

Child Protection Policy and Advice

The Children Act 1989 and 2004 both state that the 'welfare of the child is paramount'. Contention then arises when another piece of legislation directly conflicts with this notion: The Asylum and Immigration Acts 1999, 2002 and 2004 focus on the need for strict guidelines and procedures rather than welfare and there are arguments that children's welfare is not considered paramount under this legislation. Further to this, within the Children Act 2004, Section 11 states that state agencies have a duty to protect children, however this does not include asylum seeker and refugee organisations and the UN Convention of Children's Rights holds a reservation by the UK government to interpret the Convention according to domestic imperatives on asylum. Thus in the UK there is conflict between those who prioritise asylum over domestic child welfare laws and those who prioritise child welfare. However there are many who would argue that UK laws, including guidance such as 'Working Together under the Children Act 2004', state explicitly that we have a duty to protect every child in the UK, national or non-national.

Within this context then, agencies such as the Welsh Refugee Council have not had any obligation under legislation to prioritise child welfare. However individuals within the organisation have considered that this is an important and overlooked area. Part of the objective of my post, therefore, is to consider Child Protection within the context of the Welsh Refugee Council, to assist in providing support, training and advice where necessary.

A central component of the Children Act 2004 was to establish a joint way of working, increasing communication and creating an openness in which children can be protected. In addition to this an aspect of child protection work has to work at prevention level as well as helping those in crisis. It is then important that, not only are state bodies involved in this, but also those organisations and community groups that work directly with families. The second part of my post is therefore to raise awareness of child protection amongst Refugee Community Groups with the view to establishing wider understanding of child protection issues within UK law and how to prevent children from suffering harm within families.

These two central objectives form the main part of my work. In addition I will be undertaking certain other tasks such as:

General Child Protection

- i. To improve multi-agency child protection practice within the four areas – *Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham.*
- ii. To influence all Wales practice

Children

- iii. To raise awareness of child protection issues to and via children and young people from refugee backgrounds.

Campaign Work

- iv. To support the work and campaigns of key networks in Wales and at UK and European level – in order to protect children within refugee communities.

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