

# **Securing the child's best interest for unaccompanied minors living in group homes**

**A case study on how the child's best interest is understood and implemented by street-level workers in Sweden**



# Abstract

This study focuses on the part of the policy process called implementation. Theorists like Lipsky (1980) and Rice (2012) assign the street-level bureaucrats a major role in this process. The street-level bureaucrats of object in this study are personnel on group homes for unaccompanied minors. Since the children do not have anyone else to look after them, it is the welfare states responsibility to secure them their best interest. The group home personnel are the last link of this process, and it is through them the children experience the practical policy delivery.

A important part of translating a policy into practice is the implementers understanding of the policy. By interviewing group home personnel it has been possible to shed light on the meaning they assign to the policy, hence the values they base their implementation of it on. The results from the empirical material show that the child's best interest in practice is based on values characterized with warmth, good intentions and respect. It is evident, from the results, to see that the group home personnel have an important role in the implementation of the child's best interest principle.

*Key words:* The child's best interest, policy implementation, street-level bureaucrats, unaccompanied minor asylum seekers, group home personnel

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Problems to be addressed

The situation in our surrounding world makes people leave their homes in search for a better life somewhere else. For various reasons, families even send their children abroad with the hope of creating a better future for them. Many of the children that arrive in Sweden have travelled a long way. Recent years, the asylum seeking minors has come from countries such as Afghanistan, Somalia, Eritrea, Syria and one substantial group are also stateless people (Migrationsverket, 2014a). The number of children arriving to Sweden without a parent or legal guardian in 2013 reached 3852 of which 668 were girls (mail conversation with Jonas Doll, Migration Board). Children are usually placed in group homes where varying numbers of children board, with the group home personnel (GHP) present twenty-four seven. The GHP usually play an important part of the newly arrived minors everyday life (as we will see) and one of their main tasks is to make sure that the child's best interest (CBI) is prioritized. This is stated both in the UN Convention on the Right of the Child and in national laws (SFS 2001:453). While it is clear that the CBI should be prioritized, the definition of the principle is to a great extent left out. This leaves a gap for interpretation for the GHP who implement it. In the absence of a parent or a legal guardian, the responsibility of the GHP to safeguard the CBI becomes even more important. Therefore the GHP is the main focus of this study. This focus enables an examination of what the CBI principle actually can mean in practice, understand the process of translating a policy into practice and what role the GHP have in this implementation process.

## 1.2 Purpose of the essay

The object of analysis is the street-level bureaucrats (SLB) which in this study refer to personnel working in group homes for unaccompanied children. Implementation theorists like Lipsky (1980) assign SLB's a major role in the implementation process of a policy due to their discretion. The policy to be implemented is the CBI principle. The policy is somewhat vaguely defined, leaving the practical implementation in the hands of the SLB. The general theoretical purpose of the study is to contribute with knowledge about the SLB role in the implementation process on a practical level. In order to study this, the empirical aim is to examine how the policy on the CBI is understood and implemented in practice by personnel working in group homes for unaccompanied

children. This enables me to answer the empirically important question of how the CBI can be defined in practice.

RQ: How are group home personnel for unaccompanied children working to secure the child's best interest? How do group home personnel for unaccompanied children perceive and implement the child's best interest principle?

What role do the street-level bureaucrats have in the implementation of the child's best interest?

Studies are deficient on the subject, specially relating to practical application of CBI. By examining this in regard to unaccompanied children, I hope to contribute with knowledge on what the concept can mean in practice. Since the legal document already exists, it is after all in the carrying out of the policy that it comes alive and real for the affected children.

## 2 Background

### 2.1 Unaccompanied children in Sweden

In Sweden unaccompanied children are defined as children under the age of 18 that is separated from their parents or responsible adult at the time of their arrival to Sweden (SFS (1994:147) fifth section in §1). The definition is similar to the definition used in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, §1) and by the EU; “third-country nationals or stateless persons below the age of 18 arrive[ing] on EU territory unaccompanied by a responsible adult, or are left unaccompanied after they have entered EU territory” (COM(2010)231 final). The Swedish definition has been amended and persons up to the age of 21 can be regarded as children. The purpose of this amendment is to expand the possibilities for welfare service provided by the municipalities until the child is better prepared to become self-sufficient and active on the labour market and in the society (SFS (2010:197) and prop. (2009/10:60). In this study, the above mentioned definitions of an unaccompanied child will be used with the inclusion of the Swedish amendment. However, children under the age of 14 will be excluded due to the fact that the interviewees, hence the GHP, included in this study work with children who are 14-21 years old. In order to make the text a bit more nuanced, this group will be referred to as unaccompanied- children or minors.

The phenomenon of children arriving to Sweden without a parent or responsible adult is not new. However for several reasons the phenomenon is a current topic. One of the main reasons is that the number of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers has increased during the last years. Worldwide the number of unaccompanied children was more than 15 500 in 2010, and in Sweden the number of unaccompanied minors has steadily increased during the last decade. During this time period the majority of the unaccompanied children have been boys. In 2000, 350 of which 150 were girls arriving in Sweden. In 2013, the total number had increased to 3852 unaccompanied children. 668 of them were girls. Since 2000, 21 032 unaccompanied children have arrived to Sweden (UNHCR (2010) and mail conversation with Jonas Doll, Migration Board). The increase has resulted in an international as well as a national interest for the phenomenon of unaccompanied children. One example of how the matter is addressed on the international level is the EU who is working toward a common migration policy based on new formulations in the Dublin convention, allowing reunification with family members on a more generous basis. The new formulation derives from a broader definition of the term family (based on the best interest of the child) (Nya Dublinförordningen). On the national level, two changes in the Swedish law on migration have recently entered into force. The first regards the unaccompanied



minors increased possibilities to receive a permanent permit in Sweden due to new formulations in the law on aliens (SFS 2005:716) based on the child's health and best interest. The stipulation in the law of what is required for granting a child a permit is not as strict as regarding adults (SFS 2005:716), chapter 1, 10§ and chapter 5, 6§). The second change in the Swedish law on migration can be seen as a direct response to the growing number of unaccompanied children arriving to Sweden. New formulations in the law regarding placement nowadays make it possible for the Migration Board to place children in all municipalities, hence regardless of whether a particular municipality has an agreement with the Migration Board on receiving unaccompanied children or not. From the 1st of January 2014 all municipalities therefore share the responsibility of receiving unaccompanied children and providing important welfare services to these minors, such as a place to live, a school to attend and health care (SFS 1994:137, 3§ second paragraph and statements by the Council of Legislation in relation to SFS 1994:137).

## 2.2 Previous research on the subject

That the phenomenon of unaccompanied minors is a current topic becomes evident by the upcoming number of studies and reports focused in the topic. Some of the studies and reports give the unaccompanied minors a voice by investigating how the minors have experienced the reception of them in Sweden (Söderqvist, (2012)), and the possibilities for them to start a new life in Sweden (Hessle, (2009)). Both the unaccompanied minors and the GHP have been the focus of other reports. Through a study representing an example of "best practice" in Härnösand it has been possible to spread gained knowledge in Härnösand to other municipalities (Rosenberg et al, (2012). Knowledge gained from such studies is not only useful for knowledge sharing, but also for the further development of the reception of unaccompanied minors.

The legal status of unaccompanied minors has increased. Other studies related to unaccompanied children are taking a political science direction and includes investigations of policies affecting this group. One of those policies is the CBI principle which includes the child's right to take part in decision-making processes affecting them. The perhaps most important one, of which the Migration Board is in charge, is the one which concerns whether the child will be allowed to stay in the new country or not. A report made by Lundberg (2009) focused on the CBI principle in the asylum process. The result shed light on the complexity to integrate the CBI principle into the case workers investigations and provided several suggestions of how to decrease the gap between policy and practice. The report shows that in order to realize the CBI principle much effort is needed (Lundberg, (2009). The Norwegian researcher Engebriqsten (2003) used the similar focus in her study "*The child's – or the state's –best interest? An*

*examination of the ways immigration officials work with unaccompanied asylum seeking minors in Norway*". The study specifically focused on family reunification and the main conclusion was that the CBI was interpreted or turned into restricted domestic immigration policy rather than taking the aspect of the child into consideration. The study can be seen as an illustration of how the meaning of the CBI is contextually dependent and socially constructed. A third study on unaccompanied minors and the asylum process was made by Olga Kaselman (2013). Her study focused on the child as an active actor and the result, once again, shed light on the difficulty in merging the policy into practice. This time it was due to uneven power dynamics between the investigator at the Migration Board, the interpreter and the child, where the power lies with the two former. The interpreter becomes a key actor in the conversations and several examples showed how the interpreter did not interpret the stated word, thereby excluding the child from the conversation. It also showed how the investigator did not take charge over the conversation and assured the child's right to participate as an active actor. Previous studies have shed light on the complexity of translating the CBI into practice in regard to the asylum process. This study will make an attempt to investigate how personnel working on group homes for unaccompanied children translate the policy into practice. Concretization of the CBI is an important step in the implementation process and knowledge about the CBI can contribute to a more fruitful implementation process.

# 3 Theoretical approach

## 3.1 Implementation research

Implementation research "seeks to make sense of this space between government intention and policy outcome" (Smith & Larimer, (2013:149). By referring to other researchers, according to Smith and Larimer this is the core definition of implementation. The task for the implementers is to translate a policy into reality. In order to do that they first have to figure out what the policy makers' intentions are and secondly come up with a way to execute the intention. This is often a more complex task than it sounds due to for example contradictive laws, the number of actors implementing it and limited means. The list of obstacles can be made long, in the end the implementation process plays an important role for whether a policy will be successfully implemented or not (ibid, 2013:149-152).

Smith and Larimer writes about what Goggin detected as three generations of implementation studies. The importance of implementation was brought into light by different case studies that focused on policy failure. The main findings of the first generation of implementation studies "hinted that a systemic understanding of cause and effect in implementation might be possible" (ibid. 2013:150-155). This laid a ground for a theory on policy implementation. For example one conclusion to avoid policy failure, which is interesting for this study, was to "cut down on decision points and push control and authority downward to allow those closest to the project to make important decisions quickly and effectively" (ibid, 2013:155).

Theorists within the second generation, such as Bardach (1977), Mazmanian and Sabatier (1983) and Lipsky (1971, 1980) focused on explaining implementation with more systemic factors, such as what perspective to take when studying implementation – centre, periphery or target group, or on taking a top-down or a bottom-up perspective (ibid. 156-161). A top-down perspective take a policy focus, where actors on a central level is viewed as the most important variable for policy success, since they are the ones steering policy outcome. The point of departure for a bottom-up study is rather on the implementers and the target group. Bottom-uppers recognize the implementers' behaviour as a crucial variable for both policy success and for the whole policy process (Matland 1995:146-150).

The third generation of implementation studies focused on testing the different theoretical perspectives developed by the second generation. However, this was a complex achievement, far more complex than testing a framework with a specific perspective. The third generation failed to answer the question of how implementation processes work which seemed to result in a dead end for

implementation studies. As Mier argued, the third generation's "frameworks and empirical models were reflecting the complexity of implementation rather than actually explaining it" (Smith and Larmier 2013:162-167, citation from p. 167). However, researchers and theorists continued to study implementation, some are still positive about the previous paths of implementation studies such as Lester and Goggin (1998) and Winter (1999) who, in accordance with Lipsky, focused on the individual implementer and her/his behaviour. Others were taking a more negative view, and called for a new path for implementation studies. They are taking the field of public policy to another level by borrowing ideas from other fields such as public administration. For them, the quality of public management is a key variable determining if a policy will be successfully implemented or not. Smith and Larmier build on Goggin's three generations and call these last trends for the upcoming fourth generation of implementation studies (ibid. 165-169).

### 3.2 Street-level bureaucrats and policy implementation

As the discussion in the previous section shows, implementation studies are an ambitious undertaking and can take different focus. I recognize that the policy chain is far more complex than only to focus on one perspective, however this study makes no attempt to understand and explain the whole policy process of the CBI principle. The different approaches can be useful when explaining different parts of the implementation chain. The possibilities for unaccompanied minors to get their best interest secured are in the hands of the welfare state. Unaccompanied children experience the implementation of the CBI directly through the welfare workers, hence the SLB have considerable impact on the unaccompanied minors lives. This study is influenced by the bottom-up approach when answering the research questions. According to Sabatier, with a bottom-up approach, it is possible to detect local variation in the execution of implementation, which is likely to be the case between the different group homes included in this study. However, the bottom-up approach often emanates from a social problem or phenomenon rather than an already existing policy. In this sense the top-down approach has also influenced the study, since the policy of the CBI is already put in practice. One of the main critics of the bottom-up approach is that it overstress's the local actors' and forgetting that the structures they work in is set by policy makers on a higher level (Sabatier, 1986:21-44). This is a valid point and my intention is to show my awareness of the policy level and that this creates norms and structures which the welfare workers act within. However, the main focus is not on the policy per se, but rather on the perception of the implementers and the process of implementation.

The street-level bureaucrat framework put forward by Lipsky (1980) is based on the assumption that policy implementation comes alive in the interaction

between the SLB's (carrying out the policy) and the target group (recipients of welfare services). Two main reasons behind this argument are addressed by Lipsky 1) the level of discretion for the SLB and 2) their "autonomy from organizational authority".

SLB is considered to have relatively high freedom to act on their own since the nature of their work often requires them to do so. It is of great importance that the policies enable the SLB to make professional decisions based on individual circumstances of the service recipient (Lipsky, 1980:13-16). Welfare workers decisions for what is in the best interest of the child, regarding housing alternative and most appropriate health care for the minors for example, can only be determined in the interaction between the social worker and the individual unaccompanied child. If the CBI was pre-determined in more detail by the law, the discretion of the social worker would decrease, and affect the welfare service provided for the unaccompanied minor. This leads us to Lipsky's second argument, where the SLB in relation to the organizational authority or management has some autonomy. The organizational authority or management and the SLB are interdependent of each other. In order for the SLB to stay employed, she/he is required to comply with the superiors principles. At the same time, the possibilities of the superiors to interfere with the SLB job performance is limited due to the nature of their job tasks which require discretion. And since Lipsky argues that there is no guarantee for all SLB to agree with the higher level, rather the opposite, their autonomy can have an influence on whether the policy is implemented in line with or contradictive to the policy makers intentions (Lipsky, 1980:16-25).

Lipsky stresses that the actions taken by SLB is influenced by the structures they work in. A few of the organizational structures discussed by Lipsky is the management/bureaucrat relationship, recourses, the organizational goals, administrative workload versus interaction with clients. Another structure is the bureaucratic categorization of clients versus the SLB role as advocates to secure the clients their individual rights, which Lipsky argues sets the frame for the bureaucrats' behaviour. Lipsky continues his argument by addressing the SLB individual and subjective response to the organizational structures constraining their job performance. Routines are made to cope with the structures while performing well at work. It is possible to understand the bureaucracy behind the SLB job performance, by examining these routines and the SLB individual reaction to the structures (Lipsky, 1980:27-86). Reducing their discretion, hiding behind constrains of the rules or laws or creating own meaning of the goals of their job performing, are some examples of how this can be manifested in practice (ibid. 81-156). In this aspect Lipsky has some similarities to new institutionalism, when arguing not only for the impact of the structures on policy delivery but also when arguing for the individual actors' impact on policy delivery. Anthony Gidden's theory on structuration is an attempt to link the two levels. The bridge between the two levels is in what he refers to as the dualism of structure. Structures can both enable and restrict individual interaction as well as individual interaction creates and changes the structures. The institutions defining the structures will appear as everyday action. By focusing on what understanding and

what activities the GHP attach to the concept of the CBI it will be possible to get an idea of the institution of the CBI (Barley and Stephen, 1997:93-103).

A recent attempt to develop Lipsky's implementation theory is Rice's (2012) so called micro-institutionalist theory on policy implementation, which is partly based on Giddens theory on structuration. She suggests a broadening of the classical SLB framework in order for it to be more applicable on today's policy context of decentralization. The new context encourages local authority and SLB to implement national policies in line with the national policy goals by having greater influence on policy implementation (Rice, 2012:1039). In Sweden, this trend has been a reality the last 150 years since the municipalities' autonomy was introduced in 1862, enabling local actors to influence the developments and politics in their local community (Berggren, 2013:7-32). As a second feature of today's policy context that the welfare workers operate within, Rice discuss the new orientation of welfare services that increasingly aims at activating people to become self-supporting (Rice, 2012:1039). In Sweden we can find these policies applied on many areas, but interesting for this study is integration policies. By means such of language training and expanded possibilities to enter the job market, the integration policy is very much focused on reaching integration (Regeringen, 2014). Therefore it might be possible to see similarities between these integration policies and how the CBI is implemented in group homes for unaccompanied children. Rice argues that the welfare workers that implement these policies have a great influence on what activation means in practice due to the decentralization.

By adding sociological institutionalism she presents a theoretical model which emanates from the notion that "all social reality begins with individual human action" (ibid, 2012:1041). How the human action is expressed depends on the nature of the institution;

"institutions are ideas about the world that arguably come into being through the aggregated and increasingly standardized interactions of people. Once created, institutions then give meaning, purpose, and direction to human interaction in a particular type of situation but thereby also restrict the action patterns that are relevant, appropriate, or even permitted in that type of situation" (Rice, 2012:1041).

Individual institutions are embedded in larger institutional societal systems (economic, political, social and cultural) and when a change occurs in the systems so do the individual institutions. To use the CBI as an example, when the UN principle of the CBI is implemented into Swedish laws (political system), the status of the child will increase regarding child investigations. Furthermore the institution of child investigations will change and result in the welfare workers putting the CBI in the centre of every decision (instead of the parents' situation for example). Rice emphasizes the relation between the bigger societal systems and the individual institutions affecting individual action.

The welfare state as a political institution comes alive when the welfare workers implement national laws and guidelines into practice in the interaction with welfare service recipients. The interaction between the welfare worker and the welfare recipient is in turn determined by the 1) individual-, 2) organizational-

and 3) systemic context surrounding the specific institution. Within the individual context, it is the role of the welfare worker as well as the role of the welfare recipient, or how the welfare workers view the recipient that determines the welfare service provided. How the welfare workers identify their professional role within the institution as well as their level of education and experience are examples of aspects that can influence the role of the welfare worker. The recipients knowledge of their right and ability to express themselves along with the welfare workers view on how “deserving” the recipient is of a service, are examples affecting the role of the recipient. Turning to the organizational context, the interaction between the welfare worker and the welfare recipient is constrained by the organizational politics (laws and regulations), the organizational economy (recourses in terms of finance, staff and material), the organizational culture (mentality) and finally the social relations within the organization. In regard to the systemic context, Rice argues that there are even bigger aspects (or in her wording environments) that shape the organizational and individual contexts; namely the social, cultural, economic and political environments that exists on a national or even an international level. All these contexts and aspects shape and influence the actions of welfare workers. It is through these institutional settings the SLB get an idea of how they can and should act. Due to the decentralization and the welfare workers room to act on their own when implementing a policy, the SLB also have the power to form and change institutions through their aggregated actions. As already noted, Rice emphasizes the relation between the bigger societal systems and the individual institutions affecting individual action, in similarities with Giddens.

The actions taken by the welfare worker is also dependent on the welfare workers relation to the policy. As noted by Lipsky and Rice, this could depend on the extent the workers agree with the policy and her/his ability to implement it, however Lundquist adds a third important aspect in his model of the characteristics of the SLB’s, namely the welfare workers understanding of the policy. Understanding refers to the extent to which the welfare worker understands what actions are expected by her/him from the policy and the policy makers as well as the SLB ability to interpret the policy. Their understanding of the policy is closely linked to how the policy is formulated, if it is formulated in an unclear way, the welfare worker might act in what they believe is a correct way (Lundquist, 1992:69-86). Due to the vague definition of the concept of the CBI, this aspect becomes an important part for this study. In order to examine how the CBI is implemented, it is important to study how the SLB understand the policy.

I am therefore interested in what the CBI means to GHP for unaccompanied children. According to Wagenaar (2011), in order to understand social phenomena – such as the CBI – interpretive policy analysts are interested in values and beliefs. It is in people’s values and beliefs their understanding and meaning of a social phenomenon can be revealed and understood, furthermore “meaning influences people’s behaviour” (Wagenaar, 2011:4). What meaning the GHP attach to the CBI influences how they act in order to implement it. There are different types of meaning and different ways in finding out the meaning of a phenomenon. In accordance with the traditional hermeneutics the meaning of a

social phenomenon is the aggregated collective understanding of numerous individual subjective meanings. This way, in order to understand the bigger picture or structures the interpreter needs to understand the local/individual/subjective part of the bigger picture, and vice versa. The beliefs, values and experiences of individual GHP express in the interviews regarding the CBI paint a picture of what their inter-subjective meaning of the concept is. This will explain their actions when implementing the policy. As much as the meaning the GHP assign the CBI influences their behaviour, the CBI as a policy is also a result of people's values and beliefs. To understand their inter-subjective meaning, one needs to have an understanding of the policy as well. This way of grasping the social world is referred to as the hermeneutic circle and is somewhat similar to the structuration theory put forward by Giddens as well as the micro-institutionalist theory put forward by Rice (Wagenaar, 2011:40-52).

### 3.3 Applying the theories

The implementation theories discussed in the theory chapter tells us that there are several reasons to focus the analysis, of how the CBI is secured and implemented on local level, on the SLB. This study emanates from Lipsky's (1980) theoretical assumptions about the SLB discretion. How they make use of their discretion in practice is coloured by both individual as well as structural contexts surrounding them. Both Giddens and Rice (2012) emphasize how the two contexts are linked together by the assumption that the actors' interaction is both constrained/enabled by the structures they work within as well as the individual interaction also produces and changes these structures. Since there is a lack of studies, a lack of knowledge within the research field on what the concept the CBI means in practice, I will not be able to answer whether the practical meaning that the GHP attach to the concept changes the structures. A first step is rather to investigate the practical meaning of the policy. By using the theories discussed in this chapter, the aggregated individual understanding of the policy and actions taken (due to that understanding) by GHP, it will be possible to arrive at the practical delivery of the formal policy of the CBI. By examining the individual context elaborated by Rice and include Lundquist's dimension on understanding as well as the hermeneutic meaning (at least to some extent), it will be possible to answer the research questions. Both the empirical research question on what the policy means in practice and the more theoretically oriented research question on what role the SLB have regarding implementation. The theories are therefore used as a means to answer the research questions.

The vaguely defined principle of the CBI expressed in both international and national policy documents, leaving the practical implementation in the hands of the SLB, is yet another reason to focus the analysis on this particular group. The GHP need to create routines for coping with the policy. To include the structural context, that influences the GHP's discretion and create structures for what rules



and norms the GHP have to relate to when implementing the policy, the analysis will start off with a description of the policy. The policy is one of the main factors influencing the SLB behaviour. A description of it can contribute to an insight to what it is they are supposed to implement and how (if) the policy level can guide the SLB in their implementation work. Furthermore, it will also make it possible to demonstrate if there are any similarities between what is stated in the policy documents and the SLB understanding and implementation of it. In that sense it will be possible to link the two levels, at least to some extent.

## 4 Method and material

### 4.1 Methodological considerations

This implementation study will focus on how the SLB implement the CBI principle. One important part of the implementation process is how the SLB understand the policy. As stated in the theory chapter, this is in turn closely linked to how the policy is formulated. The policy formulation influences the SLB's understanding, hence influencing how a policy is implemented on a local level, in practice. A first step in answering the question is to elaborate on the policy formulation. This discussion, what Rice (2012) refers to in her theory on micro-institutionalism as the systemic institutions, can be explained by using existing written material. It will be based on first hand sources such as formal international and national reports as well as laws and other policy documents.

However, in order to conduct a study of the social world, the experience of individual persons is the primary source for knowledge. The aggregated experience of individuals can make us better understand the social world (Wagenaar, 2011:43, 47). Therefore, a second step is to ask the SLB about their understanding and how they implement the policy in practice. One part of the SLB understanding and implementation of the CBI is to examine what Rice (2012) refer to as the individual institution or context. In order to get an understanding of the existing individual institutions amongst the welfare workers, interviews are required. This is because there are no written sources of how they see their role and how they view the unaccompanied children. For example, what level of education and experience the GHP have may to a certain extent be possible to find out in other ways than in dialogue with the SLB, however I am interested in their views and thoughts about the level of education since it can provide a better understanding of how it may affect the welfare service provided as well as the individual institution. These are all value opinions and in order for me to get an idea on how they are expressed, I need to interact with GHP for unaccompanied children, consequently interviews are required to answer the research question.

For a qualitative study of this range it is not possible to include all actors implementing the CBI. It would be of value to also focus on how the Migration Board, the social services, and so on is working with this principle, and it has to some extent been done (for example Lundberg (2009)). These actors would also fit the theoretical description of a SLB, however the choice to focus this study on GHP is mainly due to the lack of previous research with a focus on this perspective. I would also argue that the other actors are acting within structures that to a greater extent limits their discretion and hence limits their possibilities to

act in line with their understanding of the CBI, than GHP. The main task for the Migration Board is to investigate the child's situation and make a decision whether she/he can stay in Sweden. Those decisions are to a great extent affected by laws that the case workers are obliged to follow. The social services main task regarding unaccompanied children is to investigate and find the most appropriate type of placement which is constrained by the existing placement alternatives. GHP are of course also constrained in their prosecution of what they believe are the best for the child. However, I would argue that the more "systematic" decisions affecting the child are the responsibility of other actors (whether they get to stay in Sweden or where to live) while the GHP have a greater possibility to use their discretion to affect these children's everyday lives. In their daily interaction with the children, they get an idea of in what ways different factors affects them, and are in a position to build an idea of what is best for these children in their everyday life. They can use their discretion to form structures in accordance with their understanding of what is best for the child based on their experience from the everyday interaction. GHP are therefore an important actor to focus on when studying how SLB implement the concept of the CBI. With their knowledge they can contribute to a better understanding of it.

For the interviewees to match the sampling criteria set up, they need to either have a manager position or work as GHP for unaccompanied children. This, in order for them to have the knowledge required about the profession and the work place to be able to answer the interview questions (May, 2011:141). Therefore only experienced personnel have been interviewed, excluding temporary staff. The managers included in this study have years of experience and answers the questions by referring to their current position as well as experiences from previous positions. Due to their position they can provide a steering perspective and give a better overview of the whole organization regarding several group homes. The GHP can instead contribute with a more in dept and detailed perspective of one specific group home. Throughout the study, both categories will be referred to as GHP, with some exceptions in the analysis where they are separated.

In order for the study not to be gender blind – only look into how GHP at group homes for only boys or only girls implement the CBI - I found it important to include group homes for both sexes. Since unaccompanied girls are a minority within this group, they were not as easy to access. After some research I found out that the majority of unaccompanied girls placed in group homes lived in the central region of Sweden. I also contacted group homes in the southern part of Sweden. Another way to get access to interviewees was to talk to contacts, both working in the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) and amongst friends. Two of my interviewees were found this way. They were contacted by email and by phone and in order for some to accept I also send the interview guide.

Due to ethical reasons, everyone that was approached was informed of the purpose of the interview. Not only by clarifying the aim of the study but also by stating the role of the interviewees, their willingness to participate can be positively impacted (May, 2011:141). When you feel confident about the topic in

question you are more likely to agree to participate in an interview. One reason for the majority of the requested interviewees to accept to participate could be that within this field of work the CBI principle is widely recognized. Another possible reason for accepting the interview could be that the requested people work at group homes where the CBI is something they work quite actively and consciously with. For the same reason others may have declined, even though the main official reason for declining was lack of time. This adds on to the more general characteristics of a qualitative case study – the result is not to be generalized due to the non-representative data (Gerring, 2006).

This leads us to the link between the purpose and the number of interviewees. The purpose of the study is not to generate generalizable results but rather to contribute to an understanding of the implementation process in regards to how SLB understand and implement the CBI. The information gained from the interviewees will make it possible to do just that. The quality of in depth interviews is prioritized over making this a large N study. Due to the qualitative aspects of this study, their answers are not representative for all GHP working with unaccompanied children (Gerring, 2006).

Anonymity is yet another important and related factor for a study using people as the main source of information. For ethical reasons, information about the interviewees as persons as well as their work place is treated with anonymity. This is something the interviewees have been informed about at an early stage and hopefully it has contributed to an open communication where the interviewees feel comfortable about their statement. This is true for both managers and personnel, but I can imagine it to have a greater impact for the GHP who's statements in this aspect also will be anonymous toward their managers. With all this in mind, revealing words such as names of cities and places is therefore replaced with a neutral word in the transcription. In the analysis section the interviewees is referred to as numbers; Interviewee 1 and so forth. Below, some short information about each interviewee and what type of homes they work in are stated:

Interviewee 1: Personnel at a group home for unaccompanied asylum seeking boys

Interviewee 2: Manager for two group homes and training apartments for unaccompanied boys

Interviewee 3: Member of the Board of Management for group homes covering the whole placement chain as well as homes for only girls, only boys and homes for both sexes

Interviewee 4, 5 and 6: Personnel at a group home for asylum seeking girls and boys

Interviewee 7: Manager for group homes covering both homes for unaccompanied girls and boys with a residence permit and living in training apartments

As stated in the theory section, the practical implementation depends on in what context a policy is implemented. A potential implication for including samples representing more than one placement alternative (see the list above) is therefore that the understanding of the policy and furthermore the implementation

of it varies. The children's situation looks very different depending on where in the process they are and affects the interviewees understanding of the examined concept. The different placement alternatives are divided into where in the process the children are. The first stop for unaccompanied children who have arrived in Sweden is so called transit group homes for newly arrived unaccompanied children who have not yet got a more permanent placement. The second stop is group homes for asylum seekers, the third stop is group homes for unaccompanied children who have received a residence permit and the last stop is training apartments for young adults soon expected to be self supportive (Munier, 2013). The interviewees included in this study cover all these alternatives (except the first one) and that can have implications for their understanding of what is best for the child. It can be expected that some aspects of what is best for the child is probably independent of where in the placement chain the child is, however, the needs might look very different for a child waiting for a residence permit and a child who already received one. Depending on what the target group are in the different group homes, the GHP's understanding and implementation of the CBI may differ. This aspect will be followed up in the analysis.

Family homes, as an alternative placement form, where a child boards with a Swedish family (often a young girl) or where the unaccompanied minor get to stay with relatives living in Sweden (Munier, 2013) are excluded from this study. This is due to the simple reason that the focus of this study is the GHP at more institutionalized placement forms for unaccompanied children, who are subject to the law on Care for Children and to the Social Services Act.

So far I have discussed the target group and the target groups' role and how they can contribute to the result. As much as the interviewees naturally influence the result, so do I. One aspect related to my role for the result is the hermeneutic view on meaning. When examining what meaning the GHP assign to the CBI, my role is to in Wagenaar's wording reconstruct meaning (Wagenaar, 2011:46). In an attempt to answer the research question one part of my role is to detect the personnel's understanding of the CBI from the information they give me through the interviews. In this sense, my interpretation will colour the result.

My pre-understanding of the topic can contribute to more accurate interpretations of the GHP's wordings. In this regard it is important for the interviewer to be somewhat familiar with the topic and the wordings used. Through my internship at SALAR where I worked in the project *Unaccompanied children – Support for locally and regionally development* (SALAR) I was introduced to the topic in a more in depth way and I got the chance to learn more about it from actors on different levels. The knowledge gained from the literature review for this study has also contributed to my understanding of the topic and hopefully this pre-understanding is helpful when identifying what structural matters the interviewees are describing in their own words during the interviews.

If the aim of the study required me to ask questions about the interviewees' personal lives, my age, sex and ethnicity would play an important role in regard to what extent the interviewees would be able to identify with me and feel comfortable enough to give a thick description of their private matters. For this study, the personal connection to the interviewee is less relevant since I have a

different focus – the interviews dealt with work related issues and in excess of this, all interviews gained approval from the management. For the purpose of the study, it is on the other hand still important to not neglect the environment in which the interviews were conducted. All interviews were held at the interviewees' work place and four out of seven times in group homes for unaccompanied children. To see the environment in which the policy is implemented enabled me to add an extra sense of reality to the information gained from the interviews (Wagenaar, 2011:45).

The complexity of the concept of the CBI principle is yet another important aspect influencing the results of this study. Due to its complexity, it is somewhat difficult to isolate the welfare workers actions as an effect of the concept. Many other factors can have an influence on their actions and how they structure their work in the different group homes. The information from the interviewees might show that the work is structured in line with what is best for the child. However the reason behind this structure might not depend on the policy or formal external guidelines stating how it should be implemented. One intention behind a policy can be to influence people's way of thinking about an issue and present something the practitioners should strive for. One way to measure this is to examine how aware the welfare workers are about the concept and examine the reasons behind their actions. Therefore, one part of the interviews focused on the welfare workers knowledge of the concept expressed in relevant laws and regulations. A stronger indication for the welfare workers awareness is if this awareness has resulted in internal guidelines or if they are structuring their work in line with external guidelines and regulations. If this is the case, then it would be possible to say that the actions are an effect of the concept. Adding to this, if the interviewees' understanding of the concept is similar to each other as well as the common understanding corresponds to the guidelines, it would be possible to say that the actions are an effect of the concept.

As for the result per se, this study makes no absolute true claims. As stated by Wagenaar "[i]nterpretive explanations do not deal in truth and falsity, but in plausibility – always under the provision that this particular explanation is not exhaustive and that at any time a better one might come up. But for the moment, this one will do as an adequate understanding of a complex, open-ended and indeterminate policy situation" (Wagenaar, 2011:47). This citation illustrates that when conducting a study of the social world, any truth claims are impossible to make. Due to the complexity of the social world, the researcher need to choose a theoretical perspective, colouring the results of the study. As just mentioned, the researcher herself also influences the study since the author will influence both the chosen research topic as well as the results by her/his interpretation of the social world.

My intention is on the other hand to examine how the CBI principle is secured by SLB regarding unaccompanied children. By concretizing the policy, it will be possible to get new knowledge about what the CBI can mean in practice and how SLB implement the policy. This knowledge can be useful for policymakers who are interested in how the policy is understood and implemented, which is an important part of to policy delivery. Without necessary making aspirations to

complete the hermeneutic circle by suggesting policy improvements, policy makes can get an idea of the practical implementation and if not satisfactory; guidelines, models and work procedures might need to be further developed. A greater understanding for the practical meaning of the policy can also be useful for the implementers in this regard. Furthermore, this study can also contribute to a greater understanding of implementation theories. For example, if the result shows the importance of the street-level workers discretion in securing the child's best interest, it might be possible to generalize Lipsky's assumption, despite the qualitative nature of the study.

## 4.2 Conducting the interviews

The intention is to get an insight to the GHP's point of view, how they understand and view the principle of the CBI and how they work with this question. With this specific focus in mind, the interview guide consists of themes and questions related to this purpose (Bryman, 2001:314-320). The themes and questions are both based on the main notions pointed out in the theory as well as on empirical knowledge; (1) how prioritized the principle of the child's best interest is, (2) understanding of the child's best interest, (3) the child's best interest in relation to other laws, regulations and structures, (4) structures on the group home/s, (5) the role of the personnel and (6) personnel (including education) (see appendix 1). The intention behind this is to first steer the interviewees to give me relevant information that enable me to answer the research questions and secondly to be able to use the theory and relate the analysis to the theory. Thirdly, the interview guide can help me to not forget important parts while conducting the interviews. The interview guide was readjusted only to a limited extent along the way.

As the previous section reveals, on the interview scale between controlling the interviewees (by asking everyone the same specific questions not leaving room for elaboration and nuances; using structured interviews) to not controlling the interviewees (using the more open interview form called unstructured interviews), this study is positioned somewhere in between when having the characteristics of semi structured interviews (May, 2011:131-139).

Six of the interviews were conducted at the interviewee's work place whilst one was a telephone interview. They were 35-90 minutes long, only two of them were shorter than an hour. The interviews started off with me asking the interviewees to make a short presentation of the group homes. The intention of starting with some general information was both to get the conversation going, making the interviewees comfortable and also give me some information I could return to at a later stage. All themes in the interview guide were discussed during the interviews, not necessarily in the same order as in the guide. The emphasis was on making the interviewee elaborate on their thoughts and experiences.

### 4.3 Method of analysis

All interviews were recorded in order for me to focus on the interview, following up leads and giving the interviewee full attention. Tape recording was also important for the coming analyzing of the data. To process the data collected from the interviews, a first step was to transcribe them all into written texts, enabling me to get a good overview of the content as well as enabling other people to take part of the collected data (Byrman, 2001:321-323). Already during the hours of work with the transcription, notes for the analysis were taken. A second step was to read through the data and mark the parts relevant for the research questions, however, this does not mean that other parts was never read again. On the contrary, I went back to the original texts after sorting the relevant data up into themes, which was done as a third step of the analysis process. The GHP's understanding of the CBI is one example of such a theme. The themes made it easier to get an overview of each part subjected for analysis. In the analysis part of the study the results from the interview is stated and analyzed in relation to foremost the research question, the policy level but also to the theories.



# 5 Analysis

## 5.1 Analytical framework

The purpose of the analysis is to shed light on the meaning the GHP attach to the CBI principle and what role they have in the implementation process. In order to understand how the SLB secure the CBI one part is to examine what influences SLB's understanding of what is best for the child. I emanate from the theoretical assumption that different factors influence SLB's understanding and hence affect how SLB act in order to secure the CBI. The systemic context as well as the individual context that Rice (2012) describes is examples of such factors. The layout for the analytical section is therefore based on Rice's theoretical assumptions and is divided into two main parts 1) systemic context and 2) individual context. The first part will examine one of the main systemic aspects affecting the SLB's understanding of the CBI, namely how this concept is explained on a policy level – both internationally and nationally within domestic laws and guidelines. The SLB have to relate to those in their work with unaccompanied children and in that sense policies steer SLB's understanding of it as well as their actions. The first part of the analysis will continue with how the GHP view the policy and how economic resources and external actors influences the GHP's discretion to implement what they believe is in the CBI. From this part of the analysis it will be possible to above all, see how these factors enable or restrain the GHP's discretion to implement the policy but also, to some extent, what understanding they assign the CBI.

The second part of the analysis will focus on the individual institutions. In accordance with Rice (2012) theoretical assumptions of what influences policy implementation, the SLB's educational background, the role of the GHP as well as the role of the target group will be examined. Due to the empirical information gained through the interviews, a fourth aspect will be added to Rice's original three; the dynamics within the work force in regard to cohesiveness. By examining these four aspects the intention is to elucidate what meaning the GHP assign the concept and how they work with the implementation of it. By using descriptive examples, the meaning which they assign to the concept will be brought into light. The empirical material will also shed light on the GHP's role in the implementation process.

The analytical section will end with a summarizing part containing the results of the two previous parts. This part will include a model where I map out the different understandings attached to the concept of CBI and the actions taken in order to secure the best interest for the unaccompanied minors.

## 5.2 Formal structures influencing the street-level bureaucrats

### 5.2.1 The child's best interest on a policy level

The structure is determined by many different aspects, for the range of this study one such aspect will be elaborated. In order to conduct a study on how the concept of the CBI is understood and implemented on a local level it is essential to get an idea of how it is formulated on policy level. Below follows an outline of how the CBI principle is formulated on UN-, EU- (structural context) and national level as well as in guidelines (organizational context). Except for the national policy formulation, resources will also be one aspect dealt with regarding the organizational context. The section will continue with the GHP's thoughts and own experience of how these aspects influences GHP's possibility to implement the CBI in accordance with their understanding of it.

What the CBI might mean in practice varies due to the context in which it is to be implemented. The different situation the child finds itself in is of course a determining factor when investigating what the CBI means in practice. As much as it is bound to the child's situation it is also bound to time; what is regarded to be in the CBI varies and develops over time with new knowledge and norms. Perhaps foremost CBI, is a culturally, socially and contextually dependent concept. As the following will show, "the child's best interest" need to be vaguely defined on policy level in order to be possible to implement into different contexts. This study can only provide an example of how the CBI principle can be defined in one specific context.

Since there is no universal truth about the right definition of what the CBI means, it can be said to be a vague policy. The reasons behind a vague policy can be many. This study is not taking a top-down perspective, hence do not focus on what the policy makers' intention behind this particular policy is, therefore I will only mention general reasons for a vaguely defined policy. Policies are in general a result of negotiations between a number of actors representing different perspectives. A vague policy can be seen as a result of negotiations where the actors involved have been able to reach consensus over a common interest but where the actors' perspectives differed too much for the parties to establish a more specified policy. Vagueness in a policy can also be a necessity to avoid contradiction with other existing laws and policies.

The CBI can be seen as a vague policy in regard to the definition, however the message to prioritize what is best for the child is on the other hand very clear. On the international level, what Rice (2012) refers to as the systemic context, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child put pressure on member states to comply with the common international understanding that the status of the child is

important. In Article 3 in the Convention, it is stated that the CBI always need to be considered in decisions affecting the child. While the target group for the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is all children in the world, the EU has more specific guidelines for how to make the member states comply with the UN Convention on the Right of the Child and secure *unaccompanied* children their legal security. In the Action Plan for Unaccompanied Minors it is stated that housing should be provided for all unaccompanied minors entering the EU territory, with special focus on what is in the CBI (COM2010/13 Final). On EU level the unaccompanied minor seem to be an actor deserving of a legal system protecting them.

The UN Committee on the Right of the Child can be seen as a measurement of how far the implementation process has come, at least on policy level. The committee has the function of controlling that UN member states that have ratified the UN Convention on the Right of the Child is complying with its commitments. The member states have to report to the Committee on a regular basis about the implementation progress and receives comments and recommendations from the Committee. In the latest report (2009) Sweden received positive feedback on its progress in implementing the Convention. However, further improvements were urged in the area of legislation and the dissemination of the Convention. In regard to legislation, “[t]he Committee invites the State Party to take all necessary measures to ensure that national legislation is brought into full conformity with the Convention and recommends that the State Party continue to strengthen its efforts towards formal recognition of the Convention as Swedish law. It further recommends that the Convention should always prevail whenever domestic law provisions are in conflict with the law enshrined in the Convention” (CRC/C/SWE/CO/4, 2009:3). Regarding the knowledge of the Convention, the Committee found the level of knowledge amongst the target group as well as amongst professionals working with children as low and recommended more training and education about children’s right (CRC/C/SWE/CO/4, 2009:3). Hence, Sweden needs to further implement the Convention into national laws as well as improve the knowledge amongst professionals in order to comply with the UN Convention to a greater extent. The Committee’s report show how Sweden has made progress in the implementation process since the development of previous reports. This indicates that the Committee is influential to the actions taken on a national level. By influencing member states on how to implement the Convention the international level can be seen a steering mechanism for how the Convention, and CBI, is understood on domestic level.

As mentioned in the theory section in regard to Rice’s (2012) theory, the organizational context also influences the interaction between the SLB and the welfare recipient. One such constraining aspect is the one of resources. Since 1993, governmental decisions directly affecting the work of municipalities are to be financed by the state, in accordance with the general principle of financing (Finansdepartementet and SALAR, 2007). More specific, in regard to the financing of the municipalities’ reception of unaccompanied minors, municipalities have the right to be compensated for expenses such as costs for housing, school and language. They all receive a clump sum to use for providing a

reception of good quality for receiving unaccompanied children. The municipalities are also entitled to apply to the Migration Board for refunding expenses as the ones just mentioned, and it is possible to receive financing for the actual costs in many cases but not all (Migrationsverket, 2014b).

Another constraining aspect regarding the organizational context is the organizational politics, hence laws and regulations on national level. Ever since Sweden ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990, actors on different levels have worked with the implementation of the concept (UNCRC). In the governmental proposition (prop 1997/98:182), a strategy to actualize the convention on the right of the child in Sweden, it is stated that in order to really prioritize the child perspective the awareness about the convention needs to be spread to decision makers, to people working with children as well as to the children themselves. Only then can a change in attitudes, work procedures and laws be seen. Furthermore, all decisions made by governmental authorities regarding children need to include a child perspective. On a county and municipality level it is stated, that in order to secure the CBI, one important part is to offer professionals relevant education in order to increase the knowledge about the target group. More specifically about the CBI, according to the interpretation of article 3 in the UN Convention; “the child’s best interest shall always be considered in all types of decision making affecting the child. However, the Convention do not claim that the CBI need to be the only factor determining a decision, but rather an aspect of particular importance for the decision. If the CBI is not the determining factor, it needs to be clearly documented how the CBI have been included in the decision” (my translation) (prop. 1997/98:182, p. 13). In Sweden, the idea of the CBI was, also before the UN convention, included in some of the national laws regarding children. For example, the first law regarding custody of children entered into force in 1924 and included a more care-giving aspect of the custody concept for example (prop. 1997/98:182). Today, the CBI principle is implemented into national laws regarding children such as in the Code of Parents and Children (SFS 1949:381 and prop. 2005/06:99), The Law on Care for Children (SFS 1990:52) and the Social Services Act (SFS 2001:453). For example, in the Social Services Act §2 it is stated that “the child’s best interest shall especially be respected in interventions with children” (my translation) (SFS 2001:453, §2). The stipulation forces every professional to prioritize the child perspective in their work. The outline of the policy level regarding the concept demonstrates how the structural level (the UN and the EU) has had an influence on the organizational level (on national policies and recourses), through control mechanisms, which in turn has had a positive impact on national policy implementation of the UN Convention on the Right of the Child and thus the CBI principle. Even though the reasons for policy implementation regarding the CBI can be many different once, it is possible with regard to the above mentioned example, to see how the structural level and the organizational level are linked, and influencing one another.

## 5.2.2 Guidelines for the child's best interest in regard to unaccompanied children

There is no definition on policy level of what the CBI is. However, there are some basic indicators; that the child is not harmed, that the child is safe and that the child's physical and psychological wellbeing is maintained (Nilsson and Munier, 2012). In establishing what is in the best interest of the child there are some helpful tools that the social workers can use. One model frequently used within the social services is BBiC [Barnets Behov i Centrum]. To determine the CBI an overview of the child's situation is needed and the BBiC model interweaves three main aspects; the child's needs, the parents' capacity and the child's surrounding environment (Socialstyrelsen, 2013). This model is used within the social services and in regard to all children, not just unaccompanied.

Turning to guidelines specifically targeted on unaccompanied children, there is a (unaccompanied-children-specific) list, produced in cooperation between the Swedish National Board on Health and Welfare, the National County Administrative Board, SALAR and in dialogue with Children's Ombudsman and the National Agency for Education, which provides important aspects of what municipalities need to think about when planning their reception of unaccompanied children. This document is not officially decided upon but should rather be considered as a document for internal use for the County Administrative Board in their negotiations with the municipalities regarding placement for unaccompanied children. From the list it is possible to deduce what all children needs and hence what the municipalities should provide (email conversation with contact at the Swedish National Board on Health and Welfare). Aspects included on this list is access to a legal guardian, access to an educated and well experienced social worker, access to full time studies after individual ability, access to physical- and psychological health care and access to an authorized interpreter with knowledge of the child's mother tongue. The other aspects presented on this list regard the placement of the child. The general hold regarding placement of siblings or family is that they should be placed close to the child, if this is requested by the child. All placements should be safe for the child and be based on the child's individual needs. This emanates from three principles; 1) that the placement should be within the municipality responsible for the child, 2) that there need to be a flexibility in regard to finding new placement alternatives if necessary and to be responsive to possible discrimination factors and 3) to have a continuous contact with the child as long as there is a need for support. The last principle includes keeping closeness throughout the whole placement chain in regard to both geographic as well as number of placement. Furthermore a flexibility of change of placement after the child turns 18 is required and lastly a retained contact with an adult until the child is self supportive (Checklist for internal use).

An active actor in the realization of the UN Convention on the Right of the Child is Save the Children. On own initiative the NGO produced a thorough check list directed to the municipalities with the aim to improve the quality of their reception of unaccompanied *asylum* seeking children. According to Save the

Children, basing all their work on a child perspective and the UN Convention, the reception of unaccompanied children should be based on the CBI principle. In accordance with the list discussed above, Save the Children also includes skilled interpreters on their list, a legal guardian and education after individual ability. Beyond this the list includes a starting kit (both with appropriate clothes and information about Sweden). Cooperation between the different actors involved in the reception of unaccompanied children is yet another aspect often lacking and Save the Children suggests that working groups should plan and follow up the work as well as exchange experience and knowledge. The child's need of support is a separate point on the list of Save the Children, but where the access to physical- and psychological health care is included, so is also the child's right to influence her/his life. In addition to this they offer a "to do" list for the municipality and personnel under each aspect. Regarding placement, and particularly group homes, the CBI is emphasized and according to the "to do-list" regarding to this the child should have access to an own room as well as access to computers and internet connection in order to be able to contact her/his family. Save the Children also believes it is important to separate the homes for asylum seeking children and children who have received their permanent permit since the two groups is faced with very different situations (Sundman and Simonsen, (2010).

In addition to this, "single" municipalities also offer guidelines, for example guidelines compiled by Stockholm Stad; *Ensamkommande barn och ungdomar: riktlinjer för handläggning av ärenden gällande ensamkommande barn och ungdomar*. However, as the proposition (1996/:124) states "the concept is relative and means different things to different people depending on how they understand the child's needs" (prop. 1990/97:124 p. 100). Welfare workers implementing the CBI policy into their everyday interaction with the unaccompanied children, need to form an understanding of what is best for the child, an opinion which they can base their actions on when securing the CBI. This section has elaborated on some of the aspects that can influence the GHP's understanding of the policy. Laws, regulations and guidelines are something the GHP have to comply with, but it also have a norm creating function. Hence, the SLB's understanding of the concept has a great impact on welfare workers everyday interaction with unaccompanied children.

### 5.2.3 External laws and guidelines in the eyes of the group home personnel

The awareness of the CBI on a policy level is very high amongst the interviewees. Not surprisingly, they are all familiar with the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child as well as national laws and regulations. When I asked them about guidelines the majority thought there was a lack of external guidelines except for interviewee 3 who thought NGO:s have produced guidelines with useful information. Interviewee 3 agreed with the others that there was a lack of

guidelines for how to implement the CBI in practice. He was, however, not under the opinion that this was negative:

*“I believe that how you apply it [the policy], still it is a guiding principle, but what it means concrete, I believe that is something you have to arrive at on each group home. How do we translate the principle of the child’s best interest? And what does it mean, and that is something that depends on different things. The situation the child find them self in [...] And therefore I believe it is difficult, very, very difficult, to have steering documents on a central level about how to work with this in practice. On the other hand, guidelines, thoughts and so on.”* (Appendix 2, quote 1).

Interviewee 3 who is in the board of management for several group homes states that they have internal guidelines for how to create a safe environment, reach individual interests and meet the children’s needs and that

*“the principle of the child’s best interest, to a great extent is about making individual need assessments”* (Appendix 2, quote 2.).

As an example for why interviewee 3 believes steering documents on a central level is difficult to produce due to the children’s individual situation, the children’s varying level of maturity. He meets children that are very mature in the sense that they, before their arrival to Sweden, have been supporting themselves (working for several years and living on their own taking care of a household). The life in group homes could for these children become anti-developing due to the routines. Interviewee 3 saw the importance of flexibility regarding the routines in order to meet the different levels of maturity for the children living there. Lipsky’s (1980) theoretical assumption that the SLB discretion is an important variable regarding the implementation of a policy is confirmed by the statement made by interviewee 3. In accordance with the policy documents, interviewee 3 also confirms the necessity of not defining the policy on a central level, and this is due to the importance of discretion when implementing it in an individual context. In order for the GHP for unaccompanied children to secure the children their best interest, the GHP need to be able to make individual need assessments. Since the needs can look very different depending on a child’s situation discretion is crucial.

#### 5.2.4 Resources influence on the group home personnel

It can be of value to keep in mind that the majority of the interviewees work as personnel and are not directly involved in the planning of the economic resources. However, since the interviewees operate within the economic restrictions their experience can shed light on to what extent it is possible to combine economic restrictions with the CBI and their possibilities to implement the policy. Physical-,

cultural- and social activities for the children is the main aspect the interviewees seem to relate to as something that *could* be negatively affected by restricted economic resources. However, the common perception seems to be that the possibilities to offer activities for the children is not affected by the economic resources the group homes have, since it is offered in all group homes. The children are usually offered a physical activity since it is a common understanding that it is good for the children's health, networking, social life and wellbeing to have an active leisure time. Some group homes offer both a physical and a cultural activity, to a reasonable price (Interviewee 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7).

One example of how the economic resources are not restricting the SLB's possibilities to implement what they believe is in the CBI, despite extra costs, is given by interviewee 5. If the staff at interviewee 5's work place is noticing that a child is not feeling good (for example locking her/him self in the room with the risk of developing a depression) they act. According to interviewee 5 it is important for the child's wellbeing to not only have her/his basic needs meet but also to be seen and acknowledged on a daily basis. Usually it is the particular child's contact person<sup>1</sup> who comes up with a solution (in this case it was a recreational activity the child really likes). In these situations, the price for the activity is less relevant than what is considered to be in the CBI and is usually allowed by the management.

Interviewee 1 was the only one mentioning shortages of personnel as a possible negative aspect of restricted economic resources. The young adults living in training apartments are less dependent on personnel. However, some support is still required. When they experienced a shortage of staff for this end, two more people were employed. According to interviewees 5 and 1 the resources is not clashing with their possibilities to implement what they believe is in the CBI (in these examples motivational activities in order to avoid a child to enter a depression and staff for the young adults living in training apartments). All interviewees were well aware of the economic restrictions. However, no one seemed to have experienced a contradiction between the financial resources and the implementation of the CBI. On policy level, regarding the organizational context of economic resources, it is stated that municipalities have the opportunity to seek refunding from the state for many of their costs. This could be one of the reasons why the interviewees did not mention any severe dissatisfaction over the economic resources.

### 5.2.5 External actors' influence on the group home personnel

It should be noted that the interviewees understanding of the CBI varies depending on where in the process the children they refer to are. It is my

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<sup>1</sup> A contact person is a GHP with extra responsibilities for a minor. The role is characterized with both a practical- and a personal dimension.



understanding that, for personnel referring to children living in group homes for asylum seeking children the focus is to a greater extent on the child's psychological wellbeing, to give information and to ensure a functioning everyday life. Integration and preparation for becoming self supportive is to a greater extent in focus when the interviewees were referring to group homes for children with a residence permit or children living in training apartments.

The CBI can in practice mean a whole lot according to the interviewees. This analysis will focus on the aspects the interviewees have brought up during our conversations, without stating that there is not more aspects of what the concept can mean in practice. As interviewee 6 states:

*“well, when I hear the child's best interest my thoughts are that it can be many different things [...] If you try to concretize it here, I believe a lot of it means physical and psychological needs”* (Appendix 2, quote 3).

Interviewee 6 works in a group home for asylum seeking children and he states that the children's physical and psychological wellbeing is affected by external factors such as the asylum process which is the Migration Boards area of responsibility. The asylum process can be delayed if the child is not assigned a legal guardian straight away:

*“The adolescents that are booked for an asylum interview, that the appointment is being rescheduled, and that [the interview] is very important for the adolescents since they are waiting for this. Like with great longing, and when it's finally time then, no we can't receive you since you don't have a legal guardian. And just a thing like that can latterly ruin the adolescents psychological state of mind”* (Appendix 2, quote 4)

These are factors influencing the child's wellbeing but are not something the GHP controls. In this sense interviewee 6 finds it difficult to secure the CBI and describes a feeling of powerlessness. The CBI need to be considered by all actors' influencing the children's lives. Even if interviewee 6 describes how other actors' role limits the possibility to secure the child's psychological wellbeing he describes the discretion regarding influencing the children's everyday lives on the group home as substantial. Attaching the minors' physical and psychological needs to the meaning of the CBI is similar to what is stated on policy level, where the Swedish National Board on Health and Welfare regulations includes the same aspect.

Interviewee 3 can also see how external actors can have an impact on the child's wellbeing. According to him a safe environment is in the CBI and it is important to secure that the children is given the opportunity to complain, which he also regards as being in the CBI. If there is something the child is not happy about in the group home she/he should feel safe enough to bring this up with another actor (the legal guardian or social worker for example). Creating a safe environment and trustworthy relations with the children is therefore important for

all actors involved in the children's lives, not just for GHP. Close relations to adults is always in the CBI, regardless of where in the process the child is.

The legal definition for an adult is a person turning 18. For the unaccompanied minor the time line between being a child and an adult can affect their lives in different ways. One example of when the CBI was conflicted with the group home's agreement with the Migration Board came up during my interview with interviewee 1. The group home received asylum seeking children up to the age of 18. If the asylum process was still ongoing when the child turned 18 the child was to be transferred to a home for adults. The new home was situated in another city - forcing the child who had only lived in the same group home since he arrived to Sweden, to leave his comfort zone and safety net. Interviewee 1, along with his manager in the group home, in disbelief of the routines, started to allow 18-year-olds in this situation to continue their stay until the end of the asylum process. When the minors received their permanent permit to stay in Sweden they moved to own apartments, remaining in the same area as the group home, and with continued contact with the GHP as well as the other children in the group home. The main reason for allowing these 18-year-olds to continue their stay was that the GHP witnessed the distress the forced moving caused the children. Hence, the GHP used their discretion in favour of what they thought was in the CBI.

The expected consequences for an asylum seeker turning 18 described above are a reality for adolescents in the other group homes for asylum seekers. The line is strict and the new home is often located in another city. In these group homes the GHP worked a lot with preparing the children for turning 18 and also investigated these children's network for other options.

As a concluding remark, the CBI is understood as children's physical and psychological wellbeing, their need to have a trustworthy relationship to an adult, their right to complain and their right to continuity in regard to hometown, friends and social network. The discussion above reveals that other actors to a great extent can influence the possibilities for the GHP to implement the meaning the GHP attach to the policy. The coping strategies seem to vary a bit amongst the GHP. Interviewee 1 is (not hiding behind the constraints but rather) bend the rules when allowing 18-year-olds to continue their stay in the group home whilst other GHP seem to continue to work for what they believe is in the CBI although accepting that the children turning 18 should move to new homes. It is also evident that the meaning GHP gives the CBI may alter depending on the situation.

## 5.3 Informal structures influencing the individual institution of the child's best interest

### 5.3.1 The role of the group home personnel in regard to education

One important part colouring the GHPs interaction with the minors is what kind of education and previous experience the GHP have. According to Rice's (2012) theory in regard to the individual context, this is one important aspect of what influences the role of the welfare worker and furthermore what will affect the welfare service provided in the end. One way to secure competent personnel is to ensure an educated work force. Interviewee 7, who is the manager of four group homes, seems to embrace this thought and have created a recruitment profile for this end. In order to get employed at the four group homes you need to have graduated from a school of social studies or similar. Interviewee 2, who works as a manager for two group homes, emphasized having experience of working with children when recruiting new staff rather than a specific education. Within her workforce you could find for example an assistant nurse, a psychiatric nurse, a health educator<sup>2</sup>, behaviourist<sup>3</sup>, social workers and teachers.

Interviewee 3, who is in the board of management for group homes, also emphasized a mixed workforce (personnel with different educational background as well as different experience). As the main argument for this he promoted employing staff with skills that the children are in need of. As an example, he could see a huge need amongst the young adults finding them self on the end of the chain of placement, to find an opening into the job market. Employing staff that can be a useful link to the job market or a driver instructor who could help the minors with their driver licenses was therefore prioritized. Interviewee 1 could even see an advantage of having a mixed work force. He argued that a mixed work force could cover a broader spectrum and discover and see more than a homogeneously work force due to the GHP's different backgrounds. This was also something interviewees 4, 5 and 6 had reflected upon, since the work is characterized as multidimensional; sometimes the job requires you to act as a sociologist, a teacher, a parent, a legal expert and so on. Consequently, there are many advantages of having a mixed workforce in regard to type of education and experience. This way the GHP can compensate each other's skills and be able to cover a larger set of the children's needs.

Additional to the workforces' educational background the GHP also received special training targeted at this particular target group. In order for the GHP to be able to inform the children, for example about the different roles the many actors has, they need to have the knowledge themselves. The County Administrative Board had offered training in the different actors' roles which interviewee 1 had attended and interviewee 2 had sent her staff to. Courses in cultural knowledge were also frequently mentioned and focus had been on Afghanistan since a large number of the unaccompanied minors arriving to Sweden today come from Afghanistan. Cultural interaction, conflict, trauma and genital mutilation was also training the interviewees had attended or was about to attend. Interviewee 7 also mentioned a perhaps less obvious training, namely computer training. In order for the GHP to do an efficient job she could see the need for some people in her staff

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<sup>2</sup> Swe: Hälsopedagog

<sup>3</sup> Swe: Beteendevetare

to learn more about how to use for example Outlook more efficient. Many of the interviewees mentioned training in motivational interviewing. As the name reveals it is a method used to motivate the child, to view her/his situation in a more positive way and to see the possibilities in her/his situation. Related to this, interviewee 2 mentioned seminars where you learn more about how to become solution-focused, whilst interviewee 1 mentioned training in how you could make the children an active part of their own processes.

According to the policy documents, one important aspect for the UN Convention on the Right of the Child to be implemented further is to ensure an educated work force, that the professionals have knowledge of both the CBI principle but also the target group. By the answers received from the interviewees it seems like education and experience of working with children is regarded as a fundamental aspect for practicing this profession. It is possible to see that the GHP have created structures for this end. The managers seemed to be able to use their discretion in the recruitment process in favour of what they considered to meet the needs of the children. It is possible to see a variance in the interviewees' thoughts on educational background but in general their views were based on the same values. The educational background can be an important aspect for when the GHP together in the group homes translate the CBI principle into practice. Their different or similar knowledge can both act uniting and complementing in this process. The above discussion is an indication of a common view on both the important role the GHP's regard the profession but also of the unaccompanied minors as a valuable and deserving target group.

### 5.3.2 The group home personnel's view on their professional role

How the GHP view their role in other aspects than education can shed light on how they understand the CBI. According to the theory, this is an important factor for how they choose to implement the policy. From the examples used in this section it is possible to deduce that the GHP have a great discretion in regard to the implementation of the CBI. Whether the CBI is secured, is to a great extent depending on the GHP's engagement in the target group.

The unaccompanied children can have experienced difficulties in their lives, despite their young age; abuse, terror, trauma, loss of contact with their family. The GHP can meet children with anxiety and self-harming behaviour. One of the main tasks the GHP assign themselves is to ensure the children of a well functioning everyday life. According to interviewee 3 the ideal would be if the children, upon their arrival, could leave the problems they carry at the door and live like normal teenagers after their arrival to the group homes. The minors should ideally get the chance to worry about everyday problems. Normality is something to strive for regardless of where in the placement chain the children are.

Providing a functioning everyday life for the children requires personal engagement from the GHP. How interviewee 1 identify his professional role

witness of an awareness of this and the importance of the SLB's role to secure the children a fruitful everyday life. According to interviewee 1 the mindset of the personnel and furthermore, the actions taken due to that mindset, can have dramatic consequences both for the individual child but also for the society in general. He uses activities organized for the children on Saturdays as an example to describe this in more detail. Sometimes the children are too tired on the weekends to show up in time for the activity. The GHP get tired of planning activities when the children don't show any interest and as a consequence it is tempting to stop planning new activities for the next weekend. However, it is important to activate the minors. If they sleep longer they also stay up later during the evening. Often bad memories and thoughts are troubling the children during the evenings and they get a hard time to fall asleep. As a consequence they do not show up for school and a bad circle has been formed. If they do not go to school, the children will not learn the language and will have a harder time to integrate when they move to own apartments. Adding to this, the group home as a public institution can be questioned; why are they not preparing the children for the life after the group home? Interviewee 1 could link the seemingly small issue of a Saturday activity to a bigger picture, reaching to the conclusion that a small issue could have a negative impact on the child, the group home and the society in general. He believes it is the GHP's responsibility to prevent this from happening. Instead of stop planning activities, he believes it is the GHP's task to motivate the children, and always remember that the GHP are there for the children. What interviewee 1 describes is how important it is for the GHP to always be in the right mindset, putting the child in centre, in order to avoid harmful and unnecessary far reaching consequences. He also stresses the importance of creating routines that enable the children to have an operating everyday life.

In dialogue with the child a social worker make a need assessment of the individual child which is presented in an action plan for how to address these issues. Also present on these meetings are the legal guardian and often a contact person from the group home. The action plan is something that the GHP, together with the minor, is following up on a continuous basis. The child's needs to improve their Swedish and their mental- and physical health is examples of what this plan can contain. This was one example made by interviewee 1, of routines for how they work with the CBI. However, he had noted, during his years as a GHP for boys, that these meetings only to some extent uncovered the individual child's needs. According to him, these meetings could address quite obvious needs, needs on a surface level. It was in the personal interaction between the child and the contact person that more in-depth needs could be uncovered. For this to happen, the relationship between the two needed to be characterized by trust. At this group home the manager prioritizes the relation between the contact persons and their contact children, and had reserved time for the GHP to use for this purpose (interviewee 1). This statement indicates that the CBI can only to some extent be secured through formal procedures. Instead the GHP need to, by using their knowledge and personal engagement, get to know the minor in order to assure the minor's needs. In this sense the GHP becomes a tool for securing the CBI for unaccompanied minors. The GHP need to be able to build a trustworthy

relationship with the children and be able to know how to interact with this specific target group in a way that makes the children feel comfortable enough to open up and reveal personal issues. This ability is related to the GHP's education and previous experience of working with children (discussed in previous sections). The above statement is also an indication of the soft values of what the CBI can mean in practice. It shows how important it is on a manager level, as well as amongst the GHP, to have an awareness of these soft values in order to implement structures in the group homes that encourage a deeper contact with each child, with the end goal of securing the CBI.

The contact person is the one the child should come to with their questions and problems. According to interviewee 5's experience, the GHP are the ones who know the individual minor the best since it is to them the child usually opens up and reveal personal issues. In this sense, he believes that the GHP are also the ones who know what is best for these children, as oppose to external actors. Interviewee 4 states that the role for the contact persons is to offer the minors at least one caring relation to an adult. Interviewee 3 states:

*“close relations to adults is something we always believe is good for the child [...] and so we work very much to create trustworthy relations where this is something all personnel is aiming for. Because it could be that the contact persons, they don't match, as much”* (Appendix 2, quote 5).

Not only is it important to offer a good relation to an adult, the citation also shows an awareness of the need of a flexibility in these relations. Due to the nature of personal interaction, some people have a better connection than others and this is something several of the interviewees have recognized. Therefore, it is possible for the contact child to turn to other GHP than the contact person regarding more personal issues. However the contact person usually keeps her/his practical responsibilities<sup>4</sup> even when a child turns to another GHP (interviewee 2, 3, 4).

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<sup>4</sup> The contact person's role is also characterized by a practical aspect. Often the contact person are the one who introduce the child to their new home, the one who is responsible for having both initial meetings with the child and a translator to give information about their new home, but also continues meetings with the child and external actors about their action plan. It is the contact person who arrange and help the child with the contact with external actors such as the Migration Board, the school, the Health Care and who often comes along to different appointments. Sometimes it takes a while until the child is assigned a school placement or a social worker and in those cases it is the contact person's role to engage in this child's situation, making the extra calls or give information usually given by external actors. The children meet different actors and usually they have to answer the same questions over and over again, something the children think is terrible tiresome, and the structures of having a contact person can reduce this when the same person is responsible for inform the child and be informed about the child (interviewee 1, 2, 3 and 4).

The routine to assign each child a contact person is a structure in all group homes. It is possible to link this common structure to the check list for internal use produced by the Swedish National Board on Health and Welfare amongst others, (discussed under 5.2.1), where it is stated that the child should have a continuous contact with an adult until it is self supportive. However, the interviewees are not referring to this list when discussing the structure but rather why they believe it is an important structure. The discussion above illustrates that working in a group home for unaccompanied minors require a personal engagement by the GHP. In this sense, they use themselves as a working tool in order to meet more of the children's personal needs. Several interviewees describe their role as being much more than a contact person. Their role is multidimensional and to some extent they refer to it as having the role of a parent:

*“The role as contact person doesn't say that much because we are much more than that. [...] the adolescent expect you to be both informed and engaged in his life. Because they don't have any one else to trust. [...] if you're not engaged in the adolescent, then he is the one suffering, because then he will be left to his destiny [...] So our role is firstly to show, that we work for their best in this assignment”* (Appendix 2, quote 6, interviewee 5)

*“Well, my role is to be some sort of role model, a guide into Sweden, without being too much of integration and assimilation. These big fancy concepts. It is rather about, as much as possible on the child's condition, give them as much as you can about Sweden while they are here. Like, everything from culture to societal structures, to language knowledge, the ability to take care of yourself, to learn that it is OK to feel bad, it is OK to not want to talk, it is OK to talk about very weird stuff, just to give them all they haven't got so far, and that is my role, our role. That I can be the person they turn to when everything else is messed up”* (Appendix 2, quote 7, interviewee 4).

*“Sometimes, it is not put in print, but sometimes we take the role as their parents without they noting it, but sometimes we are a bit as their parents, sometimes we act as a teacher, nurses. Our role is multidimensional so to say.”* (Appendix 2, quote 8, interviewee 5)

*“Everything we do shall aim toward preparing the minors to be ready to apply for an apartment, and take care of them self. We probably do more than many parents do, we are pouring in [information]. Parents have from 0 and up, we have a few years to make sure they get all this.”* (Appendix 2, quote 9, interviewee 7).

In accordance with Sabatier (1986), the above citations are an illustration of the local variances detected when using a bottom-up approach. The GHP's view their role slightly different. However the main content is similar. They all seem to aim at giving the minors what the GHP believe is the best for them; whether it regards to be their personal guardian, acting as parents or prepare them for their life as

young adults in a new country. It is evident that the GHP assign themselves an important role for securing the children their needs and what is best for them.

### 5.3.3 The group home personnel's view of the role of the children

One part of defining the CBI principle and examining the individual context amongst the GHP is also to examine how they view the children. In the way they talk about the children, it is possible to uncover their view of the children. According to the theory section, this could be about if the SLB believe the recipients are deserving of a welfare service, to what extent the recipient have knowledge about their rights as well as their ability to express themselves. It is important since it affects the welfare service provided. Since this study focus on the GHP and their understanding and implementation of the CBI, the minors' right and ability to express themselves are examined from the GHP's perspective; how they work to ensure that the children have knowledge about their rights, and how (if) they encourage the children to. A study with the focus on the outcome of the policy could be of value for a complementary and richer description of the role of the children, with focus on the children's view in this aspect, however, this is not the object for this study.

The unaccompanied minors's knowledge of their rights has been discussed from the aspect of information. Information is something all interviewees keep coming back to several times during our conversations and it is clear to me that one important part of their job is to provide the children information:

*“[i]nformation, that is something we truly believe is in the best interest of the child. The children shall understand their situation and their context and what will happen in the future and why they are here”* (Appendix 2, quote 10, interviewee 3).

There are several ways to inform the children. A number of group homes work with information material available in several languages. An evident example of how the GHP work to ensure the children of their rights through information is given by interviewee 2. In order for the children to know about their rights of living in a group home, as a public institution, the GHP uses a brochure developed by the Swedish National Board on Health and Welfare. The brochure is published in several languages suitable for this particular group and contains information such as the right to be listened to, the right to participate, the right to be met with kindness and respect, the right to go to school and the right to have your personal belongings to yourself. Not only does handing out such an informative brochure empower the children, it is also an indication that the GHP are quite confident that they can meet these rights. The children are also given information about the asylum process; information about the decision-makers, the rules, and how to appeal if your application is turned down. Information is undoubtedly a source to power.



Much of the information is given orally and the possibilities to communicate are crucial conditions for enabling the transfer of information. The language is an important aspect regarding this target group. Upon their arrival, the children do not have knowledge of the Swedish language and often not English either. Interpreters are therefore commonly occurring. In order to have a fruitful communication, where the children can be informed about their rights and their situation and where the children can raise their voice, the group home is dependent on capable interpreters. However, the majority of the interviewees have experienced inadequate quality of interpreters. Interviewee 6 describes how a whole conversation was ruined due to the interpreter's lack of professionalism. He describes what happens when he is trying to practice his knowledge from a course in motivational interviewing with one of the minors living on the group home. A special dialogue technique is used to motivate the child and in this case it is even more important that everything stated is interpreted in a correct way in order to have the wanted effect. The technique had been very successful in cases where the child could express herself/himself without the use of an interpreter. However, in this case the whole conversation was ruined. In similarity with previous research (Keselman, 2013) this is an example where the interpreter suddenly initiate a discussion with the adolescent excluding the personnel from the conversation, and where the interpreter does not interpret all spoken words. In order to decrease this problem interviewee 6 had, using his discretion, started a routine amongst the GHP to sign up interpreters of good quality on a list and today they use the list when booking interpreters. His initiative and personal engagement made it possible to secure the children's right to express themselves and to enable fruitful conversations.

Also the minors themselves have expressed dissatisfaction about the quality of the interpreters. According to interviewee 3 and interviewee 6 it can be a question of the sex of the interpreter. Moreover, some of the minors are not comfortable to reveal personal information to a countryman. Dialect and ancestry is other aspects that can make the minors uncomfortable talking to an interpreter. In those cases there is the option to have the interpreter on the phone instead of there in person. However, the positive aspects with a telephone interpreter are sometimes shadowed by problems of hearing what is stated or to not fully understand the conversation when not seeing each others' expressions. Another solution, at least to some extent, is to ensure that the GHP have knowledge in the children's mother tongue, something they work actively with in the group homes for which interviewee 3 is in the a board member in. Even though they promote the children to learn Swedish and the GHP's language knowledge do not solve the whole problem with interpreters, an interpreter is needed in these homes to a less extent and the everyday communication can be eased.

Interpreters are used in all important conversations such as during the introduction to the minor's new home and the new country and in conversations with the social worker, the legal guardian and the contact person when discussing the action plan. The right to express your self is regarded as the CBI and another structure used in all group homes to secure this is to have so called house meetings, during which an interpreter often is present. These meetings become

another forum where the children can be informed and are able to express their opinions as a group. The frequencies between the meetings vary on the group homes from every week to once a month.

In this section the GHP's understanding of the children have been discussed. It is possible to see that the GHP take the children and their needs and rights seriously and that they view themselves as important actors for securing the children what is best for them. The discussion above shows that the interpreter is a key actor for the GHP to be able to communicate with the children and for the minors to be able to express their thoughts. It is also clear that all group homes work with interpreters for this end. However, this section is yet another example illustrating how external actors affect the GHP's possibility to implement what they believe is in the best interest of the child. Follow the law on the right to interpreter (SFS 2003:246 8§) is not always enough to secure the children their right to raise their voices or to give relevant information, as the discussion above shows. More is often required by the GHP due to the varying quality of the interpreters. The way the GHP relate to this varies to some extent between the group homes. What the majority seem to have in common is that they are working to find solutions - written information material available in several languages, lists with qualified interpreters, telephone interpreters, employing personnel with knowledge of the children's mother tongue - which is an indication of how prioritized transferring information and communication to the children is for the GHP. In this regard it is possible to conclude that the GHP treat the children with respect and are working to secure the children their right to be heard and to be informed about their situation. Furthermore, the discussion indicates that the GHP find it important for the children to participate in their own process. This can be related to the societal developments where children have gained more respect, which is mirrored also on policy level. On policy level children are regarded as an active actor and this is also emphasized in the Social Service Act where the CBI should be considered in all decisions concerning the child (SFS 2001:453). Once again it proves how important the SLB's role is in the implementation process, in accordance with both Lipsky's (1980) and Rice's (2012) assumptions.

#### 5.3.4 The dynamics within the work force

In addition to the three aspects brought up by Rice (2012) in the theory chapter as important aspects to consider when examining the individual context affecting policy implementation, a fourth theme is detected from the information gained by the interviews, namely the dynamics of the work force. Due to the size of this study, the work force cohesiveness will be the aspect discussed in this section, even though other aspects such as sex and cultural background were also brought into light during the interviews as important aspects of the work force in order to secure the CBI.

A cohesive work force seems to be a condition for securing the children their best interest. From the three previous sections we have seen the importance of

creating structures in the group homes to better meet and cover the children's individual needs. A condition to be able to develop these structures is cooperation amongst the GHP. Some of the interviewees had reflected upon this more than others. Interviewee 2 and 8 perceived their work group to be cohesive, having no considerable problems to cooperate. Interviewee 8 states, as a manager of several group homes, that her role is to stimulate cooperation. Since the dynamics of the target group is changing in numbers, cultural background and sex, her task is to stimulate the work force to work with these changes. Interviewee 1 and 5 had experienced a shift of management which had affected the workforce to the better. Both had experienced a change from a non-cohesive work force to a cohesive workforce and from that experience they had seen how important this aspect is - not only in order to enjoy their work - but more importantly to secure the minors living in group homes their best interest.

Both the GHP and the minors living on interviewee 1's group home faced an unsustainable situation when some staff could bend the established rules for some of the children. This unfair treatment resulted in conflicts both between the staff and the minors but also within each group. As a consequence, some children felt neglected and less worthy than other children.

Another example of a risk of not having a cohesive work force was given by interviewee 7. To interviewee 7 it is important to be confident about his colleagues' state of mind and capabilities in order not to worry about the children, and especially about his own contact children, when he leaves for the day. It is important to know that the children always have someone to turn to, regardless of who is working. In this sense the GHP are very much dependent on their colleagues.

*The thought is that we need to treat our self as the group of adolescents [...] Our cooperation, require as much work as do the adolescents (Appendix 2, quote 11, interviewee 4).*

This citation is from interviewee 4 when he discusses the importance of a cohesive work force. In similarities with other interviewees, at his work place they had created routines for how to further develop the cooperation between the GHP in order to develop a united work force. Weekly meetings were held for the whole work force where they discussed and developed their work procedures. According to interviewee 4 the reward was a well functioning group of minors. The work force cohesiveness was mirrored in the group of minors' wellbeing.

The above discussion shows awareness amongst the interviewees of the influential power the work force's dynamics has on the group of unaccompanied minors living in the group homes. This awareness seems to be an incentive to spend time on developing the cooperation between colleagues.

## 5.4 Findings

### 5.4.1 Empirical findings

On policy level the CBI is not defined to any great extent. However, it is clearly stated, both in UN, EU and domestic policy documents that the CBI principle is to be prioritized. From the policy level, this is the clearest aspect steering the implementers. The SLB are obliged to focus on what is best for the minors. However, it is possible to state that the policy level allows great discretion for the GHP to interpret and implement the CBI principle. This is regarded as a necessity both in national policies and by the GHP themselves. It is possible to, throughout the analysis, see similarities between the policy guidelines and the GHP's understanding of the policy. One example of this is when, in accordance with the guidelines from the Swedish National Board on Health and Welfare, interviewee 6 describes the CBI as the physical- and psychological wellbeing of the children. In that sense the analysis show how the policy level has been transformed into the GHP's understanding and implementation of the policy. However, even though the GHP show that they have knowledge of the policy, the GHPs' understanding and implementation of the policy is not expressed in relation to the policy guidelines. It seems, to a great extent, that it is in the group homes the SLB arrive at a definition of what the CBI principle means in practice. The fourth aspect brought up in the second part of the analysis, the dynamics of the work force as well as the GHP's educational background, becomes important aspects for this process. In the interaction amongst themselves the GHP can develop structures to secure the children their best interest. By using their different experiences and often mixed educational backgrounds they can complement each other's know-how and arrive at a practical definition of the CBI. This process takes place also in the interaction with the minors and in that interaction the GHP can see which of the minors' needs that are not met. This way GHP can get an idea of what their role as GHP is and through this insight the CBI is translated from policy to practice. To illustrate this with an example; the GHP could see the importance of children having a trustworthy relation to an adult. Since this need was not met by other actors the GHP saw it as their task to make sure to offer this to the children.

The descriptive empirical material is a necessity to demonstrate the process of turning the policy into practice. It allows the reader to follow my interpretation of the GHP's process toward an understanding of the policy. Only in these descriptive examples, the meaning which the GHP gives the CBI principle is exposed. By allowing the interviewees to elaborate on different areas regarding their job I was able to, through the descriptions they provided me with, get an insight as to how they interpret and understand the CBI. The analysis has provided several examples of how they understand the CBI and act based on that understanding. In Table 1 below the practical implementation of the policy, in regard to GHP for unaccompanied children, is summed up. The first column reveals in which context the GHP have described their understanding of the concept. The second column reveals their understanding of the concept. Finally, the third column reveals the actions they take to secure the CBI of the children based on their understanding of the concept. All the different examples of their understanding of the concept leads me to the general conclusion that the GHP use

their discretion to develop and work with structures in the group homes in order to better meet individual needs and address circumstances of the unaccompanied minors living there. For example, work forces in the different group homes work with contact persons so that every child is secured a personal relation to at least one adult. Since the children's needs are individual and can be of different nature the structures allow flexibility.

The child's best interest in regard to:	UNDERSTANDING/ MEANING	ACTIONS/ STRUCTURES
External guidelines	The children are individuals with individual needs, and it is in the CBI for every child to be regarded as and treated as an individual	Individual need assessments, no generalizations. Structures for detecting individual needs such as contact persons.
Economic resources	It is in the CBI to have an active leisure time, and it is in the CBI that group homes have enough personnel.	Offer physical and cultural activities, both on an individual level as well as on a group level. The GHP keeps the management updated on needs for an increasing work force, hence employment needs.
External actors	It is in the CBI to have physical and psychological needs met. Also, it is in the CBI to have a safe environment and a right and possibility to make complaints. Furthermore it is in the CBI to have continuity in regard to placement and social life	The GHP's possibility to secure the children this is limited by other actors. It is of great importance that the GHP cooperate and work together with other actors and offer a safe environment as well as trustworthy relations to adults.
Role of the personnel in regard to education	To be surrounded with personnel that have knowledge of their situation and of the Swedish system. As well as to have their different needs met.	Employing personnel with relevant education and work experience. Fill gaps where the system fails to meet the children's needs. Be multidimensional and flexible in order to meet as many needs as possible.
The professional role of the personnel	To have an operating everyday life, to have the possibility to live as "normal" teenagers. To have a close relation to an adult. To have personal needs met.	Assist the children by having the right mindset and by putting the children in centre of their work. Create structures where each child is assigned a contact person responsible for creating a personal relation to the child. Show awareness of the soft values.
The role of the children	To have the right to be informed of their situation and their rights. To express themselves and communicate their thoughts.	Information material, creating structures for using qualified interpreters, employing staff with knowledge of the children's mother tongue and routines of having house meetings.
The dynamics of the work force	To have clear and understandable rules. To always have someone in the work force to turn to.	Work with the staff in order to create a cohesive work force.

## 5.4.2 Theoretical findings

In Table 1 the GHP's aggregated meaning of the CBI is summarized. It is a summary of thoughts expressed by the GHP during our interviews about different aspects of the implementation of the CBI. In accordance with Sabatier (1986) local variances have been possible to see in regard to almost all aspect included in the empirical analysis. Although expressed with some variation, the GHP's general thoughts were similar. Using the issue of inadequate interpreters as an example, the GHP used somewhat different methods - having an interpreter present in person, having an interpreter attending meetings only via telephone, employing staff with knowledge of the children's mother tongue – all in order to reach the end goal of securing the children their right to raise their voices, to be informed about their situation and to be empowered. This example illustrates how the GHP develop structures to meet the individual child's needs; the usage of interpreter depends on what the individual child is most comfortable with. The individual meaning the GHP reads in to the CBI adds up to their inter-subjective meaning of the concept. Without saying anything about the actual outcome of the GHP's actions, the results presented in the analysis (which are summarized in Table 1) have provided a taste of what the existing institution of the CBI is characterized with. It seems to be characterized with positive values where the GHP talk about the children with warmth, as important actors with a high value – the children should be able to raise their voice, to have an adult they can turn to, to have a valuable leisure time, to think about something else than all their problems and so on. Since the interviewees in this study work at different homes but have similar thoughts of what the CBI is in practice, the practical meaning of the CBI presented here seem to be standardized. In accordance with Rice's (2012) definition of an institution, standardized interaction both enables and restricts human behaviour. In this sense the individual institution of the CBI steer the GHP in the similar direction. The taste of the individual institution of the CBI presented in this study indicates that it would be contradictive to treat the unaccompanied minors with anything else than respect and warmth.

This case study illustrates how Lipsky's (1980) almost four decades old theory on street-level bureaucrats still has an explanatory power in regard to helping us understand the part of the policy process called implementation. By examining the implementation from the SLB perspective it is possible to state that this study illustrates that it is still of value to assign these actors an important role in the implementation process. The analysis presents examples of how the SLB use their discretion and themselves as tools when securing the CBI (often in line with the guidelines as stated above). By not only examining the actions taken to secure the CBI, but also by examining which assumptions these actions are based on allows a deeper understanding of the implementation process. Merging Lindqvist's theory and the hermeneutic meaning to the street-level bureaucrat theory made it

possible to add the important dimension of why the GHP act in a certain way. In that sense it is possible to see what the CBI means to the GHP. It also enables us to see whether their understanding is controversial or not. This is a crucial part of the implementation process since it can indicate whether the progress leans toward policy success or failure, and since it can determine if further implementation needs new ingredients. As just mentioned it is clear from the analysis that the GHP has an important role in terms of securing the CBI in the unaccompanied children's everyday lives. In this sense the GHP are ascribed power over the children's wellbeing which can be both a risk (if the GHP's understanding results in negative consequences for the children) and a possibility (if the GHP's understanding rather have positive consequences for the children). The institution of the CBI that this case study has shed a light on indicates that the GHP is using their implementation power in favour of the minors.

Rice's theory pointed out the importance of context. The GHPs' understanding of the policy and possibility to implement it in accordance with their understanding is dependent on several factors, some of which I have included in the analysis. In that sense the GHP do not act totally subjective, but are rather part of a context. This link has been illustrated in the analysis where it has been possible to see a link between the policy guidelines and the meaning the GHP assigns the CBI (as discussed in the previous section). An example of how the context can influence the GHP's possibility to implement the CBI in accordance with their understanding of the CBI is related to the organizational context. The two aspects brought up during the interviews, related to the organizational context, was economic resources and external actors. The perception amongst the GHP is that the economic resources do not decrease their discretion to implement the CBI in accordance with the meaning they assign to it. Regarding external actors, however, the GHP's view was that the minors' wellbeing could be affected by other actors such as the Migration Board. The GHP felt that their possibilities to influence the minors' wellbeing were limited. The GHPs' understanding and actions based on that understanding is therefore also context dependent. The characteristics of the institution of the meaning of the CBI, as the GHP's understanding adds up to, can therefore look very different in another context where for example the status of the child in other national policies are lower, poor financing, and where the GHP's educational background is not prioritized. If the SLB still have an important role in securing the CBI in such a context, as this study has shown, the possibilities for the unaccompanied minors to have their best interest secured might look very different than in this case.

# 6 Conclusions

## 6.1 Concluding remarks

In this study, theories that acknowledge structures' influence on the perception and action of individuals have been one of the starting point. The theories (Lipsky, 1980 and Rice, 2012) are rather generous in their inclusion of factors that influence the actions of SLB. One of the main factors influencing the implementation of a policy is arguably the policy itself. The CBI principle steer the bureaucrats by being a source for norm creation, and by, to some extent, determining the bureaucrats' discretion. Other than an outline of the policy level, the first part of the analysis has only included aspects which have been brought up by the GHP during interviews. Hence, aspects that the GHP might consider to have an influence over their possibility to implement the CBI principle; economic resources and external actors. It has been my intention to base the analytical framework on the theories, especially Rice's (2012) theory on micro-institutionalism in which the individual institution also is a determining factor for how a policy is translated into practice. The second part of the analysis has therefore dealt with aspects that determine what the individual institution is characterized with. By doing so, it has been possible to shed light on how the GHP translate the CBI principle into practice.

One finding is that the policy level, which all interviewees are well informed about, many times are similar to the GHP's own understanding of the meaning of the CBI. This could be an indication of a high level of knowledge about the policy level, which has been transmitted to the GHP's own perception and implementation of the CBI principle. At the same time, the policy allows a rather great discretion for the GHP to implement the policy in accordance with the meaning they assign to it. This is due to the policy formulation, which not to any great extent provides a definition of the CBI. Under all sections/headings in the analysis, especially when discussing the aspects influencing the individual institution, the meaning of the CBI is expressed in a similar way by the interviewees. Since they express their thoughts separate from each other this indicates that there is a common understanding within the GHP profession of what meaning to assign to the CBI principle. Since the range for this study only could included the policy level, the economic resources and the external actors as factors influencing the SLB behaviour, it cannot provide other explanations for why the GHP's coping strategies in terms of dealing with the CBI in various situations are similar to one another (that is rather a suggestion for further research). However, the GHP's inter-subjective understanding of the policy, which is presented as the empirical results, can be an indication of the individual



institution. It can be said to be characterized by warmth, good will and respect for the minors since according to the study the CBI in practice can involve the children being treated as individuals, as having a close relation to at least one adult, as being surrounded by educated personnel with knowledge of their backgrounds, as living in a safe environment, as having their physical- and psychological needs met, as having a functioning everyday life including an active leisure time and as being informed about their own situation. These are examples of the empirical findings presented in this study. The GHP believes it is in their role to provide all these things to the children. They need to show a personal engagement in the children in order to do that. Since the unaccompanied minors is a heterogeneous group the GHP need to be able to adjust their welfare service to the minors' individual needs. One conclusion is that structures are created by the GHP for this end. This study can be seen as an illustration of the great and important role the SLB have regarding policy implementation, in accordance with both Lipsky's (1980) theory on street-level bureaucrats and Rice's (2012) micro-institutionalist theory. The conclusions made and the empirical findings discerned can be useful to further develop the reception of unaccompanied children. It can, perhaps foremost, be an indication of whether or not the implementation process is heading in the right direction, and thus whether or not actions need to be taken with regard to future implementation work.

# Executive summary

The core of the study above has been to examine the street-level bureaucrats' (SLB) role in the implementation process. More specifically, how personnel translate the policy of the child's best interest (CBI) principle into practice in group homes for unaccompanied children. It is important for the implementation process to concretize the CBI principle, how is it defined, what does it mean in practice?

One of the assumptions I emanate from is that the SLB have discretion in regard to policy delivery. Both Lipsky (1980) and Rice (2012) acknowledge that it is in the interaction between the SLB and the welfare recipient the welfare state (with its policies) comes alive. For the unaccompanied children who have no one else to turn to, this delivery becomes very evident since it affects the quality of their lives in Sweden.

In order to examine how the GHP secure the unaccompanied children their best interest, it is necessary to immerse in the process of when a policy is put into practice. One important aspect in this process is to look into how the implementers understand the policy. According to Lundqvist (1992) the SLB's understanding refers to what extent they understand the policy and to the extent the SLB understand what is expected from them. This is linked to how the policy is formulated. The study above demonstrates that the policy level provides the SLB with a relatively vague definition of what the CBI principle should mean in practice. What can be said is on the other hand, that the policy level provides the SLB with what values to assign the CBI principle. The core message from the policy level is that the child should be prioritized in all interventions affecting the child. This is a signal to the implementers to put the specific child in centre of an intervention and to treat them with as much respect as they would with any other actor.

Only in conversations with the group home personnel (GHP) can the practical meaning of the policy be demonstrated. Semi-structured interviews have been conducted with seven GHP in order to grasp their understanding of the policy. All interviewees have experience of working as personnel at group homes for unaccompanied children. The interviews provided information about the meaning the GHP assign the CBI and what values they base this on.

In the analysis, it has been my intention to demonstrate how the policy of the CBI is translated into practice. The analytical framework is based on Rice's (2012) micro-institutionalist theory. She recognizes that the interaction between the SLB and the welfare recipient is influenced by societal systems; individual-, organizational- and systemic contexts. The policy level of the CBI principle is the one aspect from the systemic context examined in this study. The policy level is,

as discussed, one of the main aspects the SLB have to relate to in their implementation of it. The aspects included from the organizational context is based on the GHP's own perception on what organizational factors that can influence the implementation of the CBI; economic resources and external actors. Regarding the individual context, four aspects has been included in the study above and that is; the role of the GHP in regard to education, the GHP view on their professional role, the GHP view in the unaccompanied children and the GHP view on the dynamics within the work force.

The descriptive empirical material provided through the interviews made it possible to shed light on the process of when the GHP interprets the policy and make sense of the practical meaning of it. Separate from each other, the interviewees assign the CBI similar values and meaning. This is an indication of an already existing institution of the CBI, which seems to be characterized with respect, warmth and good intentions. The practical meaning of the CBI principle can, according to this study, be that; the children should be able to raise their voice, to have an adult they can turn to, to have a valuable leisure time, to think about something else than all their problems and so on. The GHP assign themselves the role of fulfil the practical meaning of the CBI and deliver the welfare service to the children. Since this requires a personal engagement and know-how, it is possible to conclude that the GHP have an important role for securing the unaccompanied children their best interest. In this sense, the study above is an illustration of the important role street-level bureaucrats has in the implementation process, in accordance with the theorists (Lipsky and Rice) assumptions.

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# Appendix 1

## **Interview guide**

### ***Principens prioritet***

Hur prioriterad är principen om barnets bästa?

Från higher levels:

Finns det några riktlinjer från lokalpolitiker, kommun eller Inspektionen för vård och omsorg gällande hur ni kan arbeta med barnets bästa som ni på boendet ska förhålla er till?

Finns det någon enhet som kontrollerar om principen efterlevs? Mot vem sker den rapporteringen?

Inom verksamheten:

Finns det något internt måldokument eller liknande kring frågan som ni arbetar efter? Vilka har varit med och tagit fram det?

### ***Förståelse av "barnets bästa"***

Vad är din/er förståelse av "barnets bästa"? Vad tänker du på när du hör "barnets bästa", vad betyder det för dig?

Har personalen samma förståelse av barnets bästa? Ngt ni diskuterat?

Hur tycker du att de riktlinjer som finns (eller inte finns), påverkar din förståelse av barnets bästa, och hur ni på boendet kan arbeta med det?

### ***CBI i relation till andra lagar och strukturer?***

Hur upplever du att arbetet för barnets bästa går att kombinera med övriga lagar och rutiner som boendet också ska förhålla sig till?

- arbetsgivarlagen vs barnets bästa
- Resurser (i form av ekonomi, lokaler, personal) vs. barnets bästa?
- ex, personalperspektiv vs. barnperspektiv?
- individ vs grupp
- normaliseringsprincipen vs individen

Vid "clashes", hur har ni löst det? Vad fick gå före det andra?

### ***Strukturer i verksamheten***

Vilka strukturer har ni byggt upp för att tillgodose barnets bästa?

- Till vilken grad arbetar ni för att använda er av tolk i samtal med barnen? Legitimerade tolkar?
- Är alla barn tilldelade en kontaktperson/mentor som regelbundet håller individuella samtal med barnen för att belysa deras behov?
- Hur arbetar ni för att bemöta de individuella behov som kan framkomma vid samtal med det enskilda barnet (konkret uppföljning)?

- Hur arbetar ni för att uppnå en familjär känsla hos barnen som bor hos er?
- Känner du till Socialstyrelsens kartläggning av EKBs behov?
- Till vilken grad arbetar ni för att barnen ska kunna ha kontakt med familj i andra delar av världen?
- Arbetar ni efter BBiC (modell för att utreda vad barnets bästa är i det enskilda fallet), genomförandeplanen?

Hur ser du på din roll?

- i relation till verksamheten
- i relation till barnen/barnets bästa

### ***Personal***

Hur ställer sig personalen till principen om barnets bästa?

Vilken kunskap har personalen kring barnets bästa? Hur får de kunskap om det?

Vilken utbildning har personalen på ert boende (socionom)? Hur påverkar det arbetet? Kvaliteten?

Erbjuds personalen utbildning för ökad kunskap om själva målgruppen (kulturkunskap, konflikt, kvinnors rättigheter, könsstämpning)?



# Appendix 2

## Translated quotes

### Quote 1

*Jag tror ju att det liksom blir, tillämpningen, ändå det är ju vägledande princip men vad det innebär rent konkret så tror jag att man måste komma fram till det på varje boende. Hur liksom förverkligar vi principen om barnets bästa. Och vad innebär det och att det är ju väldigt beroende av olika saker. Alltså situationen, som ungdomarna är i, kan vara väldigt olika [...] Och därför tror jag att det är svårt, väldigt, väldigt svårt att ha centrala styrdokument om hur man konkret jobbar med det. Däremot, riktlinjer, tankar och så. (interviewee 3)*

### Quote 2

*..vi ser att principen om barnets bästa, handlar väääldigt mycket om att göra individuella behovsbedömningar. (interviewee 3)*

### Quote 3

*Alltså jag tänker bara att när man säger barnets bästa så tror jag att det kan gälla väldigt många olika saker. [...] Om man försöker konkretisera det här, tror jag att det handlar mycket om fysiska och psykiska behov. (interviewee 6)*

### Quote 4

*att ungdomar som fått tid för asylintervju, att tiden blir ombokad, och det är jätteviktigt för ungdomarna eftersom de väntar ju på det här. Alltså med stor längtan, och när det väl är dags så, nej men vi kan inte ta emot dig för du har ingen god man. Och bara en sådan grej kan ju bokstavligt talat förstöra ungdomens psykiska tillstånd.(interviewee 6)*

### Quote 5

*..nära relationer till vuxna det tror vi alltid är bra för barnen. [...] Så vi jobbar jättemycket med att skapa förtroendefulla relationer och där också att alla personal försöker göra det. För det kan ju vara så att kontaktpersonerna, de matchas inte, så mycket. (interviewee 3)*

### **Quote 6**

*Rollen som, kontaktperson det säger inte så mycket för vi är mer än så. [...] ungdomen förväntar sig att du ska vara både informerad och engagerad i hans liv. Därför att de har ingen annan att lita på. [...] om du inte engagerar dig i ungdomen, då är det han som lider av det, för då blir han lämnad till sitt öde, och vem ska hjälpa honom eller henne. Så vår roll är för det första att visa, att vi gör för deras bästa i det här uppdraget. (interviewee 5)*

### **Quote 7**

*Alltså, min roll är att vara någon sorts föredöme, en vägledare in i Sverige, utan att vara för mycket det här med integration och assimilation. De här stora fina begreppen. Det handlar mer om att på, så gott det går på barnets villkor, ge dem så mycket man bara kan om Svea rike medan de är här. Alltså alltifrån kultur till samhällsstruktur, till språkkunskaper, den här förmågan att ta hand om sig själv, att lära sig att det är ok må dåligt, det är ok att inte vilja prata, det är ok att prata av sig om jättekonstiga grejer, bara ge dem allt de hittills inte har fått, och det är min roll, vår roll. Är att jag ska vara den de kan vända sig till när allting annat skiter sig. (interviewee 4)*

### **Quote 8**

*..det här är inte skrivet, men ibland spelar vi föräldrarollen utan att de märker det, men vi ibland vi är lite föräldrar till dem, ibland vi är lite lärare, sjuksköterskor. Vår roll är multidimensionell så att säga. (interviewee 5)*

### **Quote 9**

*Allt vi gör ska ju rikta sig till att de ska vara klara för att söka en bostad, och kunna klara sig själva. Sedan gör vi säkert mer än vad kanske många föräldrar gör, vi öser ju in. Föräldrar har ju från 0 och upp, vi har några år på oss att få det där här att sitta. (interviewee 7)*

### **Quote 10**

*Information, det tycker vi, det är verkligen i barnets bästa. Barnen ska förstå sin situation och sitt sammanhang och vad som sker i framtiden, varför den är där. (interviewee 3)*

### **Quote 11**

*Tanken är att vi måste behandla oss själva som ungdomsgruppen[...]Vårt samarbete, kräver minst lika mycket jobb som jobbet med ungdomarna. (interviewee 4).*