

Hungary

Mrs Julia Blumenfeld
President FICE Hungary

2006

1 The Foundation of the National Section

The Hungarian National Section of FICE was set up as an independent association in 1989. Hungary had been participating in the activities of FICE before but under those political circumstances it was unable to operate as an independent NGO. So the Department for Child Care of the Ministry of Education and the National Institute of Pedagogy maintained contacts with FICE and some directors of children's homes personally participated in international contacts.

In 1989 the Hungarian National Section of FICE could be set up legally as an NGO and has become over the past 17 years one of the most popular and recognised professional organisations in the field of child care. During the first phase of operation we received a lot of support from the German and Dutch Sections of FICE. This support involved not only the organisation and operation of the association but also assistance for the most part from German and Dutch colleagues for the restructuring of the whole system of children's homes. Their National Sections organised many educational exchanges for Hungarian colleagues and made it possible for us to translate and publish our professional brochures in Hungarian.

It was due to professional contacts provided by FICE that in Hungary, even before the Act on Child Care came into effect in 1997, adoption of modern best practice in children's homes could begin.

2 Organisation and finance

The National Section operates in accordance with the Hungarian Act on Associations. Therefore, its main body is the General Assembly convened at least once a year. Every member has a right to participate and to vote. Apart from individual members, the association also has organisational members, children's homes and family group homes, who have one vote each just like individual members.

The General Assembly elects its steering committee every two years consisting of nine members: the President, the Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer

and five committee members. In addition, the General Assembly elects an Audit Committee of three persons every two years.

The National Section has at present two independent sections: firstly, the youth section, consisting of young people living in children's homes, working actively with us; secondly, the section of foster parents made up of professional foster families.

The National Section rents an office in one of the children's homes in Budapest. Two part-time colleagues work there, doing administrative and organisational work. In the same office works the President of the National Section, voluntary based and nonsalaried.

The funding of the National Section comes from several sources: membership fees, grants, donations, funds coming from the personal income tax of citizens, revenues from publications and professional programmes and interest received. Roughly 80% of the revenues of the National Section is made up of grants. This also means that one essential and constant task of the staff is to monitor calls for proposals, to write proposals and to do the administration and accounting. Proposals tend to focus on concrete projects or programmes. Our operating costs are not reimbursed either by the state or through grants; so we have to find the money for this.

3 Membership

The National Section has about 400 individual members. Apart from that, it has 150 children's homes and group homes and 27 foster families in member status. The overwhelming majority of individual members are professionals working in residential care.

4 Activities

4.1 As a National Section

The activities of the Hungarian National Section have undergone considerable change over the years since its foundation. At the foundation and in the period afterwards the Section concentrated on professional activities. We built up relationships with National Sections of other countries, organised a number of trips and saw many visitors in order to exchange ideas and experiences. We issued publications and translated many foreign studies so that our colleagues in children's homes could be up-to-date on modern methods and best practice.

After a couple of years we felt that our work tended to be one-sided, that it only indirectly connected with the conditions of children in children's homes. So we altered and extended the aims and tasks of the Section. Now we aim to give assistance to children living in residential care to develop, to be educated and to integrate themselves into working life. Key areas of our activities are representing the interests and enhancing the skills of children, developing their talents and fostering equality of opportunity.

Over the past 10 years, the Section's areas of activity have changed profoundly to reflect the above mentioned goals. We organise for our colleagues seminars, case-study workshops and conferences. Within the framework of professional work, we carry out research and studies in various fields of residential care, e.g. aftercare, school achievement of children and the state of family group homes. We also promote the development of colleagues working in residential care each year by calling for proposals from them in numerous areas.

Publication of professional brochures is also part of our professional activities. The proportion of international programs has decreased compared with earlier periods but we still organise one or two study trips and exchanges annually with other national sections.

The other part of the Section's activities are programmes made for and created by children. We have many traditional programmes especially for children living in children's homes, for example, the annual young people's ball for 200-300 children, and the annual sports championship are organised by us and the national sections of neighbouring countries. The FICE Games Festival also has a long tradition with hundreds of children participating in special programmes and, towards the end of the year, around Christmas, we hold a 'Present Day' in a Budapest theatre where the children, besides receiving Christmas presents, also can enjoy a play. Thanks to a donation from the Würth Foundation we take 100-200 children each year to a summer camp on environment protection.

We consider the development of children's talents to be important as well: for those who can draw, paint, or write poems or prose we have created a publication called 'We-Magazin' where we can publish their work.

The National Section is eager to involve young people in shaping their own future. That is why we set up a so called 'Children's Parliament' for them representing children in children's homes.

There are two or three sessions annually where there is time for them to debate one or two important issues that concern them, where they can talk about their problems and share their opinions. Out of the members of the 'Children's Parliament' the Youth Section of the National Section has been set up. They are expected to make the relationship between the Section and children. This is the task of FICE-coordinators working in children's homes: they are residential workers keeping in touch with homes and the National Section.

There is a toll-free 'green' number for the protection of children that they can call any time from children's homes if they have a problem or question unanswered in the children's home. This number is written on the wall in every home and children do use it if it is needed.

Fund-raising, collection of donations and writing proposals serve the funding of our Section.

4.2 With other National Sections

A common activity with other national sections is exchanging ideas and organising study trips. We have longstanding relationships with the German, Dutch, Finnish and Israeli Sections.

We have organised a number of conferences together and invited many colleagues as speakers from these countries. We often receive the publications of *IGfH* (FICE Germany) and, generally, we report about them in our issues. Sport events are organised together with the National Sections of neighbouring countries.

4.3 In relation to the country as a whole

Over the past 17 years FICE Hungary has become a recognised professional organisation. The Section is involved in developing the law in relation to child and residential care and we are asked for our opinions on parliamentary bills. Training and education courses and conferences organised by the Section are accredited and are part of the obligatory state education system.

5 Future

Our objective is to maintain both sides of the activities of the section, both professional activities and activities directly involving children. As part of this we would like to develop a multi-faceted assistance program to help those leaving homes after coming of age. We are planning to set up an assistance centre where training courses can be held, where the toll-free number assistance service can be housed and where, if needed, we can provide shelter for those in need of it. This centre could host the office of the Section and provide proper working conditions for both voluntary workers and paid staff. Establishing and maintaining such a centre is only possible if its funding is guaranteed at least in the mid-term. That is why we would like to strengthen our fund-raising activities and correspondingly the management might be changed as well.

It's also important to support the independent operation of the recently created Youth Section. It involves improving their skills in defending their interests and enhancing the skills needed to clarify their interests.