



Image from le Courier UNESCO

...The situation of Russian children is alarming

The rising price level, increasing unemployment and the delay in the payment of salaries and social assistance has brought about a serious growth in social and family problems: the crisis of the family, increased divorces, lower marital and birth rates, and a rise in intoxicant abuse and crime, also among minors. The number of street-children is on the increase.

Due to lack of prevention and community-based services the solution to children's problems is often extra-familial care. The number of children in care has considerably increased. Many children have been referred to residential homes by the request of their parents only because of their lacking means of subsistence.

The need for support from the society has grown while the unfavourable development of the economy has led to cuttings and calling off social programmes directed to the protection of families and children.

Residential homes don't have enough money needed for food, heating and electricity bills. Thousands of orphan children are starving. Several institutions are in bad condition and would need fundamental renovation. Hospitals cannot provide food, medicine and supplies to their patients. Schools are not able to provide children with lunches. Day care services and recreational possibilities have become worse and are out of reach of many families.

Despite these great difficulties a lot of efforts have been taken to protect and help the children. Non-governmental organisations have been founded to improve the children's situation. On local basis also new services have been established. There are several development projects; many of them are run together with foreign partners. A considerable amount of humanitarian aid from abroad has been directed to helping children and families.

The situation varies in different parts of the country. The fact remains, however, that without far-reaching changes in the development of the economy and an improvement of the basic well-being of families, impoverishment will continue. As a consequence social problems will increase. They cannot be solved from outside. But together a lot can be done to mitigate children's suffering and prevent it from increasing. Russian children need urgently help.

Martti Kemppainen
Vice-President

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...Looking ahead for the next fifty years

Of course, these explanations are not quite satisfying and it is important to know the reasons for this new trend in order to avoid unnecessary placements. There has been a lot of research undertaken recently in Europe and in the Americas about Family Support techniques. In Canada for instance, 80% of placements could be avoided if some form of intensive family support was given to the family at risk. In the Netherlands, the Video-Home-Training method was successfully used to improve communication skills in at risk families, preventing the placement of children in institutions. More and more institutions begin to train their staff to work with families in their natural environment.

In this context, it appears indeed very old-fashioned to focus on residential care. The same dilemma appears in the discussion about secure accommodation for delinquent youth: Nobody is very glad about it, but it still exists and there are young people in such forms of “care” who need protection, too.

So FICE will probably have a very difficult, antagonistic role to play in the future: prevent placement in extrafamilial care on the one hand and develop it on the other hand. By “developing”, I do not mean increasing the number but increasing the quality of care. To achieve this, FICE needs powerful friends and allies. The basis for this policy is strong members in each country.

As a president, I try to achieve two things: Involving FICE actively in existing international networks and creating services for its members.

Very few of our members are already involved in international networks like IFCW/EFCW, Euronet etc. The active collaboration with national branches of UNESCO, UNICEF and other international bodies is still very weak. During the last years, I tried to make links between FICE and these international networks focussed mainly on child welfare and on children's rights. So currently, FICE is a member in IFCW, EFCW, Euronet, CRIN and we try to improve our collaboration in UNICEF, UNESCO and the Council of Europe. Significant progress has been made in the collaboration with UNESCO and the Council of Europe thanks to the active involvement of our treasurer. FICE was involved in Helios II and is active in the ECSPRESS network in the frame of the Erasmus Programme. The Professional Exchange Programme seems to start slowly and FICE-Europe has had a successful start with its international seminar programme.

Since a few years, FICE publishes a bulletin in three languages (14 issues until now). This bulletin is very useful but it is very academic and does not reflect the activities of the organisation and its members. For many years, we had discussions about publishing a kind of newsletter to give an overview on important and current themes. We also discussed the necessity of having a home-page on the web. With the establishment of the General Secretariat in Florence (Italy) and thanks to Gianluca Barbanotti, these dreams have come true. The (nice) home page exists since a few weeks and today, we are proud to present you the first issue of “FICE-News”. I think and I hope that this publication will play an important role in the dissemination of important information to and from our members and the “outside” world and improve the visibility of our organisation.

Robert Soisson
President

