectations coming from a more traditional view of therapy (and mental health) together with many cultural ideas and practices that are still reinforced in academia and the protection system.

Although the situation described often made me felt impotence, frustration (even angry), I always felt the satisfaction, the great honour and the privilege of taking part in the lives of many of adolescents and families the organization worked during the years. It also showed me in action the importance of participating in other spaces (like academia) to collaborate with the transformation of this traditional view of therapy.

The latter is also related to another of the issues that emerged in the conversations: Prejudices and Adultcentrism.

Prejudices & Adultcentrism

The concept of *prejudice* was studied by the German philosophers Hans-Georg Gadamer and Martin Heidegger. Gadamer (1987) described prejudice as "the foundation of our openness to the world. They are simply the conditions by which we experience, by which we can hear what experience has to tell us"[37] (in Cecchin, Lane & Ray, 2002, p.73); while Heidegger called it 'prior understanding'. Andersen (2005) explains how, according to our prejudices, we begin to understand people before we meet them. He explains how the influence that this previous understanding exerts on the 'real' understanding, and this is in turn influenced by the difference between the two, what is called the hermeneutic circle. From there, the tendency is understandable to 'see' (or understand) what confirms our previous belief.

On some occasions, ***prejudices*** were coming from the professionals on different issues related to the living situations of the families or to their professional role. In the following conversation with the professionals about the work with Ximena and her family, they were describing two kinds of prejudices in the same situation. On the one hand, since the father's refused to work with them, all the prejudices they had about him and on the other hand, the prejudice related to the 'need of including all' in a 'successful intervention':

> *Livia: Another, another lesson for me was ... a bit ... and it stayed like...a question, is what happened with the dad. Because we could not get to him, right? Like a door that could not be opened. Eh ... And it stayed that way.*

> Now Alejandra join the conversation hesitantly*: … A pending matter.*

> *Ale: A pending matter.*

> *Livia: Yes. The work with him.*

> *Nidia: Yes. I remember that he refused vehemently.*

> *Leticia: I'm thinking ... When you say Livia ... Or Ale, you said the word "like a pending matter". What are the questions, in relation to what would have happened if we could have worked with the father? Where does the idea of "we have to work with everyone" come from, which*

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[37] My own translation.

therefore, not having been able to work with the dad becomes a pending matter"?

*Livia: No ... Above all, I think that ... there were many **prejudices** regarding the figure of that father. And because we couldn't talk with him, I do not know his story either, no ... no …*

Leticia: ... That is, ours (prejudices)*.*

Livia: Ours... In relation to what we heard of how he was, all the context that there was. Eh ... And not being able to talk with him was something that stayed there, right? We cannot force anyone to talk ... Although there was a court order. But, it's like a part we do not know. I mean, what happened to him? How did this man feel?

In other conversations, most of the ***prejudices*** have to do with how the adolescents are looked at, what is demanded and expected of them by different actors or by the system, as we can see in the conversation with the professionals that worked with Jessica:

Alejandra: Deep down, um... I don't know what the problem was. But, …at...the moment of making decisions and communicating with Jessica, the adults' discourse was very present. The same thing was happening at the Prosecutor's office. The lady (referring to Jessica's mother) *went and filed a complaint against Jessica. And, instead of investigating what the problem was, the prosecution opens... a new investigation concerning Jessica. Which also made us think and rethink about the issue of filing a legal complaint, because, for the adults, it wasn't very clear who was the victim of what. Because the mother, would go and file a complaint or say, 'Jessica went out' or...'was partying' or 'goes dancing'. And so, any chance of discussing anything besides Jessica's behavior fell apart.*

I previously discussed the complexity, the difficulty, because... um... If we could count on those institutions, on people who clearly understand... what they must investigate and judge and what they have to charge them with... But... but there was a lot of confusion there.

Leticia: You mean in the Justice system?

> *Alejandra: Yes, in the Justice system... Many times, we felt really bad about the judge's hearings.*

In this conversation Alejandra is describing how, *Adultcentrism* (which is, the supremacy of the adult's discourse or view on things) clearly influenced the prejudices that were held from the system that should protect the adolescent, parting from a complaint made by the mother who was not questioned at any time (mainly because she was the adult and the how she had described her daughter.) That is, the system approached Jessica from a prejudice that did not allow them to 'see' other fundamental things that were happening (as the abuse from their parents). This represented a challenge throughout the entire process among the various actors involved.

Another way in which prejudice was shown is when the **Adolescent Pregnancy** came into view. I would like to introduce this transversal theme that is important to consider as part of the challenges that are included in this section.

Adolescent Pregnancy

Considering that Lidia, Jessica, Beatriz and Verónica had their first child at ages 14 and 15, this topic is present in the whole vision and complexity of each situation described in this study. Throughout the conversations, aspects of adolescent pregnancy such as school desertion, the need for sexual education, the negative impact of separation from the baby and the issue of forced abortion was highlighted. "Running away from home" is also included as an alternative that appears to avoid abortion and in the absence of family support during pregnancy.

I think it is important to highlight that Paraguay has the highest adolescent pregnancy rates in the South America. This means that 20% of pregnancy occurs between 10 to 19 years old and each day 2 girls between 10 to 14 years are giving birth[38], while mothers of another 55 babies born each day are between 15 and 20 years old. (UNFPA Paraguay, 2014)

The analysis of this situation is complex because the factors involved are very diverse, resulting in girls having to assume roles and responsibilities that could

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[38] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=smDtK-ZnFAs

affect their development, future possibilities and that of their children, also considering that they do not receive any type of state support (and often even from their families). In Paraguay girls and boys do not receive health and reproductive sexual education, abortion is punishable by law and although it is a secular state, it has great religious influence. Two of every three pregnant girls or teenagers do not finish school placing them in a situation of possible precariousness (also considering that they are single mothers and with less labour opportunities).

As the study by Moragas (2012) shows, adolescent motherhood reflects a problem of social inequality, since it is more frequent in sectors of the population that could be considered more disadvantaged. "The link between teen pregnancy and poverty is one of the central debates around which the adolescent maternity study revolves." (Moragas, 2012, p.16)

Another theme that appears -transversely- has to do specifically with the fact of being a woman or being a man, which was named: Gender perspective.

Gender perspective

In the conversations, this theme was associated with **prejudices and expectations,** about gender stereotyped cultural practices, beliefs or social roles (Ravazzola, 2002) that influenced both the professionals, the system, the decisions of young women, among others.

One example, 'to count on the help of a man to raise their children and continue studying', young women conversed. This referred to situations in which the best option the adolescent had was to depend on a partner (man) who supported her emotionally or economically, to be able to take care of her children or to continue studying, seeing this as a sign of 'love and help' and not as part of their responsibility. Obviously, the lack of support from the extended family, and from the state (in terms of protection) put her also in a vulnerable position. Verónica commented on the situation she was living at that moment,

> *Verónica: I was pregnant (...) and had problems with my dad, he reprimanded me all the time and I cried all the time and he* (a new man in her life) *was my ... my choice and after two months that I had*

my son, I went to live with him, I left my dad and I went to live with him.

Leticia: You were 15 years old?

Veronica: Yes, 15.

Leticia: And in what sense was he an option for you?

Veronica: I said, "I no longer wanted to be a burden to my dad" and, I left my house, grabbed my baby, and I said, to that man: "I have my baby" and he said, "come with me, I'll do good for you". Afterwards, I told him: "I want my comforts, I want more things", six months did not pass, and he gave me the whole house, until now, very soon he became fond of my son...

Another example is related to her father wanting to assume her care which generated a lot of suspicions from the judiciary (again related to gender stereotypes) and professionals working there about what 'his real' intentions were (they thought about having his daughter as housewife, as a partner, etc). In the following extract of the conversation we can see how professionals reflected on what they found as 'unusual' in terms of the cultural practices of caring for children and what is expected (prejudices) considering he was a man:

Leticia: *I remember that in that sense the situation was like, unusual, a mother missing, a bunch of siblings we couldn't find, a father who wanted to take care of her daughter and being so present...*
Alejandra: *But at the same time* (the father) *was not making the decision that had to make to truly take care of her, which is also a cultural issue, right? Him, being a man, alone, having a woman in the house was like... a necessity, and there was this need to live with a woman and on the other hand the desire and the responsibility of having a daughter, which we couldn't judge in isolation, because it was part of a cultural context…*

And here, Verónica reflected on the same situation and how she experienced that:

After everything that happened when I was a child, he told me when I went back with him, that he would never again have me like that, (…)

> *And my dad broke that promise, and when my dad was busy, like I said, with his girlfriend, his drinking and he neglected me, my brother and me, and I was 13 years old back then, and I had to make sure that when my father came back from work, he had food, wash his laundry, I mean, I was practically the woman of the household...*

During the last part of her comment, Verónica describes other aspects that I can recognize as very common in our cultural context, in relation to activities and responsibilities that are expected of a 'daughter, mother, wife' or simply as roles that are view as *naturally* corresponding to women: care, attention, motherhood, upbringing, among others that allow to design the possible life project for women -including all women participating in this research-, which with their actions and conversations can reinforce those ideas and beliefs. (Goodrich, Rampage, Ellman & Halstead, 1989)

Reflections on how gender issues can be understood, should necessarily be analysed in a larger context. Like in the situations described, -as minor examples- both the prejudices of the professionals towards the father and the decisions that Verónica had to make, happened in circumstances of 'vulnerability' and need for familiar support.

'Vulnerability' & need for familiar support

Moving onto this theme, there are descriptions made from the participants with the intention to emphasize the dimension of their needs (from their particular view), or how critical the situation in which they were living was. In many occasions this is closely related to the institutional fragility (system).

Reading the previous descriptions, I can recognize as one of the cross-over themes, life in conditions of material precariousness (poverty) or in conditions described above as 'vulnerability' or 'social injustice'. Analyzing this problem exceeds the scope of this research; however, I would like to highlight some issues that I consider important as a framework for understanding the impact that poverty and 'vulnerability' has had within the challenges encountered to collaborate with the families that are derived in this work.

Macedo (2017) refers to social exclusion as a systemic phenomenon, in which there is an interrelation of phenomena: the difficulty of access to rights influences the self-perception of people, which leads them to the separation from their environment and marginalization, repeating the circle.

In this scenario, I consider the importance of working with the awareness that the subjective aspect of 'vulnerability' and the need for support can be deconstructed during the work of inclusion of families, (which does not pretend to "provide" them materially, but to facilitate the access to possible resources and networks in the different areas of their lives), collaborating with what Macedo (2017) calls the *generation of authorship*.

In the following conversation with Beatriz regarding the recommendations that she gives to her friends, she is describing how difficult the situations she went through were that put her in a vulnerable position and needing family support. It is important to notice that she is in a different position at the moment, an experienced adolescent giving advice to others, and taking care of them,

> *I only want them, if they get the chance, to finish school, I want them to be someone in life, I can still do that, but I am going to figure that later on. I don't want anyone to go through what I went through, I suffered a lot in this life and the worst of it is going through stuff in the street, sleeping in the streets, not eating for three or four days, five days, being malnourished, I went through all that, I was cold also, I slept in the streets, on the floor, on the grass, but today I am still standing. And that is what I tell all my friends, they look at me with surprised faces. (Beatriz)*

These topics were also reflected in the conversation with Ximena and with the professionals. They shared views on the influence of financial conditions and the possibilities to change that, and then the 'absence' of governmental policies and resources,

> *Ximena: financially for example ... if she had had some support, a subsidy ..., she for example sometimes did not have resources, to get her out of there* (the situation of violence).

> *Leticia: You mentioned, Livia, 'there were no conditions'. What do you mean?*

Livia: Economical, I think. To continue sustaining the long processes. To hold it…

Leticia: Yes, I even think how different the possibilities would had been ... and even, emotional ... if the mother had had, support for the number of children she had. In other words, there were food issues to solve, which generated a lot of stress to the family. Eh ... And for the older children too. And they were looking for work while they were studying. That is ... if there had been support, at least for the younger children, that would have greatly reduced family pressure.

Livia: Because I also think that they are families that ... are very lonely and need help in ways to accompany their children. Because, either, we are not a country like others, where the State helps you think about the best forms (of raising children) *You are going to reproduce* (patterns), *if you are not very reflective. So ... uh ... they need some information. In other words, it is not only listening, but information, accompaniment, and some response that they are looking for because they do not find it in other places.*

Within the social context of poverty, another theme emerged from the conversations: Institutional Fragility.

Institutional Fragility (system)

This theme refers mainly to the ideas and perceptions about the characteristics, limitations, non-articulated services and programs, lack of policies, the view and prejudices professionals have of the families, among others that are part of the institutional system (justice, educational, social, health, etc) in Paraguay. The participants of the present study referred about this *fragility* of the institutions or the protection system (social) in the context of talking about the **challenges**, with the **complexity,** sometimes also revealing the **expectations** they had on the system and that usually generated **frustration**. **Institutional fragility** is closely related to the theme of '**vulnerability' & need of family support** and the **time**. In the sense that generally the more institutional fragility, and 'vulnerability' in one situation, the more time is needed in many aspects of the work to be done. Although I can 'see' some connections within the themes, it

is not my intention to create 'causal' or 'lineal' analysis. These reflections are always connected to the conversations I had in this research. I would like to invite Ximena, who referred to her experiences with the protection system. She mentioned the 'precariousness' and compared what she knows about how it is in other countries when you count on a 'articulated and well-completed system'. Finally, she includes her vision referring to the impact on women.

> *It seems to me that ... the national system, defends the criminals, rapists, abusers. For example, I made my complaint at the police station twice, since I was 15 years old. Because on two occasions, of the many and thousands, I had to call our police station, and my complaint disappeared and how? (...) both the police station and the prosecutor's office, everything is very precarious, there is not a good system ... we cannot compare with other countries (laughs)* [where] *there is an articulated and well-complete work system. But not here. The woman is quite abandoned.*

For their part, the professionals focused on other aspects that make institutional fragility,

> *Nidia: Well, actually the whole structure of the State remains very much in that idea of stigmatizing. And to impose saying " do this, then this ... if you do not do it, ok then…" when in fact, institutions like the Judiciary system, the Child Secretariat, the Codeni* (municipal service for child protection)*, could have a work plan that includes all of them* (referring to actors involved and the whole family)*. Looking at the fact that, of course, there are families that due to fragilities will take more time. And the thing is there are more conditions to go back to repeat situations, whether of violence, or conflict. So, I think that this work plan must be, of course, not from the stigmatization, or "or the going backwards, "once again you didn't…" not from such a punitive stance.*

> *Leticia: Yes.*

> *Nidia: obviously, they need another type of ... conditions so that in the long run, well, it can be set back on track. And afterwards the family will walk.*

> *But there are families that take more time…*

The importance of respecting the processes with each family was highlighted together with the attitude they are received and treated within the system. Just where families go looking for support are institutions that mostly have a type of management governed by standardized procedures, statistical measurements, social control. These institutions "represent socio-political forces and the ideological beliefs of the culture[39]" (Macedo, 2017, p.334) maintaining them and sometimes resisting the critical reflection on those and their transformation.

Finally, Rosa, a family home mother and an experienced social worker in the field of Childhood governmental programs, introduces her analysis related to what happens when adolescents become 'adults' for the law. At the end of her comment, she also includes the topics of 'bureaucracy' and corruption; other aspects that contributes to the system' fragility.

> *Because when children or adolescents reach their legal age it is like they are helpless again. It happens with children in street situations; they turn 18 and 'goodbye', out of the system, and they despair; they want to go somewhere where they feel protected and realize that it is their last chance, "when I turn 18 I am out of services" it's like* [at 18] *you wash your hands and that's very sad, the social policies, the state no longer fulfills that role, it's throwing you into the void, and they know that if they commit an infraction the Secretary is not going to be there, it will be on the justice (...), and the bureaucracy here in our judicial matters is very messed up, depends on who gives money* (referring to bribes).

Need for more follow up and articulated networks

Considering the latter, participants reflected on the ***Need for more follow up*** after the team (or the judge) decide to finish the work evaluating how much could have been positive, useful or preventive; if there had been some kind of continuity. It also has to do with the importance of developing ***articulated networks*** with other actors to achieve sustainability. In the conversations, these topics where reflected together with others like expectations, frustration

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[39] My own translation.

and "failure", professional challenges, especially at the institutional and macro level (system).

In the following conversation, the professional team reflected on these topics related to the work with Ximena and her family,

> Nidia: *Actually, we know this situation … even though for a while it seems as if it is resolved, … it is a long-term process, so that it can 'effectively' generate other life conditions and such.*
>
> *Livia: And for them to have a larger network as well…*
>
> *Nidia: Of course.*
>
> *Livia: and for families to search for other support networks.*
>
> *Leticia: When I think about it, I mean, it's paradoxical…where is the line where one says "ok, some way or another I have the guarantee that if I do the follow-up visit I am helping, or they see me as helpful, or that I will be able to avoid certain issues… and to what extent I am not." right?*
>
> *Livia: I think there should be certain criteria, right? For example, the coming of age could be one, right?*
>
> *The network… that is, the family already has other more positive networks. From the beginning of the process with us and finishing with a network. Additionally, unite the institutions with the informal networks...... formed by the families, right? friends, who else?... also, the children themselves.*
>
> *I mean, like certain indicators...For example, dropping out of school…*
>
> *How much I draw closer and how much I draw away. That is, it doesn't have to be something exactly after 30 days, every month but it can be every once in a while. It can be a phone call.*
>
> *I mean, in what way starting to step back, but with the security that there are other things for the family, right? That they can hold up alone, right?*

Clearly, the professionals reflect on the need for follow up and the conformation of the networks as something that goes hand in hand. I would like to take the networks notion of Pakman (2002), as a metaphor that speaks of social relations bringing the attributes of "containment", "support". Pakman points out that "the network is not an objective in itself, but a metaphor for action that allows maintaining, expanding or creating desirable alternatives for members" (p.301)

I would also like to consider Sluzki's (2002) proposal about how stories are (from a multidimensional and macroecological perspective) affecting the perception and construction of the families' networks. In this sense, I consider it fundamental that the passing of professionals through the history of families offers enabling narratives so that the expansion of their networks contains stories that enhance their resources.

Finally, the professional's concerns regarding follow up and the importance of articulating networks become a crucial factor regarding 'care leavers', which Gilligan (1997, & Sabatés, 2017) extensively studied and noticed the paramount significance it has in helping them to develop an autonomous life.

Section 2.   Relational Aspects

Considering the Challenges described, and with the intention of answering the research question: 'Which working elements are identified by the main actors (adolescents, family home members and the professionals involved from ENFOQUE Niñez) in the collaborative practices with adolescents (referred by the child protection system) who have been separated from their families?' two Categories of themes will be described in the current section, namely **Relational Aspects** and **Family Home Placement.**

Relational Aspects contains 12 different themes. Among the relational elements, I could distinguish the first two themes presented in this chapter; *relational ethics* and *relational responsibility*, as transversal to all the themes that emerged during the conversations. Based on these, which appear in all the relationships and conversations between the young women, the family home mothers and the professionals are: the *trust*, the *joint work*, *participation* & *dialogue.* As for the type of relationship and treat, I am referring to the *close bond*- for which *empathy* was crucial- and the *tenderness*, the *treat and love received* in the family home particularly, along with the *care*.

Finally, and specifically in relation to the professionals, the theme of the *emotions* towards the work and the importance of generating space where professionals can undertake the *conversations* needed for each are highlighted.

Relational Ethics

The concept of *relational ethics* is grounded in what McNamee (2015) called 'Radical Presence' as explained later in this chapter. To talk about relational ethics, I would like to suggest the following:

> Embracing a relational ethic requires that we abandon reliance on abstract principles and formal codes – not in an attempt to create chaos or anarchy, but in an attempt to pay attention to what is

> unfolding in the specific contexts and relations in which we find ourselves". (McNamee, 2015, p.376)

Emphasising the idea of 'local contexts', the ethical commitment with getting to know and to respond to what every situation or relation calls for implies avoiding following dominant discourses or a set of 'abstract ethical codes'. This idea of relational ethics allows to consider new possibilities of how to develop relationships with adolescents, families, colleagues, the protection system. This means, to increase the alternatives, to invite creativity beyond 'the state', beyond what it is 'permitted' and limited especially in our professional discourses.

To understand this concept of ethics, Rapizo (2017) refers to the notion of relational responsibility as having a sensibility for the connections, to develop a commitment – even reflexive vocabulary to "question the discourses of the individualism" (Rapizo, 2017, p.65).

When working with these young women, to agree on many things was not necessary. Finding a common place from where it was possible to build trust and a relationship together was important.

Relational ethics being such a fundamental and sensitive topic, related to the kind of work described and the experiences lived implicated in this research, I would like to bring the voices of the actors involved in the conversations:

> *Jessica:* [What is important] *Is that he or she will not feel so lonely, that you will all be there to help him or her ... that they will have someone to count on and that is what is worth a lot ...*

> *Their* (referring to the team and family home) *support, no one supports you like this in your life just because. It's because it has a synonym of what happened to you that it's there ...*

> *Leticia: When you say support, if you could enter that word, what would you see there? What other words would you find?*

> *Jessica: In the emotional, in the company ..., many things ..., not only for being there, but to be there in each of the things, or maybe it won't be there all the time, but it is there to support in whatever is possible.*

Leticia: Is there something that you can think of concretely, in your daily life, that makes you feel that the other supports you?

Jessica: When someone asks you: how are you? One question: how are you? can make your day much better. And you asked me many times, hello, how are you, Jessi?

Or Rosalba and Paty were going to see me, those are the things ... or a "good morning" from (family home members) *...Or a: how did you sleep? That is worth a lot...*

At this moment, the conversation became very emotional, and Jessica is pointing out many of the themes (emotional support, help, not being alone) that were very important along the work process that will be deepened further on.

Leticia: I also think about ... there is something that the others give you and there is something that you are also open to receive, right? That is your part ...

Jessica: Yes ...

Leticia: Is there anything that helped you to receive?

*Jessica: To **trust**. Because I did not want to talk to you at first, not Rosalba, not Paty. The first time I felt forced to come and talk ... Yes ... It's the fact of trying to trust a person.*

Leticia: And that was your decision ...

Jessica responded laughing,

Yes ... and that's why I'm here today, and I'm still talking to you and I love you very much ...

In this extract of the conversation with Jessica, the importance of the necessity to coordinate actions that could allow the generation of a common 'ground' from where to build trust, become clear.

In the following conversation with the professionals that worked with Jessica, the topic, which she had previously brought up, is newly mentioned, not only in direct relation to Jessica, but also in terms of the complexity of the coordination between all the members of the team.

Alejandra*: For me, working with Jessica was challenging from the beginning. And …(...) the only way in which we could help her was ... uh ... **Being there***. It was the feeling I had. And that, many times, put us, took us to the limit of our ... our ... eh ... ethical issues.*

And, in fact, on several occasions, within the same team there were different stances about how we should treat her and how to accompany her and how to give her the, the possibility of care, um... bearing in mind the whole diversity of things we had to work on. Starting from the autonomy of her as a teenager, from her voice as, ... as an adolescent, which was also our responsibility to bring; from the voice of her daughter (baby at that time)*, who is also another person who had no ability to verbally express "I like this, I do not like this, this is good for me, this is not good for me". Eh ... From our adult point of view on what a teenager should be, or what the care of a child should be. And, on the other hand, the relationship between them.*

At this point, the conversation became a little tense, like it used to be during the team meetings when discussing about the same topics...After a pause, we continue:

Rosalba*: And ... it was clear that the parents abused ... Jessica. They abused her, in the sense that they made her work in (…) being an adolescent. That was very clear! Because Jessica, at her age, a teenager, was the one who took care of all the expenses of the house. Pay the rent, the food, the ... the comforts of the parents ...for everything. It was her...*
And that was very clear to us. That is another issue that ... that ... also seemed to me, on which we - we could intervene. But, to avoid confrontation with Jessica, we did not file the complaint, right? Another thing that hung there ... in the ... in the air. And we did not do it institutionally, neither ... nor ... did we reach an agreement to do it personally or in particular.
Leticia*: Yes ... I remember- ...*

> Rosalba*: I mean, I could not go to ... to file one, a complaint just like that, because what we had talked about here was not ... not to confront with ... with Jessica in that, in that aspect, because ... Jessica had, had her, her ties to her parents as well. A relationship that, in my opinion, was better to avoid than ... continue to strengthen, because they took advantage of their daughter. And they took advantage of that feeling she had, ... of wanting to feel the affection of her parents. But, no…*

The conversation continued with reflections about the complexity, the challenges and all the ethical dilemmas and different aspects that we had to consider at the same time...

> Leticia*: yes… I remember ... all the conversations and conversations and discussions and conversations we had about that. And how much of it, too, uh ... was ... well, was the judge already aware of, himself. Right? And what we said ... For me, eh ... (...) how will all the members of the family feel protected? And, when we asked ourselves, well, if she must go to testify, is she going to say it? Because she did not want to denounce them.*

Reading this part of the transcription and remembering the whole conversation and many of the discussions we had related to our joint work, I found it important to remind myself of the idea of *radical presence* (McNamee, 2015), as a way of finding how to 'go on together' especially in situations that we may call ethically difficult, such as the work we were describing during the conversation, and when we had opposite stances. This situation described by Rosalba, also led us to other themes described in the previous chapter, like *professional challenges*, having *different stances in the team* and the *prejudices*. Whereas those were the aspects reflected in the conversation about the work with Jessica and her family, in the following, Alejandra was reflecting around relational ethics, but this time focusing on the 'how' to accompany, deal with ethical dilemmas, difficult situations and 'what' they found important to do in the joint work with Verónica and her family:

> *I do not know what else it could have been other than to put ourselves in her place, her need, her history, her record, respect that and respect*

*her desire at that moment, at her age, with the story that she had already lived, (...) it was Veronica's father, it was Veronica with her father, and I think that was present and because if I have a record also of having participated in the team meetings and not so much of the interviews and visits and even so Vero was present, "Vero says, Vero brings, Vero wants, we talk with Vero, we talk about Vero with so-and-so " (...) we could have taken another way. There the thing was to sit down and **listen** to what Veronica was saying.*

In this part of the conversation, Alejandra highlighted the importance of respecting the local context during the entire work process to understand the situation and maintaining an ethic sensitive to the local. Similarly, we can see these aspects of the theme in the conversation with professionals about the work done with Ximena's family

Livia: *it seems to me...they did not feel judged.*

Alejandra*: There were moments in the conversation that had to reach that level: "Remember you have a responsibility" ...It is not that we do not talk about things so that they trust us, but we talked about everything with great respect. And we also achieved that they could listen to everything we went to tell them. Yes. Because I remember that conversation we had there in the house. There were little children ... And it was in that tone ... And she took it as a help, rather than as...*

Livia: *Rather than as a threat.*

Nidia*: Yes. I remember that you had commented that after the meeting. It was more about understanding and contextualizing everything that the situation implied and not as a threat like 'the police will come to you' …*

Ale*: Or we're going to report you ...*

Nidia*: So, it seems to me that this possibility is what also makes the families themselves open up, makes them contact you ...They maintain the relationship. Beyond, even, the closure of a process.*

In both professionals' team conversations about working with Jessica and Ximena the topic of **relational ethics** appears when describing the process of generating enough confidence to establish a relationship with families. Families who were accustomed to being 'questioned' and observed by the justice system (in the past) and found during these experiences in a different position: not being judged, listened and able to tell their stories respectfully.

And finally, in the following extract of the conversation with the professionals' team in relation to the work with Lidia where we can see, as in the previous conversations how they reflected on what was the principal ethical commitment:

> *Evelyn: (...) what I believe we did and fulfilled is in bringing her voice. Eh ... And ... and to listen to that and ... and to comment according to that.*

> *I think that was the difference.*

After a brief pause, the conversation slightly moves to another element to consider while reflecting on the **relational ethics** aspects, the professional power ('omnipotence') and the responsibility on its use:

> *Leticia: It makes me think about the omnipotence that we can have ... as professionals that are passing through in the lives of people. Just for little while.*

> *Evelyn: Indeed, and it makes me think of the **responsibility**... Because for me the question is what responsibility you have when making, eh, a recommendation...*

> *Alejandra: (...) and there it is your training, it is ... your way of seeing things. And how much responsibility there is in the education that one also receives. Or search for. The training one seeks to do their job better.*

Here Alejandra brought another topic related to the educational background of professionals and how our theories and training influence our gaze and the way we performance our work.

This conversation happened in the context of reflecting on a decision the judiciary technical team made in relationship to this young woman and what they thought of us.

> *Evelyn: Yes. I remember that the technical team* saw us *as an ... [laughs] "irresponsible team", eh ... eh ... that in a way, well, crazy*

As we can see, the last part of this conversation introduces to the concept of **relational responsibility** that is closely related to the relational ethics.

Relational responsibility

The reflection, of each of the actors, on the responsibility that each assumed in inter relation, appears throughout the conversations. Responsibility also from the point of view of the commitment one assumes when offering help (emotional support, care, therapy, psycho social support, fostering, among others).

A topic definitely closely tied to relational ethics. Coming from Bauman's (2011) idea of the utopia proposed by modernity, thinking that it was possible to generate codes of ethics from which human behaviour can be valued, as the law "attempts to define 'proper' and 'improper' actions in situations that will be qualified. It sets the ideal of plotting exhaustive and clear definitions that derive clear rules (...), leaving no grey area of ambivalence and multiple interpretations" (Bauman, 2011, p.18).

The underlying contradiction is to think that in every situation there is a single - or few - possibility for action and many other 'bad' ones that should try to be avoided or discouraged. The latter, from my point of view, is more like a desire to seek uniformity, regulation, control, which is only possible from the use of power (of professional, legal authority, and the like). The aforementioned is opposed to respect and attempting to understand the 'logic' from which each decision or action makes sense and is understood in its own context. As Bauman (2011) explained, this necessarily forces us to coexist with the uncertainty that appears when leaving the illusion of a code of ethics that regulates our constant 'gaze' or 'evaluation' and the derived responsibility from leaving it.

Let's look at the reflections from the team of professionals working with Ximena and her family

> Alejandra*: ... maybe we could not help the oldest brother to have a better life ... But somehow Ximena and her sister were there ... and the mother, to receive what we could give them, because they viewed*

> *us from another position and not from the judge's, who tells you what you must do.*

After this was said, there was a silence, as if everybody was thinking what to say next. Maybe it was also the need to make room for the feelings each of us had of those memories.

> *Nidia: It really is sad, this topic... of the oldest brother's final process...I think that, sometimes..., or at least the questions that I ask myself...it's as if I am working with the process of deterioration, and, sometimes, that generates many questions in me, in terms of "what I'm doing".*

> *Leticia: you mean, like we get there late?*

> *Nida: yes. I know I do not have the responsibility. But well. The fact of being there working so closely, that is, I cannot avoid ... I also cannot avoid putting myself in that situation of responsibility.*

> *He* (Ximena's brother) *also made his decisions. Well, they were not the most 'appropriate' ones. But ... It's like... that produces a lot of pain.*

The silence covers again the space. After a moment Livia says:

> *Livia: Yes, and I appreciate this space, because I needed it and did not realize. So…*

This was the final part of the conversation that took place in the meeting to reflect on the work done with Ximena and her family. And the issue that connected us was with the responsibility around the news of Ximena's younger brother's death a couple of weeks before the meeting.

The theme of **relational responsibility** also emerged during the conversation with some of the family home's mothers. They remark on the importance of knowing what the position is, that will make the difference in a harsh situation.

> *If we can, we try to give them tools, but above all, at that moment, you must be their support and hold their hands, open our doors to those in need and lend a hand to help them go on, not drown them when things are bad, on the contrary, help them float. (Rosa)*

> *... but it also leaves us with a very important and very clear lesson: that it is worth fighting for a person who has gone through ... who has suffered so much, because she is not to blame for everything that happened to her... it fills me with pride to have been part of her learning and that nowadays she says "no matter what, I'm going to be a psychologist", and she's serious, she's going to become one and maybe she's going to help, hopefully not children who have gone through the same as her, but if that is the case, she better than anyone else will be able to help them, because she will be able to help from her own experience… (Lucy)*

During the conversations, when the topic of relational ethics and responsibility was touched upon, it was very common to spontaneously reflect on what it was that allowed us to develop a relationship of collaboration. This introduces another element which had to do with being able to find a common ground where to generate mutual **trust**.

Trust

Within the conversations, this theme refers to the moments, factors, facts that helped the young women (or families) feel, in their own words, the **trust** both with the family homes and the therapist or the ENFOQUE professional team. This topic became transcendental, also considering that we (professionals or family homes members) were not in the life of these young women, because they knew us beforehand.

In the conversation with Lidia, she referred to *trust* in relation to the importance of being available for what she needed:

> *Lidia: What happened to me was that I ... it was a total change for me, and I felt very confused, at the same time I distrusted everything, the only people I trusted were you, you were the ones who helped me …*
>
> *Leticia: What made you trust us?*
>
> *Lidia: Let's see how I can explain it ..., for example...I lived with an aunt whom, as soon as she knew that I was pregnant, she kind of left*

me aside. When I received your visit, it was like...there was hope for me, I do not know how to explain it, it was like I no longer felt so alone, that's how that trust started, I was not alone anymore.

In this excerpt of the conversation with Lidia, one can observe more of a *relational* explication than a representational one (Shotter, 2009) in the way she tries to explain the *difference that made the difference* (Bateson, 1972), in making it possible for her to start trusting. In this example and the subsequent description she continued with, I can recognize the importance of *acting sensibly* and *appropriately* (Shotter, 2009), which facilitated the creation of a *common ground* taking into consideration this relational process. Lidia also referred "I was not alone anymore", describing the new network she was creating together with us, remarking its importance as a key point of feeling supported; a topic that was described before in **the need for articulated networks**.

Continuing with the topic of **trust**, professionals shared reflections -related to the work with Ximena- about the relationship with the judge, the trust she had in our work and how allowed us to design with autonomy the work intended to be done with the family and through that, as shown in the conversation below, generating trust with the family:

> *What I remember is that the Court had a lot of confidence in our work. She* (the judge) *had the police report in a drawer and only shared the file with defenders and the Prosecutor's Office. Right? And she did not show the file to other people.*
>
> *To us, yes...Eh ... She was very respectful of our work and our reports... the Court let us work and **trusted** in why we were not making the complaints, well, even though that in the reports we said that they continue having situations of violence and so on. We never stop reporting either. And the family knew that.* (Alejandra)

Later on, the reflections continue about what was important in the generation of trust with the same family:

> *For me, it was having **responded** to the request for help made by them, with our **openness to listen**, of **not judging**, eh ... of not going to criticize people. That's what I mean. That ... **Respect** their*

> *timing, because I remember too, well ... "We can make a report of domestic violence", "no, let's wait".*

> *It was also to join the family for the moments when they were ready to make decisions. And I think that generated **trust**. And surely also, ...to enter **their language**, to validate what they said.* (Alejandra)

Once again, the 'elements' Alejandra described as helping to generate trust to be able to work when the situation was so tense and there were doubts about what the following steps should be, describe more a kind of relationship, Shotter (2009) calls the *determinant context* in which trust is built. I also acknowledge how these factors like: "getting involved in their language, respecting their timing, not judging them, being open to listen" among other things, were key factors in allowing us, to be *penetrated by the otherness of the other* (Shotter, 2009)*.* This *moved* us to respond spontaneously (and probably not only verbally but also physically) and being mutually involved. This aspect is exceptionally significant for one of the other topics: '***joint work***' (which will be analysed later on) and fundamental within the collaborative stance (Anderson, 1999).

Livia, in the same conversation, reflected upon the topic, talking about how the family continues being close after the work process officially 'ended'. This as a natural 'result' of the mutual trust.

> *I think that ... In different situations, they came to find an answer and we tried to give them what we could.*

> *Eh ... I was close to the family...In other words, it is as if we remain as very close referents of the family. As someone to whom to consult some things with. Right? And I think that was achieved by **trust**.* (Livia)

Related to the generation of trust, another of the themes mentioned as key ingredients that collaborated in the joint work, I would like to move on to the importance and role of:

Empathy

In moments in which professionals and family home mothers referred to ***empathy***, they were mostly describing the ability or the necessity to put oneself in the place of the other to be able to understand and help. From the

professionals' perspective it is also considered as the way of thinking or feeling each story from their own history and different roles (Pearce, 1994) in their own lives. As Gergen (1991, 2007) named, their *multiples selves*: as a teenager, as a mother, as a woman, among others.

When thinking of my own idea of *empathy*, I found myself pondering about the role that empathy has as a *decisive factor in the comprehension* of others' experiences, which Epston, White and Murray (1996) highlighted. I found an example of this in the narration of Patricia, while talking about the work done with Jessica:

> *Our concern was her, her well-being and her daughter's, right? and...*
>
> *It was a bit of ... of patience too, of giving ourselves that space, of being there.* **It really got to me**, *um, that at the beginning... you could tell she wanted to talk but she held her tongue. right? She sorts of said things like... between clenched teeth almost. Or she was so angry sometimes, that, afterwards, we would allow her, to talk about it. That is, by reading... Beyond her own expressions. Because many times it wasn't with words, you know? it was in her gestures, her movements. All her spoke, you know? and it was "mmm" ...* **seeing** *her suffering, there, so palpable, right? And in that moment- because it was a moment, at the beginning, when she was in absolute crisis. So, it was then, after that hard time, of opening up, she let go. Maybe it was that moment that helped also, that suddenly opened a small window.*

In the conversation with Patricia, besides the story in which she describes her feelings and connection with Jessica, she also vividly described the 'scenes' or situations where words could not be used, while we reflected upon the young woman's reluctance towards having visits or conversations. The expressions of body language were the main characters in the communication. I found myself, at this point, with the notes I took during the reading of the complete conversation, and I found, in the margin, the name *Tom Andersen* and I would like to invite his words: "I used to think that we have movements and feelings and language inside us [But] we are in them: in the movements, in the feelings, and in the language. And we do not shape them, they shape us" (p. 122 in Shotter, 2015)

The situation described by Patricia connects me with the ideas that Andersen (1996, 2012) emphasized: the need to respect the space, the rhythm in which it is possible to invite the words; especially when the pain hinders the opportunity of having the internal dialogue heard externally. Andersen was referring to a kind of *relational* knowledge.

In the following part of the conversation with Lucy, she reflects on this topic, *empathy*, while remembering the experiences with one of the adolescents.

> *I used to arrive tired from work, there she was waiting for me and she was crying, we sat there, and I talked with her, she listened, and she seemed to understand, but suddenly it was like she remembered everything that happened to her and what they did to her, and it was starting back from scratch...*
>
> *I tried to **put myself in her place** and that is what ... is difficult ... because I see cases in school, girls that are maybe going through the same situation but in the end, nobody says anything, nobody files complaints, and you cannot just jump right into that because it's not possible.*

After narrating her experience on how difficult and necessary it is to generate **empathy** during the family home process, trying at least to comprehend, to draw closer to what could have been the experiences of the young women, Lucy reflects on the relational responsibility in this drawing closer. She also shows 'in action' the importance of 'being present' (Håkansson, 2014).

Lucy's reflections also allow us to introduce to a cluster of themes that were recurrent in many conversations and which will be described in the following paragraph.

Close relational bond, treat and love received in the Family Home Placement, & tenderness

Since sometimes in the conversations it was not possible to separate these specific topics, I have decided to cluster them to facilitate the reading of the reflections with all the voices.

The theme of the **close relational bond** emerged in every conversation I had with the family home mothers, the young women and the professionals. They mentioned it as crucial to create during the experience and 'as one of the most important elements' when discussing what is needed in this work.

Specifically, family home mothers used expressions like: 'making no difference in treat between the people staying at home', 'make them feel that they are one more member of the family'. Young women refer to this topic, expressing what was important for them while living in the family home to make them feel secure, confident enough to trust them and 'make use' of the experience. This topic it is also related with one of the themes that will be describe in the following chapter ('to be included as part of the family')

The **_treat and love_** received during the family home placement was referred to sometimes concerning attitudes, small details or attentive gestures that were very important for each of the young women. Based on their descriptions, I have come to believe this contributed with generating the _appropriately unusual_ difference (Andersen, 1996). It could be things like: preparing them a meal, driving them to a place, teaching them to do something, or even, in some occasions, saying "I love you". Of importance is Shotter's concept of the "responsive understanding [instead of the representational understanding] (...) from what a particular speaker uniquely means." (Shotter, 2015, p. 78)

Within this topic the young women highlighted their opinion on the importance of the way they were treated while living in family homes and during the work that was done with them. All young women who stayed in a family home expressed how the treat and the "love" they felt (especially from the family home mother) were important in making the experience positive for them. Each of them chose different words or anecdotes to refer to this.

This theme is also closely related to others like _emotional support_ and _help_ that will be extended in another section.

Here Beatriz described her experiences and feelings on those:

> Beatriz_: I went through a lot of things. The family home was super wonderful. They treated me so well...They treated me with love, as if I were one more daughter. When I was going to start school, she_ (referring to the family home mother) _would take me to school, she_

got up, woke me up and prepared my breakfast and drove me to school. They used to take me for a walk, they gave me what I needed. They spoke to me like their daughter too (...) she gave me the love I was lacking all that time that I was without my family, she gave me the love a mother can give any adolescent, even though I was not part of the family; they had patience with me...

Leticia: and what did that represent for you?

Beatriz took a few seconds to answer...*: Mmmm ... as if she was my second mom.*

Because I had...care (in the past, with her family)*, never ... not so much love. And with Silvia, I was pampered, her youngest daughter and me.*

I liked being with them. And when they told me that I was going to leave, I did not want to go away...

In this last part of her expressions she introduces into another topic that will be described in the following chapter specifically related to the family home placement. The mentioned themes are: the importance of 'being included as part of the family' and also the wish to 'stay' longer in the family home.

I would like to move to the conversation with Lupe. It took place in her garden, between her home and her hairdresser. It was a warm afternoon and we were drinking tereré[40] while having a conversation about the work with Jessica. Suddenly Lupe (in her strong voice) reflected fervently on this topic:

The important thing is that we had to give them (referring to the adolescents) *their place, their space as one in the family, **treat** them as if they were your daughter, your niece and bring them into your family, treat them like your family, teach, understand, comprehend ... that's the important thing....because it's not good to bring them and*

---

[40] Tereré is a typical Paraguayan refreshment. It is served with ice-cold water over *yerba mate* (herbs) and is shared among the participants of a conversation. In Paraguay, it is very common to drink in gatherings and it occupies an important place in the rituals of hospitality.

*put them in a corner, you do not give them affection, you do not give them **tenderness**, you don't attend them…*

And she continued:

*Because the one that comes into your house, comes looking for shelter, looking for a sincere **love**, it must be sincere the love you give, you cannot bring them and not give it, otherwise, what for are you going to bring them to your home?*

This question by Lupe remains resonating in the brief silence. Her strong voice along with the confidence with which she expressed the question, make it clear what the family home placement is about. A *polyphonic* chorus (Seikkula & Arnkil, 2014) appears in my internal dialogue, emphasizing the same point: the voices of Rosa, Lucy and Silvia the others family home mothers with whom I talked. On the other hand, Rosa adds referring to the type of bond she observed in the relationship between the team of professionals and Jessica:

For her you are also her family, you know? and every time she needs something, you are there (referring to the team of professionals) getting in touch with her, and that for example is a bond that does not break, that is very good.

And here, Silvia (another family home mother) reflects on the importance of the **tenderness** in a context of **trust**, which was already described.

Leticia: So, what do you think is the main contribution that you as a family home mother, eh ... what is your main role?

*Silvia: Well, what to say, verifying what it is useful, first: **tenderness**, that is ... there is no other way, nothing changes that, and then, not setting too many limits, of letting her ... do.*

Leticia: What would you call that?

There is long silence now. Silvia is trying to find the words to go on. I also felt tempted to stay quiet and make room for our inner thoughts...Silvia continues, hesitantly:

I do not know, you tell me ... tolerance …

*You must be open minded, ... you do not gain anything with being narrow minded ..., you have to **trust** them, believe that what they are choosing is good.*

Similarly, in the conversation with Lidia, she was describing about how she felt during the joint work and what was useful for her. She started to reflect on the elements and situations she considered important in the relationship created with the professionals, and how that made her feel:

There is also something that impressed me and that I do not know if they (referring to the professionals) *do it like that with everyone they work with, but I ... apart from what the job was, I ... I felt **loved by you**, that is, in confidence... and Magui for example, she took me to her house, that was very important for me. The other thing that I value and that was something that I always remember, was that time I was in that house and I had no one to turn to and I called you and you were there for me. That, for example, was very important for me too…*

Once again, Lidia's reflections are in the context of how relevant it was for her to be able to 'count on' someone when she experienced very concrete moments of despair and confusion (like the moments she was describing in the conversation)

The themes clustered also emerged in the conversation with the professionals that worked with Jessica, as Alejandra mentioned:

*And so, it was about showing her another world, with another type of bond, one where you relate with someone, where there is an exchange of affection and no need to exchange anything else. It's simply a bond and there is **love**. And that's final.* (Alejandra)

I found it important to distinguish the expression of 'love' in this singular context (the joint work with the adolescents). It has nothing to do with its romantic meaning. I can recognize what Seikkula & Trimble (2005) and Shotter (2015) refer about finding 'love' in the healing process could represent. They described as the emergence of a "powerful emotional attunement, an experience most people would recognize as feelings of love. (...) They are our own embodied responses to participation in a shared world of meaning co created with people who trust each other and ourselves to be transparent, comprehensive beings with each other" (Shotter, 2015, p.81)

In my comprehension, following the same meaning of that 'attunement' experienced in the close relationships described in the present study -and taking into account all the themes previously described in this section- now I would like to move on to the theme of **care**.

Care

This theme is included in the stories when young women realized they have felt cared for by someone in the process of life or work, and likewise when the need to receive care is expressed. Another aspect related to this theme has to do with assuming the role of caring for young women, in this case, by the family home mother. As Silvia (family home mother) describes:

> *I offer myself in body and soul to **care** for them, all the people in my home, I don't feel lazy or tired, nothing like that. I can wake up five times during the night if they are with a fever... I like taking **care** of them, I like it and that also makes a difference, I think, one can just leave them watching TV, no, me, never, I am taking care of them all the time and at the same time I let them live their lives, do their things.*

After reading over the transcripts of my conversations with Silvia several times, I recognize a feeling I have had on many occasions all these years working with family homes. A feeling of renewed wonder towards the enormous generosity, solidarity and care one can find in the family home, as well as a feeling of safety and comfort.

This topic also emerged in the young women's group conversation:

> *Verónica: When I was in the family home, they didn't leave me uncared for one single minute, you know what I mean? It was different.*
>
> *Lidia: Attention is very important.*
>
> *Jessica: Exactly.*
>
> *Lidia: The attention. Because attention is what is lacking, and attention makes people feel good, that is why they are very fond of you, because you give them that attention that one needs, and you can feel, how do*

> *you say it? Taken **care** of, protected, not alone, right? That's very important.*

Everything described till now occurred within the ***Joint work***, which was another of the elements that emerged during the conversations.

Joint work

At this point, the recognition of collaboration between all the actors is emphasized and it has also to do with the participation each of them had related to the role they were taking (a member of the professional team, a family home member, the adolescent or their family) and with the availability to actively collaborate with the professionals.

In the following conversation with the professionals related to the work with Jessica, we were discussing what was important, for each of us separately and as a team, to be able to 'deal' with the complexity and the challenges present. I would like to bring Patricia's voice:

> *The work in pairs, the team meetings, right? All of that, in itself, helped me a lot…, to check, to evaluate. If we were doing good work, um… what other things could we try with her, what other alternatives…That, is what I value very much and is very important, …Of having another… I don't know, a person to tell us "oh ok, good, yes, let's do this here, we are fine." Or even exchange views.*

In all the other conversations with the professionals, especially with reference to the big responsibility that it takes to write a recommendation to the court, to help the families or the adolescents make decisions, or even when dealing with their own emotions considering also the ethical dilemmas and different positions, the importance of being part of a team and more concrete to have 'pair colleague' or a close relationship both with the family home members or the adolescent not to feel that everything has to be 'on their shoulders' was observed.

The theme of ***joint work*** was also reflected upon by the family home mothers. In the following part of the conversation, Lupe is describing the relationship with the professionals and the role she thinks they had during the joint work.

(referring to the professionals) *I had a lot of support. Every time I needed it, I would contact the office. I always had support, they always responded, they came, they talked with her* (the adolescent)*, because more than two or three times I asked for help and they were here, Rosalba* (one of the professionals of the team) *was here.*

And being able to perform joint work requires participation and dialogue.

Participation & dialogue

Participation specifically refers to the young women's participation throughout the work process or family home placement. The importance of having conversations with the girls (family homes and youth, team and youth) about what happens and the decisions that are being considered. Moreover, it is related to the themes: empathy, trust and a close relational bond, the latter facilitating it.

Returning to the notes made while reading the transcripts of the conversations on this point, I found the voices of Seikkula & Arnkil (2014) who emphasizes the respect of the other, *the unique otherness of the other* as one of the pillars (he would call it the heart) of the dialogicity on which relational practices develop. Understanding that only where we are open to know the otherness of the other is when dialogue becomes possible and necessary. "The clients' matters should not be discussed behind their back but in dialogue *with them* and with a focus on resources instead of deficiencies" (Seikkula & Arnkil, 2014, p.149).

This theme of participation & dialogue emerged during the conversation with the professionals in relation to working with Verónica:

> *Yes. It's like she* (Verónica) *had a lot...she had more active* **participation***, including a lot of* **protagonism** *in the process and in the direction towards where the work of the team was developing. What struck me, I do not know if by the Veronica's characteristics, was how… she* **challenged us** *and mobilized us, but she had a* **leading role** *in the process, unlike other children, in other situations, she was…the one that encouraged us to do the work process* **together***, where we really had like the ability to listen and to respect her a lot in her contributions, in what she was also asking, in the needs that she*

> *was placing, then no ... I think that her* **participation** *was very important ... in the whole work process.* (Nidia)

Nidia reflected in detail how relevant the position that Verónica took during the joint work was, even describing her having a 'leading role' (she was 12 years old at that time) and how that experience reinforces that importance, becoming as a role model to work with other adolescents.

Now Evelyn reflected on the same aspects, about the work with Lidia:

> *I also recall that what made Lidia's work process easier, smoother, was that* **she contributed a lot**. *In what way? she had the capacity to express herself. She could point out what she needed, ... I think that for the work team that was a... a detail or factor that... allowed an important percentage of things to turn out right. right?*
>
> *She helped a lot. She helped us work with her. Truly. She had that, that skill.*

Besides the active participation of the young protagonist, which is necessary from an ethical perspective, the joint work poses the need for a shift in the kind of language that should prevail in the meetings or conversations. This language, far from being a "technical" language or professional discourse to which the young women or family should grow accustomed to, and in accordance with the principle of *heteroglossia* proposed by Bakhtin (1984), should respond to a language created in *each* conversation.

The way the conversations transformed and moved us (professionals) has been extensively discussed during the conversations. While each of the (groups of) participants referred to emotions experienced throughout the process, **Professional's emotions** deserve specific attention as a working ingredient.

Professional's emotions

Throughout all the conversations with the team of professionals, reflections appeared on some of the emotions that arose during the realization of the work.

Håkansson (2014) highlights that; throughout the years the different theoretical branches of psychotherapy have attempted to explain how the stories of the people we work with (therapeutically) affect us, generating all kinds of emotions. As Håkansson would say, *being present* "includes feelings of hopelessness,

sorrow, inadequacy and chaos. It encompasses not knowing and not having any answers and sometimes having to follow your belief, a sense in your body or something that in the moment is inexplicable but being here and now" (p.110)

The ***professional's emotions*** is closely related to the ***importance of having conversations*** within the team by creating the necessary space to express those emotions as an important element of the joint work, implying good communication within the organization and recognizing all the challenges brought by being part of this work. A significant aspect of ***professional's emotions*** has to do with the empathy and admiration of some of the professionals towards some of the young people.

Professionals' emotions were also described in the previous chapter when describing frustrations and expectations. Some voices from the professionals working with Beatriz and Jessica:

> Amalia: *The memory that I have is the bond that was generated from the first moment, in the hospital. I remember that it was very strong for me to know her and to know that she had lost her parents when she was 13 years old. This connected me directly with my own story and made me generate immediate empathy…*

Amalia took some seconds, tears appear in her eyes, then she continued,

> *…because I also lost my father at that age* (polyphonic voices)*. Of course, I went through all the emotions with her. I got mad too because at some point I did not understand: why is she behaving like this? With her family I was also angry: 'why are you doing this'?*

> Leticia: *and what did you do with your anger? How can you work with feeling that anger?*

> Amalia: *I think, again, of being able to put myself in her place* (empathy)*. That adolescent, who does not want any adult to tell her how to behave or what she must do, this helped me to respect her, as a person, in her autonomy, so that she would be the one who chooses.*

> Myriam: *The memory I have is a mix of feelings, on the one hand, of frustration and on the other, anxiety. Frustration because of Bea's whole situation, everything she went through, which was a lot and how*

we could help her. Anxiety regarding how to maintain the defence attorney's interest, to avoid her disenchantment.

Myriam also referred to her experiences while working with Jessica:

Of course, I went through all the emotions with her.

I think of Jessica and... a lot of movement. Even a bit of dizziness sometimes, from all this movement. Um... To a level which concerned me and speaking off the record. I mean...a lot of movement, suddenly. A lot of sensations of all colour. Um... many times of powerlessness, many times of anger, um... I don't know.

All that makes me think of the process that I underwent particularly near Jessica, of her way of living, the work. That: dizziness, quick movements, abrupt. Um... They also had very nice moments. But evidently, the other weighs in more.

This connects me to what Seikkula and Arnkil (2014) discuss about the dialogical skills, of learning to identify our own voices, stories and emotions that are triggered with the stories of the people we work with. Like them and their team, it is observed that the work in the social or psycho-social field many times makes us face difficult aspects of the human life, with the consequent emotional responses and the importance of creating a space where all these embodied responses be heard or at least recognized.

This leads us to the following topic that emerged in the conversations: the importance of having conversations within the team.

Importance of having conversations (within the team)

There are many different themes that arose within this larger topic. Among them: how dialogues transform professionals, as described by Myriam when referring to the emotions she felt when accompanying Jessica; collaborative stances, as those described by Alejandra when referring to the elements important in the generation of the trust and in conversation on relational ethics; and dialogical processes, as shown in the expressions of Lucy regarding the vital daily conversations she had with Lidia, just to name a few.

In the occasions when within the conversations, professionals looked back on how difficult things could have turned out, one fundamental factor was explicitly

indicated: the ***Importance of having conversations (within the team)*** when this type of work is carried out, especially when needing to express the emotions which is an important issue as a part of the professionals' care. In addition, the importance of good institutional communication was mentioned.

As it was reflected in the team that worked with Beatriz:

> *I think it has to do with the conversations, with **having these*** ***conversations** that we have, where we can express how we feel, what happens to us with the work. This means that even though many times you feel that you cannot continue, that you want to leave, that is what holds it together*. (Marcela)

After she spoke, there was a silence as if each of us was processing her strong words on the situations we could recognize that lead us to our limits. I wonder to what extent of being able to witness what some people are open to share and give (family homes for example) helped me live with uncertainty and chaos. To *dare* (Håkansson, 2014) to let things happen and many times trust the process.

> *I think that... For me particularly, the **conversations we had** helped a lot... Because I was very... tempted by my "being a mother", my "being a grandmother" also, my "being a lawyer" and "being human". Like that. Um... because everything, in every way, was always drawing my attention. And I think that one of the things that made it easier for me... was **the conversations we were always having**. That is... sort of, to understand from the other's point of view, or to calm me.* (Myriam)

At this point of the conversation, with Myriam's reflections, we are again reminded that social reality is always polyphonic (Seikkula & Arnkil, 2014) and in terms of the complexity described in the previous chapter, that becomes the context of the professional challenges described in the last conversation.

With the voices of Marcela and Myriam, the central place of having the conversations within the team becomes clear, as pointed out by all the professionals I talked with during the present study.

Family Home Placement

Continuing with the working elements identified by main actors (adolescents, family home members and the professionals involved from ENFOQUE Niñez) in the collaborative practices during the joint work; 11 themes were identified that refer specifically to the experiences within the family home placement.

Of these eleven themes some were included in other sections because of their close relatedness to other themes. For that reason, **Treat and love received in the Family Home** was described in the previous section clustered with **Close relational bond** and **Tenderness**. Likewise, **Meaning of living in family home to their lives** and **Meaning of family home placement for the family home mother** will be described in the following section.

Regarding the experience of Family Home Placement, one of the recurring themes was the adaptation process to the family home.

Adaptation process to the family home

Here, participants give an account of the initial phase of establishing a trust bond within the family home. Entering the life and home of a new family includes a mutual process of getting to know the others and establish some living agreements. It is worth pointing out that at times both the family home or the young women had the chance to get to know each other a little beforehand, or even meet before living together. This had to be worked on as some of the young women did not ask to move to a family home from the very beginning, but always did accept the proposal. In the following, Jessica describes the adaptation process related to the first family home which she moved to:

> *Jessica: with Lupe it was difficult at the beginning, just as it is difficult to relate at the beginning to anyone you do not know. But then it was very good...*
>
> *Leticia: And what made the relationship change?*
>
> *Jessica: mmm that she was gaining my trust...*
>
> *Leticia: Do you remember how?*
>
> *Jessica: mmm...No...*

She took some seconds to think about it, and then she continued with a smile: *it started with wanting to learn about painting the boxes … and with that I got excited and I liked it ... do you remember? ... That's how it was with her…*

The description Jessica gave was on being taught to do handicrafts by Lupe - her family home mother-, which was very important for her. Although something unusual for Jessica, she became curious and inspired by her. Especially because at that specific moment, Jessica worried about earning some money. Since she was given home imprisonment as a protective measure, this implied that she was not allowed to work outside. Learning handicrafts offered her an opportunity to earn some money despite the situation she was in and allowed her to take care of her daughter at par with 'producing' something she could sell and earn money from. Additionally, this situation created an opportunity for getting to know Lupe and for learning to see her as a possible ally. Doing this activity together resulted in creating a *common ground* (McNamee, 2015) where it was possible to *meet* in the relationship; a good example of when actions become even more important than words while living in a family home. (Håkansson, 2014)

Similarly, the ***adaptation process to the family home*** was also described by Lidia who reflected on how it was when she moved from Magui's home to Lucy's home:

> *I went to a house where I did not know anyone (...), **little by little**, I was gaining confidence but at first, I did not know anything--- if they were going to take good care of my baby--- actually, at that time I distrusted everything; I felt that everything was just wrong. I despaired, I ate, and I threw everything up again, so, back then I was not well, and..., **with time**, I overcame that.*

Lidia is describing her experience highlighting how *time* (as we saw in the section of Challenges) and going *little by little* (respecting the process, not forcing) it was possible to 'overcome' the distrust she felt at the beginning. The same aspects were remarked in the conversation with Magui (Lidia's family home). Following is an illustration of how she remembers the adaptation process:

> *I remember that I used to come home and I would go to see how they were, if her door was closed I would not go in and knock on it ...that is, a lot of **respect** too, because I knew that there was a lot of internal*

procession in her and a woman who was squeezing her brain, that is, she put a lot of effort into thinking about it, if you ask me my feeling was that she was analyzing her situation 100% of the time… (...) Well, Lidia always was very respectful, I do not know how comfortable she felt at home,... for me the central part was my **conversations** *with Lidia*

From her 'host' place, Magui highlighted the importance of respecting Lidia's space (both physical and emotional). During the conversation Magui recalls how she perceived that Lidia valued this care (the pace, the freedom to interact or not), as well valuing the conversations they constantly had. Furthermore, respecting the time and the other's pace was also highlighted by Lucy, who was the second family to receive Lidia with her baby:

And ... the first few days were difficult because she talked very little, (...) one day she asked me what I knew about her, (...) and I said, 'you can count on me, do not be ashamed'. And so **little by little** *she let go until and she was part of the family.*

Regarding the adaptation process to the family home, it is not only the adolescent who has to be included in the new family (and the family to include her), but also the initiation of the collaborative relationship between the professional team working with that teenager and the family.

Occasionally, a family home has been accompanied by the same professionals in the past; in other situations, the collaboration to be developed between the family and some of the professionals is the first one. In this sense, previous experiences and mutual knowledge can collaborate by 'bringing' in the good as well as those learnings about the challenges or differences.

In the mutual effort to welcome the other in the adaptation process, a good metaphor is what Anderson (1999) describes for therapists as being *good hosts* and *good guests;* to think of a *way of being* that collaborates with this special moment of including someone in our life. As part of the *hospitality,* it becomes important to allow the very *present moment,* (Shotter 1993, Anderson 2012a) to develop the *tone* of the relationship in which, as Saint George & Wulff (2011) described, there is a *flexibility* and *fluidity* that calls for not having set leading and following roles in the collaboration.

One other important aspects mentioned by each of the family home mothers with whom I had a conversation was the fact of being included as part of the family.

To be included as part of the family

There were aspects like: 'not making any difference between siblings', 'not making the adolescents feel like strangers inside the family', 'sharing everything together', 'make them feel included' and many others. As Silvia (Beatriz and Veronica's family home mother) and Rosa (Jessica's second family home mother) expressed:

> *At home there is no difference between the children we receive and one of my children, so to speak, they have the same rights... not because they're outsiders we put them in last place ... no, they are given the same place as my children; and I also challenge them, like I do with my children, no more no less…*(Silvia)

> *When we went out she was always part of the family, we have never made her feel that she was not part of the family, on the contrary...... that 'family feeling' at least within the little that we do, makes them feel ..., we say "no fights, if we are going to talk let's talk about what is right, what is wrong, you should say what is OK, or if it's wrong" and the person who lives with us at that moment also participates in the conversation...* (Rosa)

To be included as part of the family was also reflected upon by the young women who lived in a family home. Some of these was described before in the clustered themes of ***treat and love received*** in the family home, ***close relational bond*** and ***tenderness***.

Maintenance of the bond with the Family Home

Another of the elements mentioned, as an important part of the experience, was the ***maintenance of the bond with the Family Home*** after they left the house. This includes the expressed desire and intention of the young women of not losing contact with the family home and continue counting on them. Stories of subsequent visits described as positive and as part of the bond generated from the family home mothers' perspective are also included. For example, Silvia, Lupe, Magui and Lucy similarly described how it is to continue being in

touch after what they went through with the young women:

> *It's like a daughter of yours coming over to visit. It is quite nice... It's people you have a lot of contact with, I don't know how to put it, people who know about your stuff, a lot of intimacy, it's nice to have them over. When Vero comes, we are thrilled.* (Silvia)

> *And ...* (the bond) *cannot be broken then, it is difficult for a person who spent her bad times with you, her good moments, difficult to cut off; and even more so if she needs (...) if there is a need, I'll be there* (Lupe)

> *With Lidia we always see each other (...) we never get together to eat, but (...) we always talk even if it's for a little time …*(Magui)

> *We usually meet at the supermarket (...) In fact, every time we meet we cannot stop talking* (Lucy)

It was exciting and hard to find the words to describe when family home mothers talked about these issues during our conversations. How they described the sensations, emotions, innumerable anecdotes of happiness or surprise when reuniting with the people they have received in their lives and in their homes throughout all these years. It also becomes like a regular cultural practice that family home families are chosen by the young women as godfathers and godmothers in religious ceremonies related to their children (like baptisms) which reinforces the bonds they will continue having in the future and formalizing them.

As regards the relationships that were generated with the family home members the young women expressed what they felt about their experience concerning family home placement. From these, another theme emerged: staying in the family home.

Staying in the family home
Even though all of them agreed with the decision and the time to bid farewell, some felt it was contradictory. This aspect has been extensively studied by Stein (2005) who in his research shows from the voices of whom he calls 'care leavers' the fundamental importance of working their exit from the protection system gradually as well as the strengthening of a social network with which the

young woman can count on. Referring to the young women, on the one hand they wanted to leave (Veronica longed to return to her father and brother, Beatriz wanted to return to her parents, Jessica dreamt of the day of moving out with her daughter) and on the other hand, they felt a certain sadness to leave the families. Years later, they reflected that perhaps staying longer with the family homes would had been positive; though not always 'easy' experiences. Following are Beatriz and Jessica's expressions:

> *I felt comfortable and when I said goodbye, I actually cried that day, I didn't want to leave* (the family home) *because I was happy, I felt good, I got along with their daughter, they gave me everything, all the love, all the whims, I felt really good with her* (referring to Silvia)*. I still remember all I went through with that family.* (Beatriz)

> *I loved my family home, I did not want to leave my family home* (Jessica, referring to Rosa's family)

Although Verónica shares the same feeling about staying in the family home, she reflected on how that would had impacted on what she went through after she moved:

> *Vero:* [About staying longer with the family home] *everything was going to be different.*

> *Leticia: Different in which way?*

> *Vero: (...) If I was in the family home I was not going to have that mindset, you know what I mean? To do bad things and have my dad neglect me...*

During the conversation, Verónica remembered the importance of her being surrounded by people (there were six people living in the family home's house), after school and weekend activities. She mentioned that this context created a 'life' in which she was occupied, accompanied and having conversations, while life at home with her father was completely different. She stayed at home with her little brother most of the time. When she referred to 'doing bad things' she was talking about having a boyfriend with whom she got pregnant when she was 14 (which is very commonplace in the culture of her neighbourhood).

On the other hand, and bearing in mind that the family home placement could

be described as a 'challenging' experience, while conversing with the family home mothers, they also referred to a number of daily difficulties.

Daily difficulties in the family home placement

In the conversation with Lucy (Lidia's family home), she was describing some **daily difficulties** but referring to two other adolescents she had in her home in the past:

> *And* [they], *felt that they did not fit into our family because they asked me: How is it possible that we, family homes, complete strangers to them, who see themselves for the first time in their lives, and we give them that care and protection? That they did not receive at home, and ...what she did not understand and then argued with me was, "Why would you love me if you do not know me?", "I love you and I respect you as a person, you are a human being(...)"*

Lucy was making reference to when they experienced relational difficulties, when the adolescents living at her home were very upset and it was tough to develop trust. In the following, she goes on to tell another story where the challenge had to do with the emotional situation the adolescent was going through:

> *(...) suddenly there were days that she did not want to get up, and we had to give her meds more or less asleep. "Today I do not want to see your face", "Why?", "Because I do not want to", "What did I do to you?", "Nothing", "and well, get up, take your medicine, clean yourself up, let's go have breakfast "," I do not want to, I'm not hungry "," and what do you want? "," I want to die ", and again and again...*

In the latter situation Lucy describes how important it is to develop **empathy** (described before) and the patience to hold onto the situation until things slowly started to get better. Another crucial thing most of the family home mothers mentioned, when describing similar difficulties, was to count on the professional team.

Amongst the difficulties that family home mothers could find, there is also another theme related to the aspect: the concerns family home members have.

Concerns in the family home placement

This theme includes the ideas and situations which made them feel worried when taking the responsibility of a child or adolescent living with them. Silvia reflected on the conversations she used to have with some friends or relatives that do not dare to become a family home. She expressed that most of them had fears of the 'risks',

> *Leticia: When you say it's a risk, in what do you think?*
>
> *Silvia: In accidents, in death, in suicides. Sometimes you have a word with one of those guys, and you spend the night vigilant, because you're afraid they'll do something.*

After this was said, we both stayed some seconds in silence, like we were thinking of where to continue:

> *Leticia: What does it do to you - even that you are aware of the risks - to continue doing it* (being a family home)?
>
> *Silvia: I know that the positives far outweigh the risk, it's much bigger, I do not even think about it, I think about the risk half of the time out of 10, but do not torment myself with that.*

When talking about this, the conversation moved to sources of support making it possible to continue doing family home placements despite the difficulties and concerns that are present. The reasons why they had decided to become a family home or what helps them during the experience when they have doubt or fears. Some of the family home mothers mentioned ideas connected to religious beliefs and the importance given to this in their being a family home. So, I named this theme family home placement and spirituality.

Family home placement and spirituality

Silvia and Lupe describe their thoughts on this:

> *Silvia: you feel that ... when you believe a lot in God, like me, you decide "I am helping you* (God) *to take care of a little being, (...), so that he deals with deeper things"*
>
> *Leticia: So, could you say that the spiritual part is important?*
>
> *Silvia: It's very important, for me it's very important. For me it is like*

> *a barter "I take care here, you take care of other things that I do not know how to do"(...) and as my spirit is involved, the material is of no use to me.*

> *I feel useful, I feel very grateful, because the Lord touched my house, I opened the door to children, to innocents, to help them. Understanding this is not easy but nothing is impossible* (Lupe).

Another aspect that for family homes mothers helped when dealing with the difficulties, I would like to mention that all the family homes who received these adolescents had had between one and several ***previous experiences*** of having carried out a family home placement.

Previous experience of family home placement

This was mentioned during the conversations, highlighted as a value that influenced these particular experiences to be possible the way they were. For example, the families already had a bonding experience of working with the professionals or the organization (mutual trust) and the fact that having had different family home placements allowed them to dimension the experience (expectations, time, processes).

A further significant topic that emerged in the conversations, was that with Lidia, ENFOQUE Niñez had their first family home placement of an adolescent mother with her baby, and also the country's first experience within a formal program. This fact represented a starting point for the organization to continue working to offer family home placement to mothers and their babies instead of separating them, which was (and continues to be) the usual response from the protection system. This is mainly due to the protection measures that focus on babies and young children as well as the lack of adolescent policies and programs.

Section 3. Meaning of the work

Considering the Relational Aspects on the therapeutic and social work jointly experienced between the participants, in section 1encountered Challenges were described, which somehow constituted the context within how this work was developed, as well as the complexity - at various levels-. Following, throughout section 2 the fundamental elements of joint work were highlighted. In this section we aim to answer the research question: How do the participants describe what was helpful in the collaboration with adolescents (referred from the child protective system) who have been separated from their families? The *Meaning of the Work* will be elaborated on in this section.

Meaning of the work contains 13 different themes, including the voices of participants about what the joint work process meant for them. This carried out through descriptions of experiences in which they reflect on what was useful for them and how. This section will also describe the ideas about how each theme was defined, and which aspects were considered during the conversations. As done in previous sections, to facilitate the reading and because of the closeness, the themes: *Meaning of the work done within their lives, Meaning of the therapy, Meaning of living in family home placement & Meaning of family home placement for the Family Home mother,* will be clustered in the description. Although each of the previous themes could be included into one single theme, the intention of the current disposition is to emphasize the specific *aspects* of the work process that were identified, in the conversations, as significant. Further on, the themes: *Help & Emotional support,* will highlight the importance, for the young women, of being able to count on 'help' in a broad sense. Throughout the conversations it is observed how emotional support was the most appreciated by all of them. In *Force for change, innovation* there are examples of how, when responses to a 'new' or 'unusual' situation are lacking, there is an opportunity to create, which sometimes requires us to 'push' the system or the status quo. In *Autonomy, Resilience & overcoming, Responsible motherhood,* the participants recognize their resources, decisions made which allowed them to transform their life situations and become mothers very distinct from their own (due to their own life situations). This, as a process and not a finished result, shows their strength and ability of being authors of their own lives. Finally, the young women gave *Recommendations to others.* This includes their *Learnings* which are to be

considered when performing the therapeutic and social work described in this study.   In **Helping others,** we will find some of the experiences in which the young women were the ones providing help to those in need, thus gaining new perspectives of themselves.

Meaning of the work done within their lives

Here we include conversations discussing the *impact* of the work process as a whole on the lives of the young women. In social projects jargon, 'impact measurements' (for which usually measurement indicators are established) is used. This expression makes me wonder: Is it possible to 'measure' impact? How is 'impact' defined? Who and how are indicators defined? Although, as explained thoroughly enough, the conversations did not have pre-designed questions; in each of them the young women describe some aspects they found relevant once the process had finished. In similar ways the family home mothers and professionals share what they found was significant for the young women's lives.

Beatriz for example, was 13 years old living in the streets saying she had no family when she was referred to the organization. Entering the protection system, she explicitly requested for psychological help, recalling her thoughts of having 'a mess in her head'. Beatriz had been mistreated by her grandmother. She also noticed a difference between her relationship and the one between her grandmother and sisters. Trying to understand that difference, she heard she was an adopted child, never told by her parents. A lot of confusion and pain was generated because of being able to know about her origin, and the adoption as to why she was treated differently by some members of the family, which became a 'vital' topic for her. In the next excerpt Beatriz refers to the impact of the therapeutic work done with her and her family; as a result, she was able to get to know and talk to her parents about her adoption, and family history, among other things, having a healing effect on her relationship with her parents and herself.

> *Let me tell you, thanks to ENFOQUE I am alive again, thanks to them I realized many things, because I ... I got to know many things that I never knew before*. (...) *For me, you* (referring to ENFOQUE Niñez)*, to*

this day, have always been with me, never abandoned me, even though I had children, you never left me aside, thanks to you I was finally able to get my ID and be able to register my children.

At the end, she placed emphasis on what not being excluded by the NGO after having her children represented. This was a sensitive topic because despite being able to go back to her family, following the therapeutic work; her getting pregnant soon after caused tension with her family once more. Not feeling supported, she decided to leave her home again. She mentioned '*finally able to get my ID and be able to register my children'* which was a very stressful situation for her as she was underage, gave birth alone, the police was looking for her (for having run away from home), using a fake ID at the hospital, and she was not able to give her children ID making it extremely hard to use the public services to guarantee their rights.

Professionals that worked with Beatriz also reflected on the **Meaning of the work done within their lives**. Alejandra's reflection highlighted the delicacy of Beatriz finding out she was adopted and the opportunity she had of talking about it with her parents (for the first time) in a caring and safe way.

*A lot of very important things had happened, **too transcendental** in their life as a family. And so, Bea could hear about, um... about where she came from. She could say she already knew... They had such a safe space to talk.* (referring to the therapy)

Although the aspect pointed out by Alejandra in reference to the therapeutic space will be returned to further on, in this conversation she also highlights **the meaning of work done** because of the importance it had for the whole family to be able to 'work' 'transcendental' aspects of family life: addressing Beatriz's adoption, situations of mistreatment and abuse that had happened within the family, as well as the death of one of the children, among others that accompanied the work with Beatriz.

I would now like to include Lidia's expressions about what the joint work meant for her,

Along the way, I found myself confronted with things I did not know how to face and, in that, they (referring to all the people involved in the joint work) *also **helped** me, **advising** me, **guiding** me and making me feel what for me was the most important thing:*

> ***protected**, knowing that I am not alone, that I can get ahead …*

During the conversation Lidia pointed out that beyond the difficulties one had to get through life, for her the most important thing is to feel *accompanied*, *protected*, to be able to thrive, which was highlighted in the joint work experience. Similarly, in the conversation with the young women, Verónica expressed:

> *What I took from all this is that if I did not go through with the **psychological assistance** you offered me, I was going to be a woman who had a child that I gave away to the father or someone else or had an abortion. I was not going to feel love for this child, make sure it was heard or safe... Because since I started coming to you... you **helped me** with this, with the: "how are you? how are you feeling?", helping me feel well and how I should do things right, this is what I took from there making me the person I am now. I mean the mindset I have; like I told you before, I was going to be like my mother, I was going to have ten children and give all ten children away (...) But I did not, up until the last moment I fought for them and continue fighting for them...*

Along the conversation, Verónica also mentioned the importance of being supported (Psychologically but also in general) and pointed out in both of the conversations she participated in, her afterthoughts on understanding how a person can make different decisions (in her life, motherhood, partner, among other things) having received support, guidance, conversations with people who helped her look at herself and think of herself differently. She believes, had it not been for the whole experience of joint work, she would be a very different woman and mother than the one she turned out to be and which she is proud of. Alejandra reflected with the professionals about the work done with Jessica in relationship to receiving help:

> *And... now, three and a half years later, she **asks me to help** with the food agreement* (referring to the alimony) *I mean, she was negotiating it, at some point she remembered that I talked to her about one thing...um…*
>
> *What she is told is **useful**, right? I don't know how useful it is. But... evidently, she is noticing the... people's willingness to help her again, without asking anything in return, only wanting her to be fine, to take*

> *care of herself and to... to protect her daughter...*
>
> *Evidently, **she now sees me as a future resource**. And I believe I am a reliable resource because I will not... betray her trust, right?*

In that conversation the team of professionals reflected about how significant this request for help, years later, from Jessica was, taking into account that, as described in the Challenges section, she did not trust anyone and opposed any type of help or suggestion from the team. Particularly, the topic of alimony was something she was opposed to and something which would represent the guarantee of not only her right, but mainly her daughter's. On the other hand, her approach shows that from the work experience she saw us as a reliable resource.

Meaning of the therapy

Included in the reflections about the meaning of the work done, in ***Meaning of the therapy*** the reflections specifically highlight how the space of conversation with the therapist (or what they called the *psychological help*), collaborated or helped.

The young women refer to this, in terms of what it was like for them having this space. In the following, Beatriz and Jessica commented on their experiences:

> *I remember the first time I came here with you, I did not feel like talking, it's normal, because I have been to another psychologist, I didn't talk, I didn't say anything, but with you it was different, at first I said nothing because I was afraid, but little by little I told you what was happening and I went on, I continued on my path so far, I realized everything I went through, which in the future, I do not want my children to go through the same things, I have to be beside them, I have to protect them from everything.* (Beatriz)
>
> *I didn't trust talking to anyone... I didn't trust talking to the assistants and I was trapped within four walls, I yelled at them, I couldn't take it anymore and finally you helped me carry on through all that process...during the procedures, the paperwork and all that happened. You were there during the good and the bad. During my moods and all...* (Jessica)

Both Beatriz and Jessica mentioned having experienced certain mistrust at the beginning, which is related to one of the challenges described previously; **forced therapy**. Beatriz (just like Verónica previously had) reflects on how being able to make decisions for her children's protection because the process was important. Meanwhile Jessica points out what it meant having the therapeutic space to be able to go through the whole judicial process (house arrest, family home, etc.) and posterior independence. For their part, professionals and family home mothers also reflected on how they thought it was good for the young women to have a therapist and their role during the joint work. Thinking of the role of the therapist, and after what was said by the participants, I recall the ideas reflected by Seikkula (2017) about how 'being heard and taken into account seriously' becomes the most important aspect in the therapeutic relationship.

Meaning of living in family home placement

Here, I consider important to bear in mind that *family home placement* is still an innovative measure from the protection system (in Paraguay). Despite the fact that none of the young women knew what family home placement was at the moment the possibility arose, and it being 'the only choice', they all described it positively. All of them expressed how "good" the experience was, pointing out the fond memories they have, although not being easy at times especially at the beginning (as was described in the previous section). In the following conversation with Verónica, she reflected on what it meant for her to live in the family home:

> Verónica: (…) *they never left me aside in the sense that "you are not going to come with us because you are not part of the family", no, (...) they did not leave me alone in the house …*
>
> Leticia: *And what did that represent for you? How did it make you feel?*

Verónica answered laughing out loud: *I liked it!* Then she became a little more serious and took some time to quietly think more about it, and continued:

> (...) *they helped me a lot because I used to think of it this way: there were days when I, I was not brought news of my mother and I was a little depressed because I..., my dad was with a woman who did not love me, who mistreated me almost all my childhood, my mom was not being found, I sometimes wanted to ... I do not know, to... to die,*

I did not want to exist anymore in this world, why would I want to exist if nobody loved me? and I did not want to live in other people's houses, with a family today, with another family tomorrow, that I did not want to. That's why, what helped me a lot, was once again those people (the family home) *where I was, they gave me ... hope to keep living, right?*

After having expressed this, Verónica shows herself emotionally affected. As if once again comprehending all that she experienced in that time; how vital it was, in the midst of so many negative emotions and despair, to be able to count on the welcome the family gave her, in a broad sense, *to life*.

When I had the conversation with all the family home mothers, at some point they also reflected on what they think about the family home placement, how they feel it is useful for someone in general, or what they see/feel/think is important in a family home placement. As in the conversation with Silvia:

I mean, the fact of living differently, it predisposes you to have another life, to search for that, to be better, right?, to have a family, [to be] *loving parents (...) It becomes like a model of family, (...) And it stays ... because this* [referring to the joint work] *is so big, it's so nice, it's so useful, it's so good. There are people who need us so much, that you do not even think about what can happen or not…"*

The context in which Silvia reflected about the impact that -the experience of living in a family home instead of going to an institution-, can have, as part of the therapeutic and social process, also had to do with the need to have more family homes in the country. Silvia emphasized how living a different family experience offers the young women the possibility of thinking of a life project differently from the one they were currently living. Similarly, Lucy reflects:

When she was going to leave, she said that thanks to me, thanks of being here (in the family home)*, she learned to be a better mom, a better person, and thanked me very much, that she really felt like a family here*"

In relation to the latter, something I have observed throughout the years and also realized in this present study is how much of a difference it makes that the family homes offer new relational spaces which bear witness to other possible versions of the young women's self; they generally come with 'saturated from problem' identity versions, (White & Epston, 1993).

Meaning of family home placement for the Family Home mothers

 I found fascinating what the family home mothers mentioned in relation to the impact on them, of the family home placement. While seeing for themselves what it means for the person who is living with them and who could be seen as the one who 'needs', they also observe that there is something quite significant that families are left with as they go through this experience: satisfaction, the feeling of having been useful, and also the impact they witness in their own children, who have a more positive attitude and feel there are vital things they can do when sharing their houses and time with other people, making them feel good. Many family home mothers mention that while they recognize how important it is for others, they believe the meaning of being family homes is even more important to them and their families. In the following, Silvia, Lucy and Rosa reflected on the mentioned aspects:

> Silvia: *You give her that opportunity to live in a family, you take care of her, ... it makes you feel good too, during the family home placement, you feel good, it's like you're helping. My children feel very important when there is someone we take in at home, in front of friends, in front of teachers, in front of their classmates... it's like saying "look at what I do, you are fooling around there watching TV, I take people in at my home..."*
> Leticia: *So, it's something they can feel proud of?*
> Silvia: *They feel proud, that's the word. They are proud of doing that.*
>
> Lucy: *It fills you with a lot of satisfaction seeing the person comes one way and leaves another. Then you say, "Wow, it was worth it", and for my children... also for us... I believe that even more than for them* (adolescents taken in)*, even more, we are the ones benefited.*
>
> Rosa: *it is very nice to share the little space you have, with someone, not being limited only economically…(...) that is what I can tell you, at least from my experience, very good.*

The family home mothers talk about the 'satisfaction' they feel from seeing that the experience was 'worth it', the 'pride' of their children. Rosa points out the value of sharing what one has.

After knowing what the joint work as well as the family home experience meant

for the participant and also the family home mothers, some additional themes are worth mentioning.

Help & Emotional support

These themes -considering what was expressed-, represented central themes in almost all the conversations. It refers to both the need to receive ***help & emotional support*** and the record of having received it, including the importance it had for each of them.

Although some of the participants refer specifically to "help & emotional support" in the different conversations, in some cases they refer to availability, closeness, attention, understanding, among others denominations, indicated as key elements in understanding what the work meant and what was most important (useful/ helpful) within the process as well as characteristics of the type of relationship established between all the actors involved in the joint work.

In the following excerpt Lidia clearly expressed it:

> *Yes, I say, if I had not had the **support**, the support I had with you, it would not have been the same, I do not know what would have happened to me, I do value that it **helped me** a lot, to feel valued, important, to know that someone at least cares about me.*
>
> *Leticia: What things did the people in the organization do to make you feel you were important?*
>
> *Lidia: When I ... call, they are there. They are always available to talk to me, to advise me, I do not know if it was very important for me, maybe because I never had someone who was aware of me, who would talk to me, tell me that I can. I always had people in my life who told me that I could not, that I am useless …someone who believed and that's what they did, the people who worked with me. And **that helped me physically, emotionally** too. I had no idea who sent you, what it was like, I did not know that, the only thing that mattered to me was that these people came to **support** me, either spiritually, advising me, talking to me, things that I needed because I was alone, confused, not knowing what to do and I was coming out of a darkness where I did not know where to go, and what happened with you was that you **helped me** out of that darkness, they showed me*

more or less where to go, that was what I needed.

In Lidia's story, besides highlighting **emotional support**, which was fundamental for her, also mentions the importance of availability of the members of the team, even if it was only to talk. This was also highlighted by Jessica during the conversation.

> *And in the audiences, we were listening to the Judge, and Ale* (referring to Alejandra) *told me: 'quiet, calm down everything will be fine', do you understand? ... Ale was also very **helpful**, or Rosalba and Paty who told me 'don't be nervous, everything is going to be alright', ... and all that was **very helpful**, they were always there…*

In relation to the work done with Jessica, the professionals had different perceptions about how accompanied and supported Jessica could have felt by them. In the midst of those differences, Myriam, just like Jessica, identified that the 'being there' and the 'words offered' constituted the difference that made the difference from her point of view:

> *Despite everything that happened, all the strong feelings we had, emotions... I believe she was always sure we were on her side. And I believe it now as well. She knows someone will listen. (...) Moreover, I was by your side* (referring to Rosalba) *a thousand times, in the car, and also Jessica, and the conversations that we had, and the words you offered her, they were words of a person who loved her. And one could notice that; you wanted her to be well.*

This idea reflected by participants in relation to the professionals, of 'being present' and the importance of 'someone is there' becomes central as it was pointed out by Håkansson (2014).

Moving on, I would like to invite the voices of the family home mothers about this theme. Lucy reflected on the **emotional support** (and **love**, which was described as one of the main themes within section Relational Aspects) they can give being a family home and her idea about the crucial importance it has:

> *Well, we might be poor, but we have a lot of **love and affection** to give no matter what, it's not because it is nice, no, because it's a person in need and thank God we were able to offer that **emotional support** because that is what they need the most, that support is what they are looking for, they look for that so much, that affection in saying*

"hello honey" and like that, (...) That **support** *at that hard moment they were going through.*

Rosa reflected on the same theme, but from the perspective of the support she found is important for young women to receive from the organization and its professionals,

For me, it was very good, that is, it (referring to the professional team) *occupied a principal place so to speak, because since she arrived, even before she arrived... I remember she came with (...) a face of despair, but with the psychological* **support** *of social workers, psychologists, lawyers and everything she encountered, it really worked with her, she was not left alone, even after leaving here, every time she needed she went to you…*

Concerning the same aspect of the work, the support received from the professionals, the group of young women discussed as follows:

Ximena: (referring to the professional's presence) *But just* **the fact of knowing that they are there**, *because when Livia went home for example, I knew that there was someone interested in changing things, and knowing that, it was just, basically, knowing where to go running to and ring the bell.*

After Ximena expressed that, Lidia entered the conversation laughing, while remembering her situation:

Lidia: (talking to me) *When I had my baby recently, I was crazy then, it was a really bad moment then, and I once felt so bad and I had to call you and ask for* **help**, *when Magui had to take me home? Do you remember? And that, for example, what would I do if I couldn't count on you? I did not trust anyone else.*

This final reflection of Lidia, in relation to when Magui took her home represents, besides **help**, an example of what happens when what is needed to protect an adolescent is not found in 'traditional' responses of the protection system. The moment in which Lidia had her baby, she had planned to become independent counting on a family that could take care of her baby, so she could work and earn a living. At the time of the hearing, based on the judge's stance, this plan was not possible, and Lidia has literally no place to go. The organization did not

have any family home at that exact moment who could take her in with her baby; hence Magui (who at the time was general coordinator of the organization) offered herself as a family home, establishing this as the first teenage mother to be taken into family home care within the protection system.

Force for change, innovation

Force for change refers to when the complexity and the lack of (institutional) responses lead to create a response, to innovate, often by pressure. In general, they can be seen as challenges, taken as opportunities to open roads where there were no precedents, and which were established as role models or paths to be explored in the future. Another example was the family home placement of Jessica, as part of a socio-educational measure within the adolescent penal system, as Alejandra described:

> *this was a judge who took the very **innovative** and bold decision of asking, the protection system, for an alternative for her because he had the mandate of taking her to an educational center... Right? But, it was just that what he didn't want to do, so he asked another team for help, with whom he had never worked before, to try to see what other alternative he could find.*

Force for change, innovation also becomes for me a good example of how, sometimes we need to be *irreverent* (Cecchin, Lane & Ray, 2002) in order to answer to what the situations demands from us.

Recommendations to others

When reflecting on these life experiences, for example the first adolescent mother to be taken in (Lidia), the young women makes ***recommendations to others*** (professionals, the system, other young women) reflecting on the resources or alternatives with which they count on today, based on their past experience. In the following excerpt, the young women shared comments on this topic during the group conversation,

> Lidia:*... after a person has a baby* (postpartum)*, one is very vulnerable, very sensible and I, despite everything, I loved my baby, I loved my baby very much and that affected me; and if there is*

> *something we would change its that, you know, that I would not have to get separated from my baby, that I could have someone with whom to leave my baby to go to work, which happened further on.*

Lidia is giving the recommendation to especially support a young mother during postpartum moment in which, as she describes along the conversation, a woman could be very confused, stressed, 'vulnerable'. From a relational perspective, Lidia's recommendation in relation to postpartum reminded me of the idea developed by Giberti (2010) of a *social and protective placenta.* While she referred to adoption, I found it very important to consider leaving the idea of maternity as something to be developed individually. Continuing with the **recommendations**, now the young women refer to the professionals or to the protection system in relation to the follow up:

> *Jessica: In her case for example, I mean in cases of people who don't have children and who have follow ups, I think they're supposed to continue at least one more year...*
>
> *Ximena: In one year you will realize, I mean, they will realize if she/he* (in reference to the child) *is fine or not. I think it is enough time to notice if a child will be fine and will be able to live with that person.*
>
> *Verónica: At least once a month, twice and separate the child from, from the parents or the mother or bring them here and you put the child in some place, right? And you talk to her/him and you ask "How are you getting along with your father? How are you feeling? Are they treating you well?"*
>
> *Lidia: And tell the child not to be scared...*
>
> *Ximena: Not threatening them with the idea that they will go to homes and stuff, because that scares a teenager or child a lot.*

At this moment, the young women were participating energetically in the conversation; they were actively moving as if they were speaking with their whole bodies, and despite it being the first time in their lives they were meeting, they added to one another's ideas spontaneously and harmoniously. Having participated in this part of the conversation was also very exciting for me as a therapist and part of the professional team, as well as a researcher. Listening to them from their expertise, seeing them occupying that role, has honoured me greatly.

Continuing to bring their voices on what the work done has meant and that it

was useful for them. The young women especially reflect on the importance of having enough **autonomy** (independence, freedom, not repeating 'family patterns') to make decisions in their lives.

Autonomy

Having the chance of deciding where to live, with whom, how to raise their children, to earn their own money, among other things, becomes a way for them of noticing that they "overcame" all the difficult situations they went through - as expressed by Veronica:

> *...apart from all the psychological help that you gave me, that also helped me a lot, without that my life was going to be a disaster... but thank God, as I say, now I am a person who works, I am on my own, I have my children, I support my children, I take care of them, now I signed up for a hairdressing course ... I'm super good, it helped me a lot(...) I got separated also to protect them, because I didn't want them to go through what I went through, because in a way history was beginning to repeat itself (...), and I sort of said "no, I am leaving with my children and that is final, I don't care, they are four children, so what? At least we will have food" I said, now I will start by suing him for alimony... and at the same time I also work…*

Verónica highlights the aspects mentioned in relation to her autonomy: the ability to work, study, take care of her children alone, protect them and even take the decision to separate from her partner so as not to repeat the story. The theme of **autonomy** was also reflected in the conversation with the professionals talking about the work done with Jessica. Here Patricia reflected on how it was for her, regarding the challenges that represented for her to accompany, respect and support her decision,

> *There was a lot, a lot of rethinking, you know? For me. The fact that she **decided to live alone**, eh ... To **assume**… **the total care of, her daughter**. And all that. (...) I mean, that stage I think was quite ... eh ... important, for as a team that accompanied her, as I think also for ... for Jessica. right? Because it was something she ... she wanted with her soul, And ... Well. And I did what I could, right? In the way I could to ... to be there, right? Because in all that, it was ... it was very little, the support she had from her parents...*

Closely related to **autonomy** is the theme of **Resilience & Moving on** which will now be delved into.

Resilience & Moving on

In all the conversations with the young women, they reflect on what some of them called "**moving on**". There are examples of situations where they feel they can *move forward*. One specific issue that what also related to this theme was the importance of working. Young women mention how much the fact of finding a job, helped them emotionally and allowed them to put together a project of autonomous life. This was how Lidia described her experience:

> *Leticia: In addition to time, do you have an idea of anything that was important? for you to have ...*
>
> *Lidia: Moving on...*
>
> *Leticia: Aha*
>
> *Lidia: Work. Work, for example, served me not only economically but also socially, in order to be able to socialize, to realize that not only do I have problems but that everyone has problems, that is something that helped me a lot. And I, with time, I also grew, matured and realized that little by little everything can be **moving on**;*

Lidia described what was useful for her to overcome, to which she offered in a vehement way and with no doubts, to work. Then she goes deeper into how 'working' became crucial in that process. Additionally to the family home, her work place became the first social space in which she could relate as a young person with other people, and through getting to know their life stories, look at themselves from another perspective.

The professionals referred to the same aspects while accompanying Lidia and introduce the idea of "**resilience**".

> *Evelyn: But, above all, what...stays with me, ... of that work process is: how this girl did it - because at the time she was 17 years old - um... have that mindset and the attitude, so...strong and so positive despite everything. That is what stays with me about her. Because I truly admire her, the way she was able to go on **overcoming** her sorrows, her hardships.*
>
> *Magui: What Evelyn is saying... Lidia is the best example of a **resilient** person. I mean this, that all the time, despite the difficult situations, she was very critical of the difficult situations (...) very connected with*

> *her life, in a very positive way. And I think she is the kind of person that takes the opportunities that arise*.

This *resilience* continued to be described by professionals as that ability to go forward, to stop feeling the way they did, to see themselves, and to feel in a way that allowed them to be "better". I found it significant that while talking about this, they also mentioned the admiration they feel towards the young women, making it newly possible for the professionals to look at themselves from a new perspective.

Thinking of resilience as a social phenomenon, from a relational perspective (Venuto & Grandesso, 2017), instead of as an individual concept or as an internal capacity of the individual. Venuto & Grandesso (2017) define **resilience** as a great possibility to respond to the challenges that allows, to face adversity and, the learning and growth. They propose that a way out of the culture of deficit (Gergen, 2006) is to see resilience as the result of a culture focused on the development of resources, identifying the protective factors and "support networks", in which the person is offered skills and opportunities to make use of in relation to others, as described by Lidia above. Similarly, in the conversation with the group of young women, Ximena reflected pointing out the importance of being able to ask for help:

> *The important thing is asking for help and I believe yes, I would come to you to ask for help and express what I am going through, so you can help. In this case I have a child, especially, because it is violence what makes you stay in time, as well as hurting your self-esteem many times, it's... it's brutal, I...yes... I would be pretty effective in asking for help after seeing how you worked…*

Ximena reflected -as part of their strengths and 'learnings'-, on being able to ask for help considering the expectation that she had in relation to her parents asking for and receiving the help. Then she continued:

> *Because of all I heard so far* (referring to the meeting with the other young women)*, I think, like, there is not a happy ending, but it is like we all take strength from those situations to start towards the good. After all, it seems like, we are good mothers, we try to reach our goals, we are fine, at least for now, we can laugh, share... but I don't know, it's from that strength of having a bad time for so long I guess... which makes one look for a way to be fine however one can.*

We were reaching the end of our meeting with the young women and in this last part, Ximena offered a view from an 'us' perspective after having met the young women and hearing their stories, experiences and current life situations. Reflecting on all the strength they could take from adversity, she clarifies, no 'happy endings', in order to become the best possible versions of themselves.

Within this version of themselves, another theme that emerged from the conversations is:

Responsible motherhood

Throughout all the conversations with the young women, there are expressions where it is evident that despite the stories lived and the complexity of situations (abuse, neglect, precariousness) there is an attempt, desire and purpose to mother responsibly. In the following, Jessica and Veronica reflected on the theme:

> *I am not embarrassed to say I became a mother at 15. I love my daughter, I brought her into the world because I wanted to. No one put a gun to my head and said: 'you know what, get pregnant'. You have to be responsible for your actions. It's as simple as that. And I did it because I wanted to; it's not as if it was a mistake.* (Jessica)

Reflecting on her responsibility, when Jessica decided she wanted to have a baby, Verónica focused on her desires of a different childhood for her children and the way she raised and protects them:

> *They are raised so well and that is what I have seen throughout my life, after all I have been through, I said, "I do not want my children to go through what I went through". "I do not want my children to grow up apart" you know?, one in one place, the other in another, and then growing up and meeting each other; I want my children to grow up together (...) I mean they protect themselves so much because I always tell them "she is your little sister and you have to take care of her, and you have to respect your older brother", you know? I said: "I do not want my children to go through what I went through"* (Veronica)

Talking about protecting them, in the conversation with the professionals related to the work with Lidia, Evelyn described a different aspect of that 'protective mother role':

At that moment, yes, it was different. Because she felt sorry for the baby. She always played that protective role. That is indisputable. And it's in that protective mother role, um... that she was very sincere about her feelings towards her daughter. What she triggered. The effort she made to...stay with her and the fact of recognizing that she could not (do it), and everything it generated at that moment.

What Evelyn discusses here, was the topic of many discussions within the team of professionals that accompanied the work with Lidia. The justice system had the idea of 'taking responsibility of their motherhood' implying an effort, a demand even, to prioritize mothering and take responsibility of the care. Meanwhile, our stance also considered 'taking responsibility of their motherhood' implying recognition of limitations and respecting them, as a way of protecting their child from themselves.

When the young women reflected on how they became mothers, another of the themes that emerged was on their 'lessons learned'.

Learnings

Its presence in many of the conversations, the idea of something "learned" from the whole experience also emerged. This was raised by the young women, the professionals and the family home mothers. 'Learning' could be related either to something concrete which they realized they hadn't had the chance to learn before, or something in general terms related to "insights" they had as a result of the work done. Beatriz expressed the following:

From this (referring to the whole experience) *I **learned** to be ... a mother, with these two children that I have. I carried on in life, after so many bad things that happened. I have two children and I carried on well, thanks to ENFOQUE and the family home*.

For her part, also in relation to learning, Patricia reflected on her own learning process as a professional:

[Referring to the work with Jessica and her family] *With her it was all a... um... **learning** process, right?... Because, Lupe also has a way of being like, very, um motherly. And Jessi was in that phase of... of challenging, ... But... I remember that the nice thing with her was that this also came from teaching Jessica how to make crafts, the small*

> *boxes, and everything, right? Through that they became closer....*
> *Well, they started to... sort of win each other over, you know?*

Patricia was referring to how challenging the work with Jessica and the family home, which was described previously in the Challenges section, was for her in her professional role considering what she called their 'different ways of being'. Patricia appreciates that part of her learning had to do with 'being there', which allowed her to see how, through the handicrafts made by Jessica and Lupe, they were able to come closer; she describes it in the last part of her comment.

In the following excerpt, Rosa, one of the family home mothers which took Jessica in, commented, during the conversation, on the learning she observed:

> *What did we give by taking her into our family? Well, "let's teach her to be a mother". What she always **learned** here was living in family, how to coexist, that harmony, if she had a very screwed up life, so to speak, very harsh, here she saw another change process … as we said to her "do not repeat what you've already gone through.* (Rosa)

This learning referred to by Rosa, among others, becomes evident in Jessica's life, when she herself, mentions that what it was the most important to her in the experience, was her learning related to ***helping others:***

> *The important thing was that I **learned** many things during this process. For example, I love **helping** people now, and I was not like that before. I was even a family home, for (XX), do you remember?*

What Jessica mentioned last has to do with an experience I find very significant. After living in two different family homes, Jessica started to live independently with her daughter. Shortly after, a good friend of Jessica's found out she was pregnant, and she needed to move out of her home. This friend did not have the support of her partner and Jessica offered her to come stay with her until she could organize how to get on with her life. This happened while I was still going through the follow up and I could actually witness her *being a family home*. Jessica not only provided support during the pregnancy and postpartum (accompanying her to the doctor appointments, paperwork, emotional support and advice based on her recent experience at being a mother) but also accompanied her through the death of the baby's father and the death of the adolescent's mother. Beside the daily mutual support, Jessica developed a new

'self' from this experience, which from her point of view, strengthened her.

Helping others

This ***learning*** mentioned by Jessica happened in the context of another topic that emerged from the conversations, and it is related to the moment in which the young women change their position from being those who need to receive the help and care, to become those ***Helping others***, moving from cared for to caregiver. Ximena describes the situation, after living autonomously, how she had to help her little brothers in a critical situation:

> *One day I took my grandmother's car and I took my siblings, like a kidnapper, it truly was like a kidnapping because I didn't ask them, I got my siblings and took them, I had to...Now I look back and I was very crazy at that moment, ... I felt like a power over them and I sort of took ownership of them because I saw things and said: 'this cannot be'. I swear to you, I grabbed all their things and I brought the four of them with me, without asking anyone.*

During this anecdote Ximena emphasized the 'force' that seized her, pushing her to do something immediate to change the situation in which her younger brothers were living, surprising herself at her own courage.

In what follows, Lupe shares an anecdote about a health situation they had in their family while Jessica was living with them and where she was spontaneously committed to help.

> *Lupe: She* (referring to Jessica) *lived here with me and we were at my nephew's house, and we all heard about it* (the critical health situation) *and she started looking* (for a bed in a hospital) *...everywhere! She had her contacts and it helped us a lot in the midst of the despair, because in despair you don't just stand there, we were all there and she also searched. That was something of huge importance in my life, because one feels such despair, and to receive from a girl, support like this…*

After this was expressed, Lupe became very emotional and with tears in her eyes, we continued,

> *Leticia: A girl...*

> *Lupe: A girl. And she was the one that looked, she was the one saying*

Oh my God! She made us cry (by her solidarity) *...all of us who were there, and we continued until the night (...), and she* (Jessica) *was right there alongside me.*

And it was because she had her own experiences. She already had a daughter and also, according to her, has already been through (...), so for that reason she also wanted to help... It really got to her, so to speak.

In Lupe's experience, once again it is evident how by offering new relational spaces, new roles appear that allow changing the *constructed discourse of the crisis* (McNamee, 1996) from the identity by a more positive expansion of her 'selves' (Gergen, 2006).

Chapter 5: Reflections…

Throughout the 14 years in which I have been working in the area of children and adolescents being separated from their families, deinstitutionalization and family home placement, I have been able to identify diverse emotions and driving forces as a therapist, activist and woman. Such emotions that have walked by me and pushed me to carry on, have been: discomfort, desperation, above all indignation. If I ask myself what has contributed to the emergence of these moving and driving emotions to me, my immediate reply is: having had the chance to listen and meet the families, children and adolescents, listen to their stories, wishes, dreams, their indignation has transformed me, and their voices have remained with me and will continue doing so. Another profound transformation in me was having encountered such solidarity and generosity by way of the family homes, and colleagues willing to hear out these voices and still believe in our capacity (between us all) to give rise to changes and ruptures in traditional practices. The latter has implied and still does so a great number of challenges and difficulties in which counting on each and every one (along with their commitment, attention and support) has been truly necessary.

Looking back, in the field of family reintegration I can acknowledge the great headway there has been in only a few years as a country in terms of public policies and norms, which could even be considered new generation in the region. Initially, this seemed a fundamental path so as to be able to bring about structural transformations, hold practices from a human rights perspective and substantiate the need to change the manner of viewing and "intervening" as agents of the protective system.

It is now known that, although this has been a crucial step as a nation, it has not been enough to impact in everyday situations in which child and adolescent separation is executed for their so called 'protection' whether it be by the authorities, professionals of the system or society. Each day, we continually come across the need to witness the importance of developing a viewpoint that includes family history (with all its members), community, social, economic, cultural (among others) context and work that bears such in mind. In such way, authoritarian, abusive and breaching interventions will be avoided, which do not take account of and respect the voices of those protagonists of the 'protection'.

In the diverse analyses I have taken part in over the years with colleagues involved in the matter, distinct variables have been identified as 'focal points' of attention to guide the efforts and cover the system's "loopholes" and frailties in order to implement current policies: investment (general state budget) is still a pending and urgent matter. The Paraguayan state must allow for the nationwide strengthening of the protection system as well assure that the families can rely on resources that avoid ruptures and separations for reasons of poverty. This continues to be great pending matter.

Another aspect identified concerns the fragility of institutionalism and continuity of the set lines of work by governments in office. On repeated occasions, within civil society organizations we find ourselves dealing with the impact that constant public servant rotation causes with the change of authorities that begin operations (and decision making) without the knowledge of current norms and with the 'social pressure' of providing 'immediate' protection solutions that 'resolve' that flaws of previous governments. This results in an enormous "depletion" within the system that many a time even ends up "retrogressing" to former practices that had already been comprehensively discarded (such as institutionalization).

Resulting from this is the intention, by way of the current research, to be able to bring the voices of those who I considered are the protagonists of such social work and therapeutic processes before the present need to sustain and strengthen the proposal and with the belief in the role that research plays as a pillar in the transformation of society. Even though background research on the matter exists (in other countries and contexts) I considered it timely to be able to contribute alongside my conversational colleagues in a local experience that aims at sharing one (of many) possible ways alternative to the common practices in our own context when an adolescent is separated from their family and enters the protection system. Upon finishing this research, we once again found ourselves as a nation in the start of a new government with the challenge of visualizing the importance of giving continuity to family home placement and its strengthening as an imperative means of protection (over institutionalization), which reasserts the need to have performed this study and politically speaking having taken the decision to do so.

I still uphold some of the questions that stimulated my desire to carry out the present research: In what way do the professionals, workers relate and meet with those we work with? What are the language games that perpetuate this type of relationship? What are the power games that keep these relationships alive? What emotions accompany our experiences throughout these kinds of situations?

Even today, on each occasion in which I share these work experiences, talk with students and colleagues regarding family home placement in our setting I still come across the following expressions: Do these families exist? Are there families that are willing to do this? What is the 'best' way of working with adolescents who have been "victims" of diverse situations of abuse?

Since completing my degree in psychology, I have been involved in all sorts of academic activities (teaching, organizing and participating in courses and seminars), my main professional role has been devoted to working with families and political incidence. Throughout this research I decided to dedicate more time to teaching psychology at university. Not only has this choice meant making the effort to carry out this research as well as teach, but also allowed me to consider the impact of the training professionals receive from the academy has and the manner we 'meet' with the people (or 'disconnect' from them).

Pleasantly surprising is having found myself in conversations with students who query me on: How could we help the families if we do not carry out a diagnosis? What does the therapeutic accompaniment consist of then? What is most important? I expect that this research answers these questions in some way and also share and inspire professionals of diverse disciplines and subjects with the questions and questionings, that they keep us conscious of not overly believing in our theories if that distances us from people and the chance to work collaboratively with them.

Reflections related to the themes generated from the conversations

This study concerns five different clusters of actors that had been involved in collaborative working processes at ENFOQUE Niñez in recent years. A total of 20 people participated in 17 different (individual and group) conversations. The

aims of the study were (1) to comprehend if and how collaborative work practices can be helpful for adolescents, referred by the child protection system, who have been separated from their families (2) and to explore the lived experiences and challenges as encountered in collaborative practices by adolescents, family homes members, and professionals from the team of ENFOQUE Niñez from their voices.

Regarding the first research question -From the perspective of the adolescents, the family home members and the professionals involved from ENFOQUE Niñez, what are the challenges experienced in the joint work?, I primarily want to put focus on my personal research notes made regarding these topics. They allow me to reconnect with various emotions described in many of the conversations. A bunch of emotions are mentioned. They invite me to keep reflecting about the context, the stories, the living conditions, the work, … Gratefulness dominates, though, when I realize that this work has become for me - throughout the years- a driving force which maintains my desire to collaborate with transforming this reality, despite all challenges.

As a general view of the topics that were included in the category of Challenges, I would like to present an understanding based on my personal experiences:

A large portion of the challenges appear as contextual and/or cultural situations. For example, much of what generates 'complexity' has to do with the living conditions of many of the families and adolescents. Due to an amalgam of factors, they are not able to get access to the support that guarantees the fulfilment of their basic rights, contributing to what might be called 'vulnerability and need of family support'. Additionally, there is a lack of effective policies and institutional fragility (services not articulated amongst themselves, lack of supplies, professionals with a welfare-based, stigmatizing view, criminalization of poverty and discrimination, male chauvinism among other things).

However, one of the things I have learned throughout years of work, -in the attempt of taking care of the reality constructed by the words we choose to describe it, as Elkaim (in Gergen, 2006) said "by renovating our metaphors, we renovate the way we see the world" (p.13)-, is how much the ability to see strategies of resistance, struggle, and the possibilities to transform generational stories of 'exclusion', can facilitate the families to place themselves in a different spot.

As Gergen (2006) already pointed out, it is in the relationships we participate in, and through language within a particular culture, where we will co-construct what we are going to call our reality. Hence the generative potential of conversations, as well as the innumerable possibilities of de-constructing meanings (realities) and re-signifying them.

In this sense, I consider it exceedingly important, from the role of professionals who offer help, being able to take responsibility of how much this view, based on deficit (Gergen, 2006) and vulnerability, may not collaborate with the respect towards processes, wishes and resources of the people with whom and for whom we work.

This increases in complexity when risk situations (life risks) are discussed, and when the work we develop finds itself framed by a legal process, (with sentences and obligations, such as involuntary therapy) towards which people have different opinions, ideologies, political stances, etc. (on which we usually base our personal and professional ethics) as well as prejudices. If these prejudices cannot be recognized and distinguished from 'reality' it can blind or limit our disposition to encounter others, who are 'experts on their lives' (Anderson, 1999).

As described before, the protection system demands solutions to the so called 'problems' which need to be 'resolved', 'dissolved' as 'soon as possible', which has a lot of power in creating the standards (and expectations) for the future work but not taking any responsibility and active participation in the latter-, above all, when there is a child that is demanding the 'solution' from the system, the NGO, the professional. From my perspective, in that 'demand', there is a risk of forcing and pushing a family system that is maybe already exhausted from trying to live in a better situation. And all this for a long time, before the protection system entered their lives.

After many of these reflections, and regarding the Expectations ('frustration and failure') themes I am curious whether it is our training that creates the need for 'success'? What is the context and the relationships that lead us (professionals) to try to develop a scenario where success could be found? And what about the frustration that is generated when even so, there is no 'success'? How does this modify or influence the work's design? What made us quit/change the idea of success? My prejudice is that when the relationship with the other is the

protagonist of the process and we respect what 'we' need/want, different things happen.

All of the above makes me reflect on what Harlene Anderson (1999, 2007, 2013, 2014) describes about the expertise of the client and the 'not knowing' position for professionals as a stance that allows us to be curious and open enough to let adolescents and families 'teach us' from their resources and capabilities how to collaborate with them in a respectful manner, considering their voices as stronger instead of our own prejudices. I also would like to remark of the value that working from the resources that families, communities, and professionals has, allowing us to maintain the hope in complex contexts as described by Fuks (2017).

Finally, and closely linked to this, other challenges emerge from this relational responsibility. The challenges related to the time, the 'follow-up' and the need to articulate and expand networks... of the families whom we work with and our own.

The second research question aimed to identify working ingredients as identified by adolescents, family home members and the professionals involved from ENFOQUE Niñez in the collaborative practices with adolescents.

Relational Aspects

Even if relational aspects are present transversally and throughout each and every one of the conversations regarding the joint work performed with all the system's actors that is created based on the derivation or intervention of the protection system. Thus, constituting relational ethics and responsibility as the backbone that supports each of the elements (ingredients) outlined in the Analysis and Themes emerged from the conversation's chapters.

The relational elements have permitted in a locally unique manner the generation of the necessary grounds to develop the kind of relationships that allowed for joint work characterized by mutual trust, and a type of close relationship in which care and even love was felt. These relationships have grown via the facing of difficulties, challenges, misunderstandings, different stances and beliefs, opinions including opposing ones, however, all were overcome via the mutual attempt to keep seeking agreements that respond to ethics sensitive to the local. (McNamee, 2015).

As described in the introductory chapter of this study, when the family in which the child or adolescent was born cannot fulfill the care function for various reasons the state takes over this function. This is done through its protection policies (judicial and administrative): the state guarantees the fulfilment of the rights of both the child and his/her family and culture and offers a family home duly evaluated, trained and accompanied for that purpose.

Throughout the years I have learned to know and accompanied many family homes; each of them has its particular style, characteristics and histories. I determined that, regardless of the fact that the programs develop their evaluation strategies or establish accreditation criteria, the main elements in the family home placement working process are *trust* and *openness* to work together; another important element is the search, in a *flexible* and *collaborative* way, towards 'answers', adjustments, 'solutions' given the particular experience the situation requires.

I found Family homes very special, for their social and therapeutic role. Family home placement although far from always being 'cute and loving stories' (whatever that could be), with great solidarity and co-responsibility family homes offer society the hope for a better place to live in.

Finally, the third research question, how do adolescents, family home members and the professionals involved from ENFOQUE Niñez describe what was helpful in the collaboration?

Reviewing my notes taken during the analysis process of the conversations on what was good, helpful and what was useful in all the work done other questions pop up: Was it useful for what? For whom? Good from what perspective?

Clearly the possible answers are not to be found in specific methods, techniques, nor procedures. Neither do they account for a psychological theory or a specific psychotherapy school. For the young women in this study, it seems the strongest element is what we called 'emotional support', referring to the experience of having asked for help and being heard – meaning that they received the help they were asking for; the experience of having a space where they could talk to each other and to other people; the experience of not being judged or evaluated, but instead accompanied.

The aforementioned also revolves around how good it was to be able to live in

a family home during moments of chaos, crisis, confusion, difficulty. It becomes clear that the sole fact of moving into a family home and living there, would not have made the difference that makes the difference, as Bateson would say. Section 2 Relational Aspects (in chapter 4) describes the type of relationships that were established, precisely leaving the view that there are those who take care of people and those who need to be taken care of, those who give and those who receive. Thus, constituting a circular view in which we are an 'us', who influence and are influenced by, and that we transform constantly. I felt marvelled by repeatedly hearing the family home mothers talk about how much the experience of being a family home 'benefited' them and their families or by hearing the professionals talk about how much they have learned from the young women, and in some cases, how much they admire them.

During the conversations, when talking about the themes described regarding the Meaning of the work, emotion is transformed throughout the process, faces light up; there is laughter, there is hope, far from fairy tale happy endings. Possibilities are created through affect, recognizing resources, capacities. There are young mothers responsibly assuming their motherhood, with the intention of changing their own story and writing a new one: a story of care, love and protection for their children and themselves. There are young women willing to accompany adolescents who can benefit from their life experience. There is a strong desire to help and care for others in the way they felt taken care of. These young women make recommendations to professionals, the system, family homes and other young women; telling them they have to ask for help when needed, telling them they act as agents of their own lives and can be autonomous. The young women recognize that they learned during this whole process and felt- even only at some moments- to be able to move on after experiencing such great difficulties.

These stories illustrate to me the *rhizome* metaphor as used by Chaveste, Kinman and Molina (2013). It represents the passing of *relationships* to *networks*, where possibilities emerge and where there is a change. As such, this idea challenges the paradigm in which relationships of power and hierarchy (many times even oppression) prevail and changes it into a way of thinking in which relationships of solidarity and *exchanges* -which Chaveste, Kinman and Molina (2013) would call 'gifts'- that hold our bonds. I highlight the rhizome metaphor, the capability it draws, of expanding and growing creatively and

chaotically, where it is still possible to support the relational 'nodes'.

This has been a built reality jointly, which 'brings forth a world' (Maturana & Varela, 1984) of which I feel I want to be a part of. A reality where professionals, family home members, adolescents, and their families walk hand by hand collaborating, and actively learning how to co-create a reality in which we feel listened and considered with our different world views and experiences.

Reflections related to the different groups of women with whom I had the conversations in this study

The professionals

One of the aspects that caught my attention concerned how much the professionals focused on the challenges within the conversations that is to say how much when describing their experiences with the work processes specifically referring to the context difficulties, complex and challenging situations, the limitations and pressure exerted from the expectations within the protection system. This could have to do with the selection criteria of the youths invited to participate in the sense that the chosen situations were those considered "paradigmatic" although another situation that arises is how many of the challenges were linked to the demand experienced from the protection system.

It turns out as a paradoxical aspect that during the work process the professionals (from the protection system) have had rather constrained participation even though the decision-making power they bear results extremely important. This in itself has been the main concerns and topics of the conversations with professionals unlike the family home mothers and young women.

This leads to ask myself: How far do the expectations and pressure from the protection system influence the professional's vision regarding the meaning and impact that the therapeutic and social work has? In what way does it affect relationships the professionals have with the system workers and the power they exercise in the work process?

Furthermore, what sticks with me from the work and conversations with them is the importance of teamwork, including each one's individually, where dialogue and the chance to create a relational ethic that allows all our voices be heard and in such manner care for ourselves so as to care. In a context where the various time dimensions and their impact may be considered, and conversations are valued over theoretical frameworks, the need to defend "a truth" over others becomes diluted and there is a prevalence of cooperation and creativity.

The Young women

With Beatriz I have reinforced the significance of respecting the right time to talk about that which may be painful. She has shown me how much courage it takes to create a parallel life story that has enabled her to survive the pain of her own story (that is seen from outside by the health system as a possible psychological disorder, totally understandable in her story). Moreover, the fact that having started a path to "healing" a wound (in this case her story of adoption and abuse) also exposed her to very hard situations. However, she trusted in all the help she was offered (therapeutic and social, from the family home, her different partners) and I have learnt from her great strength and desire to fight for a brighter future even if this means distancing herself from her adoptive family for her own protection.

I have also consolidated the importance of working to raise awareness and avoid such common practice of irregular adoptions (or child appropriation) in our context, as well as ensuring that the professionals and actors of the system can offer the appropriate guidance (within children rights) to the adoptive parents that guarantees the fulfilment of the adopted child's rights. The need, as a nation, to rely on a system of standardized registration, (health, education, identity, protection). Aforementioned would have given way to offering her protection and know her whereabouts much sooner as well as avoiding Beatriz having to live informally and out of the system for fear of the consequences as she was underage.

For her part, Jessica has taught me to persist, trust and hold the wish to "meet" after so many disappointments that the adult world had given her. Following several occasions in which she had felt judged, forced and pressured to behave "correctly", Jessica showed me that it is worth insisting in finding the difference that makes the difference so as to trust again. Working with Jessica has

challenged me to contention that her voice ('irreverent', 'distinct', 'questioning', 'manipulative', among many other adjectives given by the system and colleagues) be heard and considered with all the fears that her decisions inflicted on those involved in her accompaniment. Jessica has reminded me how people respond and 'are' in relationships and the contexts in which we are part of, that simply seeing people with internal 'motives' for their behavior only gives birth to great constraints for the possibilities of change.

Having worked with Jessica, Beatríz, Lidia and Verónica there were new questions I asked myself concerning how much we (as society) need to provide for an education that includes fathers taking on their responsibilities in parenthood as well as regarding the restrictions that our social mandates with reference to how "a mother" should live in order to be respected and not judged. Jessica restated the experience in which to be a family home it is merely putting yourself in the other's shoes, offer an experience that dignifies to all involved.

I have also gone through with them the impotence of witnessing how the lack of state, family and community support may source so much desperation that leads us behave and make decisions that may easily be judged as 'bad' if the context in which they were taken is not borne in mind. I have also strengthened my belief in the importance counting on integral sexual education in the school syllabus, family planning guidance and the support the adolescents in mothering. Said may seem trivial but in our country, to date, they are still topics of debate.

They have all proved that if they are trusted, as *experts* in their lives, they are who can best actively contribute and collaborate with the work needed to be carried out implying that the professionals are open to learning alongside them, unarm and question prejudices and structures that enable them to see and hear instead of trying to 'educate', 'correct' or 'punish' them.

Another matter that has been significantly important, other than the essential work performed throughout the process is how much we need to (as society and protection system) solve the proceedings that permit the follow up stage and the adolescents exiting the protection system past legal age. We experienced the sensation of the need to continue with the accompaniment with most of the young women, and the shortage of networks that could constitute efficient support for them and their children. There is no doubt, that these young women,

having been able to count on our accompaniment and for having been in family homes have even more networks than other youths that are "abandoned" by the protection system once they are of legal age.

What is more, with Lidia and Ximena. I noticed that the fact that they had the opportunity to be inserted in the labour force (in a formal and safe environment) was fundamental in elaborating an autonomous life plan and find peace, which many of the young women did not have. Unfortunately, this gave way in a unique manner and in the private sector and not as a leaving policy. I consider of utmost importance the coordination with enterprises and sources of work be suited to the particular life possibilities of the youths for future projects.

I learnt the worth of deconstructing the prejudices we have as society concerning certain areas of the city considered slum areas with Verónica, the cultural practices and of care regarding gender, and the challenge to hear out both fears in relation to these aspects and the request and voice of the youth and family in reintegration; above all when a sustained follow up process cannot be ensured in the future.

Ximena and her family have imparted the importance of not remaining at a standstill as professionals in the "frustration" that things did not turn out the way one had wanted, and that even then we could still walk together appreciating the process of each family and the courage that the adolescents may gather in adverse situations. She also reminded me that our wish and decision to cooperate with other many a time originates from one's own story of having been in need and received help which in part makes up our "expertise".

The Family Home mothers
It is amazing to recapitulate that at end of this research, among the 5 participating families, 48 people have lived with them. It is an honour to witness to their vital social and therapeutic role in society. Listening to the countless stories (from their own childhood, daily life and the placement experiences) renewed my beliefs on a different kind of care for people entering the protection or health system.

A feeling of togetherness for the following challenges to come, was created through the conversations.

Reflections related to the research process

In our local context it could be said we still have the predominance of a culture that share knowledge orally over written communication. It has also meant a great challenge to do it in English, foreign language for me, but the doing so has been interesting at the time of 'conveying myself' and make numerous agreements, arrangements and clarifications that allowed for the present dissertation.

For some time, I have dreamt of having the opportunity of finding the space and time to reflect upon the work and undertaking of this research allowed me to do so together with those invited to be part of it. Such has meant many sacrifices for instance the effort to keep away from first line of work, and also the second until finding the sufficient space to be able to carry it out. This has not happened without multiple interruptions arising from situations that demand an immediate response on different levels: personal, family, work, social and political forming the very metaphor of how we respond to life itself.

I identified myself with the idea proposed by St. George, Wulff & Tomm (2015) to see it as a 'pracademics' understanding that as a therapist (the practitioner) the main objective of carrying out this research aimed to respond many of the questions that emerge from daily practice and that have to do with the curiosity of what we are doing and what we could do better considering all the situations of life in which we find ourselves working, and what they have in common or the ways that we usually respond. Does the way we respond could be collaborating with the status quo or on the contrary the generation of an arena in which it is possible to deploy all our creativity and imagination to design new and better possibilities for the families with whom we work?

Moving away from the role of researcher that *represents* reality or tries to find the 'truth' or the 'answers' from a positivist position, it was my intention to generate a relationship with the participants that might invite dialogues for a new comprehension of the situations. (Gergen 2000, 2014b; Anderson, 2007; McNamee, 2014)

As Kenneth Gergen[41] expressed if we are relational beings, in one level, every

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[41] (2017) at the International Congress of Collaborative and Dialogical Practices in Tenerife, Spain.

research we do could be called *relational research*. He also explained that when we are talking about relational research, we are also talking about a posture within the research. How do we do it? How do we invite the participants? How have we positioned ourselves within the research? What are we doing research for…?

Gergen expressed: *we need to create new languages to reach novel places*. Therefore, I had to ask myself in which way I should write or describe to create new meanings and new futures regarding to the theme of this research. For example, "How do I collaborate in avoiding focusing on the "social/ family problems" to focus on the "social/ family resources?"

Considering dialogue, as the protagonist from where the themes emerged and following Anderson's (1999) idea of the generative capacity of dialogue and language, what was interesting were the various themes that emerged among the participants during the conversations; which influenced my journey throughout the research (DeFehr, 2008).

The atmosphere generated in the conversations included in this research was, in my view, one of intimacy and trust, in which the participants discussed actively, and emotions expressed either with tears, gestures and even voicing the impact having participated in the conversation had.

In response to the question: "What do you remember about working together?", the professionals, family home mothers, and the young women responded in different ways. Each choosing where and how to talk (starting by making a historical account of the facts, or describing the "end" and making interpretations, questions, among others.)

In my roles as researcher and professional team/therapist I was challenged to "be" in the conversations, in thoughts or commenting on what emerged from the encounters, especially as these were very "emotional" conversations. On occasions I tried not to change the course of the talks, and on others I got carried away by what the words and emotions generated in me, responding a 'spontaneous' (Shotter, 2012, DeFehr, 2016), embodied and 'withness' (Anderson, 1999, 2012a) answer, with the risks and uncertainty implied in

letting the conversations evolve by themselves.

Some of the people whom I spoke and saw long ago surprised me with new and unusual stories of suffering and others of happiness giving me the feeling I have rediscovered countless resources they have; many of them, seemed unimaginably, impossible to be developed e.g. jobs, children, relationships, reflections, solving "problems", among others.

As Schnitman & Fuks (1994) would say, "When the dialogue is installed, however, from the shared/constructed questions, the process of exploration of the 'surprise' point, becomes at the same time, a deconstructive/co-constructive process." (p.451)

When people are invited into a dialogue, and we share ideas or topics, we cannot control or design how the conversation will turn out. As Talavera (2010) mentioned "conversations are not linear, they touch one and other issues, they intertwined; everything could be or not a motive of conversation[42]". (p.37)

With the young women, the conversation was also a good excuse to meet, see each other again, ask about our lives and people of importance, give big hugs and laugh or cry together again.

Similar things happened with the professionals of the teams that were not working at ENFOQUE Niñez anymore: Evelyn, Nidia, Magui and Livia, with whom I had my first experiences in this work with children and adolescents separated from their families and gaining very strong and meaningful learning and many questioning experiences. The experience of meeting together for this research, as we did in the past, was very special even though there still is an ongoing professional connection.

The colleagues that were still working at the organization were Alejandra, Myriam, Marcela, Amalia, Rosalba and Patricia; although being used to seeing each other every day, sharing time to reflect on our joint work is always a special gift.

Regarding the meetings with the family home mothers, most of the conversations happened in their homes and they reminded me of the conversations I used to have with them when accompanying the therapeutic

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[42] My own translation

process while someone was living with them. These conversations were informal, full of emotions, big laughs and tears; with a lot of life stories about their extended families, children they used to take care of - their own or not - past or present). The language used is casual, and while sharing stories it became common for the one asking questions to suddenly change roles to the one answering them.

As researcher, during all conversations, especially group ones, the 'controlled' (McNamee y Hosking 2012 p.66) format was lost making it possible to experience the chaos of life itself; interruptions, changes in topic, argumentation, stories, anecdotes, jokes, laughter, crying, and making me feel 'subordinate' to life itself in the conversation (Shotter, 1993).

Something unexpected

In the final group conversation with the young women there were two significant events for me as a researcher. One situation was in relation to language: one of the young women with whom I shared my writings on the themes that had emerged from the individual conversations told me: "I did not understand anything; can you explain it to me in other words?". This challenged me to take responsibility of using language as a "bridge" between daily and academic language since I had prioritizing the latter when writing. I asked myself questions and had concerns as did DeFehr (2016) regarding the right of participants in a dialogical social investigation to "speak in a familiar speech genre" (p.6) And since I was co-creating a 'meaning', I asked myself how can I participate in the relationships, with an ethical sense and a relational sensibility? How can I facilitate a dialogue between my interest and the interest of the participants and authors developing a language that is familiar and inclusive for all people involved?

I believe that the emotional bond with all the people with whom I spoke, was important in order to meta-communicate my role and the expectations in relation to the conversations involved in the research.

The young women met for the first time on December 28th and was previously agreed to toast for the motives each one had; achievements, challenges and desires, among others. The second unexpected arose during the toast which was the offer of two of the four young women participating to accompany another teenager in need at present or in the future, representing a living

example of the transformative power of a conversation, and the power of research in social sciences to proactively influence its surroundings (Gergen, 2014b); what Gergen calls "liberatory research, productive of practice and focused on action" (Gergen, 2014b, p. 303). Moreover, I believe we have been given an opportunity to reflect on what we experience and recognize our lessons, even reaching the point of wanting to "return" or share this with others.

The young women took the position of taking care of others in this conversation, as described in the *helping others* theme, reflecting all together on the therapeutic and social processes in which they were involved. The conversation allowed for the transformation of moving from the position of "the ones in need" to the position of "colleagues" willing to help others in need. As Ghiso (2009) would say "the dialogical practice has the power and capacity of reinvention, of recognition and of knowledge." (p. 55)

Reflections on future research

After concluding the present project, one of the aspects that I consider relevant regarding future research has to do with the possibility of conducting a study in which conversations with protection system professionals (from the Ministry of Children and Youth and the Judicial System), as well as adolescents´ families, can be included. By doing this, it could be relevant to bring more voices from a broader system.

It also might be interesting to organize the conversations between participants in a different way, like creating group conversations from the very beginning of the study (group conversation with family home members, and/or having group conversations with everyone involved in each of the working processes, among other multiple possibilities) which might lead to different conversations, questions and co-constructions to continue learning and creating better responses together in those situations.

Considering the lack of research in this area, I find the need to continue developing research focused on the follow up with children and families which had been part of processes within the protection system and how to improve the 'leaving' from the system in a careful and safe way.

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[43] Although APA is used for references, for a gender consciousness, the full names of authors are included.

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Appendices

1. Letter of Invitation and Informed consent

It is a pleasure to invite you to participate in this research: "Therapeutic Processes in the collaborative work with children and adolescents separated from families by the justice system in contexts of social injustice" which is developed in a doctorate course of Taos Institute program and the Free University of Brussels, Belgium. Should you accept the invitation, the participation will be voluntary, not paid and consist of holding conversations with both the researcher and other invitees.

As part of this, Leticia Rodriguez, researcher, shall use the information offered in accordance with the confidentiality agreement between both parties, entitling the participant choose anonymity in the research by means of a pseudonym of their choice.

It is worth pointing out that the participants may check the material produced at any time during the process and before its possible publication.

Thanking you in advance for your cooperation,

Leticia Rodriguez

The confirmation of this invitation implies the acceptance of said in participating in the research and acknowledgement of having been sufficiently informed about the scope and characteristics of said research.

Signature: Print: ID Nº:

Pseudonym:

2. Excerpt of one of the conversations (Spanish & English)

Group conversation with the young women

Ximena: Y con los adolescentes es la capacidad de negociar, principalmente. El intercambio: vos me das algo y yo soy…

Ximena: La forma de conversar, llegar a empatizar.

Jessica: sí, porque Ña Rosa me preguntaba luego todo el día cómo estaba y esas cosas,

Ximena: Se interesaba más.

Lidia: La atención es muy importante.

Jessica: Exacto.

Lidia: La atención. Uno pues carece de atención y la atención le hace sentir bien a la gente, por eso que se encariña mucho con ustedes, porque ustedes les dan esa atención que uno necesita y se siente también, ¿Cómo se dice?, cuidada, protegida, no estar sola, ¿verdad?, eso es muy importante.

Leticia: cuando vos decís atención… cómo?

Jessica: Estar encima, pero tampoco tratando de… por las malas. Que no me hable con amenazas o "te vas a ir a vivir a otro lado" y esas cosas… (Silencio) O "te van a quitar tu hija"…

Ximena: Pero el hecho de saber no más que están ahí, porque cuando Livia se iba a casa por ejemplo, o sea, yo sabía que había alguien interesada en que las cosas cambien, y saber que estaba no más, o sea, eso básicamente, saber a dónde salir a correr y venir a tocar el timbre.

Lidia: ¿Te acordás una vez cuando yo me fui…? ¿Dónde era que yo me fui? (risas) en la casa de… yo me fui como para trabajar, o sea, cuidar a una criatura me parece, si, antes de cumplir mayoría de edad. Cuando eso le tuve recién a mi bebé, yo estaba re loca luego, re mal estaba cuando eso (Risas) y me sentía tan mal y les tuve que llamar a ustedes a pedir auxilio, cuando fue que Magui me llevó en su casa, ¿te acordás? Y eso por ejemplo, ¿Qué iba a hacer yo si no contaba con ustedes? No confiaba en

nadie más. (Silencio)

English version on the same excerpt

Ximena: And with adolescents it is mainly the ability to negotiate. The exchange: you give me something and I am ...

Ximena: The way to converse, to reach empathy.

Jessica: yes because Ña Rosa asked me all the time how I was and those things,

Ximena: was more interested.

Lidia: Attention is very important.

Jessica: Exactly.

Lidia: The attention. Because attention is what is lacking, and attention makes people feel good, that is why they are very fond of you, because you give them that attention that one needs, and you can feel, how do you say it? Taken care of, protected, not alone, right? That's very important.

Leticia: when you say attention ... how?

Jessica: Being there... but not trying to ... do it in a bad way. They should not talk to the adolescents with threats like: "you're going to live elsewhere" and those things ... (Silence) Or "they're going to take your daughter away" ...

Ximena: (referring to the professional's presence) But just the fact of knowing that they are there, because when Livia went home for example, I knew that there was someone interested in changing things, and knowing that, it was just, basically, knowing where to go running to and ring the bell.

Lidia: (talking to me) Do you remember once when I left ...? Where was it that I left? (laughs) in the house of ... I went to work there, that is, to take care of a child I think, yes, before coming of age. When I had my baby recently, I was crazy then, it was a really bad moment then, and I once felt so bad and I had to call you and ask for help, when Magui had to take me home? Do you remember? And that, for example, what would I do if I couldn't count on you? I did not trust anyone else. (Silence)

Excerpt of the Conversation with Lidia (Spanish)

Lidia: El trabajo, el trabajo por ejemplo a mi me sirvió no sólo en lo económico sino también en lo social, para poder yo socializar, darme cuenta que no sólo yo tengo problemas sino que todos tienen problemas, eso es uno que me sirvió mucho

Y yo, con el tiempo crecer también, darme cuenta, madurar y darme cuenta que de a poco todo se puedo superar; eso sí, yo digo, que si yo no hubiera tenido el apoyo, el apoyo que yo tuve con ustedes, no hubiera sido lo mismo, no sé que me hubiera pasado, yo si valoro, a mi me sirvió muchísimo, el sentirme valorada, importante, el saber que a alguien por lo menos le importo.

Leticia: Qué cosas que las personas de la organización hacían te hacían sentir que eras importantes

Lidia: Porque cuando yo….llamo, están. Siempre están disponibles para hablarme, aconsejarme, no se si para mi nomás era muy importante, a lo mejor porque nunca antes tuve alguien que estuviera pendiente de mi, que me hable, me aconseje, que me diga que yo puedo. Siempre tuve personas en mi vida que me decían que yo no puedo, que soy una inútil…

Leticia: Alguien que creyera

Lidia: Eso, alguien que creyera y eso fue lo que hicieron, las personas que trabajaron conmigo. Yo cuando eso, no tenía ni idea de quien les mandó, de cómo era, yo no sabía eso, lo único que me importaba a mí era que esas personas se acercaron a mí para apoyarme, ya sea espiritualmente, aconsejándome, hablándome, cosas que yo necesitaba porque yo estaba sola, desconcertada, sin saber qué hacer y estaba saliendo de una oscuridad que no sabía adónde irme, y lo que pasó con ustedes fue que me ayudaron a salir de esa oscuridad, me mostraron más o menos hacia adonde ir, que era eso lo que yo necesitaba…

Y eso a mi me ayudó anímicamente, emocionalmente también

Leticia: Aha...

Lidia: A ver, también hay algo que a mi también me impresionó y que no sé si lo hacen así con todo con quienes trabajan, pero yo…además de lo que era el trabajo, yo…me sentía querida por ustedes, o sea en confianza y que lo de Magui por ejemplo, ella me llevó hasta su casa, eso por ejemplo fue muy importante para mi. Lo otro que yo valoro y que fue algo que siempre recuerdo y que fue muy importante para mi, fue aquella vez que yo estaba en esa casa y no tenía a quien recurrir y que te llamé y ustedes estuvieron ahí para mí. Eso por ejemplo fue muy importante también para mi.

Excerpt of the Conversation with Lidia (English)

Lidia: Work. Work, for example, served me not only economically but also socially, in order to be able to socialize, to realize that not only do I have problems but that everyone has problems, that is something that helped me a lot.

And I, with time, I also grew, matured and realized that little by little everything can be moving on; yes, I say, if I had not had the support, the support I had with you, it would not have been the same, I do not know what would have happened to me, I do value, it helped me a lot, to feel valued, important, to know that someone at least cares about me.

Leticia: What things the people in the organization did made you feel that you were important?

Lidia: Because when I ... call, they are there. They are always available to talk to me, to advise me, I do not know if for me it was very important, maybe because I never had someone who was aware of me, who would talk to me, tell me that I can. I always had people in my life who told me that I could not, that I am useless …

Leticia: Someone who believed

Lidia: That, someone who believed and that's what they did, the people who worked with me. I had no idea who sent you, what it was like, I did not know that, the only thing that mattered to me was that these people came to support me, either spiritually, advising me, talking to me, things that I needed because I was alone, confused, not knowing what to do and I was coming out of a darkness where I did not know where to go, and what happened with you was that you helped me out of that darkness, they showed me more or less where to go, that was what I needed.

And that helped me physically, emotionally too.

Leticia: aha...

Lidia: There is also something that impressed me and that I do not know if they (referring to the professionals) do it like that with everyone they work

with, but I ... apart from what the job was, I ... I felt loved by you, that is, in confidence... and Magui for example, she took me to her house, that was very important for me. The other thing that I value and that was something that I always remember, was that time I was in that house and I had no one to turn to and I called you and you were there for me. That, for example, was very important for me too …