

FAMILY GARDEN, COUNSELLING CENTRE FOR FAMILIES

Kamil Bagin - Katarina Bagin¹

Contextualization in which the good practice was started and develops

The *Family Garden* is a counseling centre for families, located in Bratislava, staffed by laymen – Salesian cooperators since 2014. In addition to Salesian cooperators *Family Garden* collaborates with many other specialists (gynecologist, psychologist, priest, lawyer, special education professional, financial adviser), married couples and the entire Salesian family. The *Family Garden* brings all these Christian specialists under one roof, thus helping believers who seek high quality professional help.

Motivation and Goals

The main aim of the centre from very beginning is to provide activities focusing to present family as the value which needs to be protect and picked up thanks to its importance for healthy society.

Target group

Married couples, engaged couples and singles (young people or adults).

Educational/formative objectives

Marriage preparation for engaged couples and training for people who want to become Christian coaches and thus could be prepared to offer new skills in their own parish or community.

Description of the experience (articulation of the program)

The *Family Garden* provides the assistance on two levels – counselling and prevention. Brief description of the five pillars of the centre.

1) *The testimonials of married couples and lectures from experts* are regularly held ones a month at the same time and place. Attendants of these testimonials or lectures are people of various age categories, married or engaged couples, individuals, young people or retirees. Among other topics there are as follows: marital communication, sexuality in and before marriage, differences between a man and woman in marriage, forgiveness, fulfilling of daily needs, etc.

¹ Kamil and Katarina BAGIN, Association of Salesian Cooperators, *Family Garden*, Bratislava - Mileticova (Slovakia).

2) *Marriage preparation classes* are the next main activity of our centre. Besides priests the married couples are involved in these classes as well. The whole class consists of 9 lectures in which 4 of them are led by married couple. In addition to that the lectures of family planning methods are a part of the class too. There are many positive feedbacks from young couples attending the classes. They often say that it is very influential for them that the meetings with married couples are held in their own home. And through that they can firsthand experience the real family life.

3) *Counselling for married couples or individuals* is the third main activity of our centre. Since the beginning of our centre more than 300 clients asked for counselling. When the client seeks help of a psychologist, we offer him possibility of regular meetings with a Christian coach, which 99% of our clients accept.

4) *The Christian coaching* has been established in Family Garden and as the first in Slovakia offers systematic education for people that can go along with married couples or individuals. Since the beginning 120 coaches has been trained, for example priests, religionists, i.e. SDBs, sisters FMA or Capuchins as well as laymen with various professions from whole Slovakia ready to offer themselves to the concrete service in their own parish.

5) *Volunteers* are very important part of our centre. There are young people or students who are passionate about the centre and decided to devote part of their free time to concrete help. They take part in preparation of various legal and expert documents, graphic editing of printed materials, website design and other marketing activities up to babysitting during lectures. Of course there are many experts who offered their lectures or those who offered their "*pro bono*" help for our clients.

Methodology and instruments used

Provide experience and know how on running centre including feedbacks from clients.

Points of strength, challenges, indications for improving the experience

The centre offers help and counselling to young people and families in preventive way, systematic expert and social help to individuals, engaged couples and marriage couples in various complicated situations as well as offers systematic education for people that can go along with married couples or individuals.