

# COMPENSATION OF EDUCATIONAL DEFICIENCIES IN CHILDREN STAYING IN FOSTER CARE IN BIALAPODLASKAPOVIAT

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**Abstract.** *The material for the article was created as part of the project "Education, levelling developmental and educational deficits of charges of family-run children's houses and care and educational institutions (based on the example of BiałaPodlaskapoviat)" implemented by the Department of Pedagogy of Higher State School in BiałaPodlaska. Two methods: diagnostic survey and study of individual cases were used in the research, using proprietary questionnaires for charges, interview questionnaires with educators of care and educational centres and family facilities, an observation sheet and talks with coordinators and directors of the examined institutions. The research was carried out in BiałaPodlaskapoviat in three care and educational centres and three family-run children's homes. The subject of the article was to implement the educational needs of foster care children, including the issue of levelling educational gaps. The aim of the study was to determine whether educational deficiencies are noticeable there, what is the compensation of these deficiencies in family and institutional settings, if any of these forms is more favourable, what factors affect the proper satisfaction of educational needs? The analysis of the results made it possible to conclude that educational needs are realized in both care and educational centres and in family-run children's homes, the beneficiaries of both forms exhibit numerous educational deficiencies conditioned by previous educational negligence. Compensation of educational deficiencies is more beneficial in family care. The basic forms of compensating for gaps include: tutoring, compensatory classes, individual caregiver work with a child, colleague self-help, voluntary activities.*

**Keywords:** *compensation for educational deficiencies, foster care, BiałaPodlaska poviat.*

## **Introduction**

Basic educational, care, socializing and economic responsibilities should be taken by biological parents, however, in case of dangers i.e. unemployment, poverty, breaking of a family structure, addictions, violence in families and other dysfunctions, often enough a child is directed to a foster care. Contemporary legal regulations in Poland differentiate institutional and family care. (Bill, 2011). Family care includes: foster family and family-run children's houses, institutional

care, by contrast, involves educational care centers, regional care and therapeutic institutions and intervention pre-adoption institutions. Each of the above mentioned forms of foster care should constitute an educational environment that compensate a confided child the deficiencies in care, upbringing and education.

Education takes one of the key places in one's life. A right to education is guaranteed by Polish Constitution, in a section of an act no. 70 one can learn that everyone has a right for a free education in state schools and education is obligatory till the age of 18. Both institutional and family care institutions should guarantee their charges an access to education which is adapted to their age and developmental chances as well as take care of a proper balancing of educational deficiencies (*Bill on supporting family and foster care system, sections of an act no. 40 and no. 93*). Moreover, for each child that is directed to institutional care a help plan is constructed right after its coming to an institution. This help plan includes i.a. child's educational development, a residence card that reports on the contacts between an institution and a school which a child attends and on its learning process. (*Decree, 2011: § 15, § 17*).

It is worth noting that children directed to educational care centers and family-run children's houses usually require undertaking compensatory activities that handle educational deficiencies resulting from past negligence coming from their family environment.

The problem of many charges is not only backlogs and negligence but also a lack of systematicity, a lack of a habit of learning, an inability to organize work. Marzena Ruszkowska thinks that small school achievements of foster care charges are conditioned by many risk factors, much more frequently occurring in this group than in general population. Besides it, these children usually from the early age experience negative, traumatic things, such as violence, different kind of negligence, deficits, shortages, humiliation that might additionally deepen their learning difficulties. These children have usually poor vocabulary, a little or no knowledge about a world, a lack of basic information concerning civilization inventions (Ruszkowska, 2013a: p. 78).

Józefa Matejek believes that it is common that charges of a foster care present a reluctance to learning, have low aspirations resulting from disbelief in their talents and chances, and additionally their motivation is decreased by failures that they experience in schools and the problems with acceptance they experience among their peers. Thus, it is necessary to diagnose children in psychological and pedagogical clinic, the aim of which is to define mechanisms that determine growth, behavioral patterns and school functioning of a child (Matejek, 2014: pp. 98-99). Each diagnosis should recognize not only student's weaknesses but also strengths and potential on which to organize correction and compensatory activities.

The article deals with satisfying educational needs of foster care charges, including the issue of balancing educational deficiencies.

The aims of the studies were as follows: first, to find if charges of a foster care suffer from educational deficiencies; secondly, to learn how compensation of these deficiencies looks like in family-run children's houses and educational care centers; thirdly, to learn if one of these forms is much better than the other and, fourthly, to learn what factors affect fulfilling educational needs of the charges successfully.

It was assumed that educational needs are satisfied in both educational care centers as well as in family-run children's houses. The charges of both forms of foster care reveal numerous educational deficiencies that result from the past educational negligence. Simultaneously, this study focuses on the analysis of such factors as a type of institution, location of a institution, number of charges and their age.

### **Researched territory and researched sample**

The researches for the studies were conducted in educational care centers and in family-run children's houses in bialski district that is located in the eastern part of Poland. Conducting of the studies was planned within the project *Education, balancing educational and developmental deficiencies of the charges of family-run children's houses and educational care centers (based on the example of bialski district)* realized by Department of Pedagogy of State School in BiałaPodlaska.

In bialski district three institutions of institutional type (educational care centers) are currently functioning. The first one, *Educational Care Centre in Komarno*, was established on the 1<sup>st</sup> August 1997. Till 31<sup>st</sup> December 2012 it was the *Children's House in Komarno*. It is a socializing institution offering 30 places. It is located in Konstanyńów commune, in the Komarno village. Since 1999 the unit directing it is Bialski District. The institution employs 14 care providers. These days there are 25 charges there.

The next institution is *Educational Care Centre in Szachy*. It has functioned since 2003. Nowadays it is an entity that comes under the *Administrative Centre of Educational Care Centers in Komarno*. The Administrative Centre of Educational Care Centers is responsible for dealing with economic, administrative and organizational tasks of the subject entity. A separate housing in Educational Care Center in Szachy resembles its residents a family house. Educational Care Centre in Szachy is dedicated to children over 10. It offers 14 places. It employs 5 care providers. These days 10 charges are residing there.

The last of the researched institutions is Educational Care Centre in Janów Podlaski. It has functioned since 1st April 2010. Currently it is subject to

Administrative Centre of Educational Care Centers in Komarno. The entity was redeveloped from the former border guards building. The building was adapted to the ruling residential standards for 12 charges. Five care providers work with the children. These days, 10 charges are residing there.

It needs to be highlighted that following the trends in caring for a child in the western countries, the number of permanent residence centers as well as the number of available places there is decreasing (Kantowicz, 2001: p. 197). The centers that function, in particular the centre in Szachy and Janów Podlaski, due to the number of their charges resemble more and more an entity of family type rather than of institutional.

The other part of the researches was conducted in Family-run Children's House in Neple and in two educational care centers of family type located in Bohukały. Both of the places are located in Terespol commune. In bilaski district there is one more educational care centre of family type in Żabka, in Międzyrzec Podlaski commune. Unfortunately, despite taken actions there was no approval of conducting the studies in the place. In every of all three places there are eight charges.

The studies in the form of a survey were done in the last quarter of 2017 on a little researched sample of 25 charges of educational care centers, aged 11-20. The whole group of this age category includes 33 people but reaching the rest of the people was impossible as large number of charges is residing in Sociotherapy Center for Youth, Educational Centers for Youth and they educate outside the centre or represent a lower age group. In family-run children's houses in the age group mentioned above 10 charges were surveyed. The survey included both closed and open questions.

Moreover, 10 care providers from the educational care center as well as 6 head people who direct family-run children's houses completed questionnaires. Among the surveyed people there were both men and women. Additionally, within the case study, the acquired information was complemented with interviews with coordinators from two educational care centers and with a director of a family-run children's house. The study was accompanied by the observation sheets, as well. A hidden, participatory observation was supposed to confront the acquired information with the actual situation in the family foster care and in institutional foster care. At the same time, it enriched and complemented the acquired researches.

### **Balancing educational gaps of the charges of both family and institutional foster care according the studies**

Researches involved compensatory actions revolving around educational deficiencies and negligence of the charges that have grown out of dysfunctional

family house. It can be assumed that the stay in a foster care itself is compensatory as long as we interpret compensation as: “a process of completing, balancing and replacing deficiencies through other methods” (Matyjas, 2003: p.147).

Detailed researches concerning compensatory activities involved such issues as: an access to school equipment and educational aids, conditions to effective learning at home and in the institution, time spent on dealing with homework, help and support in completing deficiencies and backlogs in knowledge offered at home, at school and in the environment, developing children’s passions, interests and talents.

It was found that both environments, family-run and institutional centers, ensure their charges all necessary course books and school equipment as well as offer an access to various educational aids i.e. Internet, encyclopaedias, required reading, atlases, dictionaries etc.

According to the statements of care providers from family-run children’s houses and the educational care centers, in both environments each child is provided with a room or a place for learning. Educational care centers, however, are assessed much worse. The statements of the charges support this thesis: „*if I have to prepare to a school test in the centre I usually do this late in the evening or at night because it is the only time when it is quiet and nobody disturbs me*”, or „*in the centre there is no atmosphere to learn*” (statements of a seventeen year old charge of educational care centre who learns in the secondary school).

The next problem that was carefully analyzed was the time spent daily on doing homework and learning. The table 1 presents the data.

Table 1 Time spent on doing homework and learning

Time spent on doing homework and learning	Educational care centers		Family-run children’s houses	
	No. of people	Percent of the researched people	No. of people	Percent of the researched people
Not even an hour a day	10	40%	0	0
1-3 hours a day	13	52%	9	90%
3-4 hours a day	1	4 %	0	0
More than 4 hours a day	1	4%	1	10%
<b>Total</b>	25	100%	10	100%

Out of the data it can be concluded that as much as 40 % of the charges of educational care centers do not spend their time on doing homeworks and learning at all whereas this does not happen in family-run children’s houses. Many charges of the educational care centers think that: „*education is not needed in their lives*” (the statement of a nineteen year old boy from a vocational school, a charge of

educational care centre) or they frankly state that they “do not like to learn” (every third charge of educational care center declares so).

According to the care providers and coordinators of educational care centers the charges “regard grades unimportant” and “do not care about them although they suffer from numerous educational backlogs resulting from past negligence in the family”. The staff in the center focus rather on other problems that charges have i.e. emotional problems, inability to deal with aggression, autoaggressive behaviour, escaping from the center, truancy, addictions (such as smoking, drinking alcohol and taking psychoactive substances) and other.

Findings of the research show that the largest group of the charges of the foster care (both family-run children’s houses and educational care centers) spend up to three hours a day on doing homework and learning. Usually the individual people spend more than four hours a day and they state that “education has a specific goal” which gives them “a chance to get better educational background and to make some changes in a life” (the statement of a twenty year old girl, a charge of educational centre and a student of secondary school for adults).

The studies involved also the acts of helping and supporting charges while doing homework. Table 2 presents the results of the researches on the issue.

Table 2 **Help and support with the homework**

People providing help	Educational care centers		Family-run children’s houses	
	No. of people	Percent of the researched people	No. of people	Percent of the researched people
<b>Educators/care providers</b>	12	48%	7	70%
<b>Older mates</b>	5	20%	0	0
<b>Older siblings</b>	0	0	3	30%
<b>Trainees/volunteers</b>	2	8%	0	0
<b>I do not get any help</b>	11	44%	3	30%

*Note: the results of the studies cannot be summed up because more than one answer was possible, percentage was calculated for 25 charges of educational care centers and for 10 charges of family-run children’s houses*

As it turned out, in both forms of foster care prevails help offered by educators and care providers – 70 % of the charges of family-run children’s houses and 50 % of charges of educational care centers rely on it. Charges of educational care centers do not want to get any form of support.

In family-run children’s houses children often ask for help their older siblings, what does not happen in educational care centers where siblings are often separated and reside in different forms of foster care.

A chance to get a help from volunteers or trainees happens very rarely because the places of the researched institutions are located far from the cities or bigger towns.

Besides a help offered at home there is a possibility to take advantage of external help such as extra courses, including also school environment. Analysis of courses offered to the charges of foster care is presented in table 3.

Table 3 **Extra courses taken by the charges**

Type of extra course	Educational care centers		Family-run children's houses	
	No. of people	Percent of the researched people	No. of people	Percent of the researched people
<b>Compensatory lessons</b>	1	4%	2	20%
<b>After-school activities</b>	8	32%	0	0
<b>Private lessons</b>	0	0	3	30%
<b>Optional classes</b>	3	12%	3	30%
<b>None</b>	16	64%	4	40%

*Note: the results of the studies cannot be summed up because more than one answer was possible percentage was calculated for 25 charges of educational care centers and for 10 charges of family-run children's houses*

Unfortunately, the results of the studies reveal that the charges of foster care do not have any extra activities that would balance their backlogs and deficiencies or broaden their knowledge. It applies to 60 % of charges in educational care centers (sample responds imply that they “do not want to waste their time and energy”) and to 40 % of the charges in family-run children’s house.

In case of family-run children’s houses, children take no extra activities, they rarely take private lessons because „school and the environment offer nothing”, „there is a problem with commuting to school and a return if a child wants to take any after-school activities”, „school offers nothing, regular lessons finish and school is closed”, „often there is no teacher who could offer private lessons in the surrounding or it is too far for a teacher to arrive from a bigger town, for example”.

In educational care centers private lessons do not happen at all whereas in family-run children’s houses charges do not take after-school activities. What is more, charges of educational care centers take hardly any compensatory lessons.

Compensation of educational deficiencies looks a bit more favorably in family-run children’s houses since among forms of balancing deficiencies there can be found: private lessons (although rarely), compensatory lessons (much more often), extra after-school activities, an individual work between a tutor and a child (quite often).

According to the statements of care providers from the family-run children's houses, there has not been observed any worsening of children's situation at school or worsening of their behavior since they have been accommodated in family-run children's house. Marzena Ruszkowska got similar results during her researches among foster families in the same area in 2011. Ruszkowska's results were: 14 % of foster parents regarded children's progress poor; 5 % of foster parents thought there was no progress at all and only 2 % thought the school situation got worse (Ruszkowska, 2013b: p. 100).

Coordinators of educational care centers, however, were not that optimistic because in the institutions occurred both improving and worsening of educational condition of the charges. In this case, the type of institution determined school situation of the students.

Both researches concerning education and balancing educational deficiencies of charges of foster care that were carried out in 2017 as well as the earlier Marzena Ruszkowska's researches carried out in foster families in bialski powiat in 2011 (Ruszkowska, 2013b) revealed the limited access to compensatory and developing activities that charges have does not depend neither on care providers nor on the type of a foster care, but it predominantly depends on the environmental location.

It is common knowledge that rural area offers no extra after school activities, within the premises of a school or outside it, which, in turn, affects the chances of balancing educational deficiencies as well as the development of children's interests and talents unfavorably. Researches carried out in foster families in bialski powiat, both rural and urban ones, confirm the thesis. According to foster care providers in the rural environment 42,5 % of the researched children have no interests, while in urban area it is 10,9 % (Ruszkowska, 2013b: p. 80).

Also in the literature there can be found a confirmation that students that come from or live in the countryside are disadvantaged and it is needed a lot in order to make their chances equal to the chances that children from big towns and cities have (Czajkowska, 2001).

The problem of schools in the countryside and in small towns is that the quality of education is poorer, what results in worse scores students get during proficiency tests (Buchta, 2009: p. 83). Some authors imply that the poor quality of education in a countryside school constitutes a hindrance to get an access to further education (Matyjas, 2013: p. 150).

Care providers in the educational care centers and in the family-run children's houses enumerate many problems related to child's functioning in a school environment i.e. learning problems, educational backlogs, lack of motivation, educational requirements misaligned to intellectual capabilities of a student, disturbance in attention and concentration, truancy, problems in contacts with peers, no after-school activities available, attention deficit hyperactivity

disorder, misbehaving at school, serious emotional disorders, inability to deal with aggressive and auto aggressive behaviors.

### **Conclusion**

Acquired data allow to formulate some conclusions:

1. It is recommended to establish both educational care centers and family-run children's houses in the vicinity of big towns or cities since locating them in the rural area limits the proper compensation of educational and developmental deficiencies that children have and disables developing their interests and passions.
2. Moreover, location of the institutions makes it hard and rare for children to get some help from volunteers or trainees.

### **Summary**

The analysis presented in the article does not max out the issue of activities compensating educational deficiencies of charges of foster care. It only inspires to further researches and consideration.

Both educational centers and family-run children's houses ensure their charges educational aids and a place for learning. Researches have shown that there are numerous problems, negligence and backlogs in learning. Despite their occurrence, the charges hardly ever take extra classes, private lessons, compensatory activities and very often are not interested in help from care providers and tutors. It results mainly from the two: first, the location of the institutions in the rural area which does not offer extra classes, second, the individual factors within the charges themselves.

Family-run children's houses seem a bit more favorable due to the amount of time that care providers spent with the charges, which is a more individual approach to a charge.

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