

THE THIRD PARENT

Every second marriage ends up in divorce nowadays. In every second family a third parent can be found. Almost every one of us has had some experience with a patchwork family. Despite such alarming numbers the issue of step parenthood is almost unknown. The project The Third Parent breaks down this small social taboo and brings step parents information, support, education, video stories and solutions to difficult situations.

Novelty of the Solution

The project solves problems of a so far absolutely neglected group of people for whom their partner's children are not their own. The negative connotations attached to words such as *stepmother*, *stepfather* made the author of the project come up with an innovative term Third Parent. Based on divorce and separation statistics we assume that hundreds of thousands of people are in the role of a third parent in the Czech Republic.

Until the start of the project (in 2015) there was no information about this specific role available in the Czech Republic and no support for the solution of problematic situations. People had to rely on patchy information in the media and individual psychological help. The Project The Third Parent brings a complex solution for such a social gap and has no equivalent in Europe. It is built on three basic pillars:

- **Information** (What is the role of the third parent in the family? How to solve difficult situations with one's step children? How to communicate with one's partner? What to do and what not to do?)
- **Education** (How do we manage the new role in the family? What helps a good communication with one's step children and partner? How to be happy in the role of a third parent? How to face manipulation? How to set rules in the family? etc.)
- **Stories** (We share stories of third parents in the form of texts on our blog and videos on our website).

We pass information, stories, advice and useful tips to third parents through three ways:

- **online** on the website www.tretirodic.cz and on facebook
- **in the book** Třetí rodič (The Third Parent (to be published in spring 2018))
- **in person** during workshops and seminars

The book Třetí rodič (The Third Parent)

In spring 2018 the first original book on the topic of step parenthood will be published. Its author and founder of the project, summarizes the results of her three-year work on this topic. A practical guide answers puzzling questions, describes difficult situations and suggests solutions. It is unique in its approach which comprises psychological and pedagogical expertise and author's personal experience.

Innovative approach to the target group and its involvement

The target group of the third parents sees the three following situations or circumstances as problematic:

- **Lack of information** on how to behave in the role of a third parent – a role which differs from the role of a 'normal' parent in many ways.
- **Lack of skills and knowledge** necessary to the solution of problematic and difficult situations in the family (conflicts with one's step children, fights among one's own and step children, delicate communication with one's partner regarding his/her children etc.)
- **Isolation and loneliness** resulting from the fact that there is usually nobody in the third parent's surrounding to share his/her complicated situations with (the people around him/her usually hold the stereotypical concept that being a step parent means being nice to the step children and that is it).
- **Frustration** resulting from the fact that the society does not officially acknowledge the third parenthood problematics. It is very little spoken about and when it appears in the media it is usually only in the form of simplistic statements that do not reflect the reality

of the third parent's life.

Solution with a long term effect for the target group:

- **Information regarding the role of the third parent** (to be found on the website with the possibility of coming back to the topic whenever the third parent has the need to do so).
- **Sharing the stories online** (on the website), or in person (during workshops). This brings the third parents solace and feeling that they are not on their own in such a difficult situation.
- **Enhancing competencies** for the solution of difficult situations and personal happiness (workshops, information on the website).
- **The book Třetí rodič (The Third Parent)**, which combines information, stories and education in one place and the third parent can come back to it whenever the need occurs.

Involvement of the target group to the project:

- **Members of the project team** (blogger Hana Beranová , financial manager Lenka Včeláková, director Kamila Petrovská).
- **Online discussions of third parents on facebook** (170 members, launched in June 2015, third parents give advice to third parents)
- **Blog on our website** (several third parents contributors)
- **Consultation group of third parents** for the book Třetí rodič (The Third Parent) (discussion and the text verification by third parents)
- **Stars** in the film Naše komponovaná rodina (Our Patchwork Family) and in videos shared on our website.

Improvement of the social evaluation of the target group is an integral part of our project.

Regarding the fact that third parents have been neglected both by the society and media, **we have been cooperating with Czech magazines** (Instinkt, Blesk pro ženy), **newspapers** (Mf Dnes) and **television** (ČT Sama doma) on that the perception of third parents gradually changes. Stereotypes about the role of third parents in the Czech society are still rooted. People believe that this situation is their own mistake, that it is them who caused the divorce of the previous marriage or that it is not difficult to be a third parent. In the interviews with journalists we show the reality of third parents' life, we describe their problematic situations and we offer solutions. **Cooperation on the film Nerodič** (The Non-parent) by Jana Počtová (director) has a specific place on this list. This film was in the cinemas in 2017. It stars our colleague and third parent Hana Beranová. Thanks to that it was the first time when a Czech documentary featured the role of a step parent with all its specifications.

Novelty in the realization

The project The Third Parent is unique in the complexity of the solution for the target group. It is possible to read articles online about step parenthood, or read a translation or an original of a foreign book. However, neither in the Czech Republic nor anywhere else abroad (according to our research) there is no complex support for third parents. And that is what we bring to our target group in order to give them a long-term and effective support.

In our project we brought several solutions which are innovative, new and courageous in making information related to this topic (which has been to a certain extent taboo) public:

- **Making videos of third parents' stories** which are freely accessible online.
- **Cooperation** on the documentary Nerodič (Non-parent).
- **Our own video-documentary** Naše komponovaná rodina (Our Patchwork Family)
- **Education in the competencies** necessary for a balanced life in a patchwork family.
- **Publishing of the book Třetí rodič (The Third Parent)** which is a first book of its kind in the Czech Republic dealing with this topic combining expertise and personal experience.

Impact and benefits of the social innovation:

- **Prevention** of the break-up of patchwork families.
- **Improvement of the life quality** of third parents and patchwork families.
- **Third parents find solace**, get missing information and learn new competencies necessary for happiness in their new life role.
- **Third parents get specific tools** for the solution of conflicts and difficult situations in the family.
- **Third parents have space** where they can share their troubles and find solutions (fb group, workshops, meetings).

Cooperation with other subjects:

- **Social Clinic** (winner of Sozial Marie 2015) – we share and recommend therapists from the social clinic to third parents.
- **Parenthood Academy** – trainer cooperation on the topic of Communication in the family, Role Setting in the family, Family Council.
- **Aperio, Organization for Healthy Parenthood** – Sharing the know-how of after-divorce situation of parents and children
- **Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs** – Membership in the expertise group which works on the family policy in the Czech Republic
- **Learn Tube** – cooperation on online seminars for third parents

Outer impact – innovation as an example or a model

Our innovation is rooted in the Czech environment with the possibility of its application on a European scale. In the Slovak Republic in particular we witness a huge interest in our services and products of the project The Third Parent since the situation there is very similar to the situation in the Czech Republic.

Due to the complexity of the given topic (parenthood, personal development, roles in the family, communication techniques, partnership) it is crucial in our project to cooperate with other people and organizations (psychologists, therapists, experts on parenthood, experts on online education).

The topic of step parenthood and patchwork families appeals to the media. I have noticed a growing tendency to talk about the topic of the third parenthood both in magazines and newspapers. The author of the project Kamila Petrovská has been invited to the following media so far: Mladá fronta DNES, Instinkt, Blesk pro ženy, Česká televize - programme Sama doma, online magazines (Svou cestou, Hospodářské noviny, Týden).

Figures:

3 800 viewers of our video *Být rodičem je někdy těžké (It Can Be Hard Being a Parent)* (on fb)
 2 200 viewers of our video on Youtube
 450 people follows our informative fb website The Third Parent
 160 active members of the facebook discussion group The Third Parent
 160 people financially supported the publishing of the book Třetí rodič (in a campaign on Hithit)
 150 sold books Třetí rodič before the official launch of the book

Důležité odkazy:

- **Educational website:** <http://www.tretiroidic.cz>
- **Information for third parents:** <https://www.facebook.com/tretiroidic/>
- **Discussion group:** <https://www.facebook.com/groups/tretiroidic/>
- **Videos with third parents:** https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCyxtDKCAxJ-_r3uLgVPJliA
- **The author of the project on TV:**
<http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/1148499747-sama-doma/217562220600136/video/586565>
- **The Third Parent in the media :**
https://www.tyden.cz/rubriky/zdravi/vztahy/o-rodice-navic-aneb-jak-na-vztah-s-nevlastnimi-detmi_352647.html