

## *Cultural Diversity*

- There are currently 188 new nationalities represented in Ireland (Central Statistics Office, 2006).
- Over 4,500 unaccompanied minors (also referred to as ‘separated children’) have arrived in Ireland over recent years seeking asylum and the majority of these are adolescent children of 16–17 years of age (ISPCC, 2005).
- The main countries of origin of unaccompanied minors have been Somalia, Afghanistan and Nigeria, with reasons for leaving their home country including political and civil conflicts and natural disasters (Mooten, 2006).
- Approximately half of unaccompanied minors are reunited with their biological families, and the remainder are most often placed in care, especially hostel care (Mooten, 2006).

### **Practice Scenario 1**

#### **Setting – Community Youth Project**

Claire has just begun working in a youth project that includes young people from the local residential community. Over the past four years, the project has been receiving numbers of young unaccompanied minors seeking asylum. At the moment, in addition to the four Irish teens in the project, there are two teenagers from Nigeria, one from Afghanistan and one from Moldova. Along with the other staff, Claire would like to help these young people to mix more with the other teenagers rather than keep so much to themselves and their fellow nationals.

Karim, the teenager from Afghanistan, enjoys fishing, as do three of the four Irish boys. Despite Claire’s encouragement and offers from other members of staff, Karim has never joined any of the fishing outings organised by the project. Claire even heard one of the Irish boys, Daniel, invite Karim to the next Saturday fishing trip, but Karim, looking at some of his other friends, offered an excuse and said he couldn’t be bothered. On a trip to a shop one day, Claire saw some

of the Nigerian teenagers being teased by some of the local Irish teens, including some who attend the project. When Claire asked them about it they didn't want to talk about it.

Concerned with what she has heard and witnessed, Claire seeks to learn more about Karim and some of the other service-users of the youth project. She learns that Karim and the other boys rely on independent and unsupervised lodging because they are presently living in a self-catering, privately managed hostel, set up by the Health Service Executive as an interim care accommodation. Karim is one of over twenty teenagers living in the B&B and he is without adequate resources, support or any long-term care plan.

With this information, Claire reports to her colleagues at the project that she feels exclusion from some of the planned activities is only an indication of further social and psychological exclusion (e.g. teasing and bullying) that some of the teens are experiencing in the community. The project team agrees that an intervention plan is urgent.

### For further consideration...

How can Claire facilitate the following?

- Inclusion of and respect for 'difference'
- Integration of multicultural values and norms
- Tolerance, appreciation and preservation of cultural identities
- Policy change within the community youth project

*Review the scenario and perspectives **below** and try to name other unfamiliar skills that might become part of the professional Social Care Toolkit.*

## SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Claire has correctly identified core issues facing the teens who have arrived in Ireland from other countries. Through no fault of their own, the teens are experiencing social difficulties at a number of different levels. It is likely that they are unfamiliar with Irish culture, values and expected behaviour (i.e. norms) and they may feel uncomfortable with their experience of Irish teen language, behaviour and ways of socialising. Such circumstances can lead to broad forms of social exclusion. Social exclusion may occur when an individual or group is 'cut off' from full involvement in society or when they find that they are restricted in terms of social contacts and supports.

Social exclusion is sometimes associated with poverty or marginalisation resulting from economic barriers, but it may also result from social processes or individual choices that lead to isolation and further social problems.

Giddens (2001) suggests that ‘Social exclusion can result from people excluding themselves from aspects of mainstream society. Individuals can choose to drop out ...’ Being one of only a few Afghans in the community and socially inexperienced in Ireland, Karim has not had an opportunity to represent his views or priorities regarding activities in the youth project. He has not contributed to decisions or plans, nor has he voiced any of the concerns that he and his friends have about what the teens might organise. Although Karim’s physical and economic needs are being met by the Health Service Executive, and as a part of the youth project he is given opportunities to participate in the community, he is still experiencing significant forms of social disadvantage. Karim and his friends are struggling to integrate within the community youth project and are also the targets of discriminating and prejudicial comments in the wider community.

As a project worker focusing upon the needs of a number of teens from varying social backgrounds, Claire recognises from her professional training that there is often difficulty in groups when social values are not shared across the group. Her challenge is to identify the teens’ existing social values and how those values influence Karim and his peers’ ability to participate in the activities organised by the youth project. It occurs to Claire that up to this point, all of the activities that have been organised and planned in the project have been initiated either by members of staff or by Irish teens who live in the community. She decides that in order to include Karim and his peers in the project, there needs to be a structure that facilitates their meaningful social participation and decision-making. Claire decides to raise this with Karim and the other teens, in order to allow them to identify their feelings and priority objectives on this issue. Agencies such as the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (2005) make the point that children are sometimes viewed as passive participants in society. They are seldom encouraged to participate actively in the social structures that affect their lives (e.g. education, health and justice). Rather, children are defined as belonging to adults or simply as components of a family. Such views lessen children’s worth and significance and decrease their opportunity to share or influence society’s values and ideologies. In order to change this diminished position, effective advocacy is needed as well as a commitment on the part of service providers to represent the voices, experiences and needs of children. One way of facilitating participation in the scenario above is by introducing familiar foods, music and rituals from Karim’s culture. Based on interviews with a small sample of separated children, Veki (2003) found that some children preferred to cook their own culture’s food. Others, however, reported that hostels lacked appropriate facilities. At present, the majority of separated children do not reside in children’s care centres but in

privately managed hostel accommodation. Of greater concern is the fact that these hostels and residential centres occupied by separated children are not subject to inspection by the Irish Social Service Inspectorate (McCann James, 2005; Mooten, 2006).

Claire and other care staff could better care for separated children by learning about their different cultures, special cultural days and religious events. In addition, cultural games and sports might help in small ways to alleviate the distress and 'strangeness' separated children experience when living in another culture. Equally, helping such children understand Irish norms and ways of life can assist them to understand and feel more as if they belong in Irish society. Inclusion policies involving separated children assist towards this goal and are in place in some existing children's services.

Another significant component aiding inclusion is that of language interpretation and support services. Each of these play a crucial role for both children and care staff. Service programmes that befriend and mentor, such as the Big Brother-Big Sister programme, assist children and foster a sense of belonging and social integration. Attendance at school is also beneficial in normalising children's lives and help their integration into society by providing them with a sense of purpose and structure (Mooten, 2006). Preparatory programmes are still needed, however, to help children from other cultures and background adjust to Irish schools and access the full academic and social curriculum, as some of them may never have had any experience of formal education (Wanzenböck, 2006).

Claire is also faced with evidence of racism amongst the teens in the local community. She has heard and seen derogatory actions by Irish teens towards the two Nigerian teens. Racism is seen to exist when an attitude or behaviour (either intentional or unintentional) is disadvantaging the social position of a specific group (McCann James, 2005). It often takes the form of group closure where social boundaries are formed and then used to exclude an individual or group from a form of power or social standing. At other times, racism exists because groups are believed to be 'inferior' because of a biological or cultural difference. If Karim's lack of social participation was rare or occasional, Claire might assess it differently. Instead, the reluctance to participate in the fishing trip and other organised outings has demonstrated that the 'non-Irish' teens are being socially deprived *as a group* and perhaps being subjected to feelings of inferiority and/or marginalisation.

Social inclusion for minors like Karim includes policy action that does not tolerate any form of discrimination or exclusion. It views all children as active participants in the social structures that impact their new lives in Ireland. A key part of achieving this is a multidisciplinary approach that

provides specialist services and 24-hour care for unaccompanied children, resources that support family and/or community reunification and access to educational and vocational studies. By implementing these and other recommendations, unaccompanied children in Ireland will be more visible and thereby more likely to experience a safe and meaningful childhood that values their physical, emotional and social lives.

**Sociological issues highlighted in this practice scenario include: inclusion, respect for ‘difference’, integration of values and norms, tolerance, preservation of cultural identities, social exclusion, marginalisation, discrimination, prejudice, and group deprivation.**

### **PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

Psychologically, what is striking about this scenario is the experience of separation and exile on unaccompanied minors, and bullying by young people of each other, including those from a different ethnic background.

Without the care of a parent or guardian or extended family, these children lack key psychological sources of security and support. Many have experienced trauma and bereavement, and all have come through separation and undergone loss of some sort (i.e. loss of family, friends, culture or identity). Feelings of fear and insecurity, anxiety about their future and coming to terms with the trauma and events that have led to their arrival in another country make this an extremely emotional and distressing experience for children. Children separated from the security of family, home and country experience feelings of loss and uprootedness. The often hidden nature of their predicament, their tenuous economic state, the difficulties they encounter in trying to establish their entitlement to protection, as well as their lack of knowledge of how to survive in a foreign ‘adult’ world all exacerbate the stress they experience (Ayotte, 2000).

The Separated Children in Europe Programme has highlighted that unaccompanied minors should be seen and treated as children and individuals first and foremost, rather than simply as migrants subject to administrative and immigration controls. What children like Karim need is to feel safe and help to cope with being separated from their families, homes and cultures. In the field of psychology, Maslow’s (1943) theory of a ‘hierarchy of needs’ has highlighted how ‘feeling safe’ underpins mental health and well-being. For the children, understanding about their present and future is critical to this. Knowing what is to happen to them is important to alleviate the distress and worry they have about their lives, and Claire and other care staff can help with this. Thus, professionals play a key role in helping children to understand the processes involved in

tracing relatives to assist with repatriation, and, for other children, the processes involved in seeking and obtaining asylum. In addition, feeling comfortable and safe where they live is also paramount to enhancing their sense of safety. Separated children should not feel vulnerable or scared where they live. They should feel that they have someone to go to for help whom they can trust, and with whom they can build up a relationship. Often, this might be someone like Claire, or a key-worker in the hostel where they live. A sense of safety and security is also built up by the children having routines and a sense of predictability and consistency in their lives. Knowing the pattern of their day and what can be expected reduces worry about unexpected or unpredictable events and concern over not knowing what is going on in their life.

Attachment theory (proposed by theorists such as Bowlby and Ainsworth) has emphasised the harmful and disturbing impact of the separation from loved ones. Prolonged separation from loved ones can be particularly damaging to a child's emotional well-being and future relationships. Separations which are abrupt are considered to be among the most distressing because children are not prepared for them (Fahlberg, 1991). Grief, a diminished sense of trust, fear of future loss and poor self-esteem are just some of the possible consequences from separation. Some separated children are reunited with their families either in their country of origin or within Ireland. These children need help to prepare for such reunification and in rebuilding their familial relationships. However, as Mooten (2006) noted, support for such children is often overlooked, despite the fact that the separation experience can have a damaging psychological effect on both parent and child. Follow-up care for reunited families has been recommended by Mooten (2006) amongst others. Attachment theory has also drawn attention to the value of nurturing a sense of continuity with what one has lost or been separated from. Claire and other staff could help Karim have contact with people from his own culture. Veale and colleagues (2003) reported that in Dublin there have been good experiences reported where minors were placed in accommodation centres with family groups from their country of origin, with the adults acting as role models, helping the minors.

Secondly, therapeutic work may be needed for any trauma experienced and can help children to work through their feelings of grief and loss. Violence, torture, rape, murder, kidnapping, traumatic bereavement and natural disasters, such as earthquakes and floods, are examples of some of the forms of trauma encountered. These can all be deeply upsetting, contributing to anxiety, behavioural problems, intrusive memories, eating and sleeping disorders, somatic complaints, and a lack of trust in

relationships. Sometimes, traumatic experiences can induce regressive behavioural problems, such as enuresis, as well as self-harming behaviour. The HSE Psychological Service for Refugees and Asylum Seekers provides services for children including 'self developmental group work' for separated adolescents. According to Mooten (2006), young people in this programme feel they 'think too much', expressing concerns over separation and loss from their families, the welfare of their families, uncertainty about their asylum claim, an inability to plan their future education or career, racism and daily stressors associated with living in exile and a lack of social support' (Ree in Veale et al., 2003; Trang & Lau, 2002). Individual needs also present which require more specific intervention and support. According to Veale and colleagues (2003, p. 40):

There are also many separated children with special needs, such as sibling guardians of younger children, pregnant girls, young mothers and their infants, and depressed or withdrawn youth who may not come to the attention of social workers, who have significant guardianship needs.

Thirdly, children can be helped to enhance their coping skills and overall resilience. Resilience has been defined as 'qualities which cushion a vulnerable child from the worst effects of adversity in whatever form it takes and which may help a child or young person to cope, survive and even thrive in the face of great hurt and disadvantage' (Gilligan, 1997, p. 12). In building a child's resilience, consideration should be given to enhancing social supports, such as their friendships, and their relationships with people to whom they can go to for help and guidance. This can involve helping a child to strengthen their friendships and helping professionals, such as key-workers, social workers and teachers, to encourage the child to see them as people to whom they can go to for support. Reflective work is also important to uncover the child's perspective and to help them to understand what has happened to them, what may happen in their future, and to increase their sense of 'self-efficacy' or control in their own life. For example, a child's views on decisions regarding family reunification should be given due weight in accordance with the child's age and maturity (European Commission, 2004). A sense of direction is important for children in difficult circumstances, as it can enhance feelings of stability and control. For example, Claire could help Karim to identify goals in his life and plans for reaching them. A child's interests and hobbies, such as Karim's interest in fishing, are also ways of helping them cope as they provide an 'enjoyable space', a time away from feeling worried and distraught. Hobbies, sports and other interests can also be an avenue



through which friendships and relationships can be forged. In the words of Robert, a 16-year-old separated child in Ireland:

Being an unaccompanied minor is not easy, especially in a strange country all by yourself. At first the process of asylum is complicated for most minors especially because most of the time we are treated as adults when it comes to the asylum process and are expected to produce the same documents relating to our stories as adults would. Most minors understand why evidence and proofs must be provided but feel that the government and asylum system should be a bit easier on us since when we leave our countries, documents are the last thing we think of. When it comes to school most minors are a bit intimidated mainly because the system of education is often different from the school system in our countries of origin. As a result, we feel that we might fall behind, but on the other hand many of us adapt to the system, sometimes even more than others . . . Racism is one of the other intimidating subjects for minors. According to the minors I have spoken to, almost 90 per cent have experienced racism, either directly, or indirectly. Even though these experiences can be quite traumatizing, most of us tend to be optimistic and we don't let racism hold us back, we also think positively about the outcome of the asylum applications. (Mooten, 2006, p. 57)

In this practice scenario Claire has seen some bullying of the Nigerian teenagers by some Irish teenagers. Bullying has been defined as an imbalance of strength (physical and/or psychological), a deliberate intention to hurt another with little if any provocation and repeated negative actions against another person (Olweus, 1993). It can include name-calling, teasing, being picked on, being hit and pushed around, being made fun of or being left out or 'ostracised'. It can have very serious effects, undermining a child's self-esteem and mental health and contributes to depression, loneliness, self-harm and suicide (Wilkins-Shurmer et al., 2003). Research with Irish adolescents has indicated that one in fifty young people are bullied on a weekly basis, and that the incidence peaks in the second year of secondary school (approximate age 14 years). Verbal bullying (e.g. name-calling, rumour-spreading) was the most common form reported (55 per cent) followed by physical (25 per cent) and psychological bullying including exclusion (14 per cent) (O'Moore, Kirkham & Smith, 1997). This shows that bullying is a worryingly prevalent problem amongst children and young people. Such bullying may at times be construed as racism, a concern voiced by separated children attending the HSE psychological service for Refugees



and Asylum Seekers self-developmental group work (Ree in Veale et al., 2003). Whether considered to be racially based or not, bullying does compromise a child's sense of safety and well-being. Consequently, Claire and her colleagues should consider the best way to encourage the children in care to open up and disclose bullying experiences and to help them to identify helpful and unhelpful responses, as well as strategies to deal with it and who to go to for help. Further action may be needed, such as informing the school. Inclusive initiatives involving children and their families in the locality with the separated children might also reduce the incidence of separated children being targets of bullying as they come to be more integrated into peer groups. In addition, involving families might help to reduce any bullying triggered by racist attitudes picked up in the home.

**Psychological issues highlighted in this practice scenario include: impact of attachment separation and trauma, prejudice, identity formation and social belonging, and peer acceptance/rejection.**

#### **PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

The context for this discussion on professional practice issues is a Drop-in Youth Project. The focus is on the professional skills and challenges that are associated with cultural diversity. It is important to state at the outset that youth work and social care are distinct professions. Youth Work is defined as 'a planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young persons through their voluntary involvement' (Government of Ireland Youth Work Act 2001). Social care, on the other hand, is described as being 'committed to the planning and delivery of quality care and other support services for individuals with identified needs' (IASCE 2005). Whilst there is a clear distinction in both approach and professional relationship, there are increasing overlaps between these professions. The scenario in focus here allows discussions of practice issues common to both professions.

Cultural diversity is a fact of life in twenty-first century Ireland. In recent years, Ireland has experienced a rapid growth in ethnic, religious and cultural diversity. The Census (Government of Ireland, 2006) shows that one in ten of Ireland's population is now non-Irish. This diversity builds on the diversity that always existed in Ireland (albeit in relatively small numbers) and which includes the Travelling Community, Jewish, Muslim, Asian and African communities. The example under discussion here reflects the reality of the challenge – and opportunities – that result from this diversity. At the official launch of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008, the European Commissioner for Education, Ján Figel declared:

We want to move beyond multicultural societies, where cultures and cultural groups simply coexist side by side, where we live ‘parallel lives’. We need to become intercultural societies where plurality of cultures cooperates in dialogue and in shared responsibility.

We will now look at some of the key skills required in promoting interculturalism.

The Youth Project that provides the setting for this scenario is typical of a targeted response to meeting the needs of young people in defined disadvantaged areas. The ‘drop-in’ nature of the service is designed to engage young people in activities and provide opportunities for discussion, education and social interactions with peers and leaders. In examining this scenario, three areas of professional practice will be discussed: *engagement*, *planning* and *cultural awareness*. The discussion here is informed by the comments of both professionals in the youth work field and by young people recently settled in Ireland.

### **Engagement**

Professional social care is based on relationships. These relationships often create the space in which meaningful and positive change can occur. Hawkins and Shohet (2002) describe the work of the professional social care worker as protecting this therapeutic space. In the informal context of the drop-in project given in our example, it is essential that opportunities be created in which marginalised young people can begin to overcome the isolation they experience in moving from home to a new and different country and culture.

Professional’s comment: ‘The challenge for Claire is that the issues described need to be tackled at so many different levels. A starting point might be to devise and facilitate an activity that would be attractive for all the ‘drop-in’ teenagers. This would give her an opportunity to engage with the boys from different cultures and get a picture of their needs.’

The engagement activity therefore serves two purposes: firstly, to overcome isolation and begin to break down barriers; secondly, to create opportunities that establish professional relationships in order to identify needs and plan future work. The skills associated with this aspect of the work again cluster around the relationship-building task. Communication, both verbal and

non-verbal, are essential and need to adapt to the setting – in this scenario the ‘organised chaos’ of a teenage gathering! Listening skills can sometimes be taken for granted. Claire has shown here a capacity to listen not just to what has been said but to the underlying messages being communicated by the service users that have the potential to alienate one group from another.

Young person’s reflection: ‘A young Polish woman I spoke to could easily relate to the young people in the example. She saw their starting point as one of isolation, away from their family, their language and the things that are familiar to them. They need the opportunity to meet new people and gain confidence in their new surroundings. Sometimes the opposite happens and other young people reject them.’

## Planning

The reality for many people newly arrived in Ireland is that they are located at the edge of the local community, be it physically in the way that they are housed (often together, temporarily and institutionally), socially, by language and cultural difference, and economically, by limited educational and employment opportunities. The first reaction of the professional interviewed about our example was that the response needed to happen at many different levels. The response, therefore, needs to be planned over time, with clear objectives and with some way of measuring its success.

Because of the nature of social care work, outcomes are often open-ended. This is because the ultimate aim is long-term. This, however, does not mean that we should abandon all efforts at evaluating our work. The scenario in question here does indeed have a long-term aim of integrating young people into the indigenous population – something that might only be measured two generations from now! It is possible, though, to measure shorter term outcomes, such as instances of integration, higher levels of cross-cultural communication, improvements in social, educational and economic opportunities, reduction in incidents of racial discrimination and abuse.

The challenges involved in this aspect of the work can prove both demanding and exciting for Claire and her colleagues. The skill-set required to address these challenges is clustered around what could be described as ‘empowerment social care work’ (Miley et al., 2004). This concept places the role of the professional worker as *working with* rather than *working for* vulnerable people or groups. It sees advocacy and enabling skills as integral to the social care worker’s job. This in turn demands of the worker an understanding of not just the effects of societal injustice but also an ability

to work towards challenging their causes. Good research and writing skills are necessary. Claire has shown a capacity to reflect and a willingness to work as part of a wider team in planning a response to the immediate and longer term needs of the young people she observed in the course of her work.

### **Cultural Awareness**

It was clear from talking with a young person who recently arrived in Ireland that the immediate challenges Karim faced were as much to do with being away from family and friends as specifically the result of being culturally different. However, these feelings of loneliness and isolation were more severe because of cultural differences and a further barrier was created by Karim's not speaking English fluently. Indeed it was the ability to identify these barriers and to focus on ways to overcome them that marked the professional interviewed as being culturally sensitive. She recommended English language classes as being important in building confidence. When asked to comment further on the scenario above, her focus centred on 'a big activity towards team-building'. The experienced professional explained that the aim here is to begin to break down barriers. A shared positive experience that enables all the young people who use the service to participate equally can create opportunities to explore cultural difference together.

The cultural competence (i.e. the set of relevant skills) displayed by the professional here is based on an understanding of interculturalism. It reflects the five themes that form the basis of an intercultural framework set out in The National Action Plan Against Racism (Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform, 2008), Protection, Inclusion, Provision, Recognition and Participation. These themes point towards direct action and place an onus on the worker to ensure that the agency is responding to its service-users on a number of levels. In our scenario, Claire has used observation and recording skills in responding to her initial concern for the welfare of the young non-Irish boys using the drop-in service. She is aware that she is not alone in her professional role and sets about bringing the team together to discuss an action plan. Teamwork skills are key here; indeed, the promotion of inclusion of non-Irish young people into the general activities of the project challenges the team as a whole to assess its own readiness for this new work.

Creative work was identified in the professional interview as an approach to overcoming barriers that exist amongst diverse groups. The worker must have an openness and willingness to organise creative activities. The value of such activities, such as arts and crafts, group games and cookery, was verified by the young Polish woman when asked what aspect of the youth service

that she used helped most. She went on to explain that these activities helped to break down the language barriers but also the social barriers. One of the biggest obstacles for a new arrival is to make meaningful contact with peers from the host community. In fact, for this young person and for the young people in our example, their first experience of their Irish peers was negative, as they were excluded from the group and even more directly by racist comments. The role of creative work in this context is more than merely bringing people together: it is to establish opportunities for the young service-users to meet and engage with one another in an environment that is non-threatening and mutually respectful. In planning creative activities, the worker must be aware of their multi-functional properties.

<b>Skills Grid</b>			
	<b>Engagement</b>	<b>Planning</b>	<b>Cultural Awareness</b>
Familiar	Relationship-building	Writing/Research	Self-awareness
	Communication	Reflection	Creativity
	Listening	Teamwork	Group work
	Group facilitation		
Unfamiliar	<b>Engagement</b>	<b>Planning</b>	<b>Cultural Awareness</b>
	Cultural awareness	Multi-level planning	Identity self-awareness
	Welcoming skills	Negotiation	Foreign language

**Professional practice issues highlighted in this practice scenario include: life-space intervention, intercultural work and enhancing resilience.**

Minority populations need to be able to maintain their ethnic identities even while seeking inclusion in the societal mainstream (Lum, 2004). Lum goes on to identify the factors that form ethnic identity as, 'skin colour, name, language, common religious beliefs, common ancestry, and place of origin'. The worker needs to be aware of their own role in creating positive spaces in which minority and majority groups can explore their own and each others' identities. The skills identified and discussed in this section are not exhaustive, but are informed by the comments and insights of a service-provider with hands-on experience of working with young people from

different ethnic backgrounds and by a young person recently arrived in Ireland. As the profession of social care evolves, professionals and students need to identify, critique, adopt and adapt a range of skills that serves the specific purposes of social care. The skills grid summarises those in use in the above example. The grid also includes some less familiar skills that are also applicable.