

PROJECT TITLE: MONITORING STANDARDS IN CHILDREN HOMES

Goal:

To establish screening and monitoring structures for the protection of children in care homes

Objectives:

- To deter wrong or unlawful practices by staff
- To provide training of staff for best practice
- To monitor and supervise telephone calls
- To set up recording system

Background and Rationale:

Children's homes play an important role in providing care for children who fail to thrive in their families. The Social Affairs Department is mandated to safeguard and ensure the safety and security of children in care. Monitoring activities that take place in children's homes are essential in ensuring that the environment is safe for the children and staff.

Presently, Social Services and other partners are required to investigate child protection concerns for children in care. This may involve a member of staff who might have allegedly hurt a child. It can relate to numerous instances whereby a situation has been handled inappropriately, leading to a child being hurt or at risk of being hurt. Presently, investigations into allegations or suspicions of harm against children are difficult to monitor due to a lack of concrete evidence.

In 2017 Social Services hosted a workshop on the introduction of standards monitoring in Children Homes and Foyer de la Providence and Foyer Nazareth were identified as the two homes to be included in the project. Three main standards have been discussed as priorities.

First is the training of staff. In house training of staff is essential in equipping staff with the right tools and skills to work with and meet the needs of children in institutions. Furthermore, through training, staff will learn how to handle situations swiftly without having to fully rely on Social Services' intervention. Moreover, training should be well structured and integrative so that all staff at different levels, with different learning skills can benefit.

Second is the need to improve security and surveillance of children in the homes. Therefore, the installation of technology devices such as cameras used as monitoring tools in the homes has been proposed. This will also assist in monitoring the care that children receive when staff members are not present. Abuse, misbehaviour or inappropriate behaviour and even false accusations will be recorded. Not only will this alert Social Services but the information gathered can be used as evidence, as grounds for disciplinary action.

Within ethical boundaries, recording telephone calls inside care homes will help with monitoring the wellbeing of children. In the past Social Services has received cases whereby parents and other people made contact with children inside the homes even when they were not authorized to do so. Therefore, with the proposed introduction of recording telephone calls if a parent or relative attempts to make unauthorized contact with a child who had been removed from their care, necessary actions can be taken against them. The homes will also have evidence of any threatening, inappropriate and illegal communication from people outside and inside the homes. Knowing that their calls are being recorded might deter individuals from contacting children inside the homes if they do not have the permission to do so.

Third is the introduction of record-keeping. Staff in Children Homes is expected to keep a number of records of activities. There are specific types of records that should be maintained in the homes, such as, administrative records that are meant to demonstrate effective management and good practice. Accident book, sanctions book and a medical record book are examples of records that fall into this category as well. Staff should also keep a record for their unit which may include a log book and handover book. Furthermore, individual reports on children in the homes should also be well detailed and available. Recording in a children's home is very important, therefore, clear guidelines and procedures on how to keep records should be established.

Hence, all staff working in homes will have to know and follow the procedures. These procedures should clearly state:

- The purpose of the different records used in the homes
- The content of the different records
- How the different records are connected to one another

There is a need to introduce monitoring tools to ensure that children in homes are under permanent surveillance. Moreover, training staff to better keep records and equipping them with the skills to better deal with situations within the homes will also contribute to maintaining standards.

Description:

The Social Services will oversee the implementation of this project in two homes: Foyer de La Providence and the Foyer Nazareth. Information and guidance from Security Firms and Telecommunication Companies will be required. This project entails open surveillance technology which will include CCTV, cameras, emergency light outside and sensors. Training is also needed in the management of the surveillance system. The project has been conceived in three parts:

- The first part includes identifying a security and telecommunication company for advice on the appropriate equipment suitable for the two institutions and arrangements for the procurement of the equipment.

- Part two will involve training of staff to improve their skills for working with children, managing the information gathered from the surveillance system, and keeping records.
- Part three will focus on assessing compliance to the standards and evaluating the monitoring system in the provision of information to protect children.

Budget Narrative:

The estimated cost of the project is SCR 300, 000 and it will include:

- Purchasing CCTV equipment, Cameras, telephones and alarm systems
- Payment for installation of these monitoring devices
- Monitoring and upkeep of the devices
- Training for staff by different partners

Expected Outcomes

- Safe, secure and protective environment for children in care
- Staff complying to child protection standards

Performance Indicators:

- Level of compliance to the standards
- Reduction in the number of child protection issues
- Improved practice in the care and protection of children