

The following master's thesis is divided into two parts: part one is based on available sociological literature and deals with issues related to families caring for children in vegetative states. It begins by defining a few basic concepts and ideas and moves on to lay out processes by which families adjust to the onset of severe handicaps in their children (or when their children are born with handicaps) and to some of the main changes they confront and challenges they face. It continues by looking at these families' needs (which should be the basis for determining what services to provide them) and concludes by summarizing the social services that support the home care of children in vegetative states, both historically and in the present day.

Part two is based on my own experience and research. It compares and contrasts services provided to families in two places: Wayne County in New York State in the U.S. and the Trebic Region of the Czech Republic. I begin by describing services available in both regions to families with children in vegetative states living at home and continue with a brief comparison of these services. Main part of the research is based on an analysis of interviews conducted with parents (mostly mothers) of severely handicapped children in both Trebic and Wayne County. The interviews focus on the parents' opinions of and experiences with services provided by their respective social systems. Based on this research, I offer practical suggestions for improving the quality of such services in Trebic and the surrounding areas. In brief: my findings show a lack of adequate relief and respite services and extreme physical and psychological stress among families with children in vegetative states in the Trebic area. The findings also show inadequate cooperation between doctors and organizations providing social services, no formal system for putting volunteers to use and insufficient counseling services for families with children in vegetative states who are of school age.