

Annual report 2023



FiN – Families in Need annual report 2023

»It takes a whole village to raise a child«

This well-known African proverb means that upbringing and education is not the sole responsibility of the parents, but of all of us as a society. In addition to state institutions such as schools, daycare centres and youth welfare services, associations, educational institutions, welfare organisations, political parties, parliaments, neighbourhoods and other civil society groups are also needed. FiN sees itself as one actor of many in the community, our „village“ is the region, i.e. the towns and municipalities in the county of Hildesheim.



What puts families, children and adolescents in an emergency situation?

Mr G. lost his partner in spring - she died suddenly. They were planning to get married, they have a severely disabled daughter together and were in the process of enlarging a house. No provision had been made for such a catastrophe: no will, no decree, no security. Mr G. was overwhelmed by the whole situation and was barely able to carry out his job. He was looking for a contact point, he needed to exchange information and sort himself out, he needed practical information and help which was quickly provided.

An apprenticing company in the FiN network made contact with a young man. F. came to Hildesheim alone from Afghanistan as a minor refugee, learnt German and began apprenticeship as a gas and water installer. He was regarded as a hard-working and valued employee – but there were problems at vocational school. And after he failed the final theory exam twice, the difficulties began: Loss of earnings, delayed granting of benefits and, thereby, rent and energy debts, depression in the context of PTSD, bad news from his family back home, seclusion, unopened post, energy cut-off... With a lot of patience and in cooperation with the debt counselling service, together we were able to help him step by step.

H. is a single parent, ambitious young woman. As she only got a place to study in Münster, she commuted between Hildesheim and Münster – a huge burden as a single mother. H. also suffers from an underlying illness that restricts her and repeatedly incurs costs for physiotherapy and medication. A change of the study location to Hildesheim required a complicated admission procedure that required a hardship justification and cost fees - which H. could not afford. Contact was made with FiN via the migration counselling centre and support was facilitated.



These are just three examples from FiN's counselling services last year, illustrative of 123 families or individuals who contacted FiN. 71 of these 123 enquiries were referred by third parties, including other counselling centres, authorities, daycare centres, youth welfare organisations or women's shelters. 75% of those seeking advice are women, mostly single mothers.

The occasions or life circumstances that lead to contact being made are:

- **Separation and loss:** death of a parent, death of a child, divorce of the parents – accompanied by family and financial burdens, problems in exercising parental care, contact, alimony disputes
- **Illness or disability of children or parents:** costs for medication, aids, special purchases, therapies, counselling on benefit entitlements and arranging further assistance
- **School, apprenticeship, studies:** numerous enquiries relate to starting school, re-equipping with school materials after moving from another region, starting or changing apprenticeship or studies, fees, travel costs, basic equipment, bridging benefits
- **Pregnancy and birth:** premature or multiple births with special needs, initial baby equipment, counselling and support, especially for young mothers or parents
- **Increased electricity and heating costs:** in 2023, the high energy and living costs had an impact – noticeable on utility bills or purchases, among other things. Energy cut-offs were often threatened or already implemented
- **Education & participation:** financing course fees, sports equipment, children's camps or family holidays
- **And repeatedly:** unregulated transition situations, refusal of responsibility by funding organisations, long processing times at funding organisations, disappearance of documents, inaccessibility of official authorities... Here we support, mediate and help with bridging benefits.



The »village« has a voice

»No child should be lost« is the guiding principle of our professional work. Or as it states in the Child and Youth Welfare Act in § 1, para. 1 SGB VIII: „Every young person has the right to be supported in their development and to be educated to become a self-determined, independent and socially competent person.“ It is undisputed that a carefree upbringing, education and participation are not only basic rights, but also the most important prerequisites for preventing poverty and social marginalisation. However, the statutory benefits, e.g. for education and participation, do not cover needs, the administrative burden is high and does not reach all families. Participation benefits are not enough to support talents in the arts or sports and many children are excluded from social interaction (e.g. children's birthday parties). Social welfare organisations have long been calling for a basic child allowance that covers children's needs and free learning materials.

That is why we have helped to initiate a round table on child poverty in the county of Hildesheim and are campaigning with representatives from administration, politics and associations to fight child poverty and the consequences of deprivation at a municipal level.

As in previous years, FiN has received numerous requests for financial support for school materials, basic equipment for starting or changing school, laptops and tablets. The Round Table Child Poverty is working to ensure that families with low income can each be supported with 100 euros for the start of first



grade. In 2023, the Hildesheim Social Fund was able to disburse aid to 165 families at the counselling centres of the Diakonisches Werk alone.

In 2023, the Diakonisches Werk Hildesheim received project funds from the fundraising campaign „Hand in Hand for Northern Germany“ from the NDR for the project Happy Moments for Families in Need. This enabled parents under particular burden to spend carefree time together with their children at the swimming pool, in the cinema or in an amusement park.



Our »village« is a network

Counselling centres

FiN is often the first contact point for families – but also for institutions that support families – in a crisis or emergency situation. Here they listen carefully and analyse what is needed, with what priority aids need to be initiated, who should be involved or who should be referred. This is where the network of various counselling centres and services comes into play: the specialist centres of the Diakonisches Werk and other services, state social service providers and independent organisations such as supporting foundations.

Volunteering

We offer interested parties the opportunity to volunteer in supporting families in need. This mostly involves tasks to relieve the burden of everyday life and childcare. In 2023, we received numerous expressions of interest, but unfortunately the offers of voluntary lay help often did not meet the needs of the families receiving counselling.

The foundation Families in Need Hildesheim

Since 2011, the foundation Families in Need Hildesheim has been supporting and accompanying FiN's counselling work at the Diakonisches Werk Hildesheim. The foundation Families in Need is a dependent foundation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church District Association of Hildesheim. In cooperation with Robert Smietana, the fundraiser of the Evangelical Lutheran Church District of Hildesheim-Sarstedt, with Gisela Sowa, the coordinator of FiN, and with the administrative office of the church office of Hildesheim, it is working to continue, secure and expand the counselling services offered by FiN. After six years, the chairman of the foundation board changed: Mirko Peisert, former superintendent of the Evangelical Lutheran church district of Hildesheim-Sarstedt, retired from this office. The new chairman since June 2023 is Thomas Buschjohann, one of the co-founders of FiN in 2005.

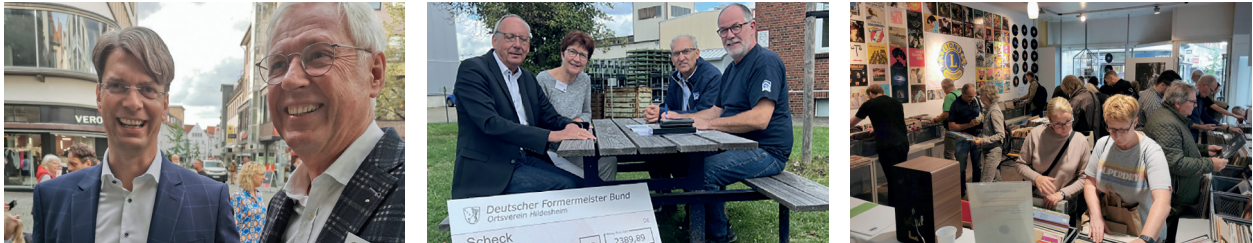


The foundation board in transition:
from left to right Mirko Peisert,
Matthias Böning, Gabriele Fürstenberg,
Ulrike Zeuner, Hermann Reinhold,
Thomas Buschjohann
(Petra Schlote is missing)

Supporter

The village is expanding, the network is getting bigger and stronger! In 2023, FiN received a wide range of practical and financial support: new, loyal, first-time, regular and occasional donors – both individuals and companies – still donated generously during a difficult

economic time for many, thereby promoting and supporting the work of FiN and the foundation. In addition, various organisations launched highly original fundraising campaigns for families in need:



Under the motto Hildesheim donates warmth, the **International Choir of Hildesheim** collected »not needed energy flat rates« for people in economic need. The **Söhlder Fastnachtsfrauen** asked the Söhlder villagers for donations for FiN on Weiberfastnacht 2023. Half of the proceeds from the summer party of the **Beamtenwohnungsverein Hildesheim eG** went to families in need. The Hildesheim **local club of the Formermeister-Bund** donated its remaining balance on the occasion of its dissolution. In September, the **Lions Club Hildesheim-Rose** organised a week-long record market as part of a pop-up store in the former business premises of Foto Storm in the city centre of Hildesheim: around 6,000 donated records were on offer – and a large proportion of these were sold to benefit families in need.

Despite all the challenges that this time brings with it, we welcome any form of practical help and financial support for families in need and thank all supporters from the bottom of our hearts – because: **»It takes a whole village to raise a child«**.

Gisela Sowa (FiN coordinator), Hildesheim, February 2024

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