

RESOLUTION

Inter-regional Academic and Practical Conference: *“Family for the Child”*

(Early crisis intervention with families: experiences, problems and prospects)

**March 1-2, 2007
Kostroma**

In his Federal Assembly address, President Putin presented general strategy principles for implementing a new national policy to protect children, taking into account the best interests and rights of a child and particularly a child's right to live in a family. Priority objectives identified by authorities include support to families with children; provision of material incentives to alternative family care arrangements for orphans and children without parental care; and creation of effective mechanisms to reduce the number of children in institutions.

Within a short timeframe, the RF Ministries of Health and Social Development, and Education and Science have drafted and adopted a large package of legal and normative documents directed at strengthening the family institution.

Regions in the Central Federal District have largely established the needed social service infrastructure, strengthening their material resources and professional personnel. Coordination to some extent has been achieved among education, social protection, health care and other preventive agencies. A positive dynamic has been experienced in family-based care placement of orphans and children without parental care.

Greater material and human resources are needed in the short-term to develop services that keep children with their biological parents. This short-term investment would result in considerable returns, reducing the number of children that enter institutions and transferring children in institutions to families.

Despite a considerable increase in the number of children placed in alternative families, the number of social orphans in institutions has not decreased. There is a long overdue need to enhance and conduct more targeted measures directed at prevention work with birth families, including pregnant women; early identification of potential crisis situations in families; timely rehabilitation to enable the child to remain in his/her birth family; reduction in termination of parental right cases; and reduction in the number of social orphans, through promotion of adoption, guardianship, and other alternative family care arrangements.

Conference participants recognise that early crisis intervention with families and prevention of child abandonment are still impeded due to difficulties and inconsistencies of legal, administrative and methodological nature.

Extensive attention regarding reorganisation of institutions is required, converting institutions into social service centres for families and children that include counseling, rehabilitation and alternative family care placements.

Standard provisions of educational facilities for orphans and children left without parental care do not consider alternative family placement or supervision for children, and even less support for biological families. No solution has been established to address the need for specialists in

health care institutions (*baby's homes*), who would work with alternative family care placements. Current legislation also lacks provisions regarding the organisation of preventive work to identify vulnerable families at an early stage and to enable children to remain with their families.

The conference participants recognise that:

I. Basic Working Principles:

1. "The best interests of the child" should be at the centre of the family policy. Proceeding from these interests, the key policy focus should be on measures to keep a child in his/her biological family. For this purpose, social protection, educational and health care services direct their work on prevention, and early identification of and intervention for vulnerable families. Human and financial resource allocation should be largely directed to activities supporting biological families.

In the event of a life-threatening situation, temporary withdrawal of a child from his/her family should be addressed through placement in alternative family care.

2. For children without biological families or for whom preservation of the family is deemed impossible, priority should be on the timely placement of the child with relatives, either through guardianship or adoption.

3. In the absence of relatives, the priority focus should be adoption, first of all by Russian families, taking into account the best interests of the child.

4. When adoption is not possible, alternative family care should be provided.

5. In exceptional circumstances, a child could be placed in an institution, with his/her rights and interests being duly respected. In these exceptional cases, use of institutions needs to be reformed to better uphold children's rights and to ensure a care approach based on the best interests of the child.

6. Under any of these child care placements, there should be mandatory provision of individual supervision and monitoring of the child's well-being, and counseling and training for parents.

7. It is necessary to identify and remove systemic barriers that prevent a child from remaining in his/her biological family or from being placed in alternative family care, under which the best interest of the child is considered. Removal of these barriers requires the creation of effective and efficient monitoring mechanisms to ensure the observance of and respect for the rights and best interests of the child at all the stages.

8. Policy developments in the best interests of the child should be based on clearly defined goals and indicators that facilitate the evaluation process.

Conference participants call for development between 2007 to 2010 of a targeted programme approach for preventive work regarding vulnerable families and social orphans.

II. Strategic Working Elements

9. There is a need to consider regional government and municipal administrations' experiences in developing a complex of services to support the family, including prevention of vulnerable families and "social orphans" and early crisis intervention with vulnerable families, prevention of child abandonment, development of alternative family-based care settings for orphans and children left without parental care.

10. Further expansion of the child rights ombudsperson institution could provide an essential tool to protect child rights.

11. Non-governmental organisations have an important role in working with families, acting as the government's strategic partners to enable children to remain in their biological families or to live in alternative family-based care, and, thus, contributing to the reduction in the number of institutionalised children.

12. The church and religious community have an important role to play in enhancing family values.

III. Requests to the Federal Government:

13. The RF Ministry of Health and Social Development and the RF Ministry of Education and Science to draft and adopt regulatory documents on:

- a) professional status and related issues such as labour remuneration, work record, social security and pension coverage for persons conducting foster care;
- b) organisation and implementation of specialised services for placement, counseling and supervision for orphans and children left without parental care; alternative families in children's homes, boarding schools, and the social protection system's specialised facilities for minors; and personnel from the above institutions;
- c) insuring health care facilities conduct early identification of and assistance to vulnerable families;
- d) organisation and implementation of services for counseling and supervision for orphans and children left without parental care regarding adoption, guardianship and other in family based care forms;
- e) provision to Russian regions of implementing regulations and methodological recommendations regarding transfer to regional authorities of social responsibilities such as guardianship and trusteeship. An expedient solution to these issues should be provided to enable its timely inclusion into the budget process. Issues regarding staffing of trusteeship and guardianship agencies and definition of their structure should be addressed at the government level.

14. The federal government level to elaborate measures that provide orphans and children without parental care with housing based on social lease contracts and different forms of support to regional housing programmes (e.g. interest-free loans, mortgage credit lending, co-financing of housing construction for this particular group of persons).

15. Deem it expedient to publish materials of the inter-regional research and training conference "Family for the Child" and propose the Steering Committee forward these materials to those regions whose representatives took part in the conference to use in their practical work.

16. The Office of G. S. Poltavchenko, Plenipotentiary Representative of the Russian President in the Central Federal District, to facilitate regular sharing of experiences gained in Russian regions regarding solutions to the problem of social orphans.