

CFCI Summit

Session documentation

This document summarizes the key topics, insights and next steps arising from the CFCI Summit held from 15 October 2019.

Track:	Participatory Cities
Title of session:	Child Rights Ombuds person
Date and time:	Wednesday, 16. Oct. 4pm
Facilitator and resource persons:	Dr. Sebastian Sedlmayr, Linda Zaiane, Dominik Bär Garry Bevel, Alfa Jóhannsdóttir, Daniela Krenzer, Gerison Lansdown
Name of rapporteur:	Linda Zaiane, Dominik Bär

Main topics and ideas discussed:

Gerison Lansdown gave an **introduction** and background to the topic from a child rights perspective:

General Comment No. 2 by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child gives a strong view of the importance of these ombuds institutions. Their mandate consists of several tasks:

- raise awareness on CR
- monitoring of CR
- child rights advocacy
- bridge between policy makers and children
- individual complains and investigations

Why do children need specific ombudspersons? Children cannot vote and have no lobby like other groups. But public service is important for children and they are more vulnerable to the impact of policies. The aim is to have effective mechanisms to hold governments accountable.

Role of children's commissioners at local levels in comparison to national level: more accessible for children, closer to the children, reach out effectively to children, facilitate better decision-making on the local level.

Literature: Championing Children's Rights (UNICEF Innocenti research center)

Presentation by Garry Bevel (Jacksonville): "With all Odds"

- Independent from Government means financial resources should mainly come (from other than governmental sources (like foundations and NGOs)
- Broad power to investigate, Centre for Children's Rights established to investigate cases
- Resources are a challenge

Goal 1: Right to be respected, valued and treated fairly: See the Girl (Leadership program), Expanded Human Rights Ordinance (LGBTQ), Hope Pipeline Project (CCR). Ombuds office works in cooperation with policy centre that employs victims of human trafficking.

Goal 2: Right to be heard: e.g. CFCI in North America Expert Group Meeting in Jacksonville, Lead

Letter: How can we empower youths? Listen to them! Development of key strategies “in a place where people matter”

Goal 3: Right to participation in social services: Baby friendly hospital, rights respecting schools, system of care framework (e.g. juvenile justice, recreational, health, educational, social services)

Goal 4: Right to be safe: Human trafficking, stigmatizing, bullying

Goal 5: Play, leisure, family life: Attractiveness of the city

Panel Discussion

Different situations in the three municipalities:

- Alfa (Akureyri in Iceland) welcomes every child born, informs in the kindergarten about child rights, has a child friendly office and child friendly opening hours. Problematic is that children are often asked to participate when it is too late.
- Daniela (Frankfurt, Germany): Children's office is an own department of the city administration. So well equipped with own funding (only one in Germany), but lacks statutory power and so depends on policy changes. The office is largely independent in terms of advocacy activities but not regarding reactions to individual complaints.

Federal Association of Local Institutions for Children's Interests (www.kinderinteressen.de; 50 members) has standards for the representation of children at the local level. Ombudspersons is one of four areas covered by the standards. The standards require that they are independently funded, take individual complaints and have some sort of statutory power.

- In Akureyri (Iceland) the ombudsoffice is funded by the local government and secured through CFCI action plan (made with children)
- Jacksonville: One ombudsperson and researcher work at the office in a city of 1 million inhabitants

Is there an annual report?

Frankfurt has biannual reports on special topic; this year for example on how children are treated in kindergartens and which decisions they can make.

Iceland: first wellbeing report at national level this year

Jacksonville: No report yet but starting with one

How do children know about the ombuds office?

Frankfurt: city-wide campaigns and projects in schools and kindergartens e.g. annual children's concert, programs for educators and parents on child protection.

In Jacksonville ombudsperson Garry Bevel goes a lot to schools, children also know about him through social media

Q&A

Question about the **mandate of ombudsperson in comparison to social workers** in schools. If a single child has a problem, they do not find the way to a central office. So social workers are in each school. Is an ombudsperson still needed and what for?

- If the responsibility is too wide, some things might get lost, like children's rights. A specific focus is necessary to have one person with an oversight on the situation of children in the municipality and tasked to guarantee meaningful participation of children.
- Frankfurt is in the process of setting up an ombudsperson: They are asking children, what topics they would discuss with the ombudsperson. These are quite different from typical social work

issues. Moreover, independency is crucial to challenge the local government (there might be cases also against social welfare offices). This is missing in the case of social workers.

How could an ombudsperson help pupils fighting for their rights to participation regarding decision making in schools?

- Garry Bevel works with school leadership councils to facilitate trainings to teachers and teacher awards to honor teachers who use good practices.

What is the relation between a local and a national ombudsperson?

- In Iceland the national ombudsperson has more power to follow up cases, not possible for local ombudsperson who can just bring the case to local government

- Referral function of ombudspersons in Iceland and by now also in Jacksonville

Cooperation with other institutions?

Yes, is absolutely necessary, e.g. LGBTI advocacy groups or groups representing children from vulnerable/marginalized communities. Intersectionality is needed in advocacy work for children's rights.

Key insights, good practices and lessons shared: *Please describe the main insights and lessons shared during the session, including those shared during the discussions and group work.*

Groupwork:

1. Which added value does a ombudsperson for children bring?

- One designated Office/person children can turn to
- One person to coordinate child rights work
- one institution to gather data/see the bigger picture
- complaints can be directed against social services, so specialised independent office is needed

2. How could you go about establishing an ombuds office?

- Function is more necessary than having a specific person in the beginning, job description would be useful
- Selection: appointed or voted?

3. What mandate should ombudsperson have?

- Individual complaints, go to court
- Child Rights Advocacy, use media and press
- Qualification needed: Law degree and skills in relation to social work
- Analyse patterns concerning what is a stressor for children
- Determines how our society is looking at children
- Responsible for translating the CRC to local level, Youth consultation is necessary
- Review the legislation to check if laws are child friendly
- Networking/cooperation with regional and national institutions
- Guarantee participation of children in urban planning/development