Children looked after and their right to participation in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 12

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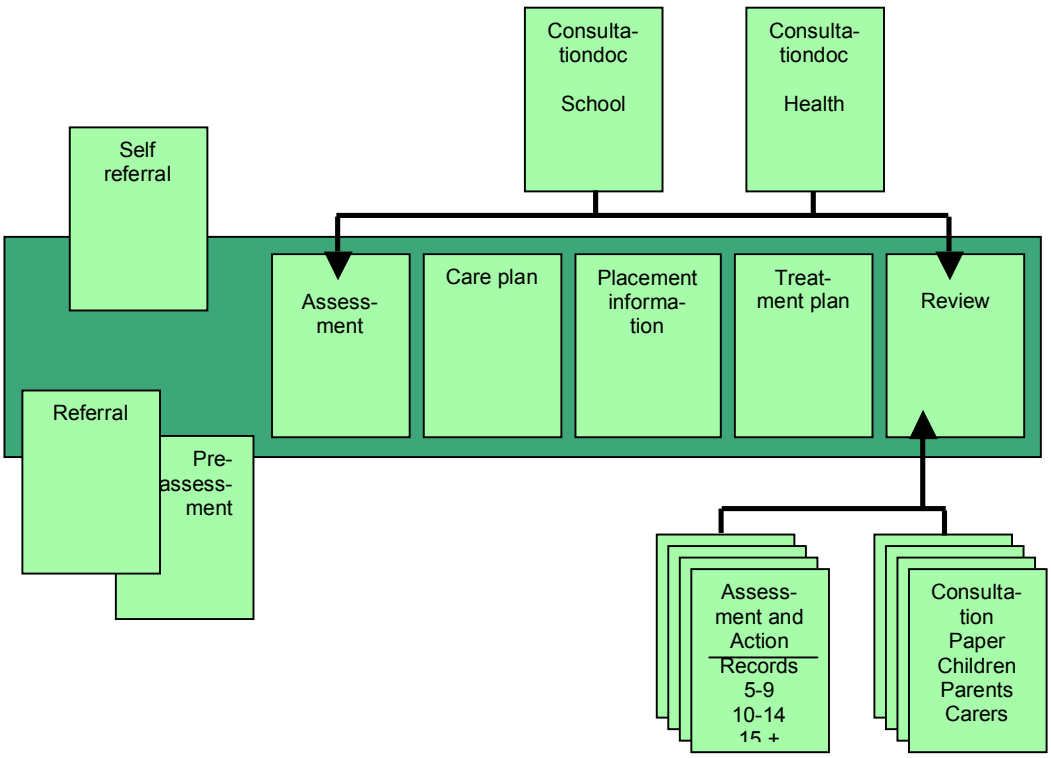
Abstract

Research has been done on children's participation in review meetings, a method for reviewing foster and residential care. The method is tested within the national project Children's Needs in Focus (BBIC) inspired by the British Integrated Children's System and operated by the National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen) in Sweden. The objective of the evaluation, conducted on behalf of Socialstyrelsen, was to investigate frameworks and scope for – as well as the child's experiences of – participation and joint decision making concerning planning, decision-making processes and review of arrangements. The overall issue propounded was linked to one of the aims of the development work: do review meetings contribute to strengthen the child's position in accordance with the aims of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Social Services Act? The study included content analysis of 55 BBIC-forms, together with interviews with 11 children, 8 – 18 years old, 8 independent chairpersons and 11 social workers. One of the conclusions is that the framework and scope that is created for the child's participation in reviews, within the BBIC project, provide the preconditions to strengthen the position of the child in accordance with the aims of the Social Services Act and the articles 3 and 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Introduction

Since 1999, the National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen), has operated the project Children's Needs in Focus (Barns behov i centrum – BBIC), together with seven trial municipalities/municipal districts in various parts of Sweden (Socialstyrelsen 2005). The objective is to develop a unified system for assessing, planning and reviewing within child welfare. The project aims to test and develop a series of forms that follow the entire case process, from the referral, self referral and assessment to review of arrangements. This documentation system will support social workers in systematically gathering information and following up their work with individual children in child welfare.

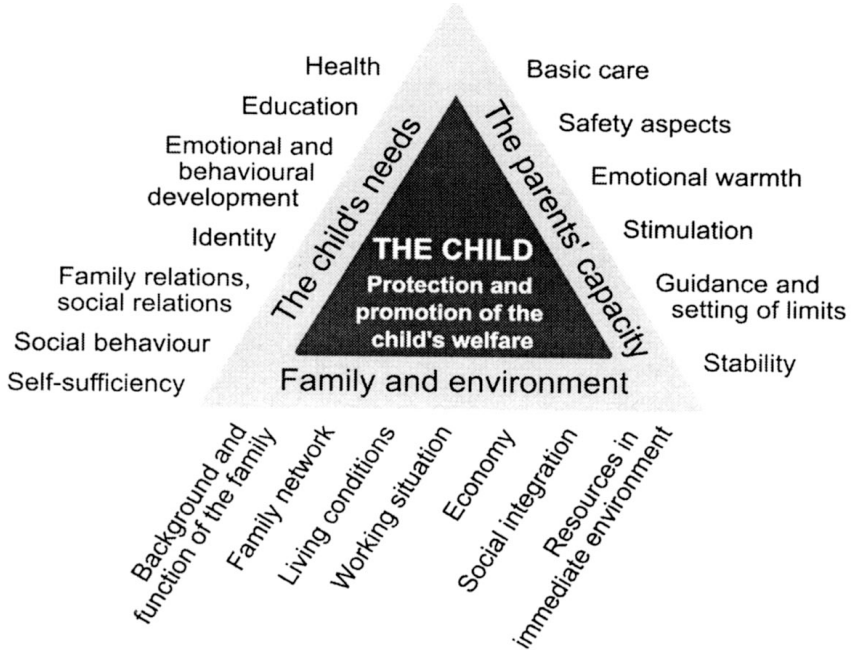
Figure 1. BBIC – forms



The project follows the British model *the Integrated Children's System* – ICS (Department of Health 2003). ICS has it's background in two other models – *the Looking After Children System* – LACS (Parker et al 1991, Ward 1995, Ward 2004) and *the Framework for Assessment of Children in Need and their Families* – AF (Department of Health 2000, Cleaver et al. 2004). It is grounded in knowledge, defined as theory, research findings, and practice experience. It takes an ecological approach for understanding of human growth and development, which says that an understanding of

a child must be located within the context of the child's family (parent and caregivers and the wider family) and of the community and culture in which he or she is growing up (Seden 2002). This approach is portrayed as a triangle made up of three domains representing children's developmental needs, parenting capacity to respond to those needs, and family and environmental factors (Department of Health 2000).

Figure 2. The Integrated Children's System Framework



Partnership is an important underlying principle in the British model as well as in BBIC. Social workers have to strive to achieve clarity, win respect and search for consensus solutions in relation to parents and children (Department of Health 1999, HMSO 1995). This principle has of course high priority in relation to children in foster and residential care. Within the BBIC project a method, following the British model, for reviewing foster care and residential care, has been tested in three of the trial municipalities. In the review meetings, the child, the social worker and important people from the child's network meet together. The meeting is led by an independent chairperson. The basis of the meetings includes documentation prepared, using the forms for planning and reviewing that are being tested within the BBIC project. These forms include: care plans, placement information, treatment plans, review of arrangements, assessment and action records, consultation papers for children, parents and caregivers, record from the review meeting, school consultation documentation and physician's consultation documentation. The goal is

to build a team with the assignment to work together for the benefit of the child. Each member of the team contributes with his or her unique knowledge and experience (Walker 2001).

This paper deals with an evaluation of review meetings (Rasmusson at al 2004).[1] It comprises one of three sub studies on the evaluation of the BBIC project (see also Rasmusson 2004, Johansson 2004) which is still in progress at the National Board of Health and Welfare. It will be concluded when the system is developed to the extent that it is ready for dissemination among other municipalities in Sweden, which is estimated would imply finished by end of 2005.

Background

The British model

During the seventies many cases were reported where children were killed and other cases of children that were sexually and physically abused while being in foster care or in institutions. As a consequence of these alarming reports a group of researchers, with support from Department of Health, started to develop the Looking After Children System – a system intended to enable social workers and managers to more systematically follow up decisions made by the social services (Parker et al 1991, Ward 1995). Research carried out in relation to LACS was an important impetus for change in the British legislation that was implemented in the Children Act 1991. The legislation has strong demands on care plans and assessments of action affecting children in the care of social services. The preparation of care plans, assessments of care and the implementation of review meetings are regulated in detail in the Children Act and in Guidelines and Regulations from the Department of Health. This specifies, for example, who is to be consulted on care plans, who is to chair the review meetings, who is to be present at these meetings, and what topics are to be covered. The follow-up of how the developmental needs of the child have been met form an important starting point for these assessments.

Research on children's participation in reviews

A number of researchers have studied the effects in practice of these amendments to the legislation. Surveys have shown that the patterns with

[1] The paper is based on a report written on behalf of the National Board of Health and Welfare, Stockholm. Co authors are research director Ulf Hyvönen and research assistant Lina Mellberg at the Field Research Unit, Social Services in Umeå.

respect to the participation of children altered markedly once the new law had been introduced. Roger Grimshaw and Ruth Sinclair (1997) found that it became considerably more common for the children themselves to be present at review meetings. They also report on results from a minor qualitative study carried out with 12 children (aged 11-18) and their parents, who were interviewed after their review meetings. This study showed that both the children and the parents were consulted prior to the meeting, but that they did not receive sufficient information to be able to take part in the meeting in a satisfactory way. The researchers emphasise the importance of accommodating the feelings of the children during these meetings. It also emerged that there were varying perceptions among the children on the consultation documents. Some thought they were easy to fill in, while others thought it was difficult to know what to write. They found themselves in a dilemma when they had to state their views on sensitive questions.

Steve Walker (1999 a, b) carried out a qualitative study in which he interviewed 15 children aged between 12 and 15 for the purpose of viewing the children's own experiences of review meetings more closely. He found that as far as the children were concerned, planning and assessment had nothing to do with a process, but were seen as a one-off event; and moreover, an event on which they often had negative views. For many children, the assessment was a formal and bureaucratic procedure, which took place on the adults' terms and was based on the requirements of social services itself. Often, many children wanted to get away from these meetings as quickly as possible, instead of thinking how they themselves could contribute and utilise the meeting form on the basis of what they themselves wanted. A child who described the feeling of being an outsider when the adults opened their diaries to note a date for the next meeting gave a telling example of the dominance of the adult perspective: "But I don't have a diary, so nobody asks me". The children felt that the aim of the meeting was to talk *about* them, not *with* them. Some of them felt that the language used by the adults was far too difficult. The adults took charge and used various strategies to marginalise and exclude the child. They were often busy dealing with their own conflicts of interest. If the children were to enter into these discussions at all, very particular skills with respect to strength and the ability to negotiate were required. It is worth noting that the children here were meeting the people with the greatest influence over their lives. Steve Walker (1999 a) describes the fact that the consultation, which took place with the children before the meetings often consisted of filling in parts of the LACS material. None of the children interviewed liked these forms.

They were boring and repetitive. The information that could be gleaned from these documents was thus limited. The written answers were often brief if the children received no support from an adult when filling in the forms. If they received such support, the information given was also more complete. The same was experienced at the review meetings. If the child was given information and if adults provided support and showed respect for the child, it was also possible for the child to speak on his own terms.

To summarise, the British evaluations and research show that in spite of often good intentions, it is difficult to give the child space and to come up with strategies which work on the child's own terms in the many formal procedures which characterise child welfare work. There seem to be considerable difficulties in breaking the power relationship between adults and children. Children need support at various stages of the process so as to be able to exercise their own rights (Butler & Williamson 1994, Dalrymple & Hough 1995). It is also apparent that even small, qualitative studies can provide us with important knowledge.

Swedish conditions

During the years 2002 about 15 000 children and young people in Sweden were in out-of – home placements in foster care and different types of residential care. About a quarter of children in out – of - home care are placed without the consent of the parent(s) in accordance with the supplementary *Care of Young Persons Act* (LVU), regulating placements under compulsion. The other three quarters are placed voluntarily in accordance to the Social Services Act (SoL) (Socialstyrelsen 2003).

Including children and taking into consideration their knowledge and experiences is an important quality target for the child welfare services. In 1998 the Social Services Act was supplemented to reinforce children's rights. The introductory section (section 1) introduces a provision that when measures affect children, the requirements of consideration for the best interests of the child are to be specially observed. This provision was added partly as a consequence of the requirements laid down by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The child's right to be heard has also been reinforced. When measures affect children, the child's opinion is to be clarified as far as possible. The social welfare committee is to take account the wishes of the child, where this is possible taking into account the child's age and maturity.

Various surveys, such as review of case law in the 1990s showed that parents' relationships are investigated and their views noted and respected, while the child and his/her needs end up as secondary concern. The National Board of Health and Welfare's follow-ups of the amendments of

the Social Services Act has demonstrated improvements which have taken place in the work of social services with children and young people, but it also shows that attitudes of children are often not described and that children's attitudes were rarely reflected in the decisions made (Socialstyrelsen 2001).

The experience of children in respect of participation in planning, decision-making and assessment processes within child welfare services is an area almost entirely unresearched in Sweden to date (Andersson 2000). There is a great lack of knowledge about children's own perspectives on living in foster homes and institutions.

The BBIC project is an attempt to find solutions to problems similar to those found and reported in Great Britain. Recurrent reports from the State Audit Institution (Riksrevisionen) and the Parliamentary Commissioner (JO) criticise the authorities responsible for foster care and residential care. Knowledge about outcomes is insufficient, existing methods to ensure quality are not used and children's participation have to be improved.

Review Meetings in Sweden

Aims and issues

The purpose of studying review meetings is to investigate frameworks and scope for – as well as children's experiences in – participation and joint decision-making concerning planning, decision-making processes and review of arrangements. The overall issue propounded is linked to one of the aims of the development work: Do review meetings contribute to strengthening the child's position in accordance with the CRC and the Social Services Act? The study is based on qualitative methods – document analysis of BBIC-forms and interviews.

In case of *the document analysis*, the main issue relates to how statements from children themselves have been documented in BBIC-forms for planning, follow up and review. The *interviews with children and youth* aim to clarify the following main issue: How do children themselves perceive and experience their own opportunities for participation in assessments of the care and in review meetings? Apart from the child, *the chairperson* is the main person at the review meeting, and the aim for interviewing these peoples is primarily to clarify the opportunities and obstacles they have perceived in this form of assessment. The interviews with *the social workers*, responsible for the single cases, deals

with how they used the BBIC-forms, how they communicated with the children and how they experienced the Review Meetings.

Methods, material and sample

The evaluation, which has a formative approach (Høgsbro & Rieper 2001), is based on analysis of 55 BBIC- forms for follow-up of care, and qualitative interviews with 11 children and young people aged 8–18, 8 independent chairpersons and 10 social workers in three of the seven municipalities testing BBIC. The participating children had taken part in one or more review meetings. The reason for their placement varied, three of them were in different kinds of institutions or residential care and nine of them in foster care. For two of them the placement was compulsory (in accordance with LVU) and for the others it was on voluntary basis (in accordance with SoL). The length of the placements varied from one year up to about eighteen years.

Figure 3. Interviewees – children and youth

Name and age of the child	Placement	Participated in review meetings number
Sofia, 18 years	Foster care (SoL)	3
Johanna, 18 years	Residential care (SoL)	4
Sara, 17 years	Foster care (SoL)	1
Erik, 17 years	Foster care (SoL)	1
Barif, 16 years	Residential care (LVU)	2
Liselotte, 14 years	Foster home (SoL)	2
Rickard, 14 years	Foster care (LVU)	2
Sirwan, 13 years	Residential home (SoL)	1
Teo, 11 years	Foster care (SoL)	1
Oskar, 11 years	Foster care (SoL)	1
Sune, 8 years	Foster care (SoL)	1

The ten interviewed social workers involve all the persons responsible for all the cases. One of the social workers had responsibility for two cases. Two of the interviewed independent chairs hade been responsible for more than one of the meetings included in the study.

The study started with interviews with the children and young people in order to be as open as possible in relation to their actual experiences. The next step was to read the documentation in every single case and after that the social workers and the chairpersons were interviewed.

Reliability

The evaluation was conducted during the probationary period and in the first stage of a very extensive long-term development project. Limitations are placed on the basis of our study due to the fact that the forms have not been used and tested entirely in accordance with the recommendations of the National Board of Health and Welfare. This of course also limits how the results can be generalized while, at the same time, the triangulation that was used provided a rich crop of material with plentiful variations and nuances that improve its quality. In this way, the evaluation is

expected to contribute to increased awareness of how the terms "participation" and "co-determination" function in practice in BBIC.

Theoretical points of departure

The analysis of the empirical material takes it's point of departure in two different theoretical models – a model of pathways to participation in line with article 12.1 of the CRC, described by Harry Shier (2001) and the ecological model for human development formulated by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979).

Shier (2001) offers an alternative model to Roger Hart's "ladder of participation" (Hart 1992) and is based on five levels of participation: 1. Children are listened to. 2. Children are supported in expressing their views. 3. Children's views are taken into account. 4. Children are involved in decision-making processes. 5. Children share power and responsibility for decision-making. In addition three stages of commitment are identified at each level: 'openings', 'opportunities' and 'obligations'. The model also provides a logical sequence of 15 questions as a tool for planning for participation.

The Ecology of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner 1979) offers a holistic and interactionistic view which makes it possible to understand frameworks, premises and scope for children's participation within child welfare. The child both influences and is influenced by his or her environmental conditions. If we translate the ecological model to the BBIC project and this evaluation, we can think of the different levels as follows. At macro level are for example the legislation, the CRC and the national strategies for its implementation, the initiatives at national level, BBIC and LACS, in Sweden and Great Britain. At the exo level are the political decisions in the municipalities responsible for implementation of BBIC. At the meso level are the professional groups within social services, schools, child psychiatry and other with responsibility for collaboration on issues concerning children's welfare. At the micro level is the single foster child taking part in review meetings and the resources available for the child in the immediate environment. An important issue is to investigate how the ambitions for change, formulated at different levels, are put into practice at the micro level.

Results

Children's voices in the documentation

Analysis of the documentation illustrated that the children's own statements were not documented in the forms to the extent that is desirable and to be expected, based on the recommendations of the National Board of Health and Welfare. The documentation often gave an "objectified" description of the child, the child's own perpectives were found to a small extent or were totally absent. An exception is the consultation form for children and records from review meetings, which usually contained documentation on expressions of children's own wishes and opinions.

Example of an 'objectified' view:

> Goals for schooling: Johanna shall obtain a pass from upper secondary school. Intermediate goal: Do what is demanded to obtain a pass in two subjects. Results: The foster parents has helped her during the spring term, but it didn't succeed. Conclusion: How shall the foster parents and teachers at school keep in contact to prevent bad results?

Example where the child is included as a subject:

> Barif says that he most of all wants to take care himself. He thinks it is difficult to ask for help. He doesn't trust adults. He can handle physical contact, but is easily disturbed. It is better than before but he wants it to succed more rapidly.

Meanwhile the interviews with the social workers illustrated that the children participated in documentation to a larger extent than appeared in the forms. Generally viewed, the documentation gave a clear picture of what the social workers considered necessary for the child. Simultaneously, it can be concluded that none of the cases studied were dealt with entirely according to the 'rule book' and the recommendations of the National Board of Health and Welfare. Many of the cases lacked, for example, care plans and treatment plans in accordance with BBIC. However, although no complete file studies have been carried out, this does not mean that care and treatment plans were entirely deficient. They may have existed in some other form than in the BBIC-forms. This is in accordance with Ward (2002) who states that social workers will personally have much more information than they document.

Several of the children who were involved in completing one or more forms, were negative towards them. They perceived them as difficult and boring to complete, which is quite in line with British evaluations (Walker 1999 a). Only one child gave a directly positive view of one form: the consultation paper for children and young people.

Issues and decisions in the review meetings

The content in the agendas for the review meetings have been structured within three categories defined by Walker (1999 a, 2001); day to day decisions, life event decisions and life decisions. Some examples:

Day to day decisions:
- cooking and eating habits
- schooling e.g. homework, tests and examinations
- leisure activities
- peer relations
- pocket money

Life event decisions:
- contraceptive, smoking and other health issues
- contacts with parents, siblings and relatives
- vacations
- housing situation

Life decisions:
- Leaving care
- Research for disappeared father

Children's experiences of review meetings

It was obvious that the frames and scopes for children's participation were related to the actual situation for every single child. There were big differences between for example the seventeen-year old boy at a locked institution and children who lived safe and secure with their relatives for many years.

The children and youth interviewed had widely varying perceptions and experiences of the preparations that were made prior to review meetings and of what happened during the meetings. Couples were very

negative, some were both positive and negative and couples were very positive.

Liselotte, 14 years old, desrcibed that it could be difficult to be the only child in a big group of adults:

> It is, so to say, easier for adults because they know each other, they gang together. I don't think they are aware of what they are doing. It is just something I am feeling. They try to respond to me, but then they just gang together. It depends on their ignorance. They think they know everything and then they come there and decide how everything shall be. They sit there as the worst crowd against you. They don't know anything about my life. I get angry when they think they understand even if they don't know a shit about me. They think they know what is the best for me, but they don't know what is the best for me, because it is not their life. So how could they know what is the best when they aren't me? They listen to what they want to hear, so to say. They try so much and they don't know what they are trying to do, it just goes wrong, so to say.

Sofia, 18 years old, is one of the youths with very positive experiences:

> In the latest meeting I wanted to talk about when I shall meet my parents. I use to visit them every fortnight. I wanted to talk about that I don't want it be compulsory to go there. And it was decided exactly what I wanted. Now I am going to visit them once a month. Then I can decide myself, if there is something special, then I go there. So I get some time for meeting my friends too.

All children who expressed their views on the issue were, for the most part, positive to the form of review meetings and the role of the independent chairperson.

> It is important to review and follow-up what happens. It is good with an independent chairperson. The discussions are sometimes a bit too intense and somebody could be angry. Then the chairperson can say stop and suggest that this issue should be discussed later. The meetings were not so regular before. They were once a year, you have got coffee and talked about "how is the weather" and "how are you getting on work" and then we have finished. After this project started we have to meet every sixth month. The demands on the social workers have increased (Sofia, 18 years old).

Preparations

A couple of children were satisfied on how they were prepared for the meetings. They felt informed and knew what they could expect of the meeting.

It was important for the children that meaningful and important issues from their point of view were put on the agenda. The following quote illustrates the scope between different issues on the agenda, from day to day decisions to important life decisions about contacts with mother and father.

> I had seen the agenda before and I had written about what I wanted and what I didn't want to have on the agenda. I wrote that I wanted to talk about that I wanted a computer and that I didn't want to meet my mother. I would also like to know where my father is and then I don't remember any more. Those issues I wanted on the meetings were discussed there /…/ I think it is good with meetings and I think it is just right with meetings once or twice a year (Rickard 11, years old).

But there were even those who felt uncertainty about the agenda and the aims of the meetings.

> Before the meeting Stina talked to me and I don't remember if I wrote in any documents. I didn't understand why she wanted to talk to me, but I think it was because she wanted to use what I said in the meeting. I should have been better if she had given me some more information. She had difficult questions and use so long words. I wished she would have explained a bit more (Teo, 11 years old).

One girl was very upset because the agenda was sent to her foster parents but not to her. Another child got a 'shock' when a chairperson appeared asking her about what she wanted to talk about at the meeting.

> I sat there as big question mark. I didn't know what he knew about me (Sara 17, years old).

Motives and feelings

Independent of their feelings and attitudes nobody wanted to abstain from going to the meetings. There could be good reasons for being there to express a wish, listen to what the adults were talking about or to get

information about the future. One reason could be to go there for the adults' sake.

Go there to express my wishes

Teo describes how he was able to get influence on the agenda:

> We went through the agenda. They asked me if I got on well at school and they asked me about my health, then I don't remember any more. And about contacts with other important adults, and things like that. I had seen the agenda before and I was allowed to write what I wanted to put on the agenda and what I didn't want to talk about there. Those issues I wanted to talk about came up at the meeting /…/ It is good with meetings and I think it is just right to meet once or twice a year.

Go there to listen

One young boy with negative experiences of his own meeting and with negative feelings against the social services ("soc") was thinking of going to another meeting just to listen on what they were saying, but he had decided not to contribute himself.

> I don't want to go to meetings like this, then I prefer to stay at home. But I think I would go there if there will be some. But there is nothing I want to initiate, I would just sit there and listen and answer a lot of questions.

Go there because they make decisions

To go to a review meeting could mean that you get information about important things concerning answer on your questions on when you could go home to mum and dad or move to an appartment of your own.

> It is good with these kind of meetings for children. Because then can they hear more about – that they can go home (Sune 8 years old).

The children were satisfied when they got tangible answers and when the decisions were clear. A couple of youth with long contact with the social services could make comparisions in relation to former routines.

> This review meeting was good because things were decided. It was never like that before /…/ otherwise it is only drivel (Barif 16 years old).

Go there for the adults' sake

It became apparent that there were differences in children's and adults' perceptions of what took place during the review meetings. The children's descriptions were, in many cases, more critical than those of the adults.

One girl, talking with a great deal of scepticism about the adults' kindness and attempts to turn towards her as the most important person of the meeting, didn't think that the meetings gave her anything. She went there because of the adults' will. She had however no suggestions on how to make changes.

> I think it is okey as it is, but you just look upon it as something you go to (Liselotte, 14 years old).

These categories of motives are in line with the findings of David Schemmings (1999) in a survey on child participation as part of the child protection conferences. He describes participation in these contexts as complicated ways of human interaction. When we are invited to take part, we intuitively consider how we will behave – if we should go there to a) "see" what happens, b) be seen, c) hear what happens, or d) be heard. These four variables can be combined in 16 different ways. Children themselves most often stated that they attended these conferences mainly because they wanted to listen to what was said.

Different levels of participation

In accordance to Shier's model we found that most of the children experienced that the adults listened (level 1), but we also got examples of the opposite. Adults talk *to* children but not *with* them: "I say something, but it is just like air which swish past" says Johanna 17 year old and continues.

> It isn't difficult to get space, but the difficult thing is that you have to be so tactical, I think that is hard work. You have to talk in a special way, you have to turn around the sentence in a special way and refine what you say very much. If you use a more sophisticated language – then there is a possibility that it could come into their heads (Johanna 18 years old).

Level 2 and 3 were reached in some cases when the children felt supported by their social workers or other important persons in their network. Oskar, 11 years old, is one of those who felt supported by his social worker:

> Anne use to ask a lot of questions and she writes what I say. I will answer on such documents. It is good /…/ Anne listen to what I think, but I don't remember if we have talked about goals. I can participate in decision – making. I don't know much about how Anne can decide but I think she make good decisions. I am the one who decides most at the meeting. It is good. If my mother doesn't want the same thing as I want - then we have to think it over until we meet next time. Once I said that I wanted to start going to ice hockey, but my mother would't, but now I don't want to play ice hockey any longer, so it is okay. And my mum, she is there and participate in the decisions when she is at the meetings.

A few of the youth were involved in decision making (level 4). Nobody reached the highest level where adults and children shared power and responsibility for decision-making.

Experiences of the independent chairpersons and the social workers

Interviews with independent chairpersons demonstrated that they were positive towards their assignment. They wanted this method of eview Meetings to be disseminated throughout their own authorities and among other municipalities. They were very familiar with the aim of Review Meetings and, for the most part, in agreement on the application of the method.

> It is important to give the child possibilities to control their future just a little bit. What is actually going to happen? Do I have a chance to say what I want? And…yes, I think it could be developed much more, but it is worth its weight in gold.

The chairpersons stressed that their role is to focus on the child, be a spokesperson and look after the rights of the child. In a majority of the cases the chairpersons felt that the meetings had been good and worthwhile. A review meeting can make it obvious for the child which adults who are present to give help and support. The meeting can help

the child find some control and can if all goes well help the child to get back some of the self esteem, which they have deprived. Difficulties could appear when there were hidden or open conflicts which affected the atmosphere in the meeting or if the child was shy and quiet.

Even the social workers were very positive towards having an independent chairperson to lead the meetings.

Discussion and conclusions

Despite the adults' good intentions, small details can appear that have been missed or omitted regarding the preparations and during the actual meeting, which can affect the child's attitude towards and willingness to participate in review meetings. It became apparent that there were differences in children's and adults perceptions of what took place during the review meetings. The children's descriptions were in many cases, more critical than those of the adults. The method demands a lot of sensitivity on part of the adults concerning the feelings of children and the way in which they express their interest in various stages of the processes involved in planning and reviewing. The adults' attitude, thoroughness, vigilance and respect for the children are of decisive significance for the achievement of the objective of strengthening the position of children.

The chairperson of the review meeting has an important job to do in striking a balance between the formal and the informal, to "make space" for children and parents so that the meeting is not dominated by professionals, and to ensure at the same time that the meeting is run systematically and strictly (Kendrick & Mapstone 1992).

We agree with Chris Davies (1992) who recommends a dynamic and active planning process and warns against making the planning work into an administrative procedure. There is a tension between the approach to follow-up and assessment as a process and as a single event concentrated on the review meeting. Andrew Kendrick and Elisabeth Mapstone (1992) describe evaluations as complex phenomena, which is in line with our experiences. Reviews have to include the processing of written and verbal information, identification of the needs and problems of individual children, planning for the utilisation of resources, and the creations of relations and a climate which make it easier for professionals, parents and children to contribute. They have to satisfy both legal and administrative requirements, while at the same time involving both children and parents in close co-operation. This presupposes a combination of formal and informal attitudes and strategies.

Although certain deficiencies were observed, our conclusion is that, through BBIC, the framework and scope that is created for the child's participation and involvement in planning and decision making provides the preconditions to strengthen the position of the child in accordance with the aims of the Social Services Act and the CRC. Through this method every child is guaranteed to be involved in assessments of the care every sixth month. The child is consulted, has the opportunity to express her or his views and, if all goes well, participate and also exercise some influence in important planning and decision making processes that affect them. The interviewed children have not levelled particularly hard criticism at the actual working method itself but rather the people applying it. Children's knowledge, experiences and way of thinking and acting present adults with the opportunity to learn a great deal from the meeting with children.

Legislation and the CRC both contain inherent tension between the child's right to protection and social support and the right to participation. There is a good reason to reflect upon the criteras for reaching level five in Shier's model of pathways to participation. Is it possible or even desirable, at least for the youngest, to reach this level within the context of child welfare? As Gunvor Andersson (2000) has expressed it:

> In social work with children it could be especially urgent to balance and nuance the concepts in use so that social workers can offer children more participation in social work without giving them more responsibility for their life situation (page 183).

The results of our evaluation are very much in line with those of the British research. Possibly the experiences of the swedish children are a bit more positive than the British.

In the context of child welfare, the interpretation and application of the CRC is complicated. However, one important conclusion is that the child's right to express her or his views is an objective that has to be given diverse meanings in different situations and that should also be realised in different ways. For example the child's age, maturity and previous experiences are important aspects to be considered. Social workers therefore need, in relation to every individual child in every given situation, to consider and carefully reflect on the child's best interest and on the significance of the child's right to express his or her own views. It is worth remembering that children in the care of social services are confronted with considerably greater demands for their participation in

decision-making that will affect their own lives and their own everyday existence than is the case for children in general.

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