



**Ten years  
of service to families**

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**'I can tell you,  
I don't want  
to miss  
this!'**

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# Table of contents

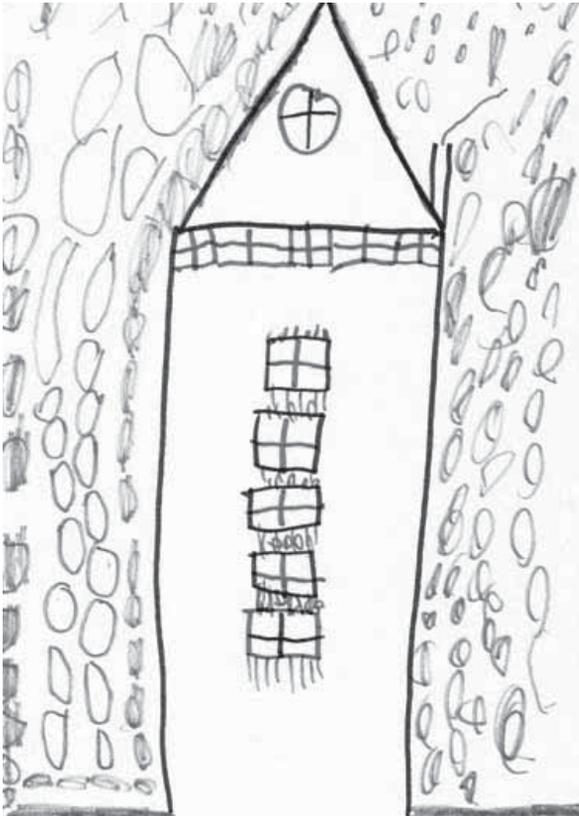
I.	Recommendation .....	4
II.	Who are we? .....	6
III.	Structure .....	8
IV.	Ten years in numbers .....	11
V.	Portraits: from a ten year perspective .....	11
VI.	The Organizers – Individual, but united .....	16
VII.	The Volunteers: ‘Fairies – they really do exist’ ....	22
VIII.	Families – Love the best out of them .....	31
IX.	Cases .....	35
X.	Dr. György Purebl : The Role and Place of Home-Start in Hungary .....	39
XI.	Our Foreign Adventures .....	41
XII.	Postscript .....	48

# I. Recommendation

10 years: many or few? For those who work for and serve the families, it is a significant and determinative time. There have been many joyful moments, happy faces and grateful eyes and, sometimes, tough difficulties that have had to be overcome.

Ten years in Home Start's life is not much, since we have planned for 100 years. We pass on the patterns to the next generation. We would like to let you into these secrets, dear Reader, on the following pages.

Monika Lehőcz



Dear Reader, I would like to welcome you in the name of the Home-Start Hungary board. Those who are, or used to be, our clients are familiar with the stories in our booklet. We also welcome those who would like to join us because they like the spirit of our sayings:

- 'Honour and love for families.'
- 'Beauty and challenge within the micro-communities of parents and children.'
- 'Faith, in that the volunteer's skilled and humane help can ease the difficulties generated by change in functions of the family'

We are 10 years old and we have a lot to celebrate. We have many families and, therefore, many friends. Our courses are popular, and in our training we continuously enhance and deepen our knowledge about family issues. The number of our volunteers and organisers is increasing, and the work-hours spent in helping is multiplying the results.

Our foundation's mission has not lost any relevance in the last 10 years and it makes a good base for the next decade. We stand for helping at home, and we are committed to showing empathy and responsibility in our work.

We hope that more and more people will come to learn about our results and methods, which is why we welcome all families that need support and help. Dear Reader, if you share your good experiences with others, if you distribute our information, you help us to help others.

Finally, we would like to thank those who contributed to our success, or would like to join us as an organizer or volunteer. Their help is essential for more happy children and balanced families in Hungary.

Anikó Soltész, head of board

## II. Who are we?

Home Start is a network of helping services. It provides free, friendly support and practical advice to families with small children in their homes, with the help of trained volunteers. The goal of the services is to strengthen the parents in their role.

Apart from experience and friendship,  
we would like to bring joy to the families' lives.

Our service tries to preclude serious problems.

Home Start promotes the inherent value of local communities.

The organizers of our service work in close relationship  
with professional helping services and local authorities.

### **Free and beneficial service for families with young children**

(published in Dunántúli Napló in 2010 November)

Home Start is a public network, which provides free, friendly support and practical advice to families with small children. We offer our services to families with at least one child under school age. Volunteers visit the families in their homes and give practical advice based on their own experiences as parents. This service does not replace professional services but, through the organizers, a close relationship with professional services and local authorities is maintained. Thus we play the role of a gauge in the social system.

Our families are very different, of course. Let us list a few typical examples of why a family may ask for help: birth of twins, triplets; families with many children; mother often alone; grandparents, friends, relatives live far away; husband works far away, possibly abroad; father died; single parent; chronic illness of parent or child. But it's also sufficient if the parents are just exhausted or need advice.

Unfortunately a combination of the troubles above may arise in a family. For example, a father was looking after his twins on his own. He got along very well with them, but the family got into trouble when the father's employer fired him because of taking time off work to care for a sick child at home, instead of going to work.

The professions of the volunteers are also very diverse. We have millers, cooks, shop assistants, teachers, physiotherapists, businessmen and employees among them. There are volunteers with many children or grandchildren. Other volunteers practise so they can take care of their grandchildren in the future. There are old and young, wealthy and others who have a small income, but all the volunteers bring with themselves to the Home Start meetings a good will and the desire to help. Hence, there is no money to earn here and there is no envy. This is why the mood remains simple and honest. Anyone who is comfortable with these ways of collaboration can find a community here.

We know that everyone can contribute something: happiness, experiences, knowledge or kindness, but most of all, time and devotion. We had a volunteer who did not have enough money to use a mobile phone but helped children who were in even worse difficulties by baking cookies, preparing jam and organizing gifts for Christmas.

Co-workers of the service and their families experience that it is good to receive but it is also a pleasure to give.

Home Start welcomes parents and grandparents who see the value of harmony in the family, helping others and in offering civil service. We welcome those who have experience as parents and would be glad to visit families with small children that need help in their homes and would offer their friendship and time (2-3 hours weekly). We also welcome families who feel that they can handle everyday challenges, but believe that this type of free, friendly help would ease their situation.

## **Our mission**

**Home Start is a network of helping services devoted to strengthening families and encouraging harmony in the family. We appreciate the parents' role, and we work at the local level. We care for the person and the family.**

**Home Start continuously trains its volunteers and strengthens their communities through the spirit of working for others.**

### III. Structure

1. *Otthon Segítünk Alapítvány* is the Hungarian adaptation of the international *Home Start* network, which originates from England. Its headquarters is in Budapest where the advisory board, the board of directors and the administration of *Otthon Segítünk Alapítvány* are based. This country-wide centre provides professional assistance, fulfils administrative tasks, searches for resources, keeps in contact with the media and, last but not least, it trains organizers and provides regular supervision, consultancy and further training for organizers who form into communities.

The associates of the Institute of Behaviour Sciences of Semmelweis University have worked out a 140-hour accredited, organizing course. The aim of this training program is basically to acquire the following three groups of skills:

1. The skills that are needed for the supporting/helping activities used to support a family-oriented approach.
2. Professional and management skills which are needed to operate the organization.
3. Enabling the organizers to organize and carry out the 40-hour training course for volunteers.

2. It is the responsibility of the organizers to set up the service locally. They recruit volunteers and, during a 40-hour training course, they train them in how to visit families. Later on they provide a continuous feedback facility: they keep in touch with families and they also make it possible for the volunteers to discuss cases in groups. To form the trained groups of volunteers into a happy community is also an essential task of the organizers and it's important that they know local special services and professionals.

Organizers can get continual support from HHS and from other co-organizers in the cities where they work.

In several cities the local Home Start service also works as a foundation, such is in Budapest 3rd district – Óbuda, Esztergom, Gyöngyös, Székesfehérvár, Tatabánya and Tiszavasvári.

**3. Volunteers** visit families in their homes. ‘How can I help?’, people ask. The best way to help is by being there regularly. We offer a new human relationship for families that are to be helped. A trained volunteer, who is a parent, too, regularly visits these families in their homes. She goes to the spot where families live, she is not in a hurry, she is present and gives help like a good friend or a grandmother would do. She takes the children for a walk, helps with housework, plays with the children or has a chat, according to family members’ needs, in order to make these years at home joyful instead of filled with feelings of lethargy and boredom.

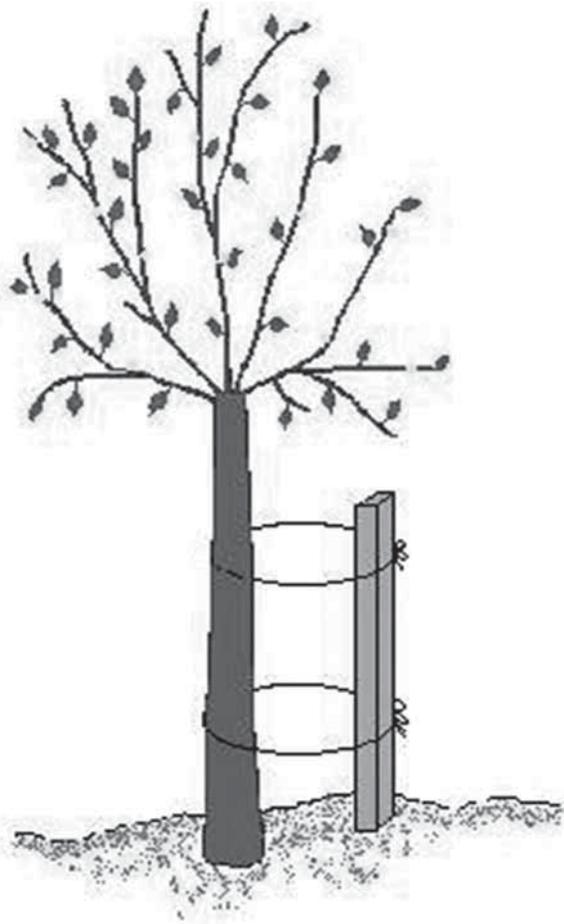
The focus of our help is directed to the parent, in most cases the mother, who stays at home. The concept of the Service is that we can help children the most if they are given more and more attention, understanding and love from their own parents. Therefore, by reinforcing the mother in her role and by helping her to recognize her own and her children’s values we can promote the whole family’s development. (It’s not difficult to imagine how much better it is for the father to arrive home if his wife isn’t waiting for him bored and depressed.)

*The strength of the Service lies partly in its simplicity.*

We reflect two messages towards families through individual, human relationships. We accept and respect the other person as an individual with his/her values. Furthermore, we help her realize that she is not left alone with her problems. The situation they are in is both unique and typical. Volunteers discuss many situations and examples during their training. It’s important that they acquire a method of assistance, which doesn’t oblige them to sort out problems instead of the family doing it. Their role is not to make a path, but to support families in a difficult stage of their lives. We help families with a cheerful and understanding manner. Cheerfulness is a medicine in itself. Even the presence of a child brings happiness to us. It’s essential for the family to notice not only difficulties and problems but also this happy feature.

To present the Service we have our dearest image – a little tree with a supporting stick. A family with small children is like a sapling. Life and growing is ahead of them, but many times they need some help.

Sometimes a simple stick is sufficient. A stick is a piece of wood made from an older and more experienced tree, therefore it is strong enough. The function of the stick is to make the sapling grow without growing itself; otherwise it would take territory from the sapling, thereby weakening the young tree. Provided with this support, the sapling itself becomes strong and doesn't need the stick any more. It grows more and more fruit. The stick is then free to support another young tree.



## IV. Ten years

### HS Hungary's services in 2011



#### *In HS Hungary's services in 2001-2011*

- The number of volunteers prepared for family visiting was 725
- 989 families were given support where
- 2214 minor children were being brought up.
- The number of volunteer hours was: 160 000

## V. Portrait: from a ten year perspective

### **The Centre – background that we can always count on**

The headquarters of the Home Care Foundation is in Budapest. Only a few people work here at the centre of the foundation, but they nonetheless provide operational proficiency and professional supervision. Their work is very diverse: the new organizers are selected and educated here. During the course of case studies and supervisions held monthly, all the organizers working in the country can meet with each other. Since this is also the administration and

management centre where the grant applications and reports are written, organizers can also receive information about future events and campaigns, get help with advertising, and collect local reports. Their work establishes that professional and experienced, yet community spirited background support that more than dozens of organizers and hundreds of volunteers can always rely on. We thank them for these ten years!

### **Dr. Ágota Benkő- first Director of the foundation**

As president of the NOE (Hungarian National Association of Large Families) I met the founder of the Home Start Program at a presentation at the beginning of the 1990's. I immediately invited him to have tea with me and, at the end of our long conversation, I knew that this service was very good, and we needed it in Hungary, too. I tried to raise interest for it but, at that time, I did not have the time or energy for it. However, after stepping down from the presidency of NOE (in 2000), I fully committed myself to establishing the organization in Hungary. I have found many well-intentioned, warm-hearted, family loving, smart mates who were intent on doing something. Professionals, fellow mothers, government officials, and a few journalists. I must mention the leaders of NOE who have recognised that this service brings the values of 'The Large Family Association' to fruition in everyday life. The Home Start Foundation has been one of the biggest challenges of my life. Its existence is surely justified; it has especially proven its viability during the very difficult past ten years. It is a good example that there is a lot of volunteer help provided and commitment felt for other people in a world characterized by greed, selfishness and disunity. This Foundation provides a good example that people are willing to act for a good cause.

### **Monika Lehőcz, Director**

Our third child was already six years old in 2001 and I was looking for a part time job when I found the announcement in NOE's newsletter. Dr Ágota Benkő and the trainers, psychologists and psychiatrists working in the Institute of Behavioural Sciences were looking for

participants in the first group of organizers. I always considered helping others to be important, and I enjoy undertaking organizational tasks. If I could do these things for an acceptable salary, then the job was right for me.

The first years were enjoyable and challenging. It was pioneer work. We invented many things together. The tasks were great and complex, but the organizers did not get any salary. The financial resources were not there to provide a permanent salary for this job in Hungary even though it is normally a paid position in the Western European countries. During these years, many organizers had to leave the foundation because they could not afford to work as a volunteer without any regular payment. However, Hungary is unique among the Home Start network countries because, here, there are so many committed participants working voluntarily as organizers for long periods of time. Ágota Benkő retired in 2007 and I became the leader of the Home Start Foundation. This is a very responsible job and often takes more time than eight hours a day. But the job is enjoyable and is affirmed daily by the growing number of volunteers and the growing number of families asking for help. There is a need for this service, whether we want to give or receive support for it. It is an unbelievable feeling to see what some charismatic organizers and volunteer parents are able to do together for their local communities. More experienced parents apply as volunteers after receiving training to help younger, less experienced families. The support given to families strengthens the local communities in small steps. Like the ripples caused by small stones dropped into water spread, the message gets out, 'You are not alone; ask for help'. Already, families who have received support are now applying to be volunteers for the foundation or they have started to set up their own teams in order to help others.

### **Krisztina Lukácsné, Administrator/Accountant**

After spending 23 years at home raising my six children, Ágota Benkő invited me to take the administrative-accountant position at the Home Care Foundation. This decision introduced big changes into the life of my family. I'm not at home all day long and my sons worry about their lunch and about other important issues. My husband,

however, immediately took over the task of ironing, and he persists in ironing up to this day. In the beginning I took it as a part time job (four hours/day) along with my maternity leave. Later the position became full-time and nowadays I stay in the office longer than eight hours a day. As a result of my diligent work, we went from 4-5 thin file folders in 2001 to approximately 50 large boxes when we moved into our new office two years ago and the number of obligatory files stored for 5-10 years is growing at an alarming rate.

Luckily, we have other achievements to prove that our large amount of stored paperwork is not a waste. Despite our limited resources, the number of supported families, organizers, and volunteers is growing steadily. The organization seems to be always renewed like a phoenix. Sometimes at the post office, or anywhere else where our name is mentioned, total strangers who have heard about or contacted our foundation greet me and express their gratitude.

### **Dr. György Purebl psychiatrist**

When I started to work in the Institute of Behavioural Sciences in 1995, our first child was only one year old and my wife still attended university. Although our families were very supportive, at that time they were not able to give us much help, because they worked very hard and our grandparents already required help as well.

At this time I met Ágota Benkő with whom we organized skill development training for NOE. I had already experienced by this time that next to today's criticized, alienated consumer culture there is another strong parallel world that is not so visible in the media: it is a community system based on mutual support and unity. Meanwhile, we had a second baby, and Agota presented us with the idea of Home Support in 2000. I liked the idea very much, because I remembered our 'teething troubles' and I recognised that this is what many young couples need. At the beginning, we did not know how to start the service in Hungary. Adaptation of the British model and way of thinking is not easy in our culture. Luckily, we had the experiences of other countries – Irena is Polish and Laszlo Lajtai has worked in many foreign countries. My own family has a Scottish member who helped me to better understand the functioning of British families. We

started it anyhow, but we had a clearer picture only after the training for the first group of organizers. Actually, it was rather a common way of thinking than a training course. My most important experience in connection with Home Care – then and now – is the constant experience of love and acceptance towards total strangers. We feel this mutual love every day for our beloved family members and friends. But this is something different: a general, unbiased love towards other people, towards the world and actually, towards life in general. I have experienced such an intense only here. All of us who have experienced this feeling know that the world is basically good and we can fully trust it.

### **Dr. Irena Szumska, Psychologist**

I joined the Foundation from the very first beginning. We developed the organizers' training program together, continuously modifying its content. We considered the experiences and demands of practising organizers. Our aim was to develop a very practical educational program. It is a fantastic experience to witness people during the organizers' training program and see the good-intentions and willing action of the volunteers as they prepare to meet the families in need, how people change and like-minded teams are formed.

My other task is – together with my colleagues – to lead supervisions. In my opinion these meetings are very important, partly because everyone has the opportunity to turn to someone with a problem, and partly because it improves the common way of thinking through concrete problems.

From a ten-year perspective, my basic feeling is that of a mother whose child has exceeded her and she is very proud. I remember our third or fourth meeting in Nagykovácsi, where I astonishingly looked at the hundreds of people arriving: organizers, volunteers, and families. I thought sceptically, 'Have we set this up?' And I realized that the answer is 'no', because we only initiated something: created a framework for an organization that can be supported by many well-intentioned, helpful people. This is very encouraging.

## **Dr. László Lajtai, Psychiatrist**

2011? Unbelievable! Where have 10 years gone? What's more, 5 years have gone since I wrote for the fifth anniversary.

Concerning Home Start and my role in it, I cannot, unfortunately, report many facts from the past five years. (Unless we do not perceive the snivel about the passing of time as a description of an aged man's soul?)

I moved abroad for a year in 2005, and I am still here, abroad. Mean-time, I once spent nine months and once six months in Hungary, and I hope to return next year. During the short intervals I spent at home I tried to get involved in the daily business, but I must acknowledge that I could not contribute fully to the success of the services provided by the Foundation in the past five years. The glory is yours, who initiated and pursue this service. You come again and again to participate, even return, who fight the thousand headed dragon of your difficulties, who dedicate your souls and precious time to a good cause, and - this is very important – you do it by yourself, independently from us, from initiators, you do your own jobs.

Instead of repetition let me wish you perseverance, lovely experiences and peaceful happy weekdays.

## **VI. The Organizers – Individual, but united**

The rich diversity of Home-Start is encouraged by the colourful personality of the organizers. They mediate the scale of OSA's values towards the volunteers: acceptance, openness, family- and child-centred. *Unlike the international practice of Home-Start, the organizers in Hungary also work as volunteers.*

We asked some organizers to say something about themselves.

### **Anikó Lukács from Esztergom**

*I became a mother; the world hasn't changed; yet everything is different.*

I was originally an economist and sociologist. After university I looked

for a workplace where I could use both of my studies. My work was varied and a real challenge: it made me happy. I was sure however, that after the birth of our children I would adjust my work to the needs of my family. I hoped that I could do this as well as I had done everything until now. I thought earlier that it would be only a simple task of organization. I didn't suspect that motherhood would cause such huge changes in me. Other things became more important and more valuable than before. I saw people and children through a different eye. I saw the problems more clearly and it was very important to me to look for solutions. *I could imagine only jobs, where I could help people, so that we would have real meetings, connection and conversations between us.*

I met Home-Start by chance, and then I entered a one-year contract to work with them. As I got more acquainted with Home-Start, this work became more and more interesting and valuable to me. At the end of the year – as with many others – I remained there.

I found a community where very different people can work together. They inspire and complement each other. Their diversity is not a disadvantage, but quite the contrary. We constantly learn from each other and after some days together we are full of new ideas, new information, new possibilities and renewed energy.

We really need all this because new demands and tasks are always coming. The basic principle of the Home-Start Foundation is to encourage families, and to help them in solving their own problems. We know already on the basis of our experiences that we have to help, and that we must respond to the requests of every family, although the demands and requirements of each family are very different.

### **Mrs Györgyné Kollár Gabriella from Ajka**

‘Everyone, and every family, needs a safe place to live that protects during the storms and is the basis of life’. This quotation was the slogan of the Institute for National Family and Socialpolitik for families 5 to 6 years ago, but I think that this slogan is still valid.

I am very thankful that I have experienced it in my own family. *I think that much has been given to me and therefore, I owe a lot. So, I joined the work of Home-Start.*

Why did Home-Start touch me?

Everybody can get into a difficult situation or can be in need of help. As a young married couple, we moved to a village in the countryside with our three-month old daughter. We didn't know anybody there; all of our relatives lived 150-200 km-s away from us. We became acquainted with the district nurse relatively quickly, but she didn't have enough time to introduce me to the area. Soon it became obvious that I was pregnant with our second child, and I was very frightened. I felt lonely and helpless. I really needed a good, dear friend, who was experienced and who had knowledge of the local surroundings. But there was no one at that time.

Ten years later we decided to move again. Once again, we found a new home and experienced new things. We were lucky that we had already been members of the National Association of Big Families and with their help, and the help of the district nurse, I succeeded in establishing a little NOE group in Ajka. We have been living there ever since. Later, I heard about Home-Start through this association. About the time our fifth child began kindergarten, I had time to turn towards other things and I decided to volunteer for the organizer training. At that time, I didn't think that I would also be the beneficiary of the blessed activity of the volunteers, who had learned from me. Four years later our sixth, surprise baby was born. By then, two volunteer groups stood ready to help with whatever I needed.

*So it happened that I also had an opportunity to experience from the inside how good it is to have a reliable, bright, flexible helper while trying to run the whole house.*

### **Mrs Csilla Jankai from Pécs**

I can hardly remember how I was inspired to help the needy. Is it possible this is in our genetic make-up? I remember when I was an older schoolgirl, helping the elderly with housework with lots of enthusiasm. It has been many years since then, but nothing has diminished the inner prompting I felt to help others as long as I could. If somebody wants something very much, the 'Life' will bring it to him/her and help him/her to realize it. It was not by chance that I got to share the same office with a colleague like Márta Buzás who kept turning to voluntary work and who also became one of the or-

ganizers of Home-Start Hungary in Pécs. Soon came the decision, following our conversations and the gentle pressure of the former organizer in Pécs, to become members of the organizers' course. The weekends in Budapest gave us an unforgettable adventure. A new colour came into our life with the OSA colleagues. During the course we were delighted by the organizers and by the experts of the Institute of Behavioural Sciences of the Semmelweis University. It was a good feeling to make an alliance, and to be together with similarly engaged people.

The moment soon arrived when we were waiting for the volunteers in Pécs on the first day of the ten-week course. The earlier conversations about the voluntary work came into my mind. I appreciated these people who came to us to offer their time, experiences and kindness both freely and generously to those people in need. No wonder that they became a real community during the course.

### **Mrs Márton Péterné Szabó from Mohács**

I was born in Slovakia, in Rozsnyó, and I also finished my studies there. My first workplace was in Kassa, at a big metallurgical industrial firm. A big turning-point in my life was in 1979 when I met my husband and we got married the same year. Then we moved to Hungary and our daughter was born. This fact determined our next years. Both of us worked for many years at the Bolyi Complex.

I had already been considering the idea of volunteering for a long time. Many times we took children from Bóly camping to Slovakia and I helped there as a supervisor and an interpreter.

I began more intensive work in 2010 among the volunteers of the Pécs European Cultural Capital. I experienced many wonderful adventures, and this work gave me much happiness. This is where I heard about Home-Start Hungary for the first time. I think it was really a very good decision to join Home-Start. *The idea of parents helping each other is very close to my heart.*

I decided to organize a Home Start group here in Mohács also. Many people need our help. Our town has not seen this kind of help before. I am looking forward to this with great hope and enthusiasm.

## **Mrs Judit Mádiné Pix from Gyöngyös**

I moved to Gyöngyös from Budapest, when I married. At the birth of my first two sons I hadn't had any connections in the town yet. The grandparents also worked; therefore it was very difficult to sort out the practical difficulties. There is no elevator in our four-storey building where we live, and I had to store the baby carriage in our cellar. I had to do everything with one arm: pick up the sleeping child, take him out of the carriage, close the lock, and then carry my ten kg sleeping baby to our flat. After that it was necessary to leave the crying child in the flat in order to carry the packages upstairs, too. After the birth of my two sons my workplace was sold off. In the meantime, I was already helping other mothers in our building and one of my girlfriends recommended the Home-Start Foundation, as she had seen it advertised in the 'Large Families' newspaper. I thought that I practised anyway. Although I had been doing the same things up until this point, it would be easier and better to continue it having expert knowledge and safety information. I would be calmer when problems arose, and I could turn to somebody for the proper answers. I applied for the job and have been doing family visits in Gyöngyös since 2004 with the help of the volunteers. We have given out 23 certificates up until this point and our local foundation was recognized in 2006. Since we began, we have regularly helped 48 families and have given advice by phone and personally. We take part regularly on the Town Civil Days and we have a good relationship with the experts who have special qualifications and with the civil society. I hope that one of my 'old' volunteers will finish the organizer training in a short time, so I can try to find a job outside the home after being a mother. After that, we will be able to share the activities better.

## **Anikó Varga from Budapest, 7-th district**

I have been working in child protection for 16 years. I know the difficulties. I know where to go to ask for help, and what to do. As I was having my own children, I realized that I was also a client, but not the type I had learned about, and experienced. I didn't have enough hands, or enough time, and my nerves were frazzled. I was a

human being with emotions and I showed them. I wanted to know who was going to help me. My problem-solving strategy didn't leave me in the lurch for even a second. I had a big circle of friends, plus the fellow sufferers from the playground. They had been my strongholds until now.

This question (of who was going to help me), however, remained in my soul, together with the feeling of motherhood being my future mission. Finding a job became my first step in solving the problem. Primary prevention.

So I found the Home-Start Foundation. In the child protection regulations, a supplementary grandmother is sufficient and, therefore, has the lowest priority: there is no need for any expert intervention. The experts, however, began to get acquainted with the foundation and the competence requirements have been crystallized. We complement each other: we come in before them, or just continue where, owing to their professional and complex help, there is no need. Prevention and follow-up.

The helping relationship is of a friendly nature, so the mothers more easily accept it. It is sad, but to enter children under the protection agencies today is a stigmatisation in the eyes of many parents. We have to admit that the agencies aren't so interested or have the time to solve the everyday problems. So, let's help one another and go back to living in a community where a helping hand doesn't mean financial benefit, but only more smiles. The young mothers learn to trust and dare to ask. Their social fortifications have always been growing. They, the young mothers have made a place for themselves in their town and in their local community. The help of the supplementary grandmothers give happiness to everybody. At the same time they feel useful and they regain new strength and, in the light of this, happiness is restored to their daily living.

We learned it from Steinbeck:

*It is the most beautiful thing to let somebody help you.*

## VII. The Volunteers: ‘Fairies-they really do exist’

Our mission is accomplished by the volunteer's work. Their personality, experience, and spirit flow toward the families. It's exciting to see their lives and how they got to us. We cannot introduce all of them here, but I hope these examples call to all of us.\*

### Ziza

I have ‘worked’ for five years with small children thanks to the ‘Otthon Segítünk Szolgálat, OSA’ (Home Start Hungary). These have been the best years of my life. I had a similar job in the States for 10 years. I met children from different nations. I had a black-eyed boy, Bahadir, from Turkey, Tomoco and Rioco from Japan, small Paula from Mexico, Subur from Nepal, Isabelle from Chile, Szü-Szán from China, Miles, Gabriel, Paul, Claire, and Suzanne from the States. I can't list them all. The smallest ones couldn't speak, so the parents allowed me to speak Hungarian to them. I was very pleased to hear them speak Hungarian while I learned English from the older ones. You don't have to speak the language for them to get used to you, love you, and accept you as their second mum. They can hug; love the same way, no matter what language they speak. All of them are wonderful and lovable. **Children's love is a world language.** You can understand it, feel it, and feel it again, if you find a new family with babies.

### **Can you imagine loving other's kid like yours? Try it.**

Visit them, sit down, listen to their chat, and watch them play. In no time they notice you, and involve you in their lives. They tell tales and rhymes to you, teach you songs. They ask lots of questions and you just let them ‘adopt’ you: go to the playground, sew dolls’ clothes, make cakes or study English or German together. Children are creative and welcome new things. **You realise, that they are part of your life** and you are sad to say goodbye. I experienced this again and again in the past five years. But you can start over and find new families. You start everything over again, you get new kisses and hugs and you feel you are rich again. *I can tell you, I don't want to miss this!*

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\* The whole names of the volunteers are not given for confidentiality reasons but they are already written in golden ink in our heart.

## Ernó

I have always loved to help others and I have learnt from my life, that there will always be poorer, and more miserable people than me. **The best way to feel good is to give goodness to others.** Maybe that is why I volunteered for the OSA. The reason why I chose this organisation is that they help families with at least one child under school age, and at that time I was just fed up with adults, while children are miracles.

I was looking forward to attending the course because I wanted to know if I was suitable for the task.

I then waited for a long time for my first family because, as an older man, I wasn't the first to be chosen to work with small kids. I was very pleased when finally I got the chance. If you recall 'first things' in your life, it is always a good feeling. Your first red point at school, first love, first clumsy kiss, first successful kiss and the slap for it, first declaration of love... It was a similar feeling at the first call. A young couple had a five-year old son who was seriously handicapped as a result of meningitis. They also had an 8 months old daughter. The father ran his own business and the wife had problems with daily tasks. We played and laughed a lot so the mother could do the housework. My second family was not the usual case. I had to take care of a boy who went to kindergarten and a one-year old little girl. This is not typical, but I had to help them. The young mother had cancer, and I helped them while she went for check-ups. I was on the afternoon shift that week, so I had the week off to be able to baby-sit. The first visit was, of course, not enough to get used to each other, so I was very nervous on that first day. The kids were asleep when I arrived. Nothing went well at first, but finally I pulled myself together and remembered babysitting my kids who are grown now. By noon we had played and had lunch happily.

**I went home with strange feelings. On one side I was happy to help, and on the other side I felt sorry for this family who had to face these problems every day.** And maybe it's going to be the same every time until I get used to it, if I can. I began to feel that every event was the first one. Every time I got home from a 'helping' day I felt that I had not only given help but also received help. I learned each day that the hard thing was not the helping itself, but to be part of their troubled life day by day. I'm happy to be part of it and I think I'm lucky too. They need me.

## Ibolya

I lived in a very happy marriage and thought it was going to be like that until we died. Unfortunately our marriage lasted for only 25 years. I was broken. My strength left me, and the pain was intolerable. **I felt that no one needed me.** My children had grown up. Then my daughter wrote to me, 'Mum, I love you very much.' This was the first thing that I could cling to. But how could I move on? I met a kind, patient, helpful man who was very nice to me. Then I found an 'ad' and I hesitantly volunteered. I was afraid of rejection. Finally I got to the course group. I could not say a word, although they were all nice people. They wanted to know my opinion and they listened to me. I felt the power of togetherness. I learned that we are all different and we can't change each other, but we can only accept one another as we are. After finishing the course I was still very shy, but the co-ordinator trusted me with the first family.

There was one little boy in my first family, then two in the second and fourth one. In the third family I worked with there were 5 children, although they now have 6. We are still in contact. I feel love and appreciation from them. Children can be very thankful. Sometimes, in the middle of the game they call me mum. They called me a good witch because of my crooked nose. They asked me to move in with them. On my birthday they recited a rhyme and sang. Life went on. Besides the volunteer work I graduated from a Child and Youth Care course. I learned a lot, especially in Psychology and Education, which I can apply in my work. I went through a labour suit and I won it. I was able to defend myself in a humiliating situation. **Then I started on another course – I became a foster parent. I have eased the lives of two children in difficult situations. I thank my group and my leader who trusted me.**

## Éva

Though I was born in Budapest, we moved a lot because of my father's job. I had two younger sisters. One of them died of brain cancer and my other sister has been living in Canada for 35 years. I have had two children, after an ectopic pregnancy, Zoltán and Beáta. Unfortunately my husband thought he could show his strength with violence. On my 25th birthday he beat me so badly that I packed and



Prize for 'Network Learning' was awarded to Home-Start Hungary in 2010 to acknowledge the outstanding network in the field of Life-Long Learning



Founders of Home-Start Hungary: Dr György Purebl, Dr Ágota Benkő, Dr László Lajtai, Dr Irena Szumska



The first team of organizers with Margaret Harrison, the founder of Home-Start in 2001



The 11th team of organizers in 2011



Handicraft activity in Esztergom and Mummy and Baby Club in Pilisvörösvár





Several activities for children and adults in Nagykovácsi at the National Meeting in May 2010





10th birthday



International conference 'Familywell-being – role of the civil society' organized by us on 9th February 2011 in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs





Volunteer graduation in Pécs...



and organizers' supervision in Ajka



Visit of organizers and volunteers from Budapest to Esztergom



Study trip to Home-Start Norway



left. I raised my children alone, but we had to move to be safe. My daughter went to college in Pécs, got married and had children there. On one of my visits to Pécs, my daughter was crying while she was saying goodbye, so I decided to move to Pécs. It's a great pleasure to be a granny and to be with them. In the meantime, my son got married, too, and had a beautiful daughter who has Down's syndrome. We visited her with my other grandchildren to get to know her and to be able to accept her. This year my 4th grandchild was born. Although my daughter and her family moved to Szombathely, I stayed in Pécs. **I felt empty, but my heart was overflowing with love and my hands were eager to help.**

I often visit my grandchildren, but it is far. Fortunately, I saw a short advertisement for the Otthon Segítünk Alapítvány on TV. I knew that this was for me. I enjoyed the meetings very much and we learned about the organization and their role in a family's life. Our family traditions can be completely different. I have already helped some, and it was a great pleasure. I was warmly welcomed and I'm looking forward to the next meeting. It is good to help others while grandparents have to work. Besides, I feel useful. **I got what I desired: love and acceptance.** I give and receive with my heart.

## **Anikó**

I'm in my late 40's and have 2 children from 4 pregnancies. After the birth of my second child, I had a serious miscarriage in the 5th month, and I had to deliver the baby. This was a milestone in my life, and I felt the forces of nature come over me. Only the vital can be delivered easily. I live with my parents in a house with a garden. **I had to leave my job to stay at home to help my mother who has brain cancer.** I must take care of her 24/7 with the help of my father. It was a great turning point in my life when I had to leave my stable financial situation and career. I go to evening classes for health-care and nursing. When I finish I'd like to find a job in this field. I applied to be a volunteer because I have worked as a social worker before. I currently live with elderly people, and my children have grown up. **I'm eager to be with small children and experience their happy, cheerful lives.**

## **An old age pensioner from Tatabánya**

I was pleased when I got to know OSA in 2003. I retired from a hospital where I worked as a nurse.

This was not only a job, but also a profession, and I can't rest as long as I'm healthy. The things I learned and got from the patients were so great. I got a lot more from the ill and handicapped than from physically healthy people. I'm richer than a millionaire.

## **Rózsika**

I have been working for the OSA in Gyöngyös for 10 years and I love it. I was invited by Judit Mádiné Pix, the organiser to become a volunteer. I completed the course and supported the foundation financially. I like to organise events too, like the Civil Service Day in Gyöngyös, which has been very successful. I often tell my friends about OSA and volunteering. Young people are especially welcome.

## **Irén**

I'm 57 and I live in Gyöngyös. I have been without a job for 3 years. I learned about the OSA from an advertisement and I thought that I could be useful with my free time by helping others. **After I applied, the organiser visited me to inquire about my determination to help families with small children.** So I joined the group.

Since I worked in the psychiatric ward before, I knew how important a helping hand could be. **Besides, for us unemployed, it is very important to feel we are useful and not only to our families.**

There are many lonely ladies and I would like them to know about this possibility. In the meantime I finished a social assistant course, and I realised that I could help families who got lost in bureaucracy and would need that kind of help, and not only physical help. I would love to share my knowledge and be 'not only' a granny.

Besides my own grandchild I would like to help other mums who don't have their own grannies to help them.

**I would like to help where help is needed.**

## Éva

I became a volunteer for the OSA in Gyöngyös when I was 61 and had retired a few years earlier. I was not bored, but I enjoyed the ‘free life’. However, I wanted to do something useful, not only for me but for others, too.

I found an ‘ad’ in the local paper asking for volunteers who were needed to work with families and I knew this was the task for me, because I like small kids very much. I called the organiser hesitantly because I was afraid she needed someone younger. However she encouraged and welcomed me. I knew this was the right place for me. I wasn’t disillusioned. After finishing the course I worked with a family with one and a half year old twins. **There, I was warmly welcomed.** I spent two years there, visiting them twice a week. The mother really appreciated me. She often told me, **‘Éva, what would I do without you?’** I felt she needed some rest. It was a wonderful time with beautiful experiences and warm memories. Let me tell you one. When the twins’ sister was born I visited their mum in the hospital. I brought her a handmade diary. When I handed it to her, she was deeply moved. In this little booklet I wrote down our common memories. On each page there was a story.

Let me quote some of them. – The twins told me that they were about to go on holiday by airplane.

‘Good for you,’ I said. ‘But you can come with us too,’ said the little girl. ‘There’s the sea, which is big enough for adults to swim in, too.’ The little boy said, ‘We built a small house in the garden.’ ‘You too? Well done,’ I asked. ‘Not so well, my daddy and a man helped, too.’

One day, while he was searching my blouse, the small boy said, ‘Nurse me.’ I told him I didn’t have any breast milk. The little boy replied, ‘Then you are going to be my mummy and I’m going to be your baby.’ Isn’t it logical? It was only a game. We made things clear finally.

**It meant a lot to me and the time I spent in service was unforgettable.**

## Gizike- the ‘profiteer’ volunteer

After graduating from the Secondary School of Arts I started to work at the Geodesic Company in Pécs. Later I became part owner at a

company, which sells geodesic parts. The financial crisis has struck our company, too. We are struggling to survive.

While our firm was struggling, several foundations asked us for donations. We chose one foundation in Pécs to grant money to year by year. One year we donated to the Children's Clinic to support the women's club who helped to feed children. Then I decided to support a chosen family rather than an organisation. I was at the age of a grandmother without a grandchild. After that, I read an article about the OSA in the local paper. I searched its organisation on Google and found the names of two people in Pécs to contact: Herczeg Zsuzsanna and Balogh Adél. That year there was no course, but I met a family with 3 children. The third baby was born in July 2008. During the autumn and winter period I often helped the mother by babysitting the smallest while she was taking the older ones to kindergarten. We saw the doctor and the dentist, too, with the 3 children. I escorted the 6-year-old to the parent consultation before she went to school.

Next year another article appeared in the newspaper, but this time they asked for helpers and a course was about to start. I met lots of lovely and helpful ladies besides the organisers, Csilla Jankai and Márta Buzás. **The training helped us to discover our strengths better; how to approach other peoples' problem in a positive way; and how to help the best way.**

I met the 'K' twins in May 2009. The father had raised his 5 and half-year-old twins alone for 3 years by that time. It was difficult for the family to get by, because the father received only social aid. The father took excellent care of his children and was devoted to them. The children were well behaved, something that was recognised by the kindergarten, too. Since the children were not babies, I could give help only in a special way, which differs from the usual OSA method. If the father had a job and finished after 6pm, I would get the kids from the nursery and wait for him at home or at the playground. **One day we found that the electricity and gas service had been turned off.** (Thanks to the OSA we could help, but not completely. The payment had to be made.) It was a rainy day in August, so we couldn't go to the playground, nor could we go to their home without electricity. **So I asked the father if I could take them to my home.** We drew,

watched cartoons, had dinner and a bath. They liked the new situation so much that they often asked to come over to our place again. They met my husband, Marci the cat, the dog from next door, the neighbouring streets and children and they played in the garden. Before Christmas we made colourful paper ornaments. At Easter we made small baskets, bunnies and flowers. Once we went on a trip to Malomvölgy. **They went to school in September and OSA couldn't help them anymore, but I wasn't able to leave them at once.** Our first grandchild is about to be born in October, so new tasks await us.

## Ili

I am a mother of three and grandmother of 5 children. I love children very much and think each of them is a miracle, a special creature. It's very important how we raise them, what examples we show them, and how much we love them and accept them. I've been a disabled pensioner for 10 years. I meet my grandchildren only at weekends, so I have a lot of free time on weekdays. Getting to know the OSA was somehow inevitable. The autumn of 2010 was hard for me. My disease became stronger. I was depressed because I wasn't getting well. **I could have been much more depressed, but I decided to help others.** I saw an article about the OSA and called Márta Buzás, who is my husband's colleague. In the last minute I joined a six-week programme. I overcame my fear and distress, and I started the course, despite my illness. My state of health was getting better and I felt better week-by-week. I became more open to the people in my group. I met wonderful people; it was good to be with them.

An illness can force you to act differently. I had to change my thinking and re-evaluate my life: learn to love myself first, then others. I had to forgive and let go of the past. **We can only help others if we are spiritually and physically well ourselves.**

One day Márta called me. A single mum with 3 small children needed help. I felt that it was meant to be like this. The family was quite problematic. The mother had no self-confidence, and couldn't forgive her parents. She was quarrelling with the children all the time and trying to control their every step. She was also angry and moody. She couldn't show her love towards the children. She couldn't trust people. The

children were hurt and hungry for love. They were naughty, but for me they were kind and clever. I became fond of them. I felt I had to set an example for the mother on how to be kind, patient and cheerful. We went to the playhouse of the OSA where the mum played with the other kids. They were also able to go on holiday, thanks to Márta. I can see minor changes now. The mother is not so angry with her children and she loves them more often. I know it is hard and slow to change, but I think I have been able to help her to show her love.

## Ágnes

I had a happy and carefree childhood in Pécs. My parents and elder sisters tried to protect me from bad things. I was barely 20 when I got married. We tried, but I could not have a baby. My husband never blamed me and he was committed to me. After years of trying and suffering, I decided to adopt a child. I discussed it with my husband and he didn't object because he loves children so much that he didn't mind if a child was not his own blood. So the long procedure began, but it was worth it. Six months later we got 11-month-old Gyurci. Then I decided to return to school. **I knew that my purpose in life was to help people**, especially people who were disabled and in need. I applied to the John Wesley College to study social work. It wasn't easy with a family. I had to stay away from them for one week a month, plus the exams and other duties. **I couldn't have done it without a stable family behind me:** a great husband, wonderful parents, and my sister. They supported my ideas and desires.

Last year Renáta, our daughter, came to us. Gyurci knew with his 5-year-old mind that I couldn't have my own child, but he told me that he would like a brother or sister. Now our family is whole with two children and two dogs. By Spring, I will have my degree and, hopefully, I can get a job as a social worker.

I had wanted to find a volunteer job, which would fit in with my career, so that I could get some practice. As a social worker I'm interested in families and the care of children, which is why I was happy to find an article about the OSA on the Internet. Finally, I'd like to share a very important thought: From my religious background I'm driven by one thing: **'What you have received freely, give freely even more.'** In my opinion this is the essence of volunteering.

## VIII. Families – Love the best out of them

Csaba Böjte's words can serve to be a fundamental thesis of Home-Start Hungary. Volunteers shall turn towards families with such acceptance and understanding, so that this love then can filtrate through amongst the children and the couples.

Below, letters of families are quoted.

### To Ági

The little owl has lost her dummy. The poor thing cried a lot. Finally, after many adventures it was found, and also a piece of string that it could be tied to, never to be lost again. After many years my children say: this story that Ági told them is the best story in the world. In fact, I could just stop here. How could someone receive more praise, than these children recalling her words years later?

No one else ever looked after my children other than their grandmothers, but when my third child was only seven months old, it became clear that we needed help. Ági first came to us through Home-Start. She had not been to see any other families before. We have never had anybody else helping out. Yet, I remember that we did not need any time to adjust to each other.

Everything was very natural from the first moment. I was completely trusting, and she was thoughtful and full of the desire to help. Ági participated in everything with the children around the household. Anything I asked her, she undertook it happily. She took my son for walks, they played together. She fed him and comforted him. They never had difficult times. Ági was so adept and resourceful, she even solved domestic problems that I did not notice or could not deal with. I learned several methods from her that I still use in my daily routine. Sadly, some things get neglected without her help.

She came to see us for years. Thanks to her, everything ran smoothly with the three children. The only reason that I did not find it difficult to accept that she was leaving us was because we knew that she was going on to help a family that needed her attention and love even more.

Adrienn G.

## **Through a child's eyes**

Mummy is gentle,

Mummy is beautiful,

Mummy is good

Mummy is tired, very tired.

She is alone with us, with no one to help. The three of us are very lively, and well able to wear her out.

Then comes Erzsi. She says to Mummy, 'I will help you. Where I come from, that is what we do – a calling that we chose for ourselves – to help at home.'

Erzsi says, 'Let's play! But first, let's do some exercise!'

Exercise was good. Then even better was hide-and-seek, hare and hounds, and building castles.

We were bunnies sitting in the grass, hiding in a tunnel, and having a lot of fun.

Mummy is watching us...

Mummy smiles. Its good, Mummy, isn't it, that you can relax now?

Erzsi is here to play with us. Go now, read a little, have a big sleep. For we love to be with you, very, very, very much...

Mummy, will you come and play with us later?

Until then, lots of kisses:

Bence, who is four and a half years

Kiki, who is four and a half years

and Sis, who is two and a half years

## **Dear Klári!**

I will try to describe how much you were able to help me.

We have three little ones (really lively children), still quite young (now 5, 3 and 1).

Last April, I had an unfortunate accident: I fell into a glass door in our home and cut my knee badly. After one week in hospital, I realized that I would not be able to stand up for a while, and later I would be able to move only with the aid of a pair of crutches. What would happen to my children?

First of all, I called people I knew (they have all got families) and then members of my family. Everybody expressed their sympathy and con-

cern, but none were able to offer their help. Then I tried to find other people who I thought would help, but their excuses were either disappointing, or just ridiculous. In my frustration and, as a last resort, I called you, and after the very first phone conversation I had the feeling that I had found help.

When I got home from hospital, the very next day you were here, you knew that I was really in trouble, and I needed serious help.

First I met Anikó. When I think of her now, her memory brings tears to my eyes. For me, she was like a mother. She helped not only in cooking, washing dishes, laundry, or cleaning up, but also we talked (a lot) and she slowly put me back up on my feet. Also, I became very fond of her.

Etus, an extremely charming and helpful lady, has unfortunately been able to spend less time with us. However, to this very day, when we meet, I see the smile on her face, and I know that she is really happy to help us.

It is not only them, to whom I owe my thanks, but you, as well. With you finding me such wonderful helpers so quickly when I needed them, I can look back at that 5 months now with a bit more joy.

I seriously hope to be able to get further help from you because, unfortunately, the surgery has not been successful and it will have to be repeated.

Thank you for your **generous** help, I am very grateful to you!

Erika T.

### **Eti, who is no longer with us**

I am a mother of two children. I first heard of Home-Start Hungary in 2002 from a very nice colleague of mine, at the time when my first daughter was born. I thought very highly of the initiative, and I came to experience its real value two years later in 2004. My second daughter was born at that time. I could not count on my family to help, as they lived far away and my mother worked full time. Nor could I get help from the children's father. He had to take extra jobs because we lived in very bad financial circumstances. I dared not even dream of having a nanny. So I could count only on myself.

The early period with my first child was not easy, and now, I was hav-

ing to look after a little one and an even younger one, I could not imagine how I would manage. Then I remembered Home-Start, and contacted their local organizer who, from the first moment, gave me hope and comfort. She visited my home and we outlined what kind of help would be most needed. She told me about the principles of the foundation.

She soon introduced our helper, Eti to us. Unfortunately she is no longer with us, but my children and I will think of her with great love forever.

Eti helped our family for more than two years, visiting us once a week. Friday was the highlight of the week for us and, each time she left, we looked forward eagerly to next Friday.

As agreed, she looked after my older, two-and-a-half year old in the morning. They played fondly together, being shopkeeper or doctor. She taught my daughter lots of nursery rhymes and stories. They built incredible palaces from building blocks, played board games, and many more colourful activities. This gave me time to look after the baby, and I was able to do some household chores.

**The biggest help for me, however, has been that she brought so much love and joy into our lives, constantly encouraging me, strengthening me and making me feel that I was a good mother. Her help gave me incredible strength to overcome the difficulties in my life.** This is what I missed most when she was not seeing us any longer. We did meet later on, too, and talked on the phone and this always gave me strength.

My children have grown to love her very much. They talk about her, even though they are now 9 and 7 years old. Eti's severe illness shook us very much. We miss her very much, but we know that she watches over us from above and also helps us now, just in a different way.

I am very grateful to Home-Start for being able to participate in this programme. I have to say that the people at Home-Start should also be thanked for my children being so great, as those first years are the most formative. Without the foundation we would probably not be here. Based on my own experience I can say that this type of help is very much needed in today's world.

## **Mariann P and family**

I found out about Home-Start on a poster at the chemist's, shortly before Christmas. I remember that I called the telephone number on the poster that same day. I am a mother of two little boys, who is often exhausted physically and mentally, usually due to a loss of direction. Erzsi came to see us on a regular weekly basis. Knowing that she would be here again on the appointed day, gave us a lot of strength. She reassured me in many things when I was insecure. She encouraged me when I was distressed. As the children's grandmothers live far away from us, I was looking forward to seeing Erzsi, just as others look forward to seeing their grannies, to pop in and help a little. Little things helped a lot. She came with us to see the doctor, or read a story to my son while I finished a meal.

Thank you so much!

## **IX. Cases**

### **1.**

Kati and Péter were both on their second marriage. They both had one son living together with them from their first marriages: Marci and Pisti, 8 and 10 years old. The couple had a 2- and- a- half- year old daughter, Lia, suffering from 70% brain damage. They were expecting their second child together. Lia demanded a lot of energy and this made the boys feel they were living on the periphery of the family. They were on good, if not on too good, terms with each other: they started to smoke, bum around, and they neglected their schoolwork. The family asked for help because it was difficult for an 8-month pregnant mother to look after Lia. Ili used to visit them three times a week. In this way, they managed the usual shopping, the household chores and talked a lot with each other. She also got to know what the boys were doing. Kati and Péter worried about the boys because they felt more and more that they were losing control of them. So, we arranged a meeting for the parents to meet with the volunteer and organizer, to find a solution. We had a male volunteer, Karcsi, a really young-looking man with a good sense of humor. He had two adult children, without grandchildren. This was the right task for him!

He used to visit the family once a week on Wednesday evenings. Péter and the boys were at home. They sat in the kitchen having a chat, drinking tea. Meanwhile Ili looked after Lia.

When the topic of childhood came up, Karcsi told many interesting stories from his own childhood. The uproarious laughter enticed the boys who were reluctant to participate in the conversations. Péter also remembered some happy stories from his childhood. Kati also told a story about her grandmother's goose, who could run faster than she could. On the third or fourth occasion, Pisti told a school story (which happened, of course, to someone else). Later Marci took courage too and joined in the conversation with a bad pun. Within a few months, 'The Wednesday evening talk show' took on a life of its own, and was continued after the birth of the little Évi who was also present, sitting in her mother's lap. After a while, some friends, who heard about the funny Wednesday evenings, came to join them. Marci and Pisti enjoyed themselves again, together with their parents and sisters. There was a certainty that on Wednesday evenings that they would be the centre of attention. Their mother and father listened only to them. By this time, they had already started talking about serious issues and Karcsi was gradually able to 'disappear', leaving the family and friends to themselves.

Little Évi was almost one year old when Ili also stopped her visits with them. The family later contacted Peter's family, with whom they had been on bad terms. They moved into the same village where the grandparents lived, and Péter fortunately found a job there. Here, not only the grandparents, but also two aunts, were happy to help them.

## 2.

The welfare officer asked for help with a deaf couple because their one-year-old son had to be taught to speak, in order to be able to visit a crèche: a place where people are able to hear and speak. Our volunteer, a music teacher enjoyed the task very much. The little boy was able to learn to speak very nicely by the time he could attend a crèche.

Things developed so well that, when she needed assistance, the mother called us again.

(For example: bank administration, change of address). In these cases our volunteer was able to speak instead of her. Together they were much more efficient. By itself alone, the presence of the volunteer increased the self-confidence of the mother. Based on our experiences, officials are not really tolerant of disabled clients (there are, of course, some exceptions). One year after closing this supportive relationship, we got a call from the mother telling us that they had a second baby, and if it were possible, they would need our help again.

### 3.

The female neighbour of a 40-year-old father persuaded him to turn to the Home-Start Service for help. The father lives alone with his five-year old twins in a rented flat. His wife left him. Only his mother who lives in a village 15 km away supports him.

Other relatives are not in contact with him because they opposed his marriage, that later turned out to be a bad decision. It was getting harder for him to find a job, because of the children. He was not able to work either early or late hours, or at different shifts. When the children were ill he had to stay home with them. He raised his children with great love. The children are nice and balanced, reflecting the love and affection they receive. The flat is tidy and the children are clean and well looked after.

Our volunteer only took care of the children and tried to make up for the shortage of a mother in their lives.

They cuddled up to her, told tales, and played together. The father never talked about his financial difficulties, but our volunteer heard from the children that the gas and electricity supply was turned off due to non-payment of services. The local Home-Start service was at his disposal and helped him to manage the necessary administration.

### 4.

Andi was the second wife of Mark, whose first wife died. The man was 40 years old when he married the 22-year-old Andi. Mark had a son from his former marriage, Robi, who was a teenager when Laci was born. Robi loved his stepmother and his younger brother very much. Andi developed a playful, compassionate tone with him, and

almost had a bigger influence on him than his father. Robi was doing well at school and his plan to pursue higher studies was fully supported by the family.

Laci was 6 weeks old, when Mark turned to the leader of the local Home-Start Service. He worried about his wife who, as it turned out later, wanted to be like the dead wife at any price. 'Anyhow, she raised a great son,' Andi explained. The problem was that little Laci cried all the time and did not let his mother sleep night or day. The little boy went through all possible medical check-ups, but he was considered to be perfectly healthy, only weepy. Márk and Robi helped a lot at home, but Andi was very sad because of Lacika. She considered herself to be a bad mother, unable to cope with the baby.

Our young volunteer, Erika, mother of three children, started to visit the family. Erika acted as a 'dula' and, with her authoritative opinion, she could convince Andi of the baby's perfect health. They met for two hours together, twice a week. According to their agreement, Erika played with the baby 15 minutes at first, while Andi could do some special yearned for activity that she normally had no time for. This could be such things as reading, having a bath, or listening to music -- anything that had no connection to the baby or to the household chores. In the second week, they increased the time to 30 minutes, and gradually to two hours. During their conversations, Erika convinced Andi that she was a good mother and was satisfying her little son's needs. She also convinced her that Robi was also satisfied with her. Erika assured her there was no problem with it, if her son wanted to be close to her. The volunteer mother with three children told her that she almost always carried her little babies around with her in a baby carrier. Nevertheless the babies developed to be independent at the right time. Within five months, the young mother recovered her balance. Under the influence of our volunteer she gained strength and, with the support of her loving family, she was able to independently care for her baby.

The most beautiful ending of the story is that Andi applied to be a Home Start volunteer after her little Laci turned five and began attending a kindergarten. Many young mothers require reinforcement to believe that they are good mothers. Andi has learned this lesson and would like to help others in the same way.

## 5.

Through one special case we can spectacularly demonstrate the countrywide network of the Home Care Foundation. One of our families, after being supported for a half year in Ajka, moved to Székesfehérvár where our local volunteers helped them to integrate. Later when the mother had to travel on business to Budapest, she was met by a volunteer at the railway station and escorted around the unknown city.

## **X. Dr. György Purebl: The Role and Place of Home Start in Hungary**

It is very important in our everyday operations to establish the relationship of Home Start and other available resources for help with both the families and the other partner organisations. At first a lot of people who show interest in our activities (with or without a background in professional care) associate two areas with Home Start. One is some kind of home care, home nursing; the other is some kind of crisis support - activities that are performed by other organisations as well. These first thoughts also determine the first reactions to Home Start. Some see a professional ally in us; others might see us as their competitors, while some see an opportunity to send their long-standing, complicated, messy cases to us, which cause them problems every day, without the hope of a solution.

Home Start is not a partner organisation. It provides a friendly help in some cases where social and other helping agencies are not able to help. It does not cure sicknesses, does not help to take care of social problems, does not provide psychotherapy, and does not help with money or home care. Home Start may help with seemingly simple and trivial things. We may help a disabled parent's children to get fresh air by carrying the stroller down from the fourth floor of a house without an elevator, then accompanying the children and their mother to the playground, watching the children there: running after them, taking care of them, stopping them from hurting themselves – the

disabled mother is not able to do that without any help. Or we might watch the children in the presence of the mother, whilst the mother is studying for an examination in the next room. ‘Only this much?’ Some might ask, ‘Only?’ Indeed, in this case our help will determine whether or not the children will get fresh air. There is no relative who could help, the husband is at work, neither can the district nurse, the social worker, the family doctor or the family support agencies help, since they have other responsibilities. In the second case a bachelor’s or master’s degree and with that a whole career can be at stake, and depend on a seemingly small amount of help.

These ‘small’ acts of help will have another very important additional effect: the parents and the families will get stronger, and due to the fact that a friendly helper temporarily takes over some of the everyday loads, they will be able to effectively reorganise their lives, and later on get by without help.

What is the value of this? Can our activity be measured in terms of social returns?

Today, we have scientific evidence regarding the fact that these simple, everyday forms of help are one of the most important factors in the prevention of mental illnesses. A study performed by Shekhar Saxena (the Director of the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse at World Health Organization) and his team concludes that the risk of mental illness can be mitigated with the following methods, among others:

- supporting the family in a practical way in their everyday life – the study emphasizes the importance of home visits and helping the family in its home
- supporting the parents in being able to perform on the job market,
- early development of children with special needs.

The study emphasizes that the most effective form of prevention regarding the protection of families and supporting their everyday operation is helping the families in their own homes. The social network of the family (friends, relatives) has a primary role in this. But what

if the family is isolated, because the relatives, friends live far away, or are simply not available? What if the relationship with their relatives is conflicted and therefore no help could be expected from them? That is when Home Start will step in and take on the role of the friends, relatives and, as we can see from the WHO study, this help has a tremendous role in protecting the family's health.

## **XI. Our Foreign Adventures**

### **London**

I greatly enjoyed the flight itself to London, because it was about 20 years since I had last travelled by air. I was seized by the calmness radiating from the buildings in London and the short houses reminded me of the ambience of small Hungarian towns, although we knew that we were in the middle of a big city.

I immediately felt at home as I stepped into the office of the local Home Start organisation: I saw the same mentality and diversity, as at home. Of course, they have been working for longer and have their own place, more space and devices, as we do.

English people are very friendly; they always smile when we meet. At the same time, as I later experienced, they do not pamper their guests as we, Hungarians, do: we hardly let them take a step by themselves, put everything into their hands and force them into things a little intrusively. Unlike us, the English let everyone find his or her own way. We visited London before Christmas, so we could participate at a Christmas Party organised for families. A lot of families came, and I saw a surprisingly high number of fathers at the party as well. It was interesting that when we wanted to take some pictures, they would not let us: to protect the privacy of the families. We saw a lot of nationalities here, just like in all of London, as we travelled by public transportation. This was when we could observe most how tolerant people are: men and women from different cultures treated each other with full respect and acceptance. This acceptance could be observed at the local organisations of Home Start as well.

We visited a local service in one of the suburbs. They were very wel-

coming. They were packing Christmas gifts right then, brought by students of nearby schools, which would be distributed to the families visited by the volunteers. Even schoolchildren were aware of the importance of helping others.

They took us to a social centre funded by the local municipality. There are communal and recreational areas, activity rooms and a kitchen, where they would teach you to cook if you were interested. There was an infant consultation service, a nappy changing room, a vegetable garden in the backyard and an area where bigger kids could jump around and play freely. Some children were playing ping-pong after school right then. The centre welcomes disabled children as well. We were gathering ideas. For example, at home, nobody would be satisfied with the idea that a 50 cm thick mattress placed in a container is an ideal activity room for children. At home, everyone would complicate the idea with suggestions on how to further develop the children. However, these simple, well-deliberated, durable things made from excellent material develop the children's fantasy, motion, coordination and thinking a lot better!

This place is an exceptionally well-deliberated and implemented support centre. They prepared it thinking of every little detail, yet, it is not overcrowded. The visitors can enter after registration through an electronically locked door – and they do come. At home, a lot of families would be scared off by the registration, as they would be afraid of the abuse of their personal data – maybe not without ground. Here it could not happen: they take confidentiality and personal rights very seriously. (For example, we could not take pictures here either.)

It was interesting to meet Adrienn, a volunteer, who moved to London from Kecskemét. We met at the cafe of a department store. She told us about the family she helped, in which she could develop the children with her special professional knowledge.

On our last day we returned to the local organisation and participated on a voluntary supervision, which was about the prevention of drug and alcohol abuse. It was very interesting to see how the volunteers opened up during the performance of the tasks and, just like at home, the speaker let them realise things alone and let them come to terms with their own temperaments. These sessions are spectacularly good for the development of one's personality.

After that, we talked to many volunteers at their Christmas gathering. This journey was wonderful and very educational for me. Thank you!  
Judit Mádiné Pix, Gyöngyös

### **International Home-Start Conference, 2006**

Foreigners were surprised by how much we were thinking as a team. We told them how we were trying to plan and build the Hungarian Home Start network together with the organisers, and to look for answers to the questions that came up together. Although it is not always easy – a lot of times it is easier and quicker if the decisions are made centrally, yet the team declared, ‘We would also like our Home-Start to reflect our own values and needs!’

Magdi Tamásné Kollár

### **In London Everything is Different ... Even the Day Care Centre**

I am sure many of us are familiar with the feeling: when we observe a practice that is unknown and unusual to us, at first we are surprised, then we think that ours is better, but eventually we realise that the other way is possible as well.

I was going through exactly these stages, when we visited a children’s centre one morning during our London journey. This centre was in a district populated by mostly immigrants. There were nine children’s centres with a similar function in this residential area.

The whole centre was very interesting: several tasks, a wide array of activities, many part-time social worker employees, and just a few highly educated specialists who worked mainly in the management.

I was most impressed by the day care centre. Surely, at home this would be unimaginable. About 40-45 children of various age groups were together in a huge space, which was divided by only dividing screens. There was an area allocated for indoor physical activities, a smaller backyard for outdoor activities, and a few rooms for smaller groups, divided by some furniture. Additionally, there were areas for dining, where children ate mostly what they brought themselves; and some nooks for sleeping, which were used optionally.

Our day care centres definitely provide a higher level of service in all areas, but their maintenance costs are also a lot higher. In a way, we do not have enough day care centres, since we do not have the money for them.

I still think about it a lot: if we were brave enough to rethink our concept of day care, if we would be able to accept that an establishment (school, office, family support agency) can operate effectively in a way which is different from the one to which we are used to in our own everyday life, maybe we could find solutions even in this era of financial crisis. Until then, I am left with the somewhat sour comment: everything is different in London.

Adél Balogh, Pécs

### **A Place That Lives Only In Our Dreams So Far...**

A new mother, who is never without company

A new mother, who knows who to turn to

A new mother, who feels the 'unbearable lightness' of parenting

A new mother, whose leisure activities are various and predictable

The organisation in London is a stable institution, where the mothers of small children who live nearby can meet to discuss their troubles or joys, or just to spend some time together, since they know: they are known and welcome there. Besides the wide array of leisure activities, they can consult with specialists who help them with their administrative or pressing daily problems. Meanwhile, their children busy themselves in the playroom next door. All the information and all the helping people are concentrated in one place. Exemplary child protection happens invisibly, without the intrusion of the official professional network, and without the awareness of the families. Parents do not have to stand in line in different offices, as problems can generally be resolved at this level with the tools of layman help and by mobilizing natural resources.

A place, in which parents create the services for their neighbourhood, so they can share the joys of parenting and support one another through it, is....

A place, which lives only in our dreams so far...

Anikó Varga

## **Oslo Transformed Our Decision Making Routine and Some of My Old Principles as Well**

We usually bring every major decision regarding our family together with my husband. Since we are both very busy, we respond to invitations from family members or friends only after checking our calendars. However, when I heard on the telephone that I could go to Oslo for exchanging best practices with the local Home-Start, I said, 'Yes!' in a minute, without any thinking, deliberating, or checking. Fortunately my family, seeing my enthusiasm, assured me that they were going to be fine without me while I travelled.

Our hosts compiled our program, so that we could visit as many local organisations as possible. It was good to see that we do a lot of things in a similar way, and a few Norwegian practices convinced me that we should put more emphasis on those things at home as well.

In Norway, common meals play a central role in family and volunteer programs as well. They say that you get closer to those with whom you share a meal. I did not really believe this, until I experienced how a lot of children, mothers and volunteers, whom we have never met before, opened up to us after we prepared and ate a sandwich lunch together.

We were invited to a volunteer 'graduation' (or volunteer Certificate Giving Ceremony) where, after a few minutes of our arrival, we were divided into four groups, each of which contained an experienced volunteer, a new volunteer and a Hungarian organiser. The first group prepared the macaroni; the second, the salad; the third, the dessert and the fourth, a special table decoration. This way, the conversation started easier, and the cooking became a special program – even for me, who so far only associated the kitchen with work. The new volunteers were admitted to the team by the common meal. We observed that the meal was simple, ample, but not wastefully abundant, maybe so that the food would not distract the participants from the essence: being together. Since then, I pay more attention to this on our own programs as well.

We met an organizer who found it very important that their logo would be used purposefully and systematically, and in her own organisation she utilised all possible surfaces for this. Stationery, mugs,

badges, T-shirts, posters, and flags advertised Home-Start. The other Norwegian organisers might have found this somewhat overboard, yet they were impressed as well, since they started to use some of the ideas later. As a surprise, we also received such T-shirts, and although our logos are not identical, our volunteers at home were very happy to see us in them. Since then, we try to acquire funding for such T-shirts as well.

In Esztergom we neither have our own office nor a community room. Previously we have always thought that a laptop, our mobile phone, our desks and shelves would do as an office. Regarding our community programs: some of the other civil organizations had always offered to host us. This solution has its advantages: as a result we have a close relationship with the other organisations, so it is very easy to think co-operatively, and the utility bills do not strain us financially. In Oslo and its surroundings we could experience, however, how great it can be, when an organisation has its own home, how much richer its programs can be, and that a place with the organisation's own design can send a very different message to the visitors. Thus, I came to the decision that in the following years I shall strive to find us our own home.

And the English language - I am always afraid to put my limited English knowledge into use. I did not dare to speak on the first day here either; on the second day I spoke a little, cautiously; on the third day a little more, courageously; and on the fourth day, although it took me a while, I managed to explain a rather difficult game. (If we had stayed a little longer, I would have gained some confidence. :)

We did not only learn a lot about the Norwegian Home Start, but about each other as well. Although we meet regularly at supervisions and lectures, still, in these few days we learned about a very different side of each other. This was also a very joyful and lasting experience. Our professional program was so rich that we barely had any time for sightseeing. This did not limit our curiosity, and we discovered that downtown is also interesting at night, and at 8 a.m. we were almost the only visitors in the castle. Our one hour-long boat trip started at 7 a.m. in the freezing November wind. We had plenty of space; it seemed like only leaves and newspapers travelled with us from island

to island. Fortunately the Vigeland Sculpture Arrangement was open at dawn as well. Unfortunately some museums did not take our special needs into consideration with their opening hours, but at the end we did not have to miss those either.

Anikó Lukács

### **Study Trip to London – December 2010**

I do not remember anymore why I hesitated for days when the director of OSA (Home Start Hungary) offered me the chance to participate in a trip to London. Now, when I remember what I experienced there, I long to be back. Some of the experiences were related to the journey, to getting to know the capital, and some to learning about the professional work done there.

Already on the first day I experienced a great novelty. I could travel by air, for the first time in my life! I enjoyed every moment of it. London's charm did not immediately work on me after our arrival. As we spent more and more time in the British capital, I discovered its multicultural atmosphere, and fell in love with the colourful cavalcade. The stroll through the halls of the British Museum became a lasting memory, along with the archaeological findings that I had seen only in books before, the tangible closeness of the museum pieces that we could only get to know in fragments, due to our limited time and the vastness of the collection. We walked a lot, and familiarised ourselves with the historical landmarks of London.

In the course of the study trip I could get acquainted with our colleagues, the volunteers; I could hear about their work, I could participate at their professional events, and attend training for volunteers. It was a delightful experience to meet a Hungarian volunteer based in London, to talk to her about what she observed while helping others.

A visit to a children's centre is noteworthy, where, among other things, they help adults with lifestyle issues and couples are given consultation in things related to their family lives, such as cooking, household management, and gardening. The centre provides a useful way to spend time after school. They have classes for disabled children, but children and adults can come as well, if they wish to spend their time

in a meaningful way.

We took a lot of pictures during the trip, but I did not even have to look at them, to relive and ‘see’ all the things that I could be part of in London. It shall always be an exceptional experience for me.

Csilla Jankai, Pécs

## **XII. Postscript**

*We prepared this publication with joy and love. It was nice to look back, remember, but it is even better that we do not need to say goodbye: we kindly invite everyone to this adventure in the future as well.*

*The Editors:*

*Zsuzsanna Herczeg*

*Judit Mádiné Pix*

*Gabriella Györgyné Kollár*

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*Anikó Varga*

*Monika Lebőcz*

## Why do People become Volunteers?

There are some people  
who were given help in a difficult situation and would like  
to pass it on.

There are some people  
*who were not given any help in a difficult situation,  
and thus they know how hard it is to be alone.*

There are some people  
*who are kept fit and young by being a volunteer.*

There are some people  
**who have founded food-sharing communities.**

There are some people  
who have been looking, for a long time, for a way to help others.

There are some people  
**who can pass on their former experiences.**

There are some people  
who know how good it is to receive, but even  
better to give.

There are some people  
**who are happy to help others.**

There are some people  
**who are glad to feel that they are needed.**

There are some people  
**who enjoy doing a worthwhile job.**

I have become a volunteer for the smiles I get from other people

**Why will you be a volunteer?**