



BMSZKI

Budapesti Módszertani
Szociális Központ és Intézményei

Life Stories of Homeless Women – Gendered Pathways into and in Homelessness

FEHÉR, Boróka PhD - LENGYEL, Lea PhD
BMSZKI, Hungary

BMSZKI is the largest provider of accommodation services to homeless people in Hungary. 2500 beds in 15 locations. About 1/3 host women.





The Data

50 first interviews with women
accessing hostels

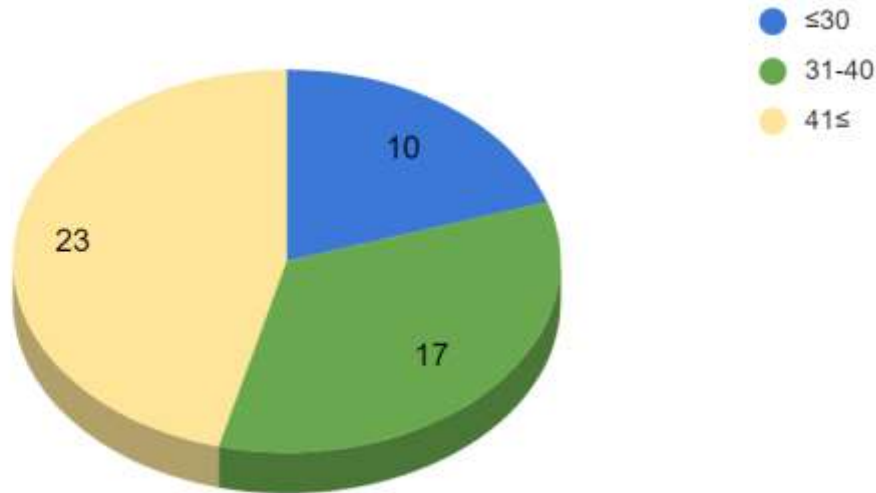
- Women under 50
 - Romantic relationships
 - Children

Care plan + Documentation of social
work

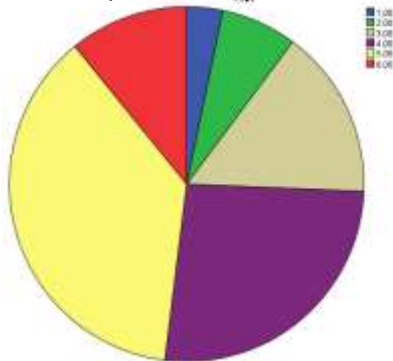
Age



Age groups (N=50)



Age of female service users (N = 304) 2018



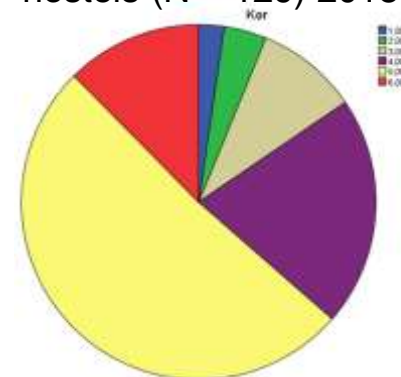
Code

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6

Age

- <25
- 26-35
- 36-45
- 46-55
- 56-65
- 65+

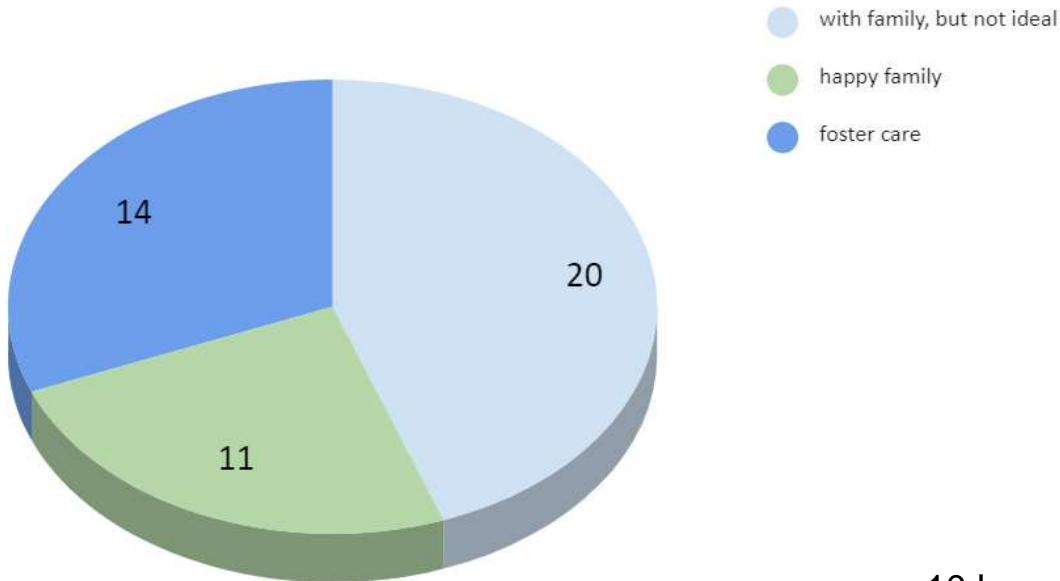
Age of female users of hostels (N = 129) 2018



Background



Where did you grow up? (N=45)



- 18 in extreme poverty
- 7 parents in prison
- 9 parents with substance abuse issues
- 10 suffered physical or sexual abuse
- 4 mentioned being raped by their (step)father

- 10 have a parent
- 2 have siblings
- 4 have adult children

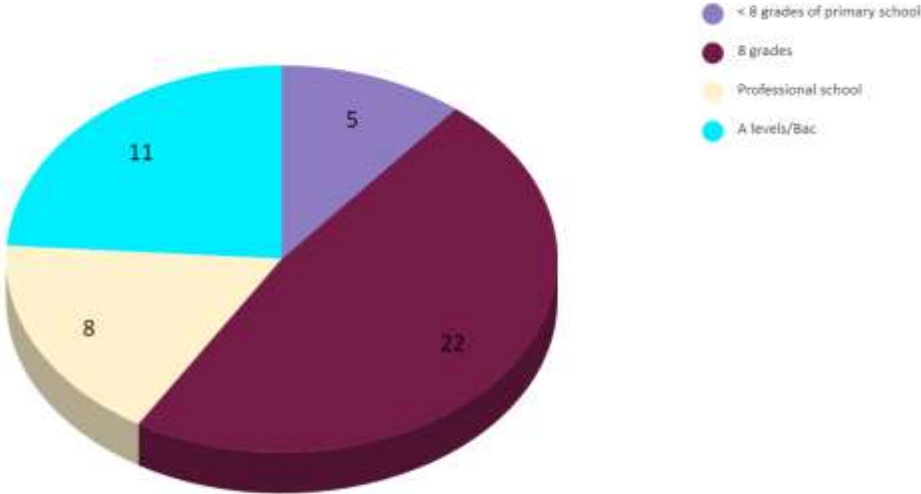
who are HOMELESS

5 left home before 18, 7 became homeless right at turning 18

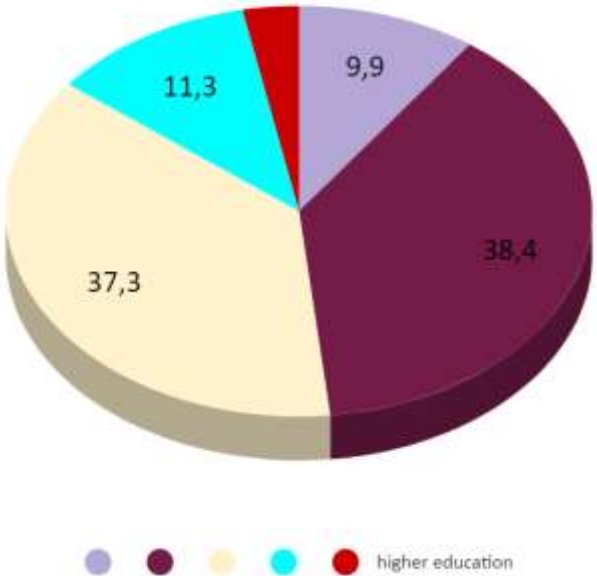
Education



Level of education (N=45)



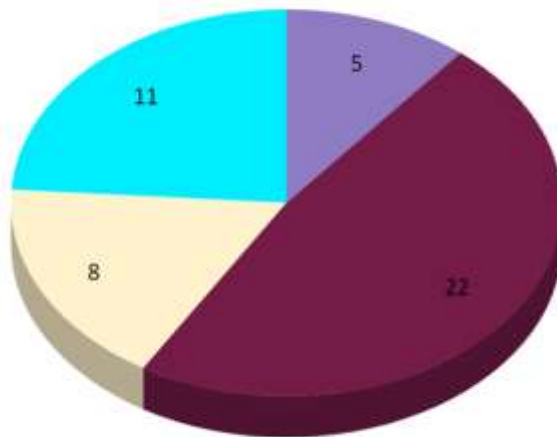
2016 national survey, courtesy of BREITNER, Péter



Education

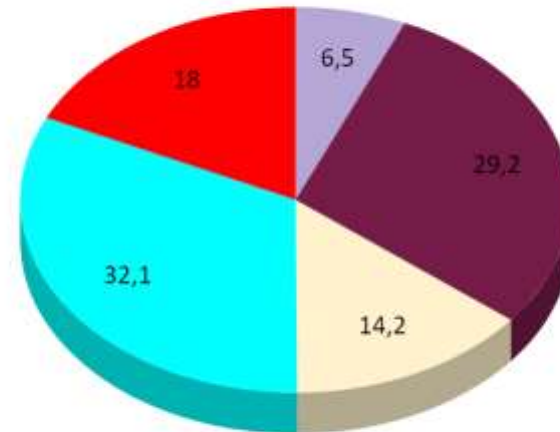


Level of education (N=45)



- < 8 grades of primary school
- 8 grades
- Professional school
- A levels/Bac

Level of education of women in Hungary (over 15), National Census 2011. népszámlálás (%)

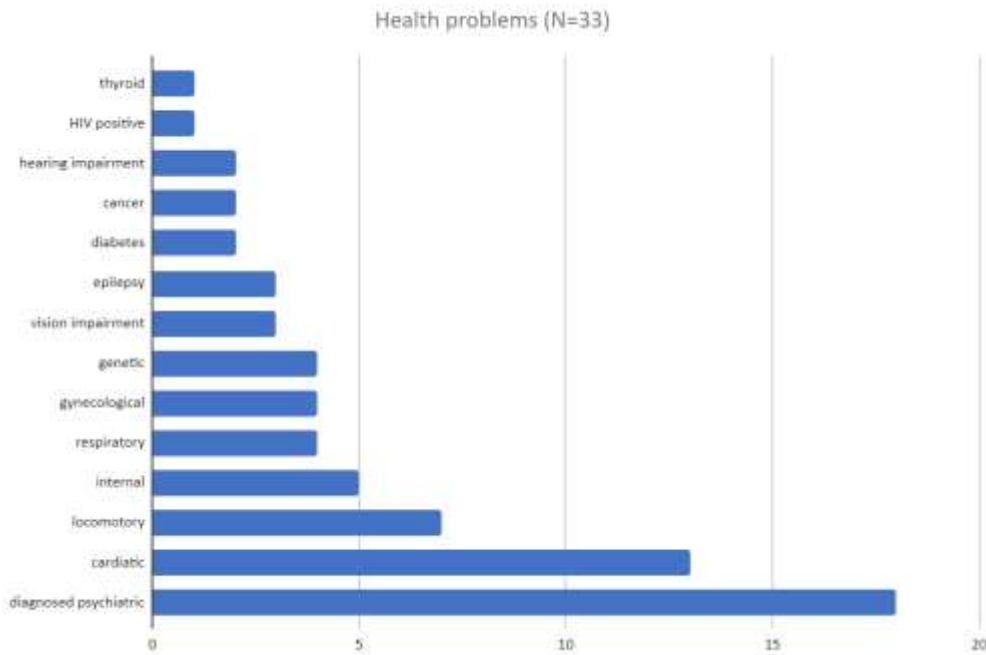


- < 8 grades of primary school
- 8 grades
- Professional school
- A levels/Bac
- higher education



Health

33 of them mentioned at least one problem related to their health

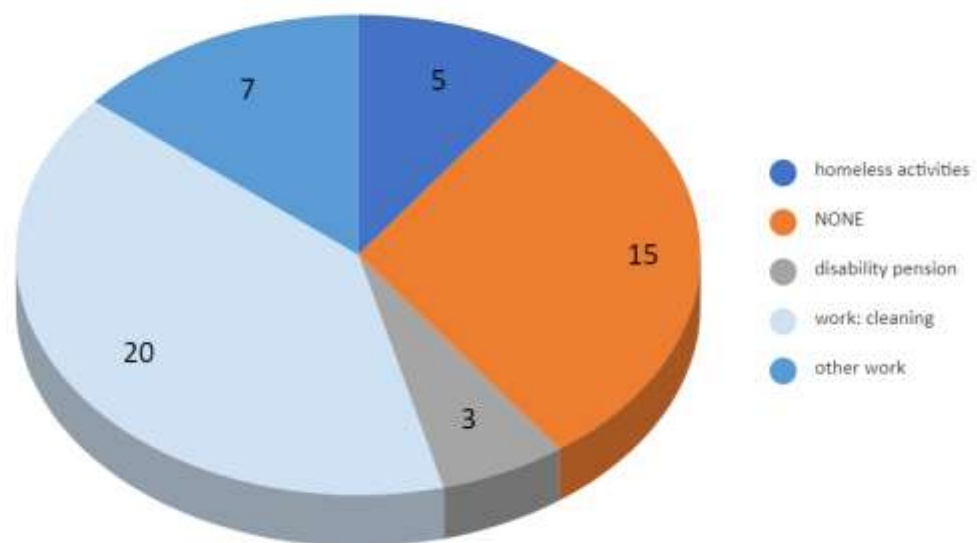


- 8 attempted suicide
- 8 substance abuse
- 3 miscarriage
- 1 abortion (2 more planning)

Income



Source of income (N=49)





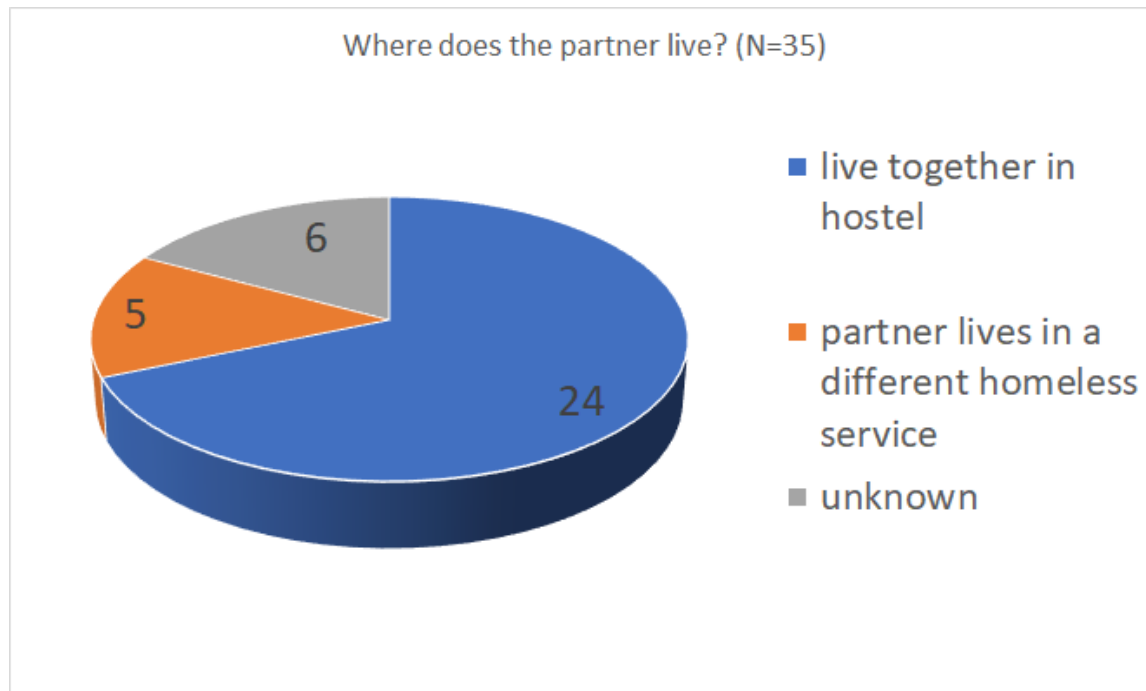
Couples – Romantic Relationships

- 5 of the women left home before 18
- 13 of them moved in with a partner when turning 18
- 2 of them became pregnant under 18 for the first time (13,14)
- 16 of them had lived in an abusive relationship at least once
- 5 partners died



Couples – Romantic Relationships

Presently, 35 women live in a couple
4 of them in a same sex couple



3 partners are non-homeless



Life story 1 – Claire (37)

“On the 12th her partner beat Claire up. She says it was not the first time. When he takes drugs, he becomes aggressive. Staff on duty asked Tibor who denied having hit her, so there is no proof. She left the building but returned later for the night.”

„Today me and deputy director XY sat down with Claire. We spoke about her loud arguments with her partner. She told us he had beaten her on several occasions and she is terrified of living with him. We told her that he had to leave as he had violated the rules several times, including hitting her. She is welcome to stay or we help her get referral to another hostel with single rooms.”

„We annul the residency of her partner. Upon her request, we also annul hers.”

Documentation of Claire, 37, 4 children



Life story 2 – Bree, 37

“Bree V. and her partner. XY came for a referral to a couple’s hostel today. They are currently sleeping rough, Bree has recently got out of hospital. When the man went to the bathroom, she quickly asked for a referral to a doctor so she could apply to a different hostel, where they had single rooms. I got the feeling that she is trying to get out of an abusive relationship.”

...

„Bree called me on the phone and asked when she could come pick her clothes up. She said they had made peace with her husband, they are well and shall remain together. I could hear him dictating each sentence from the background and she repeating what he has just said. She said she would come for the clothes with him. I told her he was still now allowed to enter the building. I also told her she could still live here, we can keep her place for some time. I tried to reassure her that I understand the process she is in and she can turn to us for help if she is in trouble.”

...

„Bree still did not come home. Even if we take her out of the register, she is welcome any time, whether for only one night or for longer, is she has nowhere else to go.”

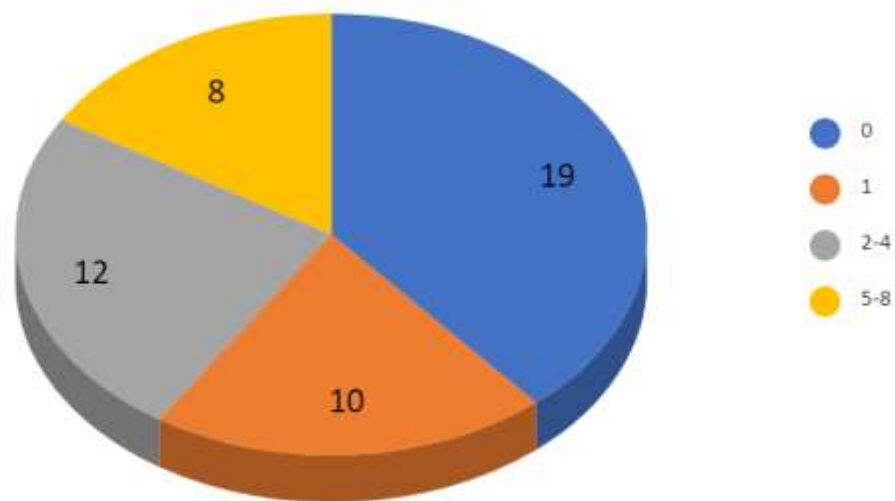
Documentation of Bree, 37, 3 children

Children



31 women have children
Some are now adults
61 are under 18

Number of children (N=48)

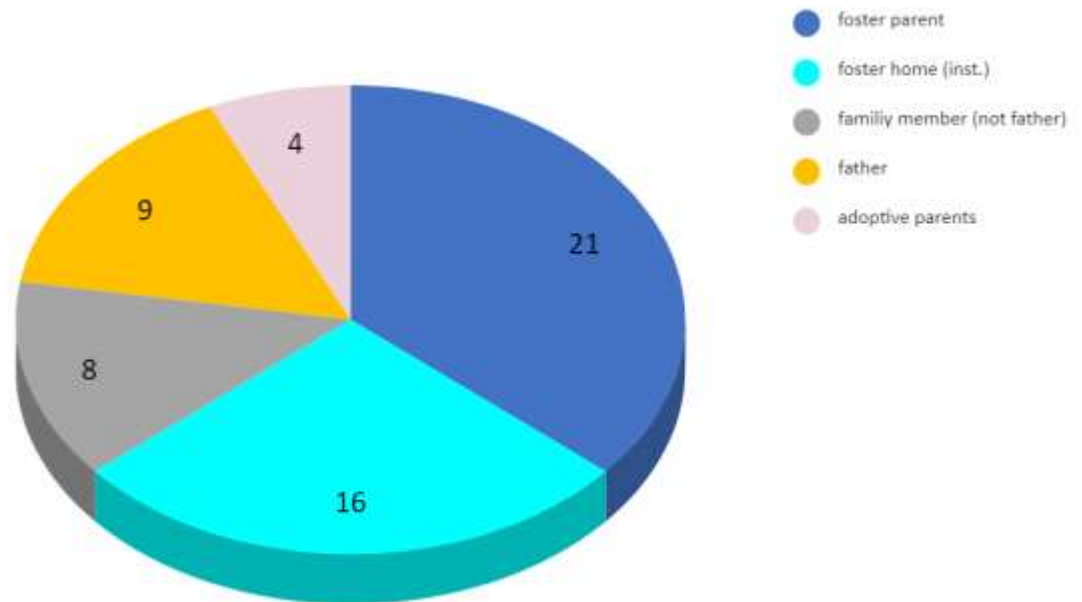


Children



- At least 8 taken from mothers after birth
- Most in small age

Where are your children who are under 18?(N=61)



Children



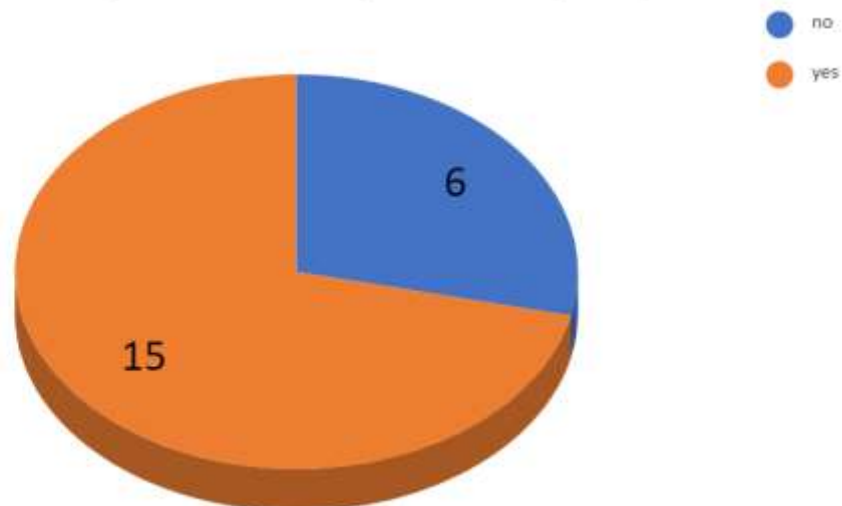
Are you in contact with your children? (N = 21)

4 of them have kids adopted

Contact:

14 regularly (weekly, biweekly, monthly visits)

1 mostly through the phone





Children in Care Plan

16 mentions of children
in care plan
14/21

- 4 cases: regular contact
- 17 cases: living together

“Their primary goal is to regain custody of their children and be able to keep the baby after brithgiving. In order to achieve this, they have applied to several temporary hostels for families.”

Care Plan of Angela, 29 (7 children)

“If she is to regain custody of her child, she needs to keep regular contact with her. Once the pandemic situation allows it, we need to get in touch with the foster parent through the guardian and organize regular visits. During the pandemic she could only talk to the guardian, and that only through the telephone. She misses her son and hopes to see him very soon“

Care Plan of Jane, 37 (1 child)



Children in Case Work

„She is very sad about her visit to her son yesterday. It was very difficult to say goodbye to him. She speaks about her plans, but I do not find them realistic. She is hoping to move out to a market rental with her new boyfriend whom she has not met in three months, and welcome her son their upon her next visit in August.

Documentation of Belle, 28, 1 son in foster care

“Evelyn told us that she did not come to sleep in the hostel the past five days because of her son. She had accompanied her son, who had been sleeping rough, until she could fine him accommodation that he was satisfied with.”

Documentation of Evelyn, 37, adult son with psychiatric problems

“Mary has asked me to help write a letter to the legal guardian of her children in order to get permission to take them to her mother’s in the countryside for a few days during the Christmas holidays. ... She would like to be reunited with her children. I have informed her of how to get a placement into temporary homes for families. She does not think this is her path.”

Care Plan of Mary, 48 (6 children, 2 adults, 4 minors)

Life story 3 – Andrea, 29



“There are also some good things in my life, for example my children.”

Documentation of Andrea, 29, expecting her 7th child



Conclusions

- Poverty and living in dysfunctional families reproduces itself
 - Stronger child protection and family protection system
 - Strengthening ways out of fostering
 - enabling women to make a living for themselves – education
- Lack of protocols within homelessness services
 - First interviews – gendered questions
 - A focus on relationships and children in care work – staff to receive training
 - YET many key workers still address these issues and go out of their way to support women
- Primary research instead of secondary research
 - Survey among women about their perceptions of security, support and children (September 2022)
 - Interviews with women in spring 2023
 - Hopefully modification of first interviews to enable secondary analysis

Köszönjük!

Feher.Boroka@bmszki.hu
Lengyel.Lea@bmszki.hu



BMSZKI

Budapesti Módszertani
Szociális Központ és Intézményei