



NEWSLETTER



Photograph of children
in the 'Jungle'

As Ireland prepares to accept refugee children currently living in France, it is good to recall the significant contribution of Crosscare, the diocesan social care agency, to the care and welfare of unaccompanied asylum seeking in the recent past.

On the weekend of 24 to 26 October, 2016 French authorities demolished the temporary migrant camp in Calais that came to be known as the 'Jungle'. People from some of the most troubled parts of the world such as Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia had been living there in the hope of making it to a better life in the United Kingdom. Among these 10,000 people were an estimated 1,500 children. Many of these children were unaccompanied, that is, they were not in the care of their parents or other responsible adults. Children who are separated from their carers in such circumstances are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Some of these children will be coming to Ireland soon.

In the early 2000s unaccompanied asylum seeking children were arriving in Ireland in significant numbers. Existing services for children were unprepared and not equipped to provide for them. Many were looked after well but others were accommodated in large premises, typically staffed by a cook and a security man but no care staff. They were given the opportunity to attend school, where many excelled. However, when they were not at school there were no responsible adults looking after them. It is known that some of these young people were exploited in a variety of ways, including sexually. Some of them went missing and were never found.

There was a general recognition on the part of both statutory and voluntaries agencies that this was an intolerable situation. They came together to provide a proper response to the needs of these vulnerable young people.



Crosscare, the diocesan social care agency, was part of this coalition of agencies. Crosscare provided a team of five social care workers for each of three units accommodating approximately 30 young people each and a smaller unit accommodating young mothers and their babies. An agreement was reached that these units would close within 12 months with all of the young people moving into more appropriate accommodation. Some of these young people were given refugee status. This allowed them to continue their studies beyond second level or to find jobs. Some of the younger ones were placed with families. Some went into direct provision when they reached eighteen.

Direct provision was not what those who worked with the young people wanted for any of them. However, even for those young people, the experience of being cared for by the Crosscare social care workers was a positive one.

Gordon Hill was the senior manager from Crosscare who managed the project. He said that many of the young people were fearful and distrustful at first but over time they responded to the care they were offered. "Basic kindness made the difference", Gordon observed.

Safeguarding is not all about policies and procedures, important though these are. It is about providing the conditions for children to grow up in safety.



PUTTING CHILDREN FIRST

Helen's Story

Helen is a student who supports herself by working at night in a school. In the evening time the school becomes a centre for adult education. It is administered by the private company for which Helen works. Helen directs people to their evening classes, deals with queries and locks up the school at the end of the evening.

One evening an eleven year old girl arrived into the school. There was gym that day and she had come home in her gym shoes. Her parents were angry with her for leaving her school shoes behind and insisted she retrieve them before someone found them and took them on her.

Helen left her desk and helped the girl to look in all of the places her shoes might have been. They could not find them. The girl became distressed and started to cry. Helen gave her a hug.

It was getting late. It was dark and raining. The girl needed to get home. Helen accompanied her to her bus stop and waited with her until the bus arrived.

When Helen got back to her desk, she wrote a report for her manager as she was required to do. When she read the report, the manager asked to speak to Helen. She said that she had acted contrary to the company's safeguarding policy. By allowing the girl into the building after school hours she had accepted a responsibility for the girl on behalf of the company, which was not something the company wished to do. Giving the girl a hug violated their policy of not having any physical contact with children. Furthermore, she had deserted her post by leaving the building to see the girl onto her bus. By the end of the interview Helen felt that she was being treated like a child abuser. She understood her job was on the line.

Helen's manager contacted the girl's teachers the following day. Fortunately, they had a different perspective. They requested the manager to thank Helen for looking after the girl and assured her that they would follow up on the matter with the child's parents.

Safeguarding policies are necessary and important and help guide people's actions when dealing with children. They can also, as in this case, be used to limit an organisation's responsibility for the protection of children. It is often said that good safeguarding practice protects adults as well as children. There is a lot of truth in this but it must be remembered that the interests of the children must always come first. Children are protected when adults assume responsibility for their welfare and protection. No policy or set of guidelines can anticipate every situation. There is an overriding duty on all of us to care for and protect children that requires us to act in such unanticipated situations.

DIOCESAN VETTING POLICY

Following a review of diocesan vetting policy to take account of the recent legislation (National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act, 2012 – 2016) it has been determined that all those who minister in public on behalf of the diocese and its parishes must be vetted.

The Act states that all those who engage in 'relevant work or activities' with children or vulnerable persons must be vetted. In setting out what such work or activities consist of, the Act refers to: "Any work or activity as a priest or minister or any other person engaged in the advancement of any religious beliefs to children or vulnerable persons unless such work is incidental to the advancement of religious beliefs to persons who are not children or vulnerable persons" (Schedule 1, Part 1, Section 7 and Schedule 1, Part 2, Section 7).

The diocese takes the view that those who exercise public ministry, whether as Readers, Eucharistic Ministers, members of choirs or whatever, minister to the whole congregation, which includes children and vulnerable persons.

TRAINING SCHEDULE

Please contact the Child Safeguarding and Protection Service Office (tel. 01-836014 or email: cps@dublindiocese.ie) for further information or to reserve a place on one of these courses.

Date	Venue	Time
Saturday 25 March	Clonliffe College	9.30 to 3.30
Saturday 13 May	Dublin South/South East Area	9.30 to 3.30
Saturday 27 May	Tallaght Area	9.30 to 3.30
Saturday 16 September	Blessington Parish Centre	9.30 to 3.30
Tuesday 19 September	Tallaght Area	9.30 to 3.30
Saturday 14 October	Clonliffe College	9.30 to 3.30
Saturday 18 November	Yellow Walls Parish Centre	9.30 to 3.30

CONTACT DETAILS

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