



# Children OF TOMORROW

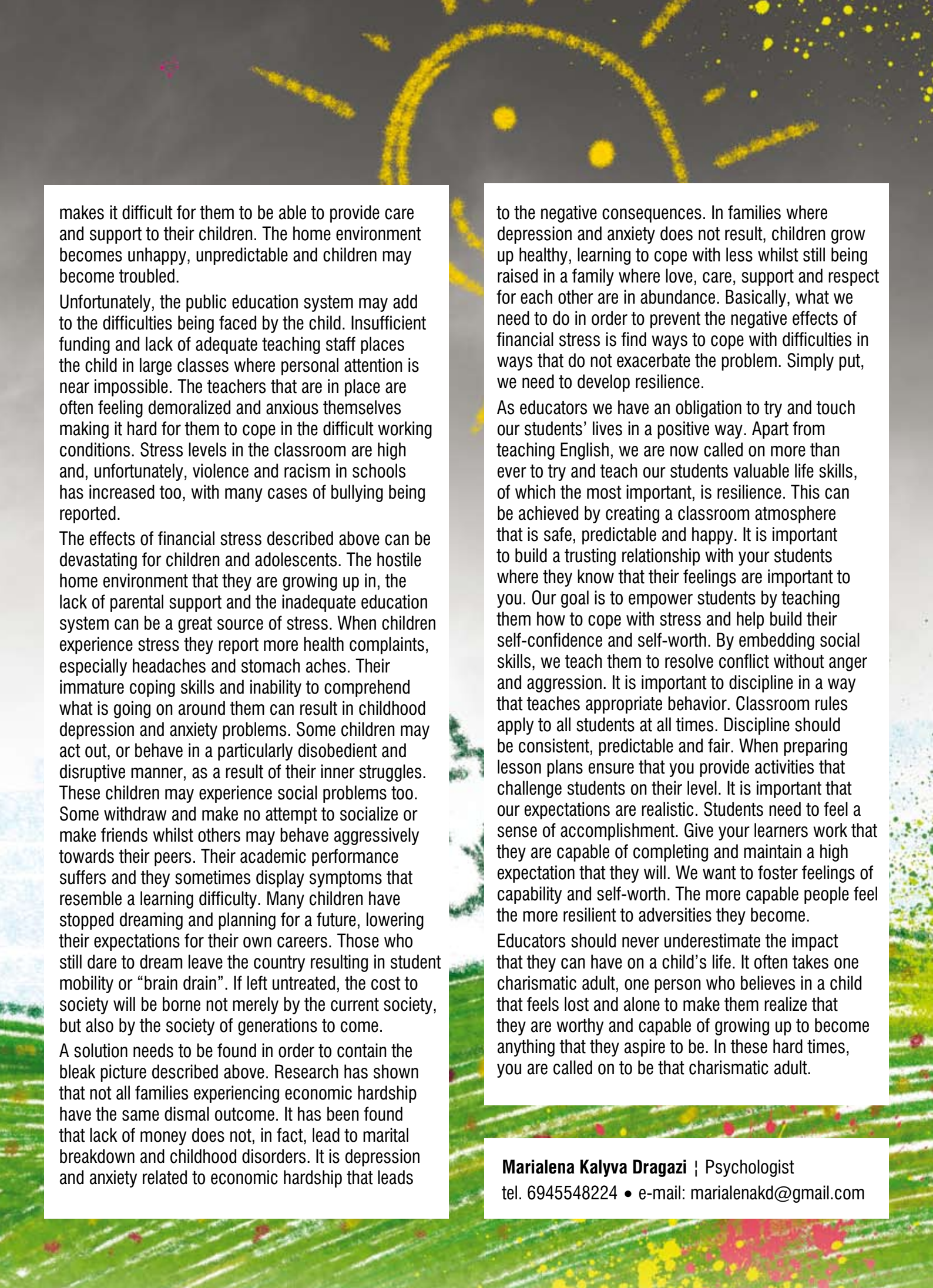
## Building Hope in Times of Economic Crisis

We all experience feelings of stress. When stress is prolonged it is accompanied by a barrage of physical, behavioral and emotional reactions. We feel stressed when we are faced with a challenge or loss that we feel we can't cope with. That we don't have what it takes to overcome the adversity that has come our way. Financial stress is experienced when maintaining a quality of life that one has become accustomed to is no longer possible or when one's ability to make ends meet is compromised. How we perceive the difficulty that has come our way and our own sense of mastery, or ability to cope, will determine how one will experience stress.

The effects of financial stress are at times overwhelming. When a parent loses his job, or a substantial part of his income, he may experience financial pressure. This may result in feelings of low self-worth and reduced self-esteem and, in many cases, feelings of depression. The individual often withdraws, may become hostile and his parenting skills become negatively affected. Simultaneously, his spouse or partner is also experiencing financial pressure with all the associated emotional and behavioral repercussions. The communication between the couple becomes negative, critical and often demoralizing. The frustration experienced at not being able to find a solution to the economic problems results in the couple blaming and feeling anger towards each other. People report less marital satisfaction when economic problems arise and all the animosity described above may lead to family problems.

Parenting skills are also often negatively affected when parents experience financial stress. Parents who have lost their job may be spending more time at home but there is a reduced amount of quality time spent with their children. Parents are less stable in their parenting practices. Their discipline may become harsher and even abusive. They are less supportive and nurturing of their children. The parent's frail emotional state





makes it difficult for them to be able to provide care and support to their children. The home environment becomes unhappy, unpredictable and children may become troubled.

Unfortunately, the public education system may add to the difficulties being faced by the child. Insufficient funding and lack of adequate teaching staff places the child in large classes where personal attention is near impossible. The teachers that are in place are often feeling demoralized and anxious themselves making it hard for them to cope in the difficult working conditions. Stress levels in the classroom are high and, unfortunately, violence and racism in schools has increased too, with many cases of bullying being reported.

The effects of financial stress described above can be devastating for children and adolescents. The hostile home environment that they are growing up in, the lack of parental support and the inadequate education system can be a great source of stress. When children experience stress they report more health complaints, especially headaches and stomach aches. Their immature coping skills and inability to comprehend what is going on around them can result in childhood depression and anxiety problems. Some children may act out, or behave in a particularly disobedient and disruptive manner, as a result of their inner struggles. These children may experience social problems too. Some withdraw and make no attempt to socialize or make friends whilst others may behave aggressively towards their peers. Their academic performance suffers and they sometimes display symptoms that resemble a learning difficulty. Many children have stopped dreaming and planning for a future, lowering their expectations for their own careers. Those who still dare to dream leave the country resulting in student mobility or "brain drain". If left untreated, the cost to society will be borne not merely by the current society, but also by the society of generations to come.

A solution needs to be found in order to contain the bleak picture described above. Research has shown that not all families experiencing economic hardship have the same dismal outcome. It has been found that lack of money does not, in fact, lead to marital breakdown and childhood disorders. It is depression and anxiety related to economic hardship that leads

to the negative consequences. In families where depression and anxiety does not result, children grow up healthy, learning to cope with less whilst still being raised in a family where love, care, support and respect for each other are in abundance. Basically, what we need to do in order to prevent the negative effects of financial stress is find ways to cope with difficulties in ways that do not exacerbate the problem. Simply put, we need to develop resilience.

As educators we have an obligation to try and touch our students' lives in a positive way. Apart from teaching English, we are now called on more than ever to try and teach our students valuable life skills, of which the most important, is resilience. This can be achieved by creating a classroom atmosphere that is safe, predictable and happy. It is important to build a trusting relationship with your students where they know that their feelings are important to you. Our goal is to empower students by teaching them how to cope with stress and help build their self-confidence and self-worth. By embedding social skills, we teach them to resolve conflict without anger and aggression. It is important to discipline in a way that teaches appropriate behavior. Classroom rules apply to all students at all times. Discipline should be consistent, predictable and fair. When preparing lesson plans ensure that you provide activities that challenge students on their level. It is important that our expectations are realistic. Students need to feel a sense of accomplishment. Give your learners work that they are capable of completing and maintain a high expectation that they will. We want to foster feelings of capability and self-worth. The more capable people feel the more resilient to adversities they become.

Educators should never underestimate the impact that they can have on a child's life. It often takes one charismatic adult, one person who believes in a child that feels lost and alone to make them realize that they are worthy and capable of growing up to become anything that they aspire to be. In these hard times, you are called on to be that charismatic adult.

**Mariarena Kalyva Dragazi** | Psychologist  
tel. 6945548224 • e-mail: mariarenakd@gmail.com