

Formal Kinship Care: Preventing and minimising the institutionalisation of children – a Brazilian experience¹.

1. Context

ACER Brazil introduced the *Programa Família Guardiã (Family Guardian Programme)* in 2009, as part of its pilot agenda for the city of Diadema². The aim was to help place 45 children who had been removed from parental care and were in care homes, with their extended families as an alternative to institutionalising them in orphanages.

ACER Brasil – Associação de Apoio à Criança em Risco (ACER Brazil – Association for the Support of Children at Risk) was founded in 1993. At that time, the organisation’s chief mission was to offer an alternative life to vulnerable young people living rough in São Paulo. In August 2001, ACER Brazil changed its focus and dedicated its efforts to community development in Eldorado, Diadema. At the time, this was one of São Paulo’s most violent districts with far too many of its adolescents and children ending up on the streets of São Paulo. ACER Brazil started work in the Eldorado Community Centre offering care and activities to dissuade these children from leaving home.

ACER’s mission is “Rescuing the dignity of Children and Young People, by Promoting the Transformation of Society”. It works with programmes and activities focussed on human development and community intervention. Its activities are grouped into areas³:

- *Education and Culture:*
 - a) The *Programa Raízes do Brasil* (Brazilian Roots programme) brings together a number of workshops involving percussion, *capoeira* (a Brazilian martial art with its roots originating in Angola and the Congo, combining elements of dance, acrobatics and music, and usually regarded as a dance-based game), African games and dances. The programme is offered in association with Diadema municipal council and state schools and helps the Diadema municipal council comply with Law No. 10.639 enacted in 2003. This law requires African History and Culture to be taught in state and private schools, from elementary up to high school.
 - b) Under an official agreement with the Municipal Education Secretariat, the *Programa Cidade na Escola* (The City in Our Schools programme) gives eight workshops, involving a variety of objectives and topics, to children aged from six to ten, after or before school. In association with the *Cultura Inglesa SP*⁴, 80 of these children are enrolled in English language courses given on ACER Brazil premises.
 - c) Optional activities (such as dance and guitar lessons) and an Art Club are provided by volunteers and *Articulate*⁵, a charity that uses art to help motivate children.
- *Sports:* The programme uses sport to promote social impact. Sports played include five-a-side football, athletics, rugby and karate. We involve children, adolescents and adults of both sexes, living in the Eldorado, Diadema/SP area.

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² Diadema is located in Greater São Paulo, in the region commonly referred to as the ABC (Santo André, São Bernardo do Campo, and São Caetano). According to an MDS (Ministry of Social Development) report, the area has a population of 409,613 inhabitants spread over an area of 30km². Of these, 36,757 families are listed in the *Cadastro Único* (Basic National Social Register) and 13.34% are beneficiaries of the *Bolsa Família* (Family Allowance).

MDS - *Ministério do Desenvolvimento Social* (Ministry of Social Development, SAGI - SUAS VISOR)

<http://aplicacoes.mds.gov.br/sagirms/suasag/index.php>

³ Find out more: www.acerbrasil.org.br

⁴ A Brazilian Cultural Organisation and the leading English Language School in the State of São Paulo. More details on: www.culturainglesasp.com.br

⁵ A worldwide ACER partner. More details on: <http://www.articulate.global>

- *Community Development*: Through an agreement with *Banco do Povo – Crédito Solidário*⁶, micro-credit loans are available to residents of the southern Diadema area.
- *Protagonismo Juvenil (Young Leader Programme)*: In association with state schools and related programmes, young people aged between 14 and 18 are trained to develop their own improved school and community projects. The programme also organises reading classes, story-telling and puppet theatre activities for kindergarten and elementary school children.
- *Social Services*: The *Programa de Reinserção de Crianças na Família Extensa* (Reintroduction of Children in the Extended Family programme) includes the *Programa Família Guardiã* (Family Guardian Programme), which is described in detail later in this article. This programme is financed under agreements with Diadema City Hall and in association with the ABC Trust⁷.

2. Conceptual and legal principles

From an institutional perspective, the Family Guardian Programme is a Social Assistance Programme, with a specific mission and vision:

Mission: “To strengthen extended families in order for them to be guardians of children who have either lost or been removed from their parents, being flexible towards change and promoting mutual support”.

Vision: “To develop a sustainable and replicable programme that guarantees each child’s right to a family, and which breaks the intergenerational cycles of institutional care. We want the programme to be shared actively in Brazil and the entire world”.

The programme’s mission and vision were prepared based on conceptual and legal principles, which we summarise below.

- a) The right of every child to a family.

In 2009, the United Nations issued its Guidelines for Alternative Care of Children:

“The family being the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth, well-being and protection of children, efforts should primarily be directed to enabling the child to remain in or return to the care of his/her parents, or when appropriate, other close family members. The State should ensure that families have access to forms of support in the care giving role.” If alternative care becomes essential, removal from the family of origin should be considered as the last resort, as temporary and for the shortest possible period of time. This is particularly applicable to very young children, i.e., those under the age of three, who should be placed in a family environment, such as the services of a foster family.

The Brazilian Child and Adolescent Statute (Law No. 8.069 enacted in 1990) – specifically, the amendments introduced by Law No. 12.010 enacted in 2009 – also defines the refinement of the system in place to assure all children’s and adolescents’ rights to family and community life. In the opening paragraph, we find the following prerequisite: “state intervention shall prioritise the guidance, support and social promotion of the need for children or adolescents to remain within their birth families”. Article 19, paragraph 3, states: “In cases where a young person is placed in family or institutional programmes, his/her right to remain with, or to be reintegrated into, his/her family shall take preference over any other arrangement, in which event he/she shall be included in guidance and assistance programmes (...)”

- b) Encouraging families to care for their children.

Article 227 of the Brazilian Constitution states that it is the family’s, the community’s and the State’s duty to assure every child, as an absolute priority, the right to life, healthcare, nourishment, education, leisure,

⁶ Brazilian organisation specialising in granting micro credit loans. More details on: <http://www.bpcs.org.br>

⁷ International partner company of ACER Brazil. More details on: <http://www.abctrust.org.uk>

professional training, culture, dignity, freedom and to guarantee his/her protection from any form of negligence, discrimination, exploitation, violence, cruelty and oppression. (Text of Constitutional Amendment No. 65, approved in 2010).

The *SUS – Sistema Único de Saúde* (Single Health System introduced by Law No. 8.080 enacted in 1990) and the *SUAS - Sistema Único de Assistência Social* (Single Social Welfare System, introduced by Law No. 12.435 enacted in 2011) consolidate their activities in the family unit, and in the territorialisation of their services. This policy is aimed at ensuring social protection and to promote responsibility for caring for and protecting the individuals it assists. Brazil's National Social Welfare Programme (*Política Nacional de Assistência Social - PNAS/2004*) states that the basic roles of the family are: "to protect and socialise its members through moral references and affectionate and social relationships, group identification, in addition to acting as mediators of the relationships of its members with other social institutions and with the State".

c) Mutual support and bonds of affection as a strategy for breaking intergenerational cycles.

The bond of affection is a key family intervention approach. Neuro-psychoanalyst Dr. Yusaku Soussumi's approach pervades the entire Family Guardian Programme. It is Dr. Soussumi's conviction that every human being has an overall basic memory record system: a baby files everything that it experiences in terms of emotion, sensation or affection. The children and adults who are in the Family Guardian programme have all undergone the three most traumatising experiences endured by human beings: abandonment, betrayal, and removal of the support system. For this very reason, in order to ensure the success of teaching/learning so that they give new significance to the meaning of past experiences and to produce new experiences, they must make an impact through affection, i.e., trigger sensations of support, care and confidence. In other words, experiences must lead to the therapeutic result of giving new significance to the affective memory records. To achieve this, the family educator must provide substitutive maternity, and:

*"(...) act out the relationship that should have been established between mother and baby since conception, i.e., the relationship of love par excellence. (...) the focus of the educators' efforts must be to develop a bond of affection with the recipients, whereby such bond provides exactly that which was lacking in their early development or which resulted in consequences that damaged them in their path to adulthood. The idea is to instil in these individuals a relationship enabling them to experience potential new relationships, to restore or create a nucleus of confidence and hope, which can be inserted into the identity nucleus which they lack. Only then, can they develop the desire, the object of the desire and the capacity to dream, which is the precursor of the confidence that, by their own efforts, determination and work, they can achieve their aims"*⁸.

This is the same philosophy held by the Safe Families, Safe Children Coalition, an international group of organizations that, for over twenty years, has been working with children in socially vulnerable circumstances. As a result, the Coalition has developed a working strategy based on common principles and effective methodologies. To summarise, the concept is that families are trapped in cycles of violence, poverty and exclusion and their children are too, by having experienced early relationships marked by these three situations:

*"(...) children who have early relationships characterised by violence often develop dysfunctional coping behaviours. Such behaviours may provoke repeated exclusion from group activities, including school. This experience of exclusion, in turn, can lead to negative life outcomes such as substance abuse or gang involvement. Poverty may further exacerbate experiences of exclusion and limit the possibility of changing life outcomes. Thus, these children must struggle against three downward, mutually-reinforcing spirals"*⁹.

⁸ Soussumi, Y. - *Pedagogia do Vínculo Afetivo*. Page 3. Available on: www.acerbrasil.org.br/arquivos/publicacoes/Livros/PVA.pdf

⁹ Safe Families, Safe Children – "Breaking the Cycle of Violence: Building a Future for the Most Excluded Children", page 10. Available on: www.acerbrasil.org.br/arquivos/publicacoes/Livros/SafeFT.pdf

In order to escape from these cycles of violence, exclusion and poverty, the following is key:

1. Sustained therapeutic support: *“By “therapeutic” we mean interventions, responses or strategies which specifically aim to help children and parents gain insights into their experiences, develop self-esteem and emotional well-being, and build healthy relationships, enabling them to readjust their responses to stress and to replace damaging coping strategies with more effective choices”¹⁰.*

2. Family-based work

The Safe Families, Safe Children Coalition believes that, to permanently break transgenerational violence cycles in the home, it is essential to work with the entire family.

“To create sustainable changes, a functional and positive support network must be developed around the child. This network, which includes but is not exclusively comprised of, the family, must provide the child with experiences and responses that support the development of personal resilience and help to ensure sustainable positive change. (...)When a positive family environment is created where relationships are nurturing and protective, the impact is dramatic and powerful. For highly excluded children and families, family and home visits are the most effective strategy for achieving a positive result as they overcome barriers to service access (vital to reach the most excluded), and intervene with a problem where it arises”¹¹.

3. Method

To ensure that this programme fulfils its mission, each family is monitored by a family educator (who holds a teaching, psychology or social services degree). The team consists of four family educators, each of whom works a forty-hour week and works with up to 25 guardians or host families and a coordinator. Care capacity is 160 children and their families. The programme has a coordinator and an administrative staff member, both of whom also work a forty-hour week. Crucially, ACER Brazil invests in the ongoing education of its team and encourages their involvement in discussion forums. It carries out systematic monthly training and individual supervision of the family educators via the coordinator. Recently, *CEINP*¹², a Study Centre founded by Dr. Soussumi, trained the entire team, upgrading its understanding of effective intervention work with families and children. The Centre also coached the coordinator. In August 2015, ACER Brazil held a seminar on Alternative Care, to which it invited professionals from Diadema and the surrounding region to join in the discussion¹³. Lastly, it is important to point out that ACER Brazil has been a member of the Safe Families, Safe Children Coalition since the very beginning.

To join the Family Guardian programme there must be one child or more under the care of the extended family. The children must have experienced the trauma of being separated from their families or have suffered psychological trauma arising from undergoing violent and traumatic events.

These families are split into two groups:

- Prevention of institutional living : children are sent to the Family Guardian Programme by CREAS/PAEFI if their parents have used violence against them and they are placed with the extended family while the parents go through the counselling provided by CREAS/PAEFI professionals¹⁴.

¹⁰ Idem, page13.

¹¹ Ibidem, page13.

¹² Neuropsychoanalytical Studies and Investigations Centre, founded by Dr. Soussumi

¹³ The speakers' videos are available on: www.familiaguardia.org.br/semin.html

¹⁴ CREAS - Centro de Referência Especializado de Assistência Social (Specialised Social Aid Reference Centre). PAEFI - Serviço de Proteção e Atendimento Especializado a Famílias e Indivíduos (Protection and Specialised Care Services for Families and Individuals). These are the support,

- Re-integration into the family – the child leaves institutional care to be cared for by his or her extended family. Children are sent to the programme by *CREAS/Serviço de Acolhimento Institucional*.

The following steps are taken to help family dynamics and to break the intergenerational cycles:

a) Individual work

The family educators make home visits to familiarise themselves with the family's circumstances and needs. A family diagnostic is carried out during the first visit. The aim is to chart the child's current circumstances within his or her new family context, the family's relationship with the local community and also the context of its relationship with other institutions. It is important to carry out detailed family history research that goes back at least three generations. In this initial assignment, in addition to completing a detailed family record, the family educator uses the following tools: historic genogram, domestic relations genogram, network map and income assessment.

It is important to understand that, on carrying out the diagnostic and work with the family, the family educator does not "hold the key to all knowledge". In his essay, *"Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight"*¹⁵, Clifford Geertz states that, for every event in life, each actor will interpret differently what has occurred, as informed by his personality, personal history, culture and view of the world.

From his or her very first contact with these children and their families, the family educator observes and studies the family dynamic in order to answer certain questions, such as: Who is this family? What were the violent circumstances experienced that resulted in the child being removed from its parents? What induced the adult to become the guardian and to take responsibility for the child? How does he/she relate to the child? Does he/she really want to care for and protect this child or has he/she been forced into this position? How is the child responding to the changes in his/her life? How is he/she behaving: with rage, feeling forced, scared, calm, welcomed, etc.?

This type of family educator work is reminiscent of the anthropologist performing his/her ethnographic work that, as we are reminded by Clifford Geertz, has no standard formula: *"Being caught, or almost caught, in a vice raid is perhaps not a very generalizable recipe for achieving that mysterious necessity of anthropological field work, rapport, but for me, it worked very well. It led to a sudden and unusually complete acceptance into a society extremely difficult for outsiders to penetrate"*.¹⁶

In order for a family educator to understand and perform a therapeutic function enabling families to care for and protect their children, a fundamental requirement is for him/her to create a bond of affection with the family, as explained by Dr. Soussumi, the Safe Families, Safe Children Coalition and Clifford Geertz. This bond is the foundation for a relation of trust between the educator and the guardian family. The existence of this trust enables the educator to identify the intergenerational cyclical problems experienced by the family.

Once the family's specific dynamic is understood and a relationship of affection and trust is present, constructive planning can begin. The guardian and the family educator jointly develop an action plan to promote the child's emotional, physical and intellectual development. For this development to be guaranteed it is important to place the child in programmes and services that meet the child's and the family's basic rights to education, healthcare, social aid, a home, etc. This is where the family educator's intervention is crucial because public service teams are not trained to work with this sector of the general public. This is partially

guidance and monitoring services for families of one or more individuals is in a situation of threat to, or infringement of, his/her rights carried out at *CREAS* or by institutions recommended by this Centre.

¹⁵ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Basic Books, New York, 1973.

¹⁶ *Idem*, page 416.

because interpretation (and life experience) of the traditional nuclear family pervades interpersonal relationships, thus hampering their ability to deal with other family structures. It is worth noting that experience has shown there is the same lack of preparation in the legal system: judicial teams encounter great difficulties in understanding the needs of an extended family when they take on the care of a child.

Although the family educator is actively involved in developing this plan, it is vital to respect the fact that the guardian is the person responsible for decision-making. The role of the family educator is to support the guardian and ensure that he/she is aware of his/her responsibility. Once the action plan has been drawn up, it is the guardian's duty to carry it out. The family educator's duty is to help the guardian, to reflect and to support him/her to implement all the actions required, and to constantly and firmly ensure that they are effectively carried out.

During the course of the family educator's interaction with the family, he/she can perform a number of different roles, depending on the background and history of the guardian and the family:

- Mediation: The family educator does all that is necessary to protect and care for the child. The need might arise for intervention in family relations to ensure the rights of the child. This can be the hardest task for the guardian in his/her position as a member of this same family.
- Support: The family educator *does whatever becomes necessary for the guardian* to protect and care for the child. The guardian might not have experienced a particular situation before and needs the support of a professional to appropriately receive the child into the family.
- Guidance: The family educator *supports the guardian* to protect and care for the child. His/her prior experience with other cases will benefit the family and provide the information needed to prepare and develop the plan. The family educator can guide the family in such a way as to avoid errors that frequently occur in childcare circumstances, by teaching non violent ways of disciplining children, for instance.
- Monitoring: The family educator *monitors modified behaviour* to certify that it is being assimilated. His/her role is to bolster the guardian's self-confidence and the sustainability of the new family dynamic. This stage begins when, based on his/her observations, the family educator can see that the child's rights have been respected for a protracted period of time (usually after approximately two years) and that, according to his/her assessment, the guardian needs little support in addressing the majority of the matters arising during the process of living with children. The decision to allow the guardian to care for the child with no family educator support must be taken very seriously. Furthermore, at this stage, exceptional care must be taken to ensure that the guardian does not feel abandoned but, rather, encouraged and prepared to take full responsibility for the child's upbringing.

Thus, the family educator is responsible for diagnosing the family dynamic and, together with the guardian, must plan methods for overcoming any problems that might arise. The plans are monitored by the family educator and are reviewed at six-monthly intervals together with the guardian. After this, the family educator intervenes to the degree deemed necessary to ensure the child's and its family's basic rights under public policies and the legal system. He/she also monitors the appearance of new behaviours on the part of the guardian and in the family dynamic, ensuring that the family continues to protect the child. Every six months, together with the guardians, the family educator prepares an action plan prioritising matters deemed by the family to require attention and covering joint actions to be taken with the family educator. This is achieved through monitoring actions where, in addition to the actions to be identified for this work, the family service network, family income and changes in the in-house family formation are all charted.

b) Peer education

As extended families' experiences can involve social exclusion, one way to repair the damage caused by any violation of human rights is to reintroduce a sense of community.

The Family Guardian programme does this by organizing outings and meetings with the support group. These activities bring about a sense of being part of a group. We are all aware that, as gregarious animals, we acquire a sense of wellbeing when we feel less abandoned and more protected because we are members of a group. Moreover, on experiencing situations with our peers, we can acknowledge our own unacceptable behaviours and recognize the various methods of action in the face of intersubjective discomfort or conflict. ACER Brazil seeks to synchronize the experiences of different families in time and space. The aim is that outings and support groups will place people in contact and that, with empathy, projection, transference and counter-transference, they will share their experiences, the challenges encountered, and solutions identified.

Outings: ACER Brazil organizes three outings a year with the families, always on a Sunday, since this is the most feasible day for families to join in. As explained above, a key aspect of this social approach is that it represents different ways in which guardians can resolve interpersonal problems and conflicts, events experienced by all families. Furthermore, this outing is an opportunity for family members to relate to one another and to enjoy themselves together away from the day-to-day environment. It is an opportunity to interact in a way that, given their financial circumstances, they could not afford without help. And due to exactly these financial limitations, we always choose to host our outings in public parks, so that the families see that this type of socialising could be a possibility for them in the future.

During these outings, no logistics role is allocated to the family educator, leaving him/her to concentrate on interacting with or observing the families. The coordinator, the administrative employee and the volunteers organise the outings and assist the families in caring for the children. It is important to choose a venue suitable for a variety of age groups: babies, children, teenagers, adults and the elderly. We also offer fruit juices and unprocessed snacks, to combine a pleasant outing with healthy nutrition which the families can learn from.

Support group: Once a month, the group of guardians selects a topic that they believe requires support. The family educator acts as the moderator of the support group or, when the matter requires specific moderation on a particular topic, ACER Brazil brings in specialists in the respective area. Each group consists of approximately 20 to 25 individuals who are the guardians accompanied by a single family educator. This monthly gathering assures the guardians of a safe environment where they can discuss specific matters that they are facing at home and receive and offer guidance. It is vital emotionally support for the guardians. It gives them an opportunity to express their opinions and also to establish an agreement of confidentiality within the group, an important condition for everybody to have the confidence to discuss their concerns. As stated above, the other aim is to give these guardians the opportunity to enter into social relationships with other guardians, to encourage peer education and to form a community within the programme. With this opportunity to share problems and solutions with their peers, guardians can contact one another for advice, and not just the family educator, when they experience specific problems.

Support group meetings are also attended by the coordinator, whose role is to support the family educator and to identify matters to be discussed under supervision. The coordinator also supports the administrative staff member who is responsible for logistical support and for settling problems arising from the financial support payments and financial controls.

c) Financial support.

When a guardian joins the official programme, the family educator gives details of the payment of the initial welcome financial aid of R\$250¹⁷ and a further monthly maintenance payment of R\$50, to cover some of the costs involved in accepting a child.

The initial welcome financial aid is intended to help the family pay for start-up costs such as a bed, mattress, linen, etc needed to welcome the child into the home. The monthly aid payment is not intended as full financial support for raising the child; it is merely an aid for the guardian to cover some of the expenses incurred in maintaining the child. The greater part of financial support is the guardian's liability.

ACER Brazil identified the need for this additional financial support because a) the income transfer programmes involve rules that exclude the extended families; b) many guardians are grandmothers but are not yet old enough to qualify for pensions c) many children in the programme have special needs, particularly, regarding health and education. This is often the result of trauma and/or substance abuse by their mothers during pregnancy. Also, in some cases, the guardians have to reduce their working hours or even stop working altogether to care for the child. These same circumstances were identified by a study carried out in the USA: "Stepping up for Kids, Annie E. Casey Foundation"¹⁸. The arrival of a child in the family leads requires additional financial expenses in addition to increasing stress-related and emotional costs. By providing an initial aid complemented by a monthly financial assistance payment, we seek to reduce the financial stress involved and, through the work done by the family educator, to reduce the emotional cost.

4. *Some results*

The Family Guardian Programme has now been operational for seven years. Over that time, we have strived to improve and analyze the impact of the results on these guardians and children.

The programme has helped improve children's conditions within the framework of Children's Universal Rights, although improvements are still required in the selection, collating and analysis of the indicators.

Since the start of the programme in December 2009, we have worked with a total of 174 children, 54 of whom have already left the programme for the following reasons: 14 graduated from the programme along with their guardians, 18 completed eighteen years of age and live as independent adults in diverse situations (such as a group of brothers living together, getting married and continuing to live with their extended family), 8 returned to live with their parents, 3 were returned to institutional care and 11 children moved with their extended families to other municipalities where they continued to need specialist support.

With relation to the 120 children currently being cared for in the Family Guardian programme. Family educators monitor 71 guardians with 61 families. Without taking into account the guardians and the children in care, these families consist of 114 persons (55 adults and 59 children).

During the first half of 2016, ten families (with 14 children under their guardianship) graduated from the programme. In the case of one family, three children were reunited with their parents. In the other nine

¹⁷ Amounts given in October 2016

¹⁸ Study available on: <http://www.familiaguardia.org.br/arquivos/publicacoes/Livros/UPC.pdf>

families, the guardians successfully planned and took action to care for 11 children and keeping them safe from violence and guaranteed their basic rights. After graduation, these families are monitored on a six-monthly basis.

Overall, the guardians currently in the programme, supported by the educators, are succeeding in guaranteeing these children's basic rights, as shown by the figures below:

a) Education – Out of the 120 children, only two girls (for pregnancy and childbirth reasons) and one boy (due to abandonment) do not attend school. Thirteen children are in day-care centres, 103 attend school and one baby has not been placed in a day-care centre due to the guardian's decision to keep the child at home. Eight children do regular extra curricular activities outside of their schools and 12 children (between 6 and 10) have extended school days at their schools.

b) Healthcare – All 120 children are registered with the Basic Healthcare Units, which includes their vaccination records which are all up to date and updated medical visits. Thirty children are under psychological or psychosocial care. Eight children have had specialized diagnoses: four display autism spectrum symptoms, two of whom suffer from moderate mental deficiency; two have cerebral palsy which severely undermines their development. The required treatments are currently being arranged with the *Sistema Único de Saúde* (Single Health System).

c) Welfare: Of the 61 families, 23 are beneficiaries of the income transfer programme. Three children receive Continuous Benefits for the Disabled and requests for two other children have been sent in and are awaiting approval. These families' *per capita* income varies from R\$32.83 to R\$1,081 per month. The *per capita* income of the 23 beneficiary families of the income transfer programme is up to one-quarter of the current Brazilian minimum wage. Twelve of these 23 families have a *per capita* income below the poverty line established by the *Ministério de Desenvolvimento Social (MDS- the Ministry for Social Development)*. i.e., R\$164. Three families have a *per capita* income of R\$77, which is below the extreme poverty line. The remaining 38 families do not qualify for this assistance as their *per capita* income is greater than the amount stipulated in the programme.

d) The right to live with the family – The 120 children under care have varying relationship with their parents.

Paternal relationship: The fathers of 11 children are dead and ten have a positive paternal contact; 34 children have a negative paternal contact due to substance abuse, aggressive relationship or negative interference in the family; 41 children have no contact with their fathers; the fathers of 17 children are unknown and seven fathers are in gaol.

Maternal relationship: the mothers of 15 children are dead. 17 children have a positive contact with their mothers; 56 children have a negative maternal contact due to substance abuse, aggressive relationship, or negative interference, and to the feeling of abandonment experienced by the respective child; 31 children have no contact with their mothers; one mother is in gaol. All the children have an officially recognised mother, whose name is shown in their birth certificates.

One of the biggest challenges is to gather and analyze the outcomes of this kind of child care based on the observations of the guardians and the the interventions of the family educators.

The team is currently in the process of formulating a way to capture key information through a guardian questionnaire. For example, ACER Brazil is looking to collect answers to the following question: what are the features or skills needed by a guardian to transmit a sensation of confidence and protection required to care for a child? Which result indicators relate to the child's wellbeing and which also reflect the behaviour patterns assumed by the guardian identifying a broadening of his/her range of care? What behaviours can be noted

and which will continue in the future, thereby forming a memory record? How should subjectivity be measured? How can a change in behaviour arising exclusively from involvement in the Family Guardian programme be guaranteed and also how can we isolate the intervention of other variables such as, for example, the impact of time and maturity achieved through life experience?

5. Closing considerations

Current legislation underscores the importance of investing in the family and the extended family as a strategy for avoiding, to the furthest extent possible, separating a child from his/her community and from coexistence with his/her family. In reality, the situation is very different. In general, most authorities focus on arranging institutional care as alternative care for children who are deprived of parental care in Brazil. Our experience and research shows the positive potential of the extended family as an answer to the needs of children deprived of parental care. This is especially true in the context of Bowlby's Theory of Attachment and its assertion that, from birth to the age of 18 months, a baby needs to relate to a significant person to assure its healthy development. However, we have to qualify this belief insofar as these extended families require the aid of specific programmes to support them if they are to effectively break the intergenerational cycles of exclusion, violence and poverty.