



## **Working Group for Cooperation on Children at Risk, the WGCC.**

### **Suggestions for Actions following the Conference:**

#### **“The Rights of Children in Institutions. Improving child participation, monitoring and post placement assistance”**

At the invitation of the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs of Sweden and the Working Group for Cooperation on Children at Risk within the Council of the Baltic Sea States, experts, researchers and practitioners gathered in Stockholm on the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of November 2006 to discuss how to improve child participation, monitoring and post placement assistance for children in institutions.

The ministers responsible for children’s issues, at their meeting in Oslo in May of 2005 asked the WGCC to further the improvement of the situation for the rights of children in institutions taking special note of how the monitoring could include the CRC, the Council of Europe Recommendation 2005:5 and other applicable international conventions.

The cooperation on children at risk within the Council of the Baltic Sea States, CBSS, is a platform where countries in the region may share best practices and use each other’s experiences and expertise by involving actors, researchers and experts that would otherwise work only on a national level.

The conference in Stockholm is one step in responding to the urgent need to improve the situation for boys and girls, including those with disabilities, in institutional care and for their rights to be respected. The rights of children in institutions is one of the five prioritised areas for the cooperation on children at risk implemented by the WGCC. For more information on the WGCC and its activities and to access reports from expert meetings and consultations, please see the website: [www.childcentre.info](http://www.childcentre.info).

The conference participants give the following suggestions to the WGCC:

### **Support to young persons leaving institutions:**

#### **Suggestions for Action**

All countries in the region run different programmes and support measures assisting young persons leaving care. There is a need for development of networks where NGOs, state agencies, local and national authorities and other actors may share programme design, results and best practices in the field of support to young persons leaving care.

- The WGCC is therefore suggested to
  - a. commission a mapping of programmes in the region to create a foundation for exchange and development of assistance measures in the field. The mapping should focus on including all actors regardless of their status, i.e. both state agencies and local county council authorities and bodies and NGOs, local and international.
  - b. use the mapping to create a network of organisations working to improve the assistance and support to young persons leaving care and to include these in the network of child focused agencies and organisations already existing within the WGCC network.
  - c. increase the knowledge of the situation for boys and girls with disabilities in institutions.

## **Developing the monitoring of institutions to include international Recommendation 2005:5**

### **Suggestions for Action**

Throughout the region, countries struggle to find the most appropriate way of monitoring care to respond to the responsibility of caring for children in out-of-home placement.

- The WGCC is suggested to use the network of experts in the region to
  - a. develop a plan for a training, through which monitoring skills should be developed. The plan will include specific provisions on how children themselves should be included and their rights respected
  - b. implement a pilot training, using the developed plan, including teams of monitoring staff from countries in the region.
  - c. involve young persons themselves in the development of such a plan and in the training as such
  - d. ensure that the plan for the training includes training on how young persons should be included in the monitoring of institutions and residential care settings where they themselves are residing.
  - e. involve young persons with disabilities, adjusted to their abilities, in this work.

## **Ensuring that children are heard in all matters related to support of young persons leaving institutions and in the development of the monitoring of institutions.**

### **Suggestions for Action**

Experiences of bringing children and young persons together in hearings exist within several organisations. The knowledge and expertise on how to do this should be more broadly disseminated than it presently is.

- The WGCC is encouraged by the conference delegates to ensure dissemination of methods and experiences in including experiences and views of children in institutional care and with experiences of out-of-home care in all matters relating to care. The inclusion should be there
  - a. when the child him/herself is directly involved in his/her own care arrangements and
  - b. when responsible ministries, authorities, agencies and NGOs develop plans to improve the situation for children in out-of-home care.
- The dissemination of methods and expertise on how to involve young persons can be made through seminars and smaller meetings as well as through written communication and hands-on supervision.

The influence of institutionalisation on adolescents' abilities can in part be explained by a lack of challenges in the institutional setting optimal for their development and the lack of regulatory type of communication. The excessive control typical for adolescents' daily life in institutions may undermine the motivation to engage in interesting and challenging tasks.

Poor preparation of boys and girls in institutions for an independent life in the community increases the risks after leaving the institutions. In addition, institutional care tends to be strictly regimented giving children poor opportunities to learn that their actions produce reliable and consistent consequences.

Outcomes for children in care very much depend on post-placement or follow up after leaving an institution. Research indicates that future prospects for children in residential care are poor and that they are in a very vulnerable position in transition from care to an independent life. Research findings also show that there are high rates of unemployment, homelessness, early pregnancies, abuse and criminality among those who leave residential care.

A Pathway Plan would include assistance to the young person leaving care and should take the form of a formal agreement. After all, one third of the children leaving care in Russia do find foothold in society so the support mechanisms that need to be implemented to increase the share of young persons whose lives turn out fine after leaving residential care should be increased, as is the case in many communities. A Pathway Plan must be based on the assessment of the young person's needs and should involve the youth's active participation in the assessment process.

Specific programmes to educate young persons in daily life skills need to be implemented and assist young persons as they strive to move toward independence. These programmes should be directed at enhancing life skills and education opportunities as well as strengthening social

integration and self-image. The importance of finding a place to stay must be underlined since many young persons leaving institutions become migrants in their own country, not having a community where they would feel welcome. To enable young people with disabilities to plan their life as independently as possible in their community a broad range of quality support services at community level need to be set up. (Council of Europe Rec 2006:5 “Action plan to promote the rights and full participation of people with disabilities in society: improving the quality of life of people with disabilities in Europe” 2006-215.)

The monitoring of residential care should focus on determining the ability of systems and individual facilities to ensure that children placed there

- need to be in care and need to be in that kind of care setting (the “**necessity principle**”)
- are promoted and protected throughout and immediately following the placement find themselves in a responsive care setting where their needs are met and their rights are respected (the “**suitability principle**”)

“[t]his requires simple but usable information systems collecting data on who requests services, the reasons for the request, key elements of the assessment, the services allocated and the outcomes obtained. These information systems need to collect a limited amount of data and be keyed into the administrative processes to obtain high-quality data. [...] Systems monitoring is most effective where it is used, not only centrally, but also locally, to gather key information and where it forms part of a strategy to empower managers and practitioners. This means that the information must be meaningful to users, simple to collect and facilitate feedback on the relevant services.”<sup>1</sup>

The wider legal and administrative framework within which the care system operates should be subject to monitoring and evaluation within the specific assessment exercise regarding “residential care” inasmuch as it impacts on children actually or potentially in that system.

It is vital that, in each country, children and young people with previous or current experience of care be consulted on the issues that they feel need to be monitored within their national contexts. This can be effected most expeditiously through existing associations, or alternatively through group sessions during inspections.

Such consultations to date have, *inter alia*, brought to light the fact that certain issues, while recognised by professionals, have a possibly unsuspected high level of importance in the eyes of young people in care. These include, for example, ensuring that:

- “protective measures” (e.g. curfews) are designed for the benefit of the children rather than for the convenience of staff;
- inspections are frequent and fully involve the children;
- staff are fully trained in use of physical restraint and conflict resolution;
- mental health needs are properly recognised and addressed;

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<sup>1</sup> Andy Bilson and Judith Harwin, Gatekeeping Services for Vulnerable Children and Families, A Concept Paper, *in* Changing minds, policies and lives : improving protection of children in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Gatekeeping services for vulnerable children and families, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, June, 2003

- no inappropriate pharmaceutical or chemical management of children is tolerated.

Listings such as this – all the above points were made by children and young people – already provide an indication of where serious lacunae or concerns may lie in residential care systems from the user’s standpoint and are therefore to be considered as extremely useful in developing monitoring priorities.