



FINNISH OMBUDSMAN FOR CHILDREN

Fact for Minors. Fostering Alternative Care
for Troubled minors

Rome 2.-3 December 2016

Ombudsman for Children



- The work of the Ombudsman for Children based on:
 - UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC, 59/1991 and 60/1991)
 - Act on the Ombudsman for Children (1221/2004)
 - Government Decree on the Ombudsman for Children (274/2005).
- Since 2015, the Office has operated under the Ministry of Justice.
- **Tuomas Kurttila**, Finnish Ombudsman for Children

Duties of the Ombudsman

- Tasks defined in law:
 1. Monitor the welfare of children and youth and the implementation of their rights
 2. Influence decision-makers from the viewpoint of children
 3. Maintain contacts with children and youth and convey information received from them to decision-makers
 4. Convey information concerning children to professionals working with children, decision makers and the public
 5. Develop cooperation between actors concerned with child policy
 6. Promote the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

- Three main areas of activity:
 1. assessment and monitoring
 2. promotion and development
 3. networking and communications
- The Ombudsman reports annually to the government on the welfare of children and youth and the implementation of their rights.
- The report provides an assessment of the realization of children's rights, the development of the welfare and living conditions of children, and any shortcomings in the related legislation.
- An important task is to convey the opinions of young people to decision-makers. These are recorded using surveys and reports and by personal meetings with children and youth.

Assessment of political decision making and promotion of child perspective

- In carrying out lobbying work, the Ombudsman assesses pending government projects from the perspective of the UN Convention.
- E.g. The office of Ombudsman for Children provided the Prime Minister's Office with an assessment of the programme of the new Government.
- The Ombudsman has been particularly concerned about deepening child poverty and emerging signs of in-sufficient realisation of children's equality in welfare services, for example.
- Ombudsman for Children (Report 2015):
Awareness of the UN CRC as a legally binding human rights agreement should be enforced at all levels of public administration in Finland, as well as among labour market organisations and businesses.

Proposal for the Ministry of Social Affairs (LAPS/16/2016):

Proposal for research on hearing the children placed in out-of-home care

- The Ombudsman of children has paid attention to the hearing of children and young people placed in out-of-home care, young people placed in reform schools in particular.
- According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC, 59/1991 and 60/1991) children should be entitled to express their opinion in all matters concerning them. Children's views should be taken into consideration. This includes children and young people placed in reform schools.

- In Finland there are several established surveys for monitoring the views of children and young people – but no regular, systematic instruments for hearing young people placed in reform schools.
- Young people placed in reform schools live under particularly vulnerable conditions, and failure to take their views into account when planning the services aimed at them can be harmful in the long run (for the young people themselves and for the society).
- The Ombudsman has stated that we need to explore children and young people's perspective to the practices implemented in the everyday life of reform schools, as well as the role of these institutions in the wider context of young people's lives.

Motivation for supporting the Fact for Minors project

- The interest in promoting the rights of young people placed in reform schools
- On-going co-operation between the Finnish Youth Research Society and the Ombudsman for Children
- Need to reconsider the position of reform schools in the Finnish child welfare structure, and the practices implemented in these institutions has been further underlined by the current reforms in the Finnish organization of social and health care.