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Human Rights Without Frontiers Int'l

WORLD: Democracy, Rule of Law and Human Rights

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UNITED KINGDOM

Children taken into care: why are the figures rising?

Record numbers of families are having court cases brought against them to remove their children because of factors like abuse and neglect. We look at the data and ask why are the figures so high?

The Guardian (11.04.2013) - Today the number of applications for [children](#) to be taken into care has hit a record high according to the [Children and Family Court Advisory Service \(Cafcass\)](#).

An application comes from the local authority when a child or children are thought to be in such serious danger that a court order is needed to remove them from their family. A single application can be made for one or more children in a household. The local authority application goes through to Cafcass and the courts.

If you compare the applications to previous years you can see that 2011/2012 is already clearly higher than any time in the last 4 years in England:

In total, between April 2011 and January 2012 Cafcass, received 10,199 new applications - 10.8% higher when compared to the same period last financial year

What can these figures tell us about the way the 1989 Children Act is being applied? An answer to this comes from Anthony Douglas, Chief Executive of Cafcass:

Agencies are working more quickly to ensure that children are removed from deeply damaging households where many have been for some time and are showing a lower tolerance for poor parenting. What we are seeing is an elimination of drift in neglect cases and a greater recognition of the appalling impact of neglect can have on children. Nearly every child involved needs love, care and therapy, either back home or elsewhere. All agencies need to factor in these much larger increases into their planning systems, resource allocations, workforce development strategies and service contracts, so that the most vulnerable children in the country continue to receive strong public services.

So quicker assessment and better awareness in care professionals of the damaging effects of leaving a case goes some way to explaining the increase in applications.

Another view is expressed by the Guardian's [Patrick Butler](#) who [considers](#) the "[Baby P effect](#)", but he also echoes Douglas' point about the reasons children go back into care:

Most children who go into care do so as a result of concerns that they are being neglected, not that they are at risk of physical violence or sexual abuse. The increase in applications, say professionals, reflects a greater appreciation of the impact on children of parental neglect, emotional abuse and domestic violence.

We have gathered [statistics](#) from the Department for Education showing regional breakdowns of children at many more stages in the care process in a [Google spreadsheet](#), along with the latest Cafcass figures.

What do you think? What have we learnt since the Children Act and what do these figures

tell us about society at large?

UNITED KINGDOM

A family who escaped to a happy ending

What is the problem with Britain's social workers?

The Telegraph (30.03.2013) - Last week, news reached me that there was yet another distraught mother who had fled to Ireland to prevent her three children being seized for no good reason by British social workers. Although the family have been living there for four years, with the children all doing well at school, the mother had just been arrested for failing to have a valid tax disc by the Irish police, who confiscated her car and held her in a police cell for nine hours.

When she was finally released at 7pm on a wet evening, 40 miles from home, she got back to find that the police had broken into her home by smashing a double-glazed window. They had removed various items, including a mobile phone. Much worse, Irish social workers, apparently after consultation with their British counterparts, had picked up her children from school and taken them, "traumatised", as she was told, into foster care.

There are few things odder about our social workers than their response to the ever-rising number of parents who try to evade their clutches by fleeing abroad. As I have often reported, they seem prepared to stop at nothing to get the children back to Britain. Just occasionally, however, their zeal is foiled, as in the case of the family (pictured, above), who now live in the West Indian island of St Vincent.

It is now 14 years since Debbie Paterson, brought up in London by West Indian parents, was left, after a brief unsatisfactory relationship, with a baby son, Kymani. When she then happily married, the boy grew up looking on her husband as his father. Despite attempts by various judges to set up contacts with his biological father, Kymani got to the point where he did not want any further contact.

In 2010, however, one judge decided to involve Islington social workers in trying to re-establish contact. In April 2011 another, Mr Justice Roberts, said that he was so "unimpressed" by Debbie's reluctance to co-operate with their arrangements that he invited the social workers to consider applying for a care order on the boy. The response of Debbie and her husband was immediately to fly off with their son to start a new life in St Vincent before any application could be made.

In December 2011, Debbie returned to London to clear up her affairs and dispose of their old home. She was summoned before a High Court judge, Mrs Justice Parker, who demanded to know Kymani's whereabouts. When Debbie refused to tell her, the judge sentenced her to 12 months in prison for contempt of court.

In the summer of 2012, while Debbie was still in Holloway prison, the social workers discovered where Kymani had escaped to, and two of them flew out to St Vincent to track him down.

They asked the disbelieving 12-year-old whether he would like to return with them to live in foster care in Britain. They approached the similarly disbelieving headmaster of the school where Kymani was now a prized pupil, and then tried to elicit the support of the local social workers. They could not understand why on earth such a well-looked-after boy should be of any concern to social workers from Britain. After the social workers returned home, they even offered to fly the boy's biological father out to St Vincent to see if he could persuade the boy to come back to London.

Debbie, on her release after seven months in Holloway, rejoined her husband and son in St Vincent, where Kymani is now in the "gifted and talented" class of his secondary school. The family could not be happier in their new life, supported by the stepfather's work in the building trade, and a case that must have cost a sizeable sum of public money is now closed - which is why the family can be named and their story told.

The question that remains, as in so many similar stories I have reported here, is this: how is it that our social workers can seem so determined to travel abroad, to remove children from loving parents by whom they have never been harmed, to put them in the care of strangers back here in Britain - at a cost to the taxpayers that, with the very considerable fees paid to foster carers and teams of lawyers, can eventually run to hundreds of thousands of pounds?

A full and proper answer to that question would tell us a great deal about how and why our "child protection" system has gone so bizarrely off the rails.

Some activities in 2013

HRWF Int'l mentioned in the report of the US Department of State on Freedom of Religion or Belief published this week. See <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/#wrapper> and click on Japan

Fact-finding mission in Bucharest about social hostility towards yoga groups (8-16 May 2013)

Co-organizing a conference about "Unprecedented Repression against Religious Minorities and NGOs in Russia" at the United Nations in Geneva (29 April 2013)

Organizing a conference at the European Parliament to launch two reports: "Freedom of Religion or Belief World Report" and "Freedom of Religion or Belief Prisoners List in the World" (23 April 2013)

Author "La Fecris, la liberté de religion et les droits de l'homme" in "Réveil du Religieux, Eveil de la société", edited by Dominique Kounkou & published by L'Harmattan, Paris, pp 107-113 (2013)

Fact-finding mission in Israel (9-14 April 2013)

Author of "Die Geschichte von Jehovahs Zeugen in Belgien" (History of Jehovah's Witnesses in Belgium), pp 19-52, published in Jehovah's Zeugen in Europa, Geschichte und Gegenwart, Band 1, 736 p, edited by Gerhard Besier/ Katarzyna Stoklosa, LIT VERLAG W. Hopf, Berlin, 2013

Presentation of a paper at the hearing of the European Parliament Intergroup on Minority Languages about bilingual education in Greek kindergartens held in Strasbourg (14 March 2013)

Collecting testimonies of North Korean defectors in Seoul by one of HRWF experts on North Korea, Dr Aaron Rhodes (3-5 March 2013)

Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review of China on the forced repatriation of North Korean defectors (4 March 2013)

Publication of an article entitled "EU-China Relations: Constructive Engagement" in The Parliament Magazine, Issue 363, p 38 (18 February 2013)

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