

ANGUS COUNCIL**SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE 14 January 1997****REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK****ASSISTANCE TO ROMANIA - PARTICIPATION IN THE SOCIAL EXCHANGE****ABSTRACT**

This report informs the Committee of the assistance to Romania provided by a number of Scottish Local Authorities, through The Romanian Orphanage Trust and their Social Exchange Programme. The programme is supported by the Association of Directors of Social Work. The Committee is being asked to agree, in principle to Angus Council's participation in this programme, subject to further exploration of the exact nature of assistance to be offered. There are no costs involved to the Council.

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Committee:

- (i) Notes the contents of the report.
- (ii) Authorises the Director of Social Work to explore Council's participation in the Social Exchange Register in more detail with a view of joining the Social Exchange Register.
- (iii) Report to the Committee on the progress of the Council's participation in the Social Exchange Register at a later date.

2. ASSISTANCE TO ROMANIA PROVIDED BY LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND OTHER PUBLIC BODIES

The political events in Romania in late 1989 resulted in Western Europe becoming aware of the appalling conditions in which many children lived. Members will recollect the harrowing pictures which appeared on television and in the media. These victims of the previous regime became known as "Ceausescu's children". Many countries in

Western Europe, and beyond responded to requests for assistance. A number of local authorities and voluntary agencies throughout Britain offered assistance to Romania. Initially the focus was on practical assistance.

In 1991 the focus changed to developing the quality of child care services in Romania. Staff in residential units had little understanding of child care methods, the conditions in many units were appalling, especially in those caring for children with disabilities. Few children left care to return to the community and there was a continual flow of new admissions. The latter has in fact continued due largely to the poverty which grips the country.

British social work staff were recruited to work in children's units and to attempt to introduce adoption and fostering practices to Romania. Some of this work was undertaken through the Romanian Orphanage Trust.

In 1994 the Romanian Government decided to embark on formal, recognised social work training. Social work and related training had been banned by the previous regime in the early 1960's.

In conjunction with the University of Glasgow, Strathclyde Appeal Trust designed and launched a course in social work training which was recognised by the Romanian government. This involved staff teaching in Romania and providing study trips for Romanian staff to Scotland.

Strathclyde Appeal Trust and The Romanian Orphanage Trust have also sponsored and established a Romanian Child Care Agency, Pentru Copiii Nostri (For our Children). This is now the largest child care organisation in Romania and is recognised by the National Government. This has provided a good basis for future development.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

At the present time Social Work education and training has been reintroduced to Romania, courses are being provided at Universities and the qualifications have national recognition; Romanian social work teams under Pentru Copiii Nostri operate in seven counties and in Bucharest. It is hoped to increase the number to 9 counties in the very near future and ultimately to cover all counties (judets) and the 6 districts of Bucharest. This has been requested by the Romanian government. These teams will focus on fostering, support to vulnerable families, prevention of reception into care, improved practices in children's homes etc. Each team requires the ongoing support of at least one British social worker.

The Romanian Orphanage Trust and Pentru Copiii Nostri has established small units for children, staffed by trained personnel with the objective of preparing children for fostering or return to their families or to the community. Many initiatives are at a critical stage of development. They will require the input of British knowledge and expertise.

All is not positive however. The drive towards a capitalist, market-led economy is having a dramatic effect on social conditions and living standards. Romania is now enduring unprecedented levels of unemployment, galloping inflation, the erosion of living standards, removal of subsidies on rent and fuel, the loss of the Soviet market and in general a major increase in poverty and vulnerability. Allegedly there are now more children in care in Romania than there were under the previous regime.

The needs are as great as ever but now at least the plan and structure for child care system is largely in place.

There is however a major concern that the new local authorities may be unable to release staff as required and host the Romanian delegations which come to Britain to study our systems and to learn from our experiences. The Association of Directors of Social Work is encouraging all new local authorities to continue essential input and support. (A letter from the Secretary of ADSW is appended).

To maintain and develop the services and approaches established to date, The Romanian Orphanage Trust will require input from British social workers, to work for up to twelve months at a time in Romania, residential staff to advise and improve standards, more senior staff to assist with policy development, training (especially management training), senior staff to promote criminal justice services relating to children etc. Technical assistance is required on many fronts. There is an urgent need to establish day care services, mother and baby centres, assessment procedures etc.

The Romanian Orphanage Trust is establishing a Social Exchange; a register of authorities and individuals willing to assist when and where they can. Councils throughout the UK will be asked to join the Social Exchange Register.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no cost implications for the Council. If a volunteer social worker is found to be able to participate in the Social Exchange Register, the secondment could be treated as part of the departmental savings exercise for the year 1997/98.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Sound links have been established between Romania and Scotland. Scottish local authorities and universities have made a substantial contribution to the development of professional childcare education, training and practice in Romania, following years of neglect in this area.

There is a continuing need for further assistance, and the Romanian Orphanage Trust, through the Association of Directors of Social Work is requesting new Councils to join the Social Exchange Register. Assistance is required in terms of secondment of staff and hosting of study visits to Romanian staff.

Social workers seconded to work in Romania usually undertake a six to twelve month contract. They go on unpaid leave of absence and The Romanian Orphanage Trust covers the cost of their accommodation and subsistence in Romania. There is no direct cost to any local authority other than the loss of staff service for up to one year.

More senior staff are requested to go to Romania for periods of perhaps one to three weeks to undertake specific tasks. Again there is no cost to the local authority.

A period of secondment to Romania presents a valuable opportunity for staff development, which will in future enhance the skills and experience of the participating staff members.

W B Robertson
Director of Social Work

MK/AC

Note: No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information), were relied on to any material extent in preparing this report.

APPENDIX

Mr R R Winter
 Secretary
 Association of Directors of Social Work
 Strathclyde House 4
 3 India Street
 GLASGOW G3 4PF

Dear Bob

ASSISTANCE TO ROMANIA

As requested I represented ADSW at a meeting convened by the Romanian Orphanage Trust on 26th September 1996. Attached is a paper presented at the meeting which outlines progress to date. There have been many major developments, eg. the reintroduction of social work education, the establishment of a Romanian Child Care Agency, Pentru Copiii Nostru (For our Children), Child and Family Service Teams in 7 countries and a request from the Romanian Government that this be increased, this year to 20, introduction of fostering and the possibility of closing a children's unit, the production of a National Action Plan for Children which will lead to legislation. A number of social work departments throughout the United Kingdom, but particularly in Scotland, have supported such major initiatives by seconding staff, hosting study visits, enabling senior personnel to work in Romania on a short term basis etc. Many members of ADSW have been directly involved.

Such developments are now at a critically important stage. The opportunity has been presented to firmly establish child care services in Romania. Assistance and support is now even more essential as clearly stated in the attached papers.

The Romanian Orphanage Trust is in receipt of a number of requests from the Romanian government for such assistance. To ensure that a co-ordinated response is made and that scarce resources and skills are used to maximum advantage The Romanian Orphanage Trust has established a Social Exchange Unit. The intention is to:-

- (i) Draw up lists of local authorities and individuals therein who are able and prepared to assist in various ways, eg Social Workers seconded to Romanian Child and Family Teams for 6-12 months; senior staff to assist with the design and organisation of management systems, specialists to develop residential and day care, special needs provision, fostering, juvenile justice etc.

- (ii) Pursue the possibility of authorities or groups of authorities "adopting" specific counties in Romania to ensure continued support. A "twinning" process.
- (iii) Co-ordinate requests received from the Romanian government to ensure that assistance is planned and phased appropriately.

Our colleagues in the Association of Directors of Social Services have also undertaken to encourage members to support the work in Romania and in other Eastern European countries. We anticipate that this will be pursued at the ADSS Conference in October 1996. I have established links with ADSS to ensure a joint approach and response.

For ourselves in ADSW I would request that copies of this letter and attachments be circulated to all our members with a request that they notify yourself if they are interested in assisting