

Early Childhood Intervention in Portugal: a family's experience

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Introduction

In Portugal, a family decided to share her experience after three and a half years of Early Childhood Intervention support. We did a semi structured interview based in Pinto's (2019) script guide.

Goals:

- ✓ Understand how parents were supported by the primary provider;
- ✓ Understand parents' involvement in the intervention;
- ✓ Know how the collaboration between parents and professionals was promoted.

Who they are

Mother – Raquel
32 years old
9th grade
Independent worker

Family



Father – Márcio
35 years old
9th grade
Independent worker

Primary provider

Early Childhood Educator
11 years experience in Early Childhood Intervention



Child Margarida

6 years old
Possible hearing impairment (not confirmed) – had hearing aid for about 6 months
Spectrum Autism Disorder
Margarida was in day care since she was 2 and a half years



Diagnosis: "We were confronted with that when we saw that written on a paper. (...) We sort of knew that. We haven't seen it written before." (Father)

"I wasn't expecting. I mean, I was expecting but wasn't expecting. It was hard to see it written." (Mother)

Referral

Child referral



Made by the Early Childhood Educator from day care:

"due to the difficulties that have been detected. (...) In the beginning she didn't talk. Didn't interact with..." (Father)

"People. (...) And food. And she isolated herself a lot." (Mother)

"When we were in the day care [screening moment for eligibility criteria definition], she only knew how to say ball and car." (Father)

Parents concerns identified

- ✓ Food selectivity
- ✓ Interaction
- ✓ Diagnosis
- ✓ Behavior in new spaces
- ✓ Language
- ✓ Hearing impairment
- ✓ Therapies
- ✓ Stop wearing diaper

Most difficulties were overcome through the ECI intervention

Intervention

Family participation

First 6 months: **Child + mother + primary provider:** "When were Margarida and I, the primary provider interacted more with Margarida and I observed more to see how I could help more. In that time was about communication." (Mother)

3 years: **parents + primary provider / primary provider in the kindergarten:** "And then we three [parents and primary provider] met, being together more and Margarida being accompanied in the kindergarten by the primary provider." (Mother)

Early Intervention Individual Plan

They always participated in the plan: "We achieved almost everything." (Father)
All the people had an important role through the intervention: "Not only who has the ideas but also who puts them in practice." (Father)
Almost all the ideas/strategies worked, "some were adapted to get to where we wanted." (Mother)

Transition plan

"The idea of visiting the school was very good, (...) it seemed she already knew the school. (...) [It was good] For the teachers to get to know Margarida better." (Father)

Family's relations with:

Family elements (grandparents/uncles)

"It went very well. Some people still don't know what Autism is, even when we explain. Some people compare Margarida with an older cousin who has severe Autism and they doubt she has Autism. (...) The primary provider offered herself to talk with the grandparents about hearing impairment." (Mother)

Local Early Intervention Team

They never needed to be with other professionals. "The primary provider got all the information needed and always told us what we needed to know." (Father)

Education professionals (from day care and kindergartens)

"Initially was complicated. (...) It was a shock with reality." (Father)
After that was easier and everybody (Early Childhood Educators, Assistants, Children) was helping. Parents mentioned they had a very good articulation with the professionals through the Primary Provider.

Health professionals (Pediatric Hospital)

Professionals are always available: "The Primary Provider did reports with our help to show Margarida's educational and personal evolutions." (Mother)

All the people were a lever for the parents.

Evaluation

Child

- Margarida **positive development and evolution** through the time.
- Intervention focused on **her interests**.

"For us was all very good, to all. In most things she was overcome the difficulties." (Mother)

Positive aspects



Primary Provider characteristics

- **Availability** – "She always gave all kind of help." (Mother)
- **Communication** – "We were always communicating." / "When she didn't have an immediate answer, she called later and "I have a solution for your doubt, for this question you have."" (Mother)
- **Support** – "All doubts we had, we talked with the primary provider(...). She simplified" (Mother) / "For Margarida and for us." (Mother)
- **Active listening** - "Yes, she was always our help, our rescue point." (Father)
- **Concerned with parents and the child** - "She always cared about Margarida and with us." (Mother)

Team work

- **Define strategies** to help Margarida – " (...) we tried to get strategies to overcome Margarida's difficulties (...)." (Mother)
- Primary Provider **clear all doubts** and at home parents **implemented strategies** – "When we had any doubt and presented it... and went home and implemented the... Strategies and it worked." (Mother)
- **Diagnosis**- The primary provider had the same reaction as we." (Mother) / "It was funny because we all knew but we weren't expecting..." (Father)

Negative aspect

Mother's head.

She overthinks about the child and how others saw her as a mother: "She didn't trust herself. Now she's more confident to talk." (Father)

Parents' voice

Parents' advice

"I talked with the primary provider about Margarida and Autism. The primary provider... simplifies much... And we talked a lot! **Empathy** between the primary provider and the family is very important because it will help parents so much. Without empathy, I think that the moment is not seized as people want." (Mother)

What parents learned

"To see things differently. Even if it is a small evolution, minimum, it already is a lot, very good. We learned how to appreciate Margarida's little victories." (Mother)

Parents' feelings

"We were lucky to come across people who were interested in knowing more about how to help Margarida. Margarida and us." (Mother)



References

- Pinto, M.J.S. (2018). *Participação das famílias no apoio prestado pelo Sistema Nacional de Intervenção Precoce na Infância*. Doctoral Dissertation, Universidade do Minho. Repositório Institucional da Universidade do Minho. <https://hdl.handle.net/1822/65351>