

Central Union for Child Welfare/Consultative Committee on Extra-familial Care (FICE Finland)

2006

1 The Foundation of the National Section

The Central Union for Child Welfare (CUCW) was founded in 1937 under the name of the Finnish Central Union for Child and Youth Care. The founding meeting brought together representatives of 21 NGOs and municipalities. The name of the organisation was changed to its current form in 1948.

In its statutes CUCW defined as the purpose of the organisation the overall development of child welfare and the advancement of cooperation between NGOs, municipalities and state bodies. Despite the many changes in Finnish society and in the organisation, including expanding the sphere of its activities, these are its basic functions even today.

Even though CUCW is a general child welfare organisation, throughout its history it has paid special attention to issues related to children in care. A special permanent working body for this work was set up, however, only in 1987 under the name of the Consultative Committee on Residential Care. Its current name, Consultative Committee on Extra-familial Care (CCEC), was adopted in 1993 to stress that its task is to promote the well-being and rights of all children in care, regardless of the form of care.

CUCW became an associate member of FICE in 1988 and a full member in 1990. Within CUCW FICE-related work is the responsibility of CCEC.

2 Organisation and finance

In recent years CUCW has had on the average 26 employees, of which two thirds are permanent staff members and one third temporary workers. CUCW has an office in Helsinki. As necessary, e.g. for the needs of projects, additional premises are rented outside the office in Helsinki or elsewhere in Finland.

As a central umbrella organization, CUCW has neither a field organization nor service units for children and families. An exception to this general rule is a support centre for couples and individuals who have divorced or who are

considering divorce. The centre works within the framework of a project on parent counselling at separation. Services provided by the library and CUCW's staff members are, of course, available to all who turn to them for information and advice.

The highest decision-making body, the General Assembly, meets twice a year. It elects a Board that is in responsible for running CUCW's business. The term of the Board is three years. The Board consists of the chair, twelve full members and their personal substitutes. It meets on average once a month. The sub-committee of the Board, the Work Committee, is elected for a one year term.

Standing Committees play an important role in CUCW's work. They act as nationwide cooperation and expert bodies in their special fields. They consist mostly of representatives of member organisations, but also of other experts. As a rule Standing Committees are chaired by members of the Board. At present there are standing committees for international cooperation, library and information services, the Child's World magazine, children and media, extra-familial care, immigrant children and early education. Temporary committees and work groups are established as necessary.

The largest Standing Committee, the Consultative Committee on Extra-familial Care, currently has 22 members. They represent major extra-familial care service providers, including NGOs, the private and the public sector, different forms of extra-familial care (both residential and foster care), non-residential social work, child psychiatry, training institutions, etc.

CUCW's main sources of financing are the Children's Day's Foundation (approximately 43 % of income during the past few years) and the Slot Machine Association (RAY) (34 %). In addition CUCW applies for grants from different Ministries and foundations as necessary. Costs for publishing activities and training events are covered by their income. Members pay a modest membership fee.

The Children's Day's Foundation was founded by six Finnish child welfare NGOs in 1957. The Foundation maintains Linnanmäki amusement park in Helsinki. The Foundation divides its surplus income among its founding members. Finland's Slot Machine Association (generally referred to as RAY) was established in 1938 to raise funds through gaming operations to support Finnish health and welfare organizations. RAY has an exclusive right in Finland to operate slot machines and casino table games and to run a casino.

3 Membership

At present CUCW's membership consists of 86 NGOs and 35 municipalities. Practically all the major nationwide NGOs in the field of child welfare as well as the largest municipalities are CUCW members. For its part, CUCW is a member of over ten Finnish NGOs.

4 Activities

4.1 As a National Section

CUCW's central strategic focus for its activities is to influence social policy to bring out the child's viewpoint, to promote the realisation of children's rights and participation as well as to secure the prerequisites for child welfare work. It aims to influence legislation, decisions on resources and development programmes concerning children as well as public awareness and attitudes in society based on the views of children and their rights. CUCW tries to activate public discussion about child welfare and takes part in it itself too. The latest technology is used in the development of electronic communication as well as in e-mail services.

Library and information services support CUCW's work as a spokesperson for children and developments in the field by gathering and disseminating information about children, their rights and welfare. The monthly journal *Child's World* and other publications provide current information about children and child welfare for both professionals and citizens. CUCW also publishes textbooks that are used in educational establishments.

CUCW stresses the importance of continuous development in the quality of professional child welfare work. It strives for this goal by influencing the contents of education and training in the field as well as by organising updating training of its own. The biggest training events are the National Congress on Child Welfare and the National Congress on Extra-familial Care. They are organised in alternate years in different parts of the country together with member municipalities. The congresses bring in from 500 to over 700 participants from all over the country. In addition, CUCW organises several smaller seminars and other training events.

Member organisations and other interest groups use the expertise of CUCW's staff in, for example, training, writing articles and reports, work groups and different kinds of consultation. CUCW is represented on many expert bodies, consultative committees, work groups, steering groups etc. of public authorities, NGOs and foundations. Through contracts between CUCW and interest groups expert services can be provided for a fee to national and international development projects.

Development and experimental work is mainly done in projects with special funding. CUCW's projects focus on wider issues that involve its member organizations and partners and which are concerned with central problems for children and families. The largest current project on parent counselling at separation (2005–2009) aims to improve the child's situation and minimise their losses at a parental separation. The project develops services and work methods that support parenting, conciliatory approaches and the collaboration of parents. The project aims also at to increase cooperation between NGOs and other organizations in service provision as well as knowledge and understanding of the influence of separation on children. Among recently completed projects the largest was on the quality of extra-familial care (2001–2004), the key result

of which was the development of quality criteria for residential and foster care.

To support its advocacy/lobbying and development work CUCW is engaged in research and studies, including public opinion surveys. In 1986 CUCW together with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health founded a foundation that supports financially research, experimental and development projects concerning children and child welfare.

International cooperation has been an integral part of CUCW since its foundation. It coordinates information, activities and know-how concerning children, children's rights and child welfare from Finland and abroad. It represents Finnish child welfare in international forums and acts as expert and centre of knowledge in international child welfare issues. In addition, for its members CUCW provides a link to European and international organisations. There is international cooperation in each of CUCW's fields of activities.

In the case of advocacy and lobbying, the goal of CUCW's international activities and communication is to secure the best interest of the child in European legislation, programmes and treaties as well to monitor the implementation of international treaties, above all the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Besides FICE, CUCW is a member of a number of other international organisations: End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT International), End Physical Punishment of Children World-wide (EPOCH), Eurochild AISBL, International Forum for Child Welfare (IFCW), International Foster Care Organisation (IFCO), International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN), NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Organisation Mondiale pour l'Education Pré-scolaire (OMEP). In addition, CUCW is a member of the international networks: Children at Risk in the Baltic Sea Region, European Network for School-Age Childcare (ENSAC) and Separated Children in Europe Programme.

CUCW has been active in regional cooperation since the late 1980s with the aim of supporting the reform of child welfare in the countries of the former Soviet Union. Since the Baltic countries joined the EU, CUCW's regional cooperation has focused on North-Western Russia, especially the Republic of Karelia. It is involved in projects mostly at local and regional levels but also at a federal level within the Russian Federation. Besides Russia, CUCW has contacts in other CIS countries, too.

4.2 With other National Sections

From the beginning of its membership of FICE, CUCW has had bilateral collaboration with other National Sections in the form of exchanges of delegates and study tours (e.g. Estonia, Hungary, Germany, Holland, Poland, Romania, Russia and Sweden). With Estonian FICE members the cooperation has also included participation in training and other events in both countries, publishing activities, carrying out a joint development project etc. Currently CUCW is taking part in a two-year international project on *Training and Exchange of Knowledge for Managers in Youth Care in Central and Eastern Europe* together

with FICE Bulgaria, Estonia (Estonian Union for Child Welfare), Hungary, Netherlands and Romania.

4.3 In relation to the country as a whole

Together with its members CUCW influences legislation and government programmes through membership of preparatory bodies, giving proposals, motions and statements, etc., and public awareness and attitudes through media campaigns. It contributes to the development of child welfare work by introducing and disseminating new work methods, service delivery models, good practices, quality criteria etc. through development projects and experiments, training and publications.

5 Future

The vision of CUCW has been defined as follows:

CUCW is a nationally and internationally respected centre for knowledge of children. It is an advocate of children, children's rights and child welfare both in social policy as well as at the level of everyday life. Besides traditional child welfare work, its activities include strengthening early intervention, preventative child welfare and securing children's well-being in everyday life with special attention of children living in vulnerable conditions. CUCW is a strong central organisation and advocate in child policy, formed by its committed members.

It assembles the know-how of its members, develops new work methods and supports its members in the development of child welfare. CUCW has a committed staff that can collect and analyse information and communicate it in accordance with the goals of the central union.