

11th European Forum on the rights of the child

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Plenary session I Leon Horváth – personal testimony

Leon Horváth, 19 years old (Hungary)

Hello. First of all, I would like to thank you for the invitation. It is a great honour for me to be here.

My name is Leon Horváth. I spent 14 years in state institutional care. My father committed suicide and our birth mother neglected us, so my siblings and I were placed in the child care system.

In my childhood I was very often mistreated. When I was in kindergarten, my head was held underwater until I started drowning. As a consequence, I wet the bed for a long time. Later, when I was 12 to 13 years old, the partner of one of my caregivers hung me by my ankle over a third-floor banister, and laughed while I cried and begged to be pulled to safety.

After that, I became interested in children's rights and psychology and began to discover more and more irregularities within the institutions of the child protection system, to which I tried to draw attention. Naturally, this new hobby of mine did not please many people, so I became an undesirable person. First they emotionally terrorised me, tried to intimidate me, they would refer to me as "Satan" or "Dr Hannibal Lecter", or "a genetic waste". They also said that I was a wreck. Obviously, at the age of 13, I was really disturbed by all this. Nevertheless, our exploitation, the violence and sexual abuse continued, so I continued engaging with the law and children's rights and I continued to file various complaints and legal procedures. Due to this, I was taken to a special residential care home in order to prevent me from contacting the outside world - just to make it more difficult for me to contact organisations and government institutions. This was actually an institution for young people with serious difficulties, active drug users, children with psychological and behavioral problems. I was raised, or rather, forced to live here for a year and a half.

Since I had practically exhausted almost all my complaint remedies, I finally filed a civil lawsuit against the government office responsible for child protection, which I successfully won after two years. The court ruled that my placement in that special institution was unlawful; that it was based on false, unestablished allegations about me, and also that expert opinions about me were not true. So I was finally able to win the lawsuit which I had filed against the government office.

As I come from Hungary, I would like to say a few words about the situation of child protection in Hungary. Unfortunately, I live in a country where it is not the government,

not the State, but rather civil society organisations that provide protection and support for children. This is obviously a major weakness of the system. The other issue I thought was important to talk about is the situation of refugee children in Hungary - the way they treat refugee children is a big problem. I would call myself a child rights activist who deals with refugee children and the protection of children and I just want to draw attention to the fact that, unfortunately, my country is a place where these children who had to flee, whose family members have died and who have had to leave their homes, they just desperately want, to live a normal life, but in Hungary they do not get human treatment: they are literally imprisoned. It is outrageous and I think it is important to say it. They really are treated as if they were animals, kept behind fences, but they are just as human as all of us.

Thank you for your attention!