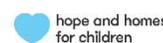




International Conference Deinstitutionalisation of Childcare: Investing in Change

5-8 *2019* *November* **Sofia, Bulgaria**

Professor Andy Bilson



*Parents Advocacy and Rights -
parents helping parents*

Making Parents Part of
the Solution
rather than the problem

International Context

Child protection systems are in crisis

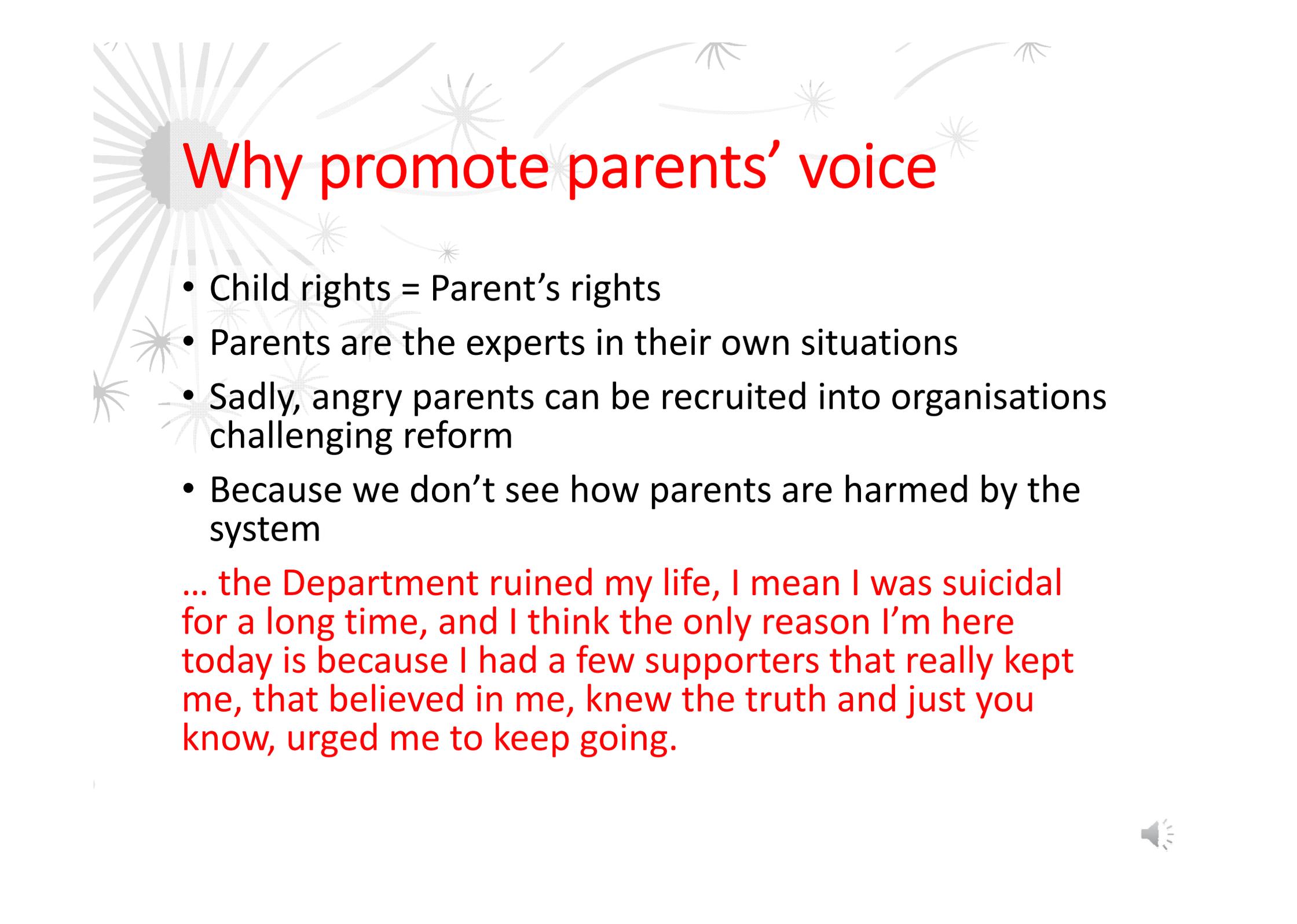
- High rate of involvement in child protection and little help for families
- Increased removal of children from their parents
- No evidence that harm to children is being reduced
- Outcomes for all types of care placement are poor
- Well-being of children is low





Bulgaria

- Strengths and achievements
 - Closure of a large proportion of large institutions
 - Development of social work and social assistance systems
 - Stronger NGO sector
- Areas for consideration
 - No change in the numbers separated from parents: high numbers of children in foster care and small group homes
 - Quality and level of support for children and families in the community
 - Low levels of well-being for large proportion of children living in poverty



Why promote parents' voice

- Child rights = Parent's rights
- Parents are the experts in their own situations
- Sadly, angry parents can be recruited into organisations challenging reform
- Because we don't see how parents are harmed by the system

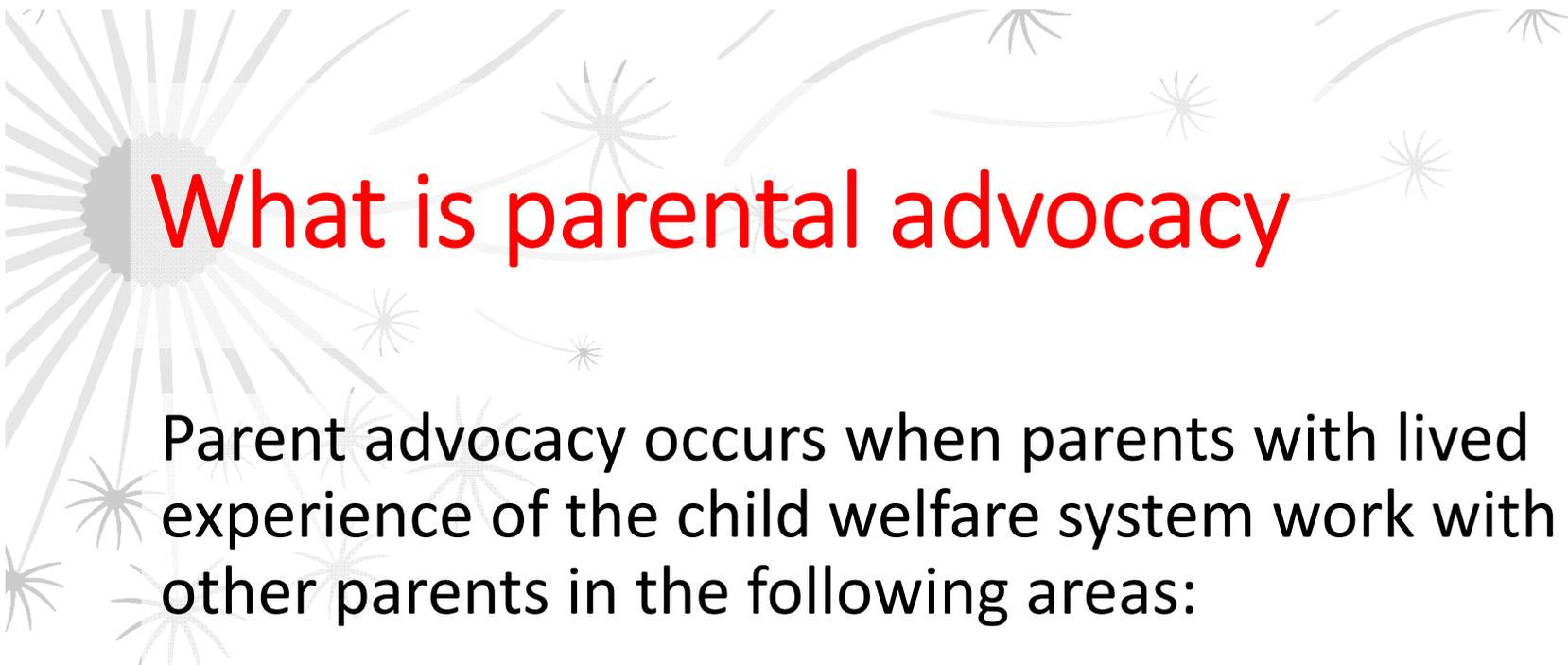
... the Department ruined my life, I mean I was suicidal for a long time, and I think the only reason I'm here today is because I had a few supporters that really kept me, that believed in me, knew the truth and just you know, urged me to keep going.



From Pariahs to Partners



... to dramatically improve the child welfare system you needed **parents themselves, with powerful and committed allies, to become a countervailing force** to the entrenched power of the bureaucracy and care agencies.



What is parental advocacy

Parent advocacy occurs when parents with lived experience of the child welfare system work with other parents in the following areas:

- ***Case advocacy***
- ***Program advocacy***
- ***Policy advocacy***



Parent advocacy research

Reduced Maltreatment

Less entry to care, More reunification, Less re-entry

More engagement with courts and services

Improvements in parenting

Changes in agency culture

Promotes hope and recovery

- for example from alcohol and drug problems:

[advocates] serve as peer recovery supports to families—they transport parents to treatment, coach them on safe and sober parenting and daily living skills, and engage them in community recovery



Developing parent advocacy as a countervailing force

- Identifying existing parents' groups
- Developing pilots. Possible themes or areas:
 - During Deinstitutionalisation
 - Parents of children with a disability
 - Parents of children in deprived communities
 - Parents involved in child protection
 - Parents who have themselves been in institutions
- Creating a parent advocacy curriculum and training
- Parent councils in municipalities and central government
- National network for parent advocacy