

Caring for the carers of asylum seeking and refugee children

Caring for unaccompanied minors – the challenges

- Caring for unaccompanied refugee children can be challenging and stressful (Kidane and Amarena 2005)
- The children's life experiences can be far different from our own
- Diversity in culture, religion, understanding and views of the world, family, community, expectations – all may be different to ours

The challenges (continued)

- Some may have experienced violence, torture, fears, poverty
- Children having to deal with loss and separation, the vulnerabilities of being in a new and strange country

The issues in caring

- Range of complex needs to meet, resources and funding not always there to meet needs
- Immigration issues affecting the services and support offered
- Future outcomes can be uncertain, which creates anxiety and concerns and ...

The issues (continued)

- Knowledge about the needs of asylum seeking and refugee children and best practice is still developing and ever changing – offering new changes and challenges to how we support these children

Possible effects on caring

- Both positive and negative
 - Can be an isolating experience
 - Impossible task, out of control, what's the point?
 - Can be seen as a challenge
 - A learning experience
 - Rewarding and satisfying

Risks to caring

- Burn-out
- Secondary trauma
- Becoming emotionally involved
- Loss and separation

Burn-out

A state of physical, emotional
and mental exhaustion
caused by long-term
involvement in emotionally
demanding situations

(Pine, Aronson and Kafry 1981)

Secondary trauma

People who work with or help traumatised people are indirectly or secondarily at risk of developing the same symptoms as persons directly affected by the trauma
(Perry 2003, Cairns 2005)

Factors that can increase secondary trauma

- Empathy – feeling the pain, having to deal with others who are traumatised
- Having unresolved personal trauma
- Having experienced a traumatic event
- Being isolated
- Having insufficient recovery time
- Lack of support

(Cairns 2005, Kidane & Amarena 2005, Perry 2003)

Indicators

- Impairment of everyday function bringing about changes in behaviour, e.g.: avoidance, decreased use of support and networks, lack of self-care
- Feelings of anger, tearfulness, fearfulness, unexplained changes in health, sleeping patterns, eating habits, physical illness

Indicators (continued)

- Jumpiness, nightmares, hyper-vigilance
- Carers can switch off to the child without knowing
- Losing confidence, self-esteem, detachment

Caring for carers

What can be done?

- By the organisation you work for?
- By you?

By the organisation...

- First, can acknowledge the difficulties faced by carers, by valuing, respecting and supporting carers in the work they do as part of the continuum of care for asylum seeking and refugee children ...

By the organisation (continued)

- Second, they can do as Cairns (2005) suggests and provide:
 - training, support and supervision
 - professional development opportunities
 - opportunities for formal & informal support
 - psychological support, when required

By you...

- Looking after yourself
- Opening up and talking to someone about it
- Exploring and identifying the problem
- Examining possible solutions
- Identifying your support network
- Recovering a work–life balance