

# *Fall Exchange 2008*

*September 26 - October 4, 2008*

*Theme "Empowerment"*

## *Participant Data*

<b>Name(s)</b>	<b>Sinéad McGuinness</b>	<b>Katie Walker</b>
<b>Organisation</b>	<b>RIA, Dept Justice, Equality &amp; Law Reform</b>	<b>London Borough of Harrow, Asylum Team</b>
<b>Country</b>	<b>Ireland</b>	<b>UK</b>
<b>Host country</b>	<b>Denmark</b>	<b>Denmark</b>
<b>Contactperson Host country &amp; e-mail</b>	<b>Maja</b>	<b>Maja</b>

## *Itinerary (List of places and people visited)*

### **Monday 29 September**

#### **Sandholm**

Introduction to the Danish Asylum procedure and wthe work of the Danish Red Cross by legal Adviser Thorbjørn Olander  
Guided Tour of Danish Red Cross Centre Sandholm by Mr Jannich Bisp and staff, followed by visit at the centre reception.

### **Tuesday 30 September**

#### **Røde Kors Huset (Red Cross House)**

Welcome to the Red Cross House by head of VUA, Mrs. Birgitte Steno. Introduction to education possibilities and teaching methods.

### **Wednesday 1 October**

#### **Røde Kors Huset (Red Cross House)**

Introduction to work training etc by head of Activation division Mr Nils Groth.  
Introduction to work with volunteers by volunteer coordinator Mrs Anne Sander.

**Thursday 2 October**

**Danish Red Cross, Centre Kongelunden,**

Working in the job centre and guided tour of the women's centre.

**Friday 3 October**

**Sandholm**

Evaluation and time to spend on report

Visit Maja in Sandholm

Introduction to the Iraq project by Ms Mette Schmidt, project coordinator

# INTERVIEW GUIDE

## on 'Empowerment'

*Empower: 'to promote self-actualisation or influence'*

Describe one example of 'empowerment' practice (training, methodology or strategy) of your host organisation. Before describing the practice research the following aspects and use the headings as lay-out for your report.

### 1. Title of the empowerment practice

**Volunteer Legal Guardians for Unaccompanied Minors**

### 2. Give a short description (one paragraph) of the practice you selected

**This practice has been devised to ensure that every unaccompanied minor (UAM) has a legally allocated adult to provide the services of guidance, support, information provision, and advocacy, throughout the legal asylum process.**

### 3. Policy

Is the practice formal policy or informal practice?

Is it a common practice for all locations or restricted to certain locations?

**This is a formal practice, enshrined in Danish Immigration legislation, which stipulates that each unaccompanied minor must be given a legal guardian (LG). Each child is formally advised in writing about the allocation of their LG. This is common practice in Denmark regardless of where the minor resides. Until a Legal Guardian is appointed, a professional from the Red Cross(RC) fulfils the required function of the LG in any formal/legal situation. This relationship with the LG is only formalised for the duration of the child's asylum case.**

### 4. Development

Who developed the practice?

- staff members, policy makers, external institute, other?

Why was it developed, was there a specific motive/reason for it?

**The role of the Legal Guardian (LG) was developed in consultation with The Danish Government, Refugee Council, Danish Red Cross and Save the Children.**

**It was identified that prior to the creation of the LG role that UAMs did not receive a consistent level of support throughout their asylum case. UAMs were not always informed clearly of the asylum process and their rights. There was a lack of advocacy on individual cases to ensure that each child's case progressed at the right speed.**

**Children were not being empowered to ask relevant questions regarding their case and its progress.**

### 5. Target group

Does the 'empowerment practice' relate to staff or residents?

Does the 'empowerment practice' relate to specific target groups: e.g. women, families, minors or certain staff members?

**The target group of the empowerment practice is the voluntary LGs. The intention of the practice is to impart LGs with the confidence, ability and knowledge to fulfil the function of their role and to access information and support as required. Due to the independent nature of the role, the LG must be empowered to recognise their strengths and utilise them.**

## 6. Timing

Does the 'empowerment practice' relate to certain phases of reception/ employment? e.g. integration, return, or part of orientation/induction program

**The empowerment practice starts from their first contact with the Red Cross (RC) and is intended to be a continual process throughout their time as a LG.**

## 7. Methodology

*What type of methodology is used*

- training, group work
- individual/guidance
- self help program
- other, (please describe)

Are there manuals, guidelines or so available? Is it used?

**Empowerment begins with the 'walk and talk' introduction course provided by the RC, which will provide LGs with knowledge of the legal system, the information to contact any of the outside services (Foreign Services, Refugee Services, Police, Red Cross, Government Officials etc.) and the UAM. LGs are provided with an understanding of the personal impact of separation and the asylum process, in order to enhance their ability to relate to, and support UAMs. LGs are supplied with the information to establish contact and network with other LGs, which enables them to create processes of information sharing and informal mentoring.**

**The RC has devised an 80 page manual that is available to LGs. Through their own initiative LGs have developed additional practice information, which is a quick reference guide 'Den Lille Hurtige' ('The Small Quick One'). LGs provide feedback on an ongoing basis to the co-ordinator of this programme and this information is then made available for all LGs.**

**Regular meetings are held between LGs and RC staff to facilitate the transfer of information, feedback, informal group supervision and support.**

**LGs are able to access further training through the RC such as First Aid training.**

## 5. Implementation

Who is responsible for implementing the program?

- Own staff of the organisation; other (partner) agencies; specialised training / education services
- Are there other organisations involved?
- What role do they play? Is this a formative, reactive or informal role?

Are there specific problems encountered for implementation?

A RC staff member is employed to co-ordinate the volunteering programme and to recruit new LGs when necessary. Training is provided by the RC. Following the initial training LGs are responsible for their own development within the role, but are expected to utilise the information supplied to access further support and specialist information. This may be through the informal support network of LGs or on a more formal basis through the Refugee Council or solicitors. LGs are proactive in their self development and the sharing and creation of information to improve their service. Although LGs work on a voluntary and independent basis, elements of their role are formalised i.e. the attendance at legal meetings. However, to a large degree they are given autonomy to fulfil their functions and are expected to show initiative in their role. Beyond the formal role, the LG can choose to become actively involved in other aspects of the UAM's life. They can develop their relationship with the UAM and become involved in their social needs. LGs liaise with staff at the Gribskov centre (specialised accommodation centre for UAMs) which may enhance the manner in which the UAM's needs are responded to. LGs can fulfil a more personal function of mentoring that is not limited by professional boundaries. LGs have more flexibility in their role than the RC professionals and are more at liberty to advocate on behalf of the UAM due to them being volunteers.

## **8. Accessibility**

How do participants have access to the practice?

- do they have to sign up themselves or are they selected
- is it voluntary or compulsory?
- are there enough places available?
- are the potential participants aware that the practice exists?
- do they have to pay for the services?

The post is voluntary and open to individuals interested in taking up this role. However, there is an expectation that the LG will have sufficient educational background and or life experience to carry out the work in the best interest of the UAM. For individuals interested in becoming a LG, they must participate in initial assessment and training. It is the practice of the RC to afford participants the opportunity to ascertain whether they have the capacity to fulfil the role. In exceptional cases the RC has had to guide some individuals towards their decision where the RC feels that the individual would be unable to fulfil the role.

The role of the LG has been advertised formally and informally by the RC and LGs. The RC has advertised through print media and specialised publications with a focus on health and legal professions. The RC also attended open professional meetings to canvas potential LGs directly.

Recruitment has also been initiated through the existing LG's personal/professional networks.

In 2007 the RC experienced a shortage in LGs, and subsequently there was an active recruitment drive, which resulted in the recruitment of between 30-40 new LGs.

The role of LG is voluntary and there is no monetary cost to participate, however, LGs are not remunerated for their time or travel expenses. At times LGs will be required to

attend meetings during their professional working day and the 'cost' of this is also incurred by the LG.

## 7. Participation

*How are the participants involved in the implementation*

- they have been part of the designing of the practice, or initiated it
- they play an active role in implementation or evaluation

**Although the participants were not involved in the original design of the programme, they are integral to the ongoing implementation and evaluation of the practice. On an individual level LGs are fully empowered to fulfil their role. This is achieved through their ability to access information and resources and to utilise the LG support network. Collectively LGs empower each other through information and knowledge sharing, informal networks and the creation of new guidance. LGs also provide informal feedback to the RC on an ad hoc basis.**

**LGs are imbued with sufficient power and responsibility to effect change in their practices. Every quarter meetings are held between LGs and RC staff to share knowledge and where necessary create changes. RC welcomes the experience and knowledge of LGs to improve the processes.**

## 8. Holistic approach

How does the practice relate to other services provided? Is there an independency, referral system?

**LGs are required to act independently - they are expected to seek out information and support through their own capabilities, and not be reliant on the RC. Although acting independently they must liaise with the immigration authority, legal services and social care services. LGs are not required to go beyond their formal role in the legal process, but they are welcome to participate further with other services relating to the child's well being.**

**The fact that LGs are in a voluntary role places them in a unique position whereby they are able to develop a less formal and more personal relationship. In effect this may enable the LG to contribute towards a more holistic response to the child's needs in conjunction with other services such as social care and education.**

**LGs have the capacity to contribute to the young person's long term social integration and personal wellbeing, as many choose to continue the relationship on a personal level once the LG has fulfilled their formal function.**

## 9. Cultural sensitivity

How are cultural aspects integrated in the 'empowerment practice' and for what reason;

- does it have the desired effect? how do the participants feel about it?

**There are no formalised RC guidelines for LGs in relation to cultural awareness or practices. Due to the personalised and individually tailored nature of the practice, cultural issues are addressed in a relaxed manner. There is no specific cultural awareness training provided to LGs however, at the quarterly meetings this subject**

may be discussed if the need arises. RC makes every effort to match LGs to the UAM where the LG may have a prior knowledge of a certain culture.

## **10. Evaluation**

How is the practice evaluated, how are the effects measured?

- Are there any predetermined goals established
- Are there any external evaluators involved, in- or external standards that need to be met?

What do the implementers think of the practice, what about the participants?

**Since the inception of the LG role there has been no regular formal evaluation process. This being said, the Danish Government in 2007 requested a formal evaluation of the role of the LGs. It was decided that all agencies involved i.e. UAMs, legal guardians, police and the local communities should participate in this process. The period of data collection commenced in summer 2007 and lasted till summer 2008. The Danish Government has taken responsibility for the compilation of the evaluation report. To date no final report has been provided. From the evaluation process the RC was able to identify that amongst service providers there was confusion on the differing roles and responsibilities.**

**When a UAM receives a final decision on their case, the RC conducts an informal evaluation of the LG's experience. The RC liaises with the LGs about the satisfaction of their involvement and to date all volunteer LGs have chosen to continue their relationship with the UAM on completion of their asylum case. RC staff at the Gribskov centre informally monitor the role of LGs through regular contact with them.**

**The RC's initial preference for the role of LGs was for it to be fulfilled by individuals in a professional capacity. The Danish Government refused to meet the budgetary requirements due to the prohibitive costs involved in this lengthy legal process, and as a result this practice became a voluntary one. Within these limitations the RC has been very pleased with the practice.**

**Participants have indicated their satisfaction and enjoyment of the role, but also the frustration experienced when young people receive negative decisions, are deported or evade deportation by absconding.**

### **Conclusion:**

What do you think of the practice you described? Do you have recommendations, remarks? Would you recommend it for your own organisation. How, or why not?

**From the information made available to us, our perception of the practice of voluntary LGs is that it is a positive and empowering one, both for the LG and the UAM. It provides the opportunity for a long term service to individuals who experience a high level of social isolation and disempowerment. These individuals often lack consistency in service provision that may hinder their ability to form and maintain meaningful relationships in their lives. The fact that the LG is present throughout the minor's asylum case means that the minor receives a far greater degree of stability and support. This may have a positive effect on the minor's social and emotional development towards adulthood.**

**Due to the voluntary nature of the LG role, it enables the LG to establish a more personal relationship with the UAM, which is not limited by normal professional boundaries. This in turn results in a more comprehensive support mechanism and the opportunity for a longer lasting relationship.**

**The Danish Government in conjunction with other agencies has demonstrated recognition of the special needs of minors, by making specific provision in the Immigration legislation for minors and their need for LGs.**

**The recent political climate in Denmark has contributed to the social marginalisation of asylum seekers and reduced their visibility within Danish society. Asylum seekers are not able to fully participate in Danish society, which inhibits social integration. The role of voluntary LGs provides an important opportunity for minors to establish personal networks with the Danish community and enhance their future capacity to socially integrate.**

**Based on the positive feedback received by RC from LGs and the fact that LGs have chosen to continue their relationships with minors beyond their formal role, it has been demonstrated that the role affords LGs a sense of personal satisfaction and enjoyment. In our opinion the voluntary capacity of LGs fills a void that is evident in many EU countries' approaches to the support mechanisms made available to UAMs. We believe that volunteers have resources, knowledge and compassion, which at times may exceed the limitations of a professional role.**

**Our recommendations are that the final evaluation report be made available to other EU countries for the purposes of promoting the role of voluntary LGs and sharing good practice. We would also recommend that LGs are recruited and trained on a basis that would provide a ready resource to meet any unpredicted increase in UAM arrivals.**

**We would highly recommend the system of voluntary LGs that operates in Denmark be implemented in our own countries. However, we would not advocate for this role to be implemented by our organisations, but recommend that the practice be operated by external bodies liaising with the existing services.**