

Fall Exchange 2008

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Theme "Empowerment"

Participant Data

Name(s)	Petter Nilsson	
Organisation	Swedish Migration Board	
Country	Sweden	
Host country	United Kingdom	
Contactperson	Nigel Hewitt	
Host country & e-mail	Nigel.Hewitt@kent.gov.uk	

Itinerary (List of places and people visited)

Monday 29th of September: Duty Team Dover

Tuesday 30th of September: Appledore Reception Centre

Wednesday 1st of October: Appledore Reception Centre

Thursday 2nd of October: Transitions Team East - Dover

Friday 3rd of October: Transitions Team West - West Malling

Triple Planning – Empowering returning asylum-seekers

**Report from a visit to the Kent County Council
ENARO Exchange, Fall 2008**

Written by Petter Nilsson (The Swedish Migration Board)

Triple Planning Strategy – Empowering returning asylum seekers

The vast majority of asylum seekers coming to the United Kingdom (UK) arrive to southeastern England, in most cases to Dover Port (i.e. Kent County). Hence, the Kent County Council (KCC) is responsible for the unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) arriving to the county. This task is mainly dealt with within the structure of the Social Services of the Council, since an asylum seeking person who is assessed as a minor (not yet 18 years old) is, like any other child in the UK, subject to the Children Act 1989 – in addition to the acts regarding asylum. In brief; the KCC assess the young person's age, living and education skills and handle his or her transition into the community.

Depending on the decision regarding the person's leave to remain in the UK, the KCC also faces the task of preparing the person for either living in the UK community (for an indefinite time or a limited) or to return to her or his home country – a decision taken by the Home Office. The KCC is not formally responsible to motivate and support the person in all aspects of the latter case, but since the Council (i.e. the social worker) normally has a close relation to an UASC it has to deal with this question. The practice used by KCC to support and aid the UASC in preparing for different outcomes is called Triple Planning (TP), named after the three possible outcomes. If given indefinite leave to remain, the young person is cared for as any native child. If rejected, or given discretionary leave (DL), the person is supported until removed. There is also an emphasis on empowering the person by giving her or him transferable skills, i.e. skills useful in the country of origin. Last but not least the KCC tries to, within what is possible, motivate the young person to return with a forward-looking spirit. The TP works best if started early and shall be incorporated in the so-called Pathway Plan, a plan made at an early stage after the young person's transition into the community.

Policy

The Triple Planning practice shall, as mentioned above, be incorporated in the Pathway Plan. In that respect TP is formal, but my observation is that the actual use of the strategy is carried out in a more informal manner. The judgment of the responsible social worker decides whether it is reasonable to discuss the question of return at certain stages. Combined with the lack of a written instruction on how (and when) to carry out the TP, the use of it becomes slightly inconsistent.

Due to the fact that the KCC is more or less the sole authority in the UK that works in the area of handling UASC, the TP is an in-house addition to the Pathway Plans. However, there is nothing that obscures the possibility to spread the use of TP to other institutions in the UK, if needed.

Development

As mentioned above the practice of TP is developed by the KCC, namely the two Transition Teams. These teams, consisting of social workers, are responsible for supporting the young person when taking the step out into the community and from then on. The circumstances have forced the development of a practice. The Social Services have to address the question of empowering a person who may have to return, depending on the positive or negative outcome on the young person's claim for asylum.

Target group

The TP practice is of course targeted against young persons seeking asylum, and probably most beneficial for those with a rejected asylum claim. With exception of the children who are given discretionary leave; there is no major obstacle obstructing the implementation of the practice in the reception of asylum-seekers in general. The approach would then be "double", more than "triple", obviously.

Timing

The Triple Planning should be included in the Pathway Plan, which is made fairly early in the transition into the community. In theory it should therefore be in use in almost every case *before* the decision regarding asylum has arrived. However, from what I understood it is not emphasized heavily until the decision has come. This means that there is less planning for different outcomes than coping with an already-given situation. There are of course a number of rational reasons to why social workers hesitate to raise the question of return (to plan also for return is *de facto* to do that) before a decision is made, and if the professional social worker makes a sound judgement that it would be counter-productive to raise it, it is probably for the best. Nevertheless, this *can* flaw the outcome since the planning, in the true sense of the word, is the idea of the practice itself. The meaning is about preparing, not necessarily about expecting a certain outcome of the asylum claim.

Methodology

The staff (i.e. the social workers) is trained in the TP within the normal training, guidance and the like. They are also given external training enabling them in assisting the young person's planning for the different outcomes in a professional manner – planning that may reach further than the normal field of social work.

The TP is not codified with written guidelines, as mentioned above. How to execute the strategy is adjusted to each young person under the responsibility of her or his social worker. However, there are reforms planned to implement a similar strategy in a more structured manner, according to a paper regarding UASC, produced by the Home Office in January 2008: *Better Outcomes – The Way Forward*.

Implementation

The two Transition Teams, Dover and West Malling, are using the TP. Implementation, in this case to make sure that the strategy is used and incorporated in the Pathway Plans, falls under the responsibility of the Team

Leader of each team. The Practice Supervisors of each team are also responsible for overseeing the use of TP.

Accessibility

The TP practice is part of the Pathway Plan, a social worker-guided exercise that the young person makes when moving into the community. In other words it is compulsory. Since the strategy is more about motivation and mental preparing than anything else (although other kinds of support is possible within the TP), the strategy is low-cost and there is no need for facilities etc. Due to this, there is no additional cost for participants and no problems with lack of places.

Participation

The young person shall be involved in making the Pathway Plan, to the largest extent possible. Of course the handling social worker offers guidance and support, and makes sure that all parts of the plan, for instance the TP, are accordingly made. The actual implementation is of course harder, as the social worker cannot force the young person to consider the question of return. If the person is refusing to think about a negative outcome there is nothing more for the social worker to do than try and try again, or wait until the final decision is made. However, one should not underestimate the worth of educating the thought in the young persons mind. Even if refusing, she or he may benefit from preparing mentally.

Holistic approach

The TP is in theory well integrated in the system, both the asylum system and the Social Services'. The strategy deals with different outcomes and is therefore relating to different pathways through the system.

Cultural sensitivity

The TP in itself is neutral to aspects regarding culture, since it has more to do with returning *from* the UK than returning *to* a certain country of origin. The support and aid given at diverse stages of the TP is of course adjusted to each person and the circumstances of her or his case. Cultural aspects are naturally a part of the assessment that decides which kind of supporting work there is need to carry out.

Evaluation

The process of the TP is impossible to carry out if the young person is refusing and, which I hope is obvious from what is written above, more or less driven by the young person her-/himself. As a result of this, evaluation becomes a difficult, not to say unfeasible. When speaking to social workers, from what I understood the strategy is a good one in theory. It is nevertheless dependant on the young person and because of this it is sometimes hopeless to even try implementing it.

Conclusion

The TP practice is a strategy well made, in my opinion. It is coherent with existing and forthcoming British policy on empowering asylum-seekers in

general and UASC in particular. That the TP is supposed to be used from an early phase in the KCC's work with a young person is very good, since the very concept of planning is to look ahead and prepare for different possible outcomes. Admittedly, raising the question of returning to the home country for a young person, before she or he has got a decision from the Home Office and maybe before the person has spent six months in the UK, is sensitive and difficult. However, preparing for reality is always better than wishful thinking, and TP is a good strategy for this. It is empowering the young person to elaborate on the question of what to do if the asylum claim is rejected and how to move forward. If the person is reluctant to even discuss the issue, it is of course hard, but the TP can never be less efficient than just avoiding the topic of return.

The implementation of TP, however, is somewhat diffuse. As mentioned, the yield of discussing return can sometimes be diminutive in relation to other tasks the social worker has to carry out. The need to discuss the question is nevertheless there, and by avoiding it, the young person is deprived from an important, empowering tool. The reason is clear to me, of course, but I can still see the need. In emphasizing the use of TP the KCC would empower the young persons even better, in my regard.

It is relevant to discuss whether the TP (or similar) should actually be conducted by social workers from the KCC, at least not as the sole authority. Maybe the work could be done in cooperation with another organisation, for instance some structure within the Home Office? This (external assistance) would make the KCC more able to cope with the conflict of both supporting the young person and abiding by the decision that she or he shall return.

Regarding the implementation of the strategy in Sweden I would of course recommend it, if I had the mandate to do so. The need is however quite small, since the Swedish Migration Board is using, in principle, the same methods in order to motivate people to return voluntarily and in a dignified manner. The structure of the Board, where both decisions and motivation work is made in-house, makes the task easier since the important early start is possible. The work with discussing different outcomes starts as soon as the asylum claim is made. The task of motivation is also part of the Board's general field of work, thus not contradicting any other tasks (as can be the case for the Social Services).