



SPECIAL ISSUE

The training and support of professionals

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EDITORIAL

Specialised and supported professionals for the year 2017 to thrive in children's rights

A country may have an 'ideal' legal framework available for children in need of protection but if, at the same time, the professionals responsible for putting this into effect are not qualified and supported in carrying out their functions, it will remain unworkable.

Ensuring that child protection is implemented by specialised professionals is part of a State's obligations, as stipulated in international standards¹ and some domestic laws, as is the case in Peru's recent Decree No. 1296, issued in December 2016 (see p. 3)². This obligation responds to a real need, repeatedly raised by the professionals themselves during the October 2016 International Alternative Care Conference. Making instruments, such as Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children are a reality, particularly for children with special needs, such as those with a disability, may be achieved through the provision of skilled professionals to understand the journey of these children and to assess, with the child's full participation, the life project most adapted to their profile. What skills and knowledge must the professionals gain? Are they supported in carrying out their responsibilities? These are major questions that the ISS/IRC suggests raising.

Professionals trained to listen to children, young people and families (skills)

The support offered to a child and family in a situation of crisis linked, for example, to violence within the family or even to communication problems, requires an ability to listen, compassion, empathy and non-judgement on the part of the professionals concerned, along with a solid belief in the ability of individuals. How can we achieve this attitude that is far from being

natural and systematic? Is it not strengthened through the basic training of child protection professionals, irrespective of their field of expertise, together with supervision sessions? These sessions are invaluable in the sense that they offer an extremely useful space for dialogue and support, allowing professionals to work on their own representations and resonances. Furthermore, for family situations of an international nature requiring cultural sensitivity, should we give priority to the resort to local professionals to complete social reports that respect cultural and social norms? This is one of the fundamental principles of the international social work carried out by ISS since its inception in 1924.

In addition, could the search for a solution for the child or family at risk be made without the participation of those principally concerned? This aspect – highlighted in international standards – also requires the acquisition of a culture of participation. What stage are we at today in the development of such a culture? An innovative practice launched in France and Italy deserves to be mentioned here. Individuals, with experiences of care, have developed a training programme aimed at professionals in institutions and child protection services. These professionals have therefore been able to experience the feelings of children and young people in care when they are

not listened to or when they are isolated from decisions concerning their life (see p. 4).

Professionals trained in the special needs of some children (knowledge)

In addition to an quality initial training (see p. 3), the profiles of some children in vulnerable situations require access to specialised training offering professionals the necessary knowledge and tools to ensure good care for these children. Has any progress been made in this field? In adoption, the growing proportion of older children, groups of siblings or children with an illness or disability proposed for intercountry adoption requires the intervention of competent professionals capable of preparing and supporting prospective adoptive parents in the care of these children. Several countries have developed specific training that is available to this effect (see p. 6). Similarly, ISS has developed training on the care of children with disabilities, guided by a better respect of their fundamental rights, such as the right to grow up within their family environment³. Without the sharing of expertise in these particularities, adoption projects find themselves exposed to high risks of failure – a situation that all adoption stakeholders – starting with States – must prevent.

Professionals supported in carrying out their functions

Professionals must have access to training and supervision fora, but what about their working

conditions? The understaffing of some services linked to child protection – due in particular to budgetary cuts – pressure from an overwhelming bureaucracy or lack of resources (transport difficulties, access to professional and logistical tools, etc.) – may all threaten the quality of the professional intervention for children and families? One may add the frequent changes in professional teams following, for example, political elections. The stability and continuity of teams guarantees retaining the expertise gained, and generates invaluable confidence for a better quality of work. In this field, civil society offers valuable assistance to States, through the development of training courses in social work (see p.7), particularly for children in migratory situations (see p. 9), or the establishment of free and accessible online courses on topics such as alternative care – a multi-agency project, which ISS is strongly committed to, and which will be launched in May 2017⁴.

At a time of reflection on our 2017 resolutions, the availability of experienced professionals, who are supported in their complex task with children and families, cannot be omitted. We work with people, and as Jean Dorst underlined, ‘nothing that is human is simple’ but all that is human should receive unconditional support.

The ISS/IRC team
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