

Trauma experienced by child refugees



Programme for child-friendly interviewing of unaccompanied alien children (carried out since 2004)

Based on an agreement between the Nobody's Children Foundation and the Office for Repatriation and Aliens, interviews of unaccompanied alien children - conducted within procedures for determining the refugee status - take place under child-friendly, **secure conditions** at the **Foundation's Child Advocacy Centre**.



During the interview the child is **accompanied** by a **specialist /a psychologist or therapist/**, who looks after the child's emotional well-being throughout the procedure.

Based on a **psychological assessment**, an **expert's opinion** is developed on the child's **psychophysical status**. This opinion is taken into consideration when making decisions about the child's future.

Children, who have already been interviewed within this procedure, came from Ukraine, Russia (Chechnya), Mongolia, China, India, Vietnam, Romania, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and African countries - Somalia and Uganda.

THE NOBODY'S CHILDREN FOUNDATION MAKES SURE UNACCOMPANIED ALIEN CHILDREN AVOID FURTHER TRAUMA DURING INTERVIEWS.

Alien-children's experiences:

Most unaccompanied alien children:

- ▶ Come from poor environments and pathological families,
- ▶ Come from neglected countries, plagued by wars, armed conflicts, and hunger,
- ▶ Have lost at least one parent,
- ▶ May have seen death or homicide of their family members and close friends (especially in Chechnya and Africa),
- ▶ Have not attended school for many months,
- ▶ Have experienced various forms of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse,
- ▶ Were severely neglected in their home countries,
- ▶ Took part in warfare (especially in Uganda),
- ▶ Travel from country to country with strangers or distant relatives,
- ▶ Are in poor health condition.

Many unaccompanied alien children:

- ▶ Have witnessed abuse,
- ▶ Have witnessed crime,
- ▶ Are victims of offences, such as illegal transportation or sexual abuse,
- ▶ Have been forced to commit offences, such as theft, extortion or corruption.

Difficulties faced by unaccompanied alien children:

- ▶ **Lack of contact with the family:** "I don't know what's going on with them"
- ▶ **Lack of full identification:** "I don't know where my passport is"
- ▶ **Lack of protection:** "I can go wherever I want"
- ▶ **Lack of legal guardian:** "And who is a guardian? "
- ▶ **Unavailability of medical care:** "I have a tooth ache and I need prescription drugs"
- ▶ **Lack of communication:** "Few people understand me, I don't speak Polish"
- ▶ **Insecurity:** "Where am I?"

Elements of trauma at various stages of the child's travel

I. Transit stage:

- ▶ Difficult travel conditions - children are transported in luggage hatches; spend many days lying on the floor, locked and unable to satisfy their basic needs; they suffer cold, hunger, and lack of sleep;
- ▶ Severe stress related to crossing the border illegally, fear of punishment;
- ▶ Exposure to violence by boarder guards or the police;
- ▶ Threats to their sense of identity /false identity/.

EFFECTS: high level of stress and anxiety.

II. Victimization stage:

- ▶ Being forced to compliance - by use of violence, intimidation, threats, and torture;
- ▶ Sexual abuse;
- ▶ Physical violence accompanying sexual abuse;
- ▶ "Programming" submissiveness;
- ▶ "Programming" fear of the police and intervention.

EFFECTS: substance use (alcohol and drugs), sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy, effects of sexual abuse.

III. Disclosure stage:

- ▶ Staying at a police station or in jail /Child Detention Centre/
- ▶ Risk of deportation - high level of anxiety

TRAUMA is an emotional injury resulting from specific events and leading to psychological effects, such as:

- ▶ Sense of helplessness,
- ▶ Sense of vulnerability,
- ▶ Insecurity,
- ▶ Loss of control,
- ▶ Self-blame,
- ▶ Destructive behaviour,
- ▶ Dissociation,
- ▶ PTSD/ Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder,
- ▶ Disrupted attachment

Risk of human trafficking

In the psychological assessment process conducted by the Foundation's experts we check whether the child has been victimized by child traffickers. Alien children travelling alone or with strangers are at risk of becoming a victim of child trafficking.

"Children Are not for Sale" campaign

In 2005 the Nobody's Children Foundation initiated the first Polish programme focused on the problem of child trafficking - the "Children Are not for Sale" campaign, sponsored by the British Embassy in Poland.



Ambasada Brytyjska

The programme's main target group are employees of intervention centres, as well as boarder guards and the police. Within the programme working sessions are organized in selected Polish cities, with a goal to work out methods of cooperation among various relevant services. Campaign materials (posters, leaflets) are also developed and published, focusing on the process of identifying potential victims of child trafficking.

The Nobody's Children Foundation performs the function of the national contact point for unaccompanied and trafficked children, as part of a programme of cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region.

National Contact Point for Unaccompanied and Trafficked Children
dzieci cudzoziemskie@fdn.pl

