Quality Standards in Out-of-home Child Care in Europe

John Role' IFCO Board Member

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- IFCO member since 2001
- Represented IFCO & Malta at the Q4C Standards 2003 - 2008
- IFCO Board Member from 2007-2010 & from 2017 -
- Participated at IFCO conferences
    1. Velden, The Netherlands 2001
    2. Tampere, Finland 2002
    3. Prague, Czech Republic 2004
    4. **Mellieha, Malta 2007**
    5. Dublin, Ireland 2008
    6. Brighton, United Kingdom 2010
    7. Sofia, Bulgaria 2012
    8. Sheffield, United Kingdom 2016
    9. **Valletta, Malta 2017**
- Organised 2 IFCO conferences in Malta 2007 & 2017

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Background: WHY

- Europe getting bigger and bigger. The bigger Europe was, the bigger were the **differences between standards** for out-of-home child care in the different countries. Europe was also expanding to include countries which partly had no standards for out-of-home child care.

Background: WHY

- All the standards we had ever seen in our life were **standards written by adult experts**. None of us knew any standards that were deeply influenced by the knowledge of those who are directly concerned: children in out-of-home care, their parents, foster parents, social pedagogues, and social workers.

Background: WHY – the Vision

"Children without parental care have to be given the chance to shape their future in order to become self-reliant, self-sufficient and participating members of society, through living in a supportive, protective and caring environment, which promotes their full potential."

Background: WHO – Organisations

- SOS Children's Villages,

- IFCO (International Foster Care Organisation)

- FICE (Fédération Internationale des Communautés Educatives)

Background: WHO took part

More than 500 people in Europe (332 were storytellers) with experience in out-of-home child contributed to the development of the Q4C Standards.

Nearly half of them were children, young people and young adults with care experience; the other half was made up of biological and foster families, caregivers, social workers and other stakeholders.

Background: WHO – the Countries

32 European countries participated in the project.

Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Luxemburg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, and the United Kingdom.

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Background: WHAT - method used

The Quality4Children standards were developed through a participatory (method) approach: the **Storytelling method**.

The standards' principal strength lies in the use of this participatory method.

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Background: HOW

- In summer 2004 these national coordinators met in Innsbruck/Austria to get to know first of all each other, to be trained in the method and to discuss further steps.

- From autumn 2004 to spring 2005 a few hundred stories were collected in the participating countries. The material was sent to Innsbruck, to Herman Gmeiner Academy, where they were clustered, and quotations were selected out of the stories.

Some quotes

- *"I contacted Children's Services and they took charge of the situation. They responded right away. That day, I realized that Children's Services really did have my best interests at heart. I was even involved in the decision about where I would move to."*

  (Girl from Norway, code 22.02.03)

- *"The future foster parents started meeting with the children but the transition process was not rushed.[...] They would meet for one or two hours; then they increased their contact. She recalls that her husband [...] used to collect the children from the residential home and take them to school. After finishing school, she would also stay with them to do their homework and then take them to the residential home.[...] During this process the children were also introduced to the extended family. The process took six months, until they finally moved completely to the fostering placement. Everyone felt ready for the move."*

  (Caregiver from Malta, code 19.06.01)

Background: HOW

- One year (2004-2005): National coordinators trained, a few hundred stories were collected in the participating countries. By the end of 2005 all stories were collected and translated into the English language.

- Major task of formulating standards out of this huge amount of material: Two feedback-circles - to the national teams that collected the stories, and to those persons who had told the stories to make sure that they could find the essence of their stories in those standards.

- Finally 18 standards were establish in three areas:
  - Standard area 1: *Decision-making and admission process*
  - Standard area 2: *Care-taking process*
  - Standard area 3: *Leaving-care process*

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Standard area 1: Decision-making and admission process

Standard 1: The child and his/her family of origin receive support during the decision-making process.

Standard 2: The child is empowered to participate in the decision-making process.

Standard 3: A professional decision-making process ensures the best possible care for the child.

Standard 4: Siblings are cared for together.

Standard 5: The transition to the new home is well prepared and sensitively implemented.

Standard 6: The out-of-home care process is guided by an individual care plan

Standard area 2: Care-taking process

Standard 7: The child's placement matches his/her needs, life situation and original social environment.

Standard 8: The child maintains contact with his/her family of origin.

Standard 9: Caregivers are qualified and have adequate working conditions.

Standard 10: The caregiver's relationship with the child is based on understanding and respect.

Standard 11: The child is empowered to actively participate in making decisions that directly affect his/her life.

Standard 12: The child is cared for in appropriate living conditions.

Standard 13: Children with special needs receive appropriate care.

Standard 14: The child/young adult is continuously prepared for independent living.

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Standard area 3: Leaving-care process

Standard 15: The leaving-care process is thoroughly planned and implemented.

Standard 16: Communication in the leaving-care process is conducted in a useful and appropriate manner.

Standard 17: The child/young adult is empowered to participate in the leaving-care process.

Standard 18: Follow-up, continuous support and contact possibilities are ensured.

Each of these standards is structured as follows.

- by clear statements regarding the required level of quality;

- by selected quotes from the storyteller's narrations. They are coded according to a Q4C database;

- by responsibilities: that means a set of tasks, duties and defined areas of authority for all stakeholders involved in the implementation of the respective standards;

- by guidelines showing the requirements related to the implementation of the respective standards;

- by warning signs, which describe what must not happen if the respective standards are implemented;

- and in an annex to the standards you can find the reference frame linking them to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. For each standard you have listed the articles and paragraphs which contain provisions related to the respective standards.

Implementation

- On 13 June 2007 the Q4C standards were presented at the EU Parliament in Brussels.

- Several countries (Malta was one of them), including some outside Europe, adopted them as the basic instrument for their new legislation.

- In South America countries, it was decided to carry out the same process to formulate their standards.

- The standards were presented at a big conference attended by 1400 people in South Africa.

- These standards were even taken into consideration during the process of developing the UN Guidelines for children in out-of-home care, and Q4C took part in this development process. And yet, a lot of work is still in front of us.

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