

**Fact sheet
N° 15**

**A global policy for Children and the Family
PROVISIONAL PROTECTIVE MEASURES: THE PRINCIPLES TO BE
OBSERVED DURING THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF A CHILD (2/3)**

Children who have been deprived of their families often have greater needs than simply the provision of an alternative placement. The loss of family attachments and identity together with the instabilities and disruptions of a new placement can impede their physical, intellectual and emotional development. If children are placed in institutions, then the State must take measures to ensure that they are provided with well-trained staff, that the children's needs are met and their quality of life is good and protected from abuse*.

Giving a family-style and/or personalized touch to the stay in an institution

The social workers bear responsibility for conferring upon the child's stay in an institution the most family-like and/or personalized nature possible to assist the child's harmonious development. Various options can be chosen, on the basis of positive experiences taking place around the world.

The institutions or their sections or groups take the form preferably of family-style units, that is to say, receiving a limited number of children, both girls and boys, of different ages. This organisational method, like that of a family, avoids on the other hand the separation of brothers and sisters and the switch between institutions according to the child's age.

It is necessary, however, to be sure to avoid the pitfalls noted in some of these institutions.

1.) These institutions must continue to be modest in their physical concept so as to continue to be as much like the child's local habitat so as not to encourage

abandonment, when the institution sometimes turns itself into a more attractive place than the family home.

2.) This type of institution should also continue to be a temporary protective measure. They cannot consider it a permanent "family-style" option; the children are not "theirs"; adoption, in this case, is preferable, in as much as it guarantees the child a permanent legal agreement for life and the benefit in most cases of a mother and a father.

The institutions should provide personalized attention, keeping a certain distance from each child's emotional expression that responds to their physical and moral needs, by giving them security, restoring their respect to them, stimulating them and preparing them for reintegration in a family environment.

It is necessary to see to it that the relations built up by the staff of institutions are individualized, are affable and full of affection, but they should not confuse the children: the trainers are not their mother(s), nor their aunt(s), they cannot "take possession" of the children in a way that

makes the child's departure from the institution too painful for them. The director of the institution, the psychologist, if there is one, have an important role to play in helping the staff to maintain a balanced approach towards the children; at the same time positive and affectionate, but keeping a certain distance.

Among the staff of the institution, it is appropriate to designate the people who will take care of each group of children on a permanent basis thereby enabling each child to identify a stable reference person. In the same way, the professionals in charge of the medical-psycho-social research and of contacts with the parents should be clearly identified so as to avoid any lack of precision in their duties that might lead to inertia.

Working to guarantee respect for every child

Every child has a name and has the right to be called by that name. It is not right to

name children according to generic or collective terms. The social workers will see to it that the child is not spoken of as a "case" and will not refer to them according to a diagnosis, but rather as a person, complete with their strengths and weaknesses.

In their work with the child, it is important to recognise the impact of the traumatic past they have experienced and their capacity to absorb and retain the information provided in this respect.

It is the basic care (feeding, hygiene) that should always be served them in a respectful and individualized manner and should be a time for an interpersonal relationship (words, smiles, caresses). All children, especially those who suffer from a lack of affection in their first months or years, will benefit enormously from stroking in a relaxed atmosphere.

ISS/IRC team, June 2006

For more information:

UNICEF *"Implementation Handbook for the Convention on the Rights of the Child"* (article 20); fully revised edition 2002 (* extract).

UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre *"Children in Institutions: The Beginning or the End? The Cases of Italy, Spain, Argentina, Chile and Uruguay"* UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Piazza SS. Annunziata, 12, 50122 Florence, Italy - www.unicef-icdc; 2000

TOBIS David *"Moving from Residential Institutions to Community-Based Social Services in Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union"* The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, The World Bank, 1818 H Street, N.W., Wash; 2000, 62pp.

The ISS/IRC would like to thank the Committee for Inter-country Adoption of the Presidency of The Council of Italy (CAI) and the Canton of Geneva, Switzerland, for their support for this project.
