



Monthly Review N° 3/2010 March 2010

EDITORIAL

A multidisciplinary team: in theory at least, but what does it mean in practice?

There are numerous administrative and legal texts that foresee the obligation to convene a multidisciplinary team when it is time to take decisions about adoption. Such texts are helpful on the condition that safeguards are integrated for their effective implementation.

In an interview with ISS/IRC, Gabriele Schreiner, a sociologist and director of the Brazilian NGO Social Conscience says “the simple act of convening professionals from different sections in one and the same office does not turn them into a multidisciplinary team” (see page 6). This statement is full of common sense and sums up the whole of the problem. Real interdisciplinary action depends on the establishment of a well nurtured inter-professional dialogue within the team as well as with the other bodies involved in the adoption procedure. Without this interaction, contradictory and sometimes radical points of view risk impeding the adoption of a decision that are most in line with the needs of the child in question.

To convene a multidisciplinary team is necessary, but it is not an adequate condition.

In order to guarantee that an adoption is the right step for a child deprived of his/her family, it is important to ensure that the different professionals involved (psychologists, social workers and lawyers etc) agree on this option, following a confrontation of viewpoints that are respectful and child centred. Unfortunately practice shows that this dialogue is often faulty. Bridges between the different professional groups are clogged or even non-existent.

Everyone thinks in terms of their own professional and personal perspective at the risk of making decisions based upon their own outlook and not upon the real needs of the child.

The difficulties that can be observed in the field lead us to consider the importance of developing activities that will bring together professionals and agencies concerned to consult and act in a complementary and not competitive manner. This is a key element necessary to guarantee respect for the interests of the child in all decisions that affect them.

Building bridges thanks to training and co-ordination.

Training is one of the first elements that encourage effective multidisciplinary action. It enables professionals to take some distance and step back in order to be able to compare their own system of values and professional culture. To fully be able to listen to others, such distancing is essential. For example, it is not rare for deep rooted prejudices to prevent constructive exchanges between lawyers, social workers and psychologists.

The supervisory sessions also constitute a useful tool for the promotion of interdisciplinary and inter-institutional dialogue. The coordinator of the team and the

intervention of an outside professional can contribute to the gradual set up of really interdisciplinary activities. One means available is making room for an in-depth analysis of certain delicate cases. Such spaces can produce vibrancy among professionals at the time when the difficulties are solved.

The organisation of seminars also permits interactions between judges and staff of the Central Authorities for adoption. For example, these seminars can help the different bodies to solve practical cases by working together with the help of a mediator if necessary. Such practices can be fruitful and promote a more rapid treatment of files that are blocked simply due to a difference of opinion

Finally the training of professionals is the clear responsibility of the States irrespective

of their resources (see page 4). As Schreiner stresses, certain tools are already accessible for all and require few resources including the organisation of meetings with a view to exchanging experiences, the promotion of space for reading and debating as well as online training tools.

A multidisciplinary team, worthy of its name, is the responsibility of everyone both at the personal and professional levels. It also requires creativity. It is important to leave room for innovative initiatives which are sometimes necessary for finding a solution to files that seem to be stuck in an impasse.

ISS/IRC Team
March 2010