The Social Work Team for Separated Children Seeking Asylum in Ireland

The Irish Model of Care & Protection for Unaccompanied Minors Seeking International Protection

Thomas Dunning 15 September 2017
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TUSLA Child and Family Agency GÖTEBORGSREGIONENS KOMMUNALFÖRBUND

PRESENTATION OVERVIEW

- Evolution of the Irish Model and the Referral System in Ireland
- Social Work Service for Separated Children
  - Unaccompanied Minors
  - Family Reunification
  - EU Relocation and Calais Special Project
  - Aftercare
- Quick look at service development and referrals history
- Why Social Workers? (Core values, Code of Ethics)
- Working with (and for) separated child in Ireland
- Missing children
SERVICE DEVELOPMENT HISTORY OF TUSLA Child & Family Agency’s Team for Separated Children Seeking Asylum

- **1999** – Number of UAMs increases to 97. Services are provided by 3 Social Workers.
- **2000** – CRISIS! 520 UAMs arrive; emergency hostel accommodation is provided by the Dept. of Justice, responsible for accommodation of asylum seekers.
- **2001** – CRISIS CONTINUES when 1085 UAMs are identified! Service becomes formalized. The children are separated from the adult asylum seekers and are accommodated in dormitory-style hostels specifically for asylum seeking children aged 13-17. 12 and under are fostered.
- **2006 to 2009** – The team grows to 32 clinical staff– based in Dublin, but providing services to many UAMs nationally.
- **2009/2010** – EQUITY OF CARE PRINCIPLE Following years of campaigning, this development helped us to close children’s hostels, the opening of 3 additional children’s residential units and disbursement of SCSA to foster care families and local SW teams around the country. (On par with Irish or EU children in care in Ireland, only residential care or foster care is acceptable.)
- **2012** – Established an even more formal national service for Separated Children within the child protection services (TUSLA Child & Family Agency) under the Minister for Children.
- **2014/2016** – The Irish Model with its “Children First” approach causes a stir in Europe and requests are made for Irish expertise and technical support for other EU member states and children’s service organisations. (EASO, Missing Children Europe, UNICEF, Cyprus, Malta, Austria, Greece, Italy, Slovakia, UK, Sweden, Germany)
- **2016/2017** – Begin working with the IRPP to receive Syrian UAMs from Greece under EU Relocation Programme as well as UAMs under Ireland’s Calais Special Project (CSP). We currently have 6 residential units.

CURRENT SOCIAL WORK TEAM IN 2017

- 1 Principal Social Worker
- 4 Social Work Team Leaders
  - 7 Social Workers
- 6 After Care Project Workers

All specifically dedicated and responsible for meeting the statutory and ethical obligations regarding separated children in care of the State. We enjoy a 0% staff turnover rate for the past 11 years. Unheard of in child protection social work teams.

We’re not entirely sure but we think we have the most gender balanced and culturally diverse child protection social work team in the country with a current make up of clinicians from **Ireland, Ethiopia, Canada, Zimbabwe, India, Australia, Nigeria, South Africa and USA.**

Historically, we have also had staff from **Germany, Japan, France, Finland, New Zealand, Spain, Switzerland, Austria, Portugal, Croatia, Rwanda, Brazil and Kenya.**
Referral System for Separated Children in Ireland

Historically, our referrals have come from the
- Garda National Immigration Bureau or
- International Protection Office;
  ...although we can now add
- the Irish Refugee Protection Program and
- the Calais Special Project

2016 referrals: 126
2017 Year to date 105

Compared with peak years of:
- 2001 1085
- 2002 863
- 2003 789

Referrals to TUSLA Child and Family Agency’s Team for Separated Children Seeking Asylum Team 2000 to 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Referrals to TUSLA's Team for SCSA</th>
<th>Placed in care</th>
<th>Completed Family reunification service provided, regardless of placement in care status.</th>
<th>Other</th>
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SOCIAL WORK TEAM, *in loco parentis*, HAS RESPONSIBILITY FOR:

- Child protection risk assessment including a dimension on age, identity issues and exploration of any contacts in Ireland as well as looking for any trafficking indicators.
- Explore and assess appropriateness of possible family reunification within Ireland, a voluntary return home to country of origin or a third country where the family may be; such as another EU member state or not.
- Accommodation provided in standardized and registered children’s home (with not more than six children) or a fostering / supported lodgings placement to meet the young person’s care needs: educational, social, emotional, religious/spiritual, psychological and medical.
- **If and when appropriate**, enter the child into the asylum process.
  - Attend all interviews and any appeal hearings and any court appearances related to asylum or legal status in the country, even post 18 years.
  - If appropriate, make representations on the child’s behalf to support their application for protection or permission to remain in the country.
- Interdisciplinary and inter-agency planning and follow up and referral to any specialist services if required.

Why Social Workers?

*Definition of Social Work*

The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work. (International Federation of Social Workers 2000).

*Six Core Values of the Social Work Profession*

- Service.
- Social justice.
- Dignity and inherent worth of every individual.
- Importance and centrality of human relationships.
- Integrity.
- Competence.
## Some Principles Of Our Service including elements from SW Code of Ethics

- The welfare of the child is paramount. (*Advocacy*)
- Best interests of the child should be deciding factor. Generally, it is in the best interest of a child to be with their family. (*Non-Judgemental Regard*)
- Take into account the wishes of the child, having due regard for their age. (*Client's right to self-determination*)
- SCSA are first and foremost children, with an absolute right to care and protection. "Children first, asylum seeker second." (*Dignity*)
- Although we are officers of the State, we are neither police nor immigration officers. (*Privacy and Confidentiality*)
- EQUITY OF CARE PRINCIPLE - Must be afforded the same opportunities and outcomes as Irish / EU children in care of the State. (*Non-Oppressive Practice*)

## Who are these children?

- Arrive in Ireland without parents, guardians or customary caregivers
- Range in age from 0 - 17 years
- Male, female and transgender
- Over 75 different countries of origin
- Variety of reasons for coming
- Variety of routes and experiences
COMMON vs. INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCES

The children have experienced a massive lack of choice in their lives. Usually, adults have decided to send them overseas and they have travelled illegally so they arrive to the receiving countries already criminalized.

COMMON - Separation from or loss of
- Family, friends, neighbours and community, traditions, religion, school.
They have endured abrupt changes in
- Culture, language, climate, faces, food, social and physical environment

INDIVIDUAL - Experiences of
- Family life, social relationships, health, education
Country of origin experiences may vary
- Tribal conflict, racial, political, social or religious persecution, extreme poverty, corruption in political decision making or access to services

All without normal family and community supports...

Other thoughts for consideration when supporting SCSA...

- Pre-migration, migration and post-migration experiences.
- The ordinary vs. the extraordinary.
  (Dr. Muireann Ni Raghallaigh, University College Dublin)
- Clarity on evolving asylum procedures and legislation relocation and resettlement.
- Challenges with Age concerns – age assessment issues
Separated pregnant girls and/or young mothers

- Most of them have no support of a partner or their parents
- Sensitive circumstances of pregnancy (e.g. Rape, forced marriage, sexual exploitation, sex work, incest.)
- Issues regarding putative father of the unborn child
- Almost all of them are having their first baby
- Distant from their peers, new to the culture in Ireland
- Difficulty connecting with the pregnancy and/or baby due to trauma
- Different religious and cultural values related to sex, pregnancy, gender, an individual’s bodily autonomy.

CHILDREN MISSING FROM CARE

The team became increasingly concerned at the increase in missing children that began in the latter months of 2008 and continued up to the summer of 2009; some of whom were suspected by social workers to be potential child victims of human trafficking.

To address this situation, along with other risk factors for children, a Joint National Protocol on Children Who Go Missing from Care was developed between An Garda Siochana (the Irish police force) and Tusla, Child and Family Agency (the State’s child protection service).
Joint National Protocol On Children Who Go Missing From Care

Some of the various measures that were agreed included:

- Collaborative interviewing at the ports / other appropriate location between social workers and Irish police force (An Garda Síochána).
- Planned police surveillance of those at risk of going missing from the point of presentation at ports to the initial placement period in units.
- Joint training of social workers and police / immigration officers in relation to identifying children at high risk of going missing.
- These measures were implemented - and existing processes improved throughout the first half of 2009. Links between local police stations and the children’s accommodations were also strengthened. The police mounted several surveillance operations with the collaboration of social workers and successfully tracked some children who went missing.
- 81 of 846 (9.6%) children went missing from the service in 2001. 2 of 48 (4%) children went missing in 2012. 1 or >1% of 86 in 2014!

Challenges

- Lack of awareness from service providers such as schools, hospitals, taxi drivers and community projects about children in migration.
- Discrimination, racism, xenophobia (fear of others)
  - Global fear-mongering and sensationalised media reports about migrants, trafficking, social welfare and benefit fraud.
  - Acts of hostility, violence and aggression against foreigners.
- Cultural, social and religious differences (including issues related to money, gender, leisure, work, sexuality, personal agency, social strata).
- Explaining negative asylum decisions to a child; the legal process; and any delays with getting a decision on their residency status.
- The shadows…all of the unknowns. ‘The mandate.’ Some children may have adult family living in Ireland yet unknown to the authorities. This can lead to problems with parenting the child. Also some young people are expected to send money back home which is problematic.

_all of these can challenges can lead to increased risk for children._
Suggestions and recommendations

- Developing rapport and trust with the young person. (Follow through)
- Liberal application of benefit of the doubt
- Good communication is facilitated by:
  - Knowledge of respective roles and responsibilities of service providers during interactions
  - Awareness of the issues surrounding separated children, both specifically and generally
  - Professional trust, respect and skills should always be taken into account
  - Cultural competency (Knowing that you don’t know! Ask.)
  - Assume good will of other professionals working on the child’s case.

We’re all in this together!

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