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Draft

The Unaccompanied Minor Refugee Program

In Ontario

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RESETTLEMENT OF REFUGEE MINORS - ONTARIO

Introduction:

In the summer of 1979, responding to the appeals launched by non government organizations, private citizens, and the federal government, to help the children who for one reason or another have been identified as "unaccompanied refugee minors" awaiting for resettlement in refugee camps in Southeast Asia, the Ontario government entered into an agreement with the federal government to establish the Ontario's Unaccompanied Minor Programme in an attempt to assist and facilitate the placement of up to 400 refugee minors from Indochina with approved foster families in Ontario. The overall role being played by the Ontario government, under the auspices of its Ministry of Community and Social Services, could be said as peripheral but supportive. In fact, according to the then coordinator (Turner, 1983), the programme is "essentially a federal programme with provincial support" and the provincial responsibilities were listed as:

- to facilitate the placement of up to 400 refugee minors with families in Ontario
- to support the federal process in their admission
- to provide on-going support to the children and sponsoring families for one year following placement

It must be noted that for reason(s) discussed in the Policy chapter, foster homes rather than other alternative forms such as group homes and/or institutions were decided upon as the appropriate care for these refugee minors. The foster parents were to assume legal guardianship for the refugee minors until they reach the age of maturity or when they were re-united with their natural families.

Recruitment of Foster Families:

Families wishing to sponsor these refugee minors must first of all apply to Immigration Canada. The application, with the backing of an approved sponsor group, has to demonstrate adequate financial resources since they would receive no government remuneration for the care of these children except moral support from Immigration officers, homefinders. When CIC accepts the application, a request will then be made to Ministry of Community and Social Services (COMSOC) to do a homestudy on the prospective sponsoring family.

The procedure of recruitment involves the assessment of the applicant-foster family by a trained social service worker who has been designated by COMSOC as a "homefinder". The homefinder is required to make an assessment of the family and overall situation with respect to the suitability of the particular family to become a foster parent for an unaccompanied minor. These recommendations are forwarded to COMSOC and simultaneously to the Ontario regional office of Immigration Canada (CIC). During the application process, prospective foster parent families are required to sign release forms which authorize COMSOC to receive personal information from Children's Aid societies and from physicians who have treated the family. Families are required to provide three personal references in support of their application.

The application is forwarded with the homefinder's report to the administrative offices of COMSOC, which selects the families, after consultation with personnel of CIC. Thereupon, the supervision of the settlement process is assumed by COMSOC, with consultation and advice from settlement branch of CIC and the homefinder assigned for that particular family. These three parties maintain contact with the foster family

throughout the settlement process until the unaccompanied minor departs from that family.

Within this operative framework, the homefinder assumes a pivotal role as troubleshooter, mediator, listener, and moderator to oversee the progress of the placement. On the one hand, the homefinder helps the foster families to realize the various limitations regarding what they can or cannot do for the minors, and, on the other hand, brings these minors to understand the role of the foster parents which may be a totally "novel experience" to them. In other words, during the placement, the homefinder has to assist these refugee minors and their respective foster parents to make necessary adjustments to one another, so as to ease the many sources of strains and tensions in the relationship which is at best one of ambiguity as a result of goals and objectives not having been clearly articulated and properly understood by both parties.

In any case, there is no clearly stipulated criterion for defining success of the placement. According to the then provincial co-ordinator's report, March 18, 1983, when she summarized the program, success has been defined as "the youth remaining in their foster homes until they are reunited with relatives or are ready for independent living." One may want to argue for or against this definition because it does not capture all the niceties and dynamics surrounding the relationship of foster parents and refugee minors. Nevertheless, this definition may be taken as a measuring yardstick to judge whether the unaccompanied minors program has indeed helped the refugee minors to assume an independent life in Canada.

Similarly, there is no clearly stipulated criterion for defining a breakdown of placement. Implicitly at least, the term "breakdown" refers to cases in which a minor requires a second or subsequent placement with another foster family. The use of this criterion may indeed indicate an over-dependence on the continuity of living arrangements in Canada, rather than the welfare of the unaccompanied minor, in light of his/her disrupted experiences leaving the homeland and in camp.

The overall goal of the program is the assistance of unaccompanied minors in their process of adjusting to life in Canada, learning English (French) and acquiring educational skills. Foster families, homefinders, and administrative personnel appear to be in agreement with respect to these goals

While these goals may be common to persons involved in resettlement in Ontario, they may not be shared by the minors themselves: as the succeeding discussion illustrates, minors may often be eager to obtain a job as soon as possible in order to support their families in their homeland and possibly to sponsor them in Canada. Thus family reunification may be an overriding objective of minors strong enough to conflict with certain of the objectives in the unaccompanied minors program, especially that of continuing education. It is possible to perceive unaccompanied minors as having expectations often quite different from those espoused by foster parents. Disappointment is likely to be keenly felt on both sides in case of such divergence.

Divergences may also follow from the approaches of foster parents who have attempted to take a very intense direction of the minors' life

under their own care. As a matter of fact, homefinders and administrative personnel both of COMSOC and CIC found that helping foster parents appreciate the perspective of refugee minors remained a very challenging task throughout the program.

The following analysis is based on a thorough examination of case materials made available to the researcher by the good offices of COMSOC. This paper identifies probable factors which contribute to success or breakdown of placement and highlights the necessarily complicated issues underlying the resettlement of refugee minors in Ontario. The discussion takes into consideration that these minors have experienced a period of storm and stress which may have forced them to behave like adults, even though they are considered as children. In the absence of their natural parents and others who contributed significantly to their lives, the children may have been required to develop a certain independence in their actions especially in camp. The subsequent adjustment upon arrival in Canada to a role of being dependent child, demonstrating love and affection to foster parents, sometimes requires an undue extension of effort, common sense and good will.

It is further understood that both unaccompanied minors and foster families may experience difficulties in appreciation of cultural differences in many different areas of life. Thus frustrations will occur both to the minors and to the foster parents for lack of such understanding. With these general considerations taken into account, the report proceeds with a general profile of refugee minors.

Placement of Unaccompanied Minors

Unaccompanied minors were placed with families located in middle-size cities disproportionately. Predominantly the families were located in the regions around Ottawa, St. Catharines, Barrie and Peterborough.

This research has encountered considerable difficulty in ascertaining the exact number of unaccompanied minors received in Ontario. According to the report written by the co-ordinator in charge of this program, as at March 1983, the total was reckoned at 245 children. Of that number ...

188 were placed in foster homes. The remaining 57 were allowed, on arrival, to join sponsoring relatives living in Ontario. Thirty-two children have been in their foster homes for less than one year and are receiving post placement support.... Minors, in this program, have been placed in 127 approved foster homes. In 15 placements involving 22 children there was a breakdown resulting in a second placement. In only 5 cases was a third placement necessary.

More recent calculation as at March 1984 indicates a total of 240 minors placed with 194 foster families. Among these 240 minors, only 181 minors could be classified strictly as "minors in the program". For the rest, some 56 children were re-classified as "family reunification" cases, with another 3 minors falling into other categories

According to records in the Ontario region settlement office, CIC, the total number of unaccompanied minors stands at 155 children (including pending arrivals and those pending provincial approval), as at July, 1983. The present researcher undertook yet another count of the unaccompanied minors through the files available in the provincial office. In an attempt to resolve discrepancies in counting, it appears to the

present researcher that certain cases in the provincial count were "double counted", owing to the particular children being placed with two or three families. Administratively, these children were re-counted every time their family placement was changed.

According to the count of this research, as at March 31, 1984, Ontario has accepted and placed a total of 175 unaccompanied minors among a total of 128 approved foster families. In addition, another 56 children (under age 18) have been assisted by the program, even though they are not strictly classified as "unaccompanied minors". These are cases in which COMSOC personnel, upon the request of the local CIC office, undertook home study in households of relatives of the minor arrivals. These relatives were already living in the province and formally applied for sponsorship. Upon positive assessment of these cases, the provincial COMSOC office forwards a letter of "no objection" to the local CIC office in order to facilitate the landing of these minors.

An additional four cases (three girls and one boy) of adoption took place

The count of unaccompanied minors, classified by sex and period of arrival, is presented in Table 1. It will be noted that the arrivals peaked in the first six months of 1980, with a marked tapering through 1980 and continuing to diminish until the end of 1983. As mentioned in discussions on policy elsewhere in this report, the lower levels of arrivals largely reflects a declining interest in sponsorship.

With respect to gender, the arrivals have disproportionately been males with a ratio of approximately two to one. It is presumed

that this disproportionality is attributable to the population distribution of children in camps. Reports have been received from numerous quarters that Indochinese families were reticent to allow daughters to leave their homes unaccompanied as refugees, although young males were permitted this option.

With respect to age, few are under age ten. The majority of these minors range between ages of 13 and 18 years. Thus, for those minors nearing the age of majority, placement with foster families would last only for a few months. This short duration of placement may have an unintended consequence in terms of distorting "success" or "breakdown" of placement. The "older" unaccompanied minors may have provided formidable adjustment problems both for themselves and for their foster parents.

The data on placement indicate that some 23 minors have required a second placement; among these 23, five required a third placement. It is difficult to ascertain whether this number is large or small. About one in six minors were age 17 or over upon arrival. According to the records, about two-fifths of these older minors separated from their first placement relatively early in what appears to be a "breakdown". The average length of those stays lasted about six months with the first family. Among the other three-fifths of the older children, the departure appeared either "normal" (leaving upon attaining age of majority) or was fairly protracted (18 months or more). Overall, the rate of "breakdown" appears to be higher for these older children than average.

(A) A Short cut for Resettlement

(B) Age Discrepancy

Overall, some 51 minors (29 percent) remain with their foster families for less than one year, a range from 2-3 days to about 10-12 months. The most common pattern for the minors' departure from their foster families appears the desire to be "living on their own". Other frequent reasons given for the departure from foster families include "living with friends" and "reunification with relatives/parents". The files indicate that only about ten minors (6 percent) stay with their respective foster families for more than two years.

The above discussion of departure and "breakdown" must be interpreted with great caution. First, this information has been obtained from files whose records may not be complete. A case was counted as "breakdown" only where specifically noted. Furthermore, departures may have occurred without their being specifically noted. Case material describing such breakdowns was sometimes sketchy or nonexistent, so that it was impossible to classify every such breakdown according to reason. Nevertheless, sufficient material exists to allow illustration of types of situations that involve difficulties and eventual breakdowns. These illustrations follow.

Some Emerging Issues

It has been noted above that case records provide illustrative information of various type of difficulties and experiences which ensue following placement of unaccompanied minors with foster parents in Ontario. These illustrations have been classified into some six categories:

A Short cut for Resettlement

Age Discrepancy

- (C) Language Barrier and Inadequate Interpretation Service
- (D) Mis-match of Minors and Foster Families
- (E) Differential Expectations: Sponsors vs Minor
- (F) Availability of Information

The following issues should not be seen as either necessary or sufficient to cause failure or "breakdown" of the placement. Moreover, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to judge whether placement of the unaccompanied minors with the approved foster families has served the best interests of each unaccompanied minor or whether arrangements had to be made owing to the urgency of the moment and the administrative necessities of governmental agencies. Rather, the purpose of this discussion is to delineate issues which highlight the complexities of the undertaking.

(A) A Short Cut for Resettlement

Some minors who might have heard about this program - either in refugee camps or through correspondence with their own sibling, kin or relatives already in Canada, would be "tempted" to claim their status as unaccompanied minors and apply to come to Canada under this programme for the purpose of re-uniting with them. In other words, it is understandable that this program might have been seen as a means or "stepping stone" to come to Canada and to expedite reunification. Instead of waiting for their sibling, kin or relatives already in Canada to become qualified sponsors and then sponsoring them out of the necessarily depressing and over-crowding refugee camps, perhaps with the encouragement and advice from these "would be sponsors," they did

intentionally conceal their actual age and/or conveniently fail to reveal that they do have relatives, kin or siblings already settled in Canada. Within months and sometimes, a matter of days, upon their arrival in Canada, these kin, siblings or relatives would expectedly or unexpectedly surface, or somehow being successfully "located." Invariably, these persons or families often make it known then to the CIC's officials or the provincial government's representatives such as the homefinders or the programme's co-ordinator that they are willing, eager, and most important of all, obliged to assume the responsibility for these minors. As well, these minors would insist on capturing the opportunity of "living with their own family members." It leaves the foster families puzzled, bewildered, disappointed and at times angered and frustrated especially if they have made the placement as a long term commitment. Not only that their plan of resettling these minors has come to an abrupt end, they might have the gnawing feeling that they were "cheated" in the sense that the departed minors' travelling expense became their responsibility. The following cases illustrate:

The minor has a brother settled in Ontario for about two years. Unfortunately, the brother was unable to have this minor sponsored. The minor's age was recorded as 15 and was matched with a foster family living very close to the minor's brother.... This placement lasted about ten days because the minor insisted on 'living with his brother' who has in his possession a copy of the minor's birth certificate that he was at that time, only five months short of the age of maturity. The goal of reunification, through this programme, was attained in a twisted way....

Two minors were matched with a foster family in March, 1980. It was reported that they entered this family without causing a ripple of discontent or discomfort.... However, in July, 1980, about four months after the apparently successful placement, these two minors' brother who has been living in U.S. since 1975 would like to have them reunited with him. The U.S. regulations make it impossible.... Then, an aunt of these two minors living nearby came forward and when she was approached by CIC's officials to see if she wanted to have these kids, she denied the intention. As a result, the minors were told to follow the house rules of the foster family and they were allowed to visit their aunt once a week.... In August, 1980, only one month after the aunt's declaration, she was visited by CIC's officials, this time, it was reported that the aunt, the uncle, and the minors would like to live together. The foster family made it known then that they would not give any further financial support to the minors....

Another foster family was matched with a reported 13 year-old minor, and the family was somehow assured that it was unlikely that he would have relatives in Canada.... After staying with the foster family for about some 18 months, the minor admitted that his age was in fact 16 and he has "located" his five cousins who meant a lot to him.... The minor attempted to sneak out to join his relatives.... Upon his final departure, the foster parents were very much saddened since they had taken him as a member of the family with the expectation of a much longer stay....

These cases indicate the overriding importance of family reunification to the minor. In fact, the program implicitly provides for reunification, in that foster parents are reminded that the children may not be adopted and that they should attempt to re-establish ties with their kin wherever they

may be. Nevertheless, foster families often, if not typically, expected their minors to commit themselves to a long stay. They doubtless experienced bewilderment, disappointment, surprise and anger upon learning that their "child" had located relatives and was eager to join them. The following cases demonstrate types of misunderstanding which severely disrupted the foster family household.

After the minors were reunited with their family members living nearby, the foster family was matched with another minor.... The bitter taste of the unexpected early departure of the minors was very much alive in the minds of the foster parents. Therefore, the foster parents became very protective of this particular minor and, as a matter of fact, they shielded her from having frequent contacts with her fellow countrymen in the area.... Other foster parents living nearby were concerned with this restrictive measure and the foster family had to relent and allow the minor to have a couple of Vietnamese friends.... In about two months, the minor stunned the family by making a request to be removed to another family....

A minor was placed with a foster family and it was reported that assurance was given to the family by CIC that she has no relatives in Canada. However, about four months after the placement, the minor has brothers and sister in another province. The foster parents felt threatened by the discovery and the continuing contacts.... The minor's sister then complained to CIC that the foster parents did not allow them to continue their contacts by phone or by letter, creating a situation which was unsettling for the minor and the foster family....for the minor was approached by CIC and she admitted that she was happy with the foster family. She wanted to stay... She was reluctant to confine the contacts with her siblings...

(B) Age Discrepancy:

Considerable evidence of discrepancy between "reported" and "actual" age surfaced for these unaccompanied minors. Whether knowingly or not, intentionally or not, many minors gave false ages to officials in refugee camps so as to make themselves "qualified" as "unaccompanied minors". This discrepancy has necessitated a few cases of minors being placed with a second foster family, or changing the minor to DCI status in order to allow him/her to become "independent" and live separately. In fact, it is extremely difficult for the foster parents being told that they were matched with a 13 or 14 years of age minor to deal realistically with an "overage" minor. The minor in turn might find it equally difficult or even impossible to act and behave as if he were a thirteen or fourteen year old teenager. The following cases illustrate:

The minor's recorded age was 13 on arrival. He was placed with a foster family that has four children, ages 10 to 19. About a year afterward, he was removed and placed with a second foster family.... According to a wrist X-ray examination, this minor was in fact over 17 years of age. Perhaps, as a camp-wise child acting on his real age, he behaved accordingly - drinking and smoking. As such, the foster family had difficulties accepting his behaviour because they were concerned with the possible influence on their own children.... This minor stayed in the second foster family for about six months before departing to live on his own.

Another minor, on arrival, refused to join the matched foster family claiming that he was really 19 years of age instead of the reported 17.... His status was therefore changed to DC I, and he became independent accordingly.

Another minor whose reported age as 17.... turned out to be 22 year old, and he stayed in the foster family for a few months. It was inevitable he would have demanded to stay with his foster family on his terms.... As well, his apparent lack of involvement in family life upset the foster parents. He did not want to share with them what had happened in his life. Yet, given the real age of this minor, his attitude and behaviour is understandable, however disappointing and confusing to the foster parents....

A minor who eventually told her foster parents that she was actually 15 years of age, instead of the reported age 13 on her application for immigration to Canada, immediately alerted her foster parents to the possibility that the minor might be thinking of leaving them soon.... They

were extremely concerned that she might then want to leave school at age 16 and to work in order to send money back to her family. They had yet to prepare themselves to deal with a new range of possible problems that came with a 15 year-old girl. Fortunately, the foster parents accepted the explanation given to them by the homefinder that the minor must have felt secure in their care for to reveal her true age. It must have been hard for her to pretend to a caring family that she was two years younger.... This placement came to successful ending as indicated by post-placement reports.

In sum, age discrepancies have at best created a certain level of uneasiness and apprehension among foster parents. Often these discrepancies created very serious dislocation in the household, as the minors would turn out to be far older than the natural children of the family, who were expected to be their age-mates and peers. Often foster parents found difficulties in enforcing "house rules" including curfews

Similarly, as an overage minor, it would be almost impossible for him/her to pretend to be a teenager. Under-reporting his/her age might have already served the purpose of coming to Canada and its continuation might have detrimental consequence. For example, they would like to be treated as an adult instead of a "child." As an adult, they would have the opportunity of leading an independent life and most important of all, obtaining a job so that they could help their family members in Vietnam, instead of being "placed" in a high school for a few years, upsetting their own priorities. Therefore, unless there is a reliable and effective way of ascertaining their actual age of the minors prior to their placement, it is extremely difficult for the foster families and the homefinders to chart an appropriate course to handle their presumed minors within a family context.

(C) Language Barrier and Inadequate Interpretation Service:

Upon the minor's arrival in their respective foster families arrangements were immediately made for enrollment in the ESL classes or in special English classes during their regular school days in order to facilitate communication. In fact, very few minors could manage to express themselves in English/French to their foster parents upon their arrival. The demand for interpreters, because of this language gap, was great. In many cases, the foster family had to depend on the minors' compatriots who had already arrived in Canada some years prior to undertake this task. These so-called local interpreters, despite a great

deal of good will, might have unwittingly over-identified with the refugee minors. Instead of translating the message literally to and from foster parents, their interpretation may have caused serious distortions, even resulting in breakdown of placement. The following cases demonstrate:

The minor was making slow progress in mastering the language, especially in comparison to other minors placed with families living in the same area.... As a result, a local interpreter was needed to help both the minor and the foster parents in understanding each other. Unfortunately, instead of translating the message to the minor regarding what her expected domestic chores within the family were, it was mis-interpreted to the minor as if she was responsible for domestic work while the foster parents did none themselves. This placement lasted only about seven to eight months until a second placement was needed....

Another case involved three minors. The foster family was extremely happy with the placement for several months. Even though the minors had intentionally under reported their age, the foster parents were nevertheless willing to cope with 3 older teenagers instead of three little girls.... Six months after the placement, during a critical time when a tragedy beset the foster family, the need for adequate interpretation service became extremely important...According to the foster parent, the final breakdown of the placement could be attributed to the inadequacy of interpretation service and the apparent incompetency of the interpreter. Instead of translating what was actually said, the interpreter took the liberty of expressing his own point of view. He would tell foster

parent that the minors did not mean what said or that they were confused. When the placement came to an unexpected and early termination despite the efforts on the part of the foster parent to salvage it...he directly and unmistakably lamented that one of his major disappointments throughout the placement, as a family project to help the refugee minors, was the inability of the interpreter to respond to expectations, however modest, at critical times....

A minor was placed with an understanding foster family who shared the minor's moments of homesickness and loneliness.... However, language barrier created some problems for the minor and the foster parents.... The minor was very keen on obtaining as much education as possible, and she was encouraged by the foster parents.... Meanwhile, the foster parents tried to help her to be realistic about exploring all career possibilities.... and educational opportunities.... The message, because of language gap, was being understood by the minor as the foster parents wanted her to quit school and work.... It took words and deeds - helping her to join her brother in U.S. yet expressing their willingness to have her stay in the family - for the minor to realize the true intention of her foster parents....

It should be clear, therefore, the provision of adequate as well as "accurate" interpretation service to the minors and their respective foster parents is crucial in bringing the placement to a successful and mutually fruitful conclusion. This point holds especially in the area of helping the minors understand realistically the notion of foster care and the needs, concerns and expectations of the foster parents. A minor, with language barrier, may have been misled by his or her fellow countrymen who came here as DCIs about the financial assistance provided

by the governments. If the minor were able to communicate in English or French to the foster parents, or if the minor were able to receive an accurate interpretation with respect to whatever questions or concerns the minor may have, thereby the two parties could possibly work out a solution for reaching a better foster parents-children relationship. A minor might not have accused the foster parents of withholding monthly money" from the government (family allowance). Likewise, foster parents might not have experienced hurt feelings by the minors' apparent inability to express gratitude or appreciation. Until minors master the household language, interpretation service holds an important key to understanding. Inadequacies in that service, often compounded by incompetent interpreters, however good their intentions, leave foster parents disappointed and frustrated; minors themselves often become bitter or resentful.

Mis-Match of Minors and Foster Families:

It has been difficult to obtain precise or ample information on procedures that were used in matching minors with foster families. Normally, after a thorough and careful home study was conducted, the homefinder would recommend the number, sex and age of minor(s) who might be placed there, based on the motivation, expectation, and financial situation made known to the homefinder during the family interview. Some cases illustrate, however, that the homefinders' recommendations had not been followed. Rather, foster families were sometimes pressured into accepting a match

which did not correspond to their wishes. The following cases illustrate this point:

After a careful and comprehensive study on the family concerning their motivation to sponsor a refugee minor, recommendation was made that in all probability, a younger child would be more appropriate for placement for this family than an older one. Nevertheless, a minor aged 17 was matched with this family... He stayed in the foster family for about five months until a second placement was necessitated.. According to the post placement reports, incompatibility of sponsor and minor especially the latter's acting out on his real age, was cited to be the reason contributing to the necessity of finding another foster family for the minor.

Another family was recommended to be foster parents for one or two refugee minors, preferably females. The foster family made it known that girls were preferred because they believed, and the homefinder concurred that they could offer much more to girls than boys. In any case, a male minor aged 16 was matched with this family.... Once the euphoric period lasting about six or seven months were over, the placement was the attention of the homefinder - finding a second foster family for the minor....

Realistically speaking, it is difficult, if not impossible, to follow all the suggestions and recommendations made by the homefinders regarding the desirable and preferred characteristics of the minors that were sought by the foster families in order to secure a perfect match, especially if one considers the urgency as well as the need to place a minor quickly. This is particularly relevant for a few cases in which the "minors" became "unaccompanied minors" only after their arrival in Canada. However, the occurrence of mis-match involves a trade-off which

means a commitment to numbers of minors being placed rather than making it a comparable commitment to the foster families' wishes. In any case, it should be emphasized that the homefinders' recommendations should be followed closely if the placement is expected to go smoothly without the necessarily unpleasant feeling - a second placement.

(E) Differential Expectations: Sponsor vs Minor

At times, basic misunderstandings occurred on the part of the minor concerning their placement with foster families. Often, minors mistook the particular situation of the family (occupation, degree of urbanization/rurality of community) as indications of directions that their own future life might take. Apparently communication to the minor about the temporary nature of the foster family placement was either unsuccessful or not believed.

Sometimes the problems in the household were traceable to differential interpretation of the respective roles of sponsor and minor.

One case resulted in removing minors and placing them with an older sister living nearby. The sponsor interpreted her role as that of a close friend who would assist minors in becoming independent. As such, the minors were expected to be guests in the house, following a schedule designed by the sponsor. This placement lasted only for about three months....in comparison to the sponsor's previous success in assisting a minor who stayed in this foster family for over a year....

Another case indicates the minor's own expectation with respect to what he came to understand as foster care... After a few months of the placement with a foster

family, he obtained a part-time job raking leaves. Nevertheless, he did feel that the job was beneath his dignity. He should not have to work for his pocket money. As well, doing his share of house chores was afterall, women's work.... He did feel that he should be entitled to some financial assistance from the government and/or the foster family.... As a result of his interpretation as well as his understanding about foster care, he did not observe the house rules and he stayed out late at night, playing pool and cards with his friends....

A minor, after staying with the foster family for a few months, left for another province with friends.... He appeared to be naive as to the realities of independent urban living, especially the difficulties involved in locating high paying jobs, with his relatively poor command in English. Nevertheless, he did expect either the foster family or the government should have assisted him finding some rewarding jobs....

Minors who have established contact with family members in Vietnam often draw members of the foster family into affairs with kin back home. In some cases, minors expect their foster parents to assist them in bringing family members to Canada as part of the obligation of the foster parent. In other words, they expect foster parents to render assistance to these family members either directly or indirectly. One minor complained, for example, that foster parents did not attempt to have age officially verified; if that had been done, the minor would have been eligible to become independent immediately. It was expected that with such an age 'correction' it would be possible for the minor to secure a job and send money back to the family in Vietnam. The bureaucratic difficulties of adjustment of official age of course escaped the minor.

These instances demonstrate that differential expectations may have a profound effect on the relationship between foster parents, the minor, and other persons including kin. As often the case with youth, minors expected both considerable assistance in the implementation of their particular desires as well as being granted a sense of independence. From the standpoint of the foster parents, it often appeared to be too much to expect them to grant minors both assistance and independence simultaneously.

(F) Availability of Information:

Assessment of the unaccompanied minors program has been hampered by the lack of detailed description about the background of minors prior to their being matched with foster families. Doubtless, such background information might have facilitated a better understanding about the overall placement of the minors and subsequent problems. Yet often such information was either unavailable or too scant for usefulness to agency personnel. Consequently, many placements had to be made on the basis of little or no background information. Yet background information often averts serious misunderstandings or is at least able to provide the sponsor family with precautions to deal realistically and constructively with problems which might arise in the course of placement

Summary

In sum, the examination of the placement of these refugee minors reminds us that the unaccompanied minor project was full of unknowns and even imponderables on both sides. How could we know that some of these minors would have "problems" in accepting the foster mother's authority? How could we ascertain a good match with so many unknowns? In any case, placement has been fraught with difficulties involving tremendous emotional adjustment on both parties. At times, the minor's expected progress is an initial sign of encouragement for the foster parents, yet this satisfaction is often followed by a sharp downswing which has taxed the coping repertoire to the maximum. In any event, an assessment of the placement without more and uniform background information for these minors can only result in an incomplete undertaking.

The following discussion draws upon some frequently mentioned patterns as available in reports of the homefinders' post-placement visits which indicate what may be ingredients of a successful placement.

Successful Placement: Some Common Patterns

It is extremely difficult to pinpoint any single overarching factor resulting in a successful placement. Rather, a combination of factors has frequently been mentioned by homefinders and governmental personnel in their post-placement observations. Based on these reports, the discussion presents, albeit briefly, some of the more common patterns characterized as "successful placements".

There is no evidence that successful placement is related to higher social-class background of a family. A majority of the approved foster families came from middle- or working-class background. Outcomes of the minors' experience were not associated with variations in such class background.

On the positive side, first and foremost, the foster families previous experience in offering foster care to other children and/or previous involvement in sponsoring Indochinese refugees, either directly or indirectly, are very helpful in terms of their acceptance of these minors. Perhaps the accumulated experience enables the foster parents to cope with whatever problems might arise in the course of placement.

Secondly, it is found that the active involvement as well as participation of the foster families' own children are extremely important in terms of helping the refugee minors' adjustment into the normal family life. They effectively ease the pain of the minor in coping with language barriers and school work while offering direction. Being close in age, and in many cases sharing a room in the home, the minor develops interests common with those of children of his/her age. The minors settling into his/her new environment is thereby readily facilitated. As such, the minor may come to feel that in spite of cultural differences, he or she is being accepted as a family member with the same privileges and attention from the foster parents.

Thirdly, the location of the minor's own family members plays an important role in facilitating the placement. For example, as stated

earlier, many minors might have "mis-used" the program as a "stepping stone" to come here and reunite with his/her kin, siblings and relatives. If, however, these family members do not insist on the reunification and rather encourage the minor to stay with the foster family, the placement comes to a more fruitful conclusion. Success is further reinforced by the foster family's encouragement -- allowing and ensuring the continuing contacts between the minor(s) and family members. The following case demonstrates:

The foster family understands minor's feelings of homesickness... helping her to maintain contact with her fellow countrymen living in nearby communities....driving her to see a relative living outside the foster family's community.... In addition, upon known that the minor has a brother living in U.S., the foster family made numerous attempts helping her join her brother even though they did not really want her to leave. Nevertheless, the minor decided to stay with the foster family because her parents in Vietnam wrote her and encouraged her to stay where she was....

Indeed, the concern expressed by the foster family with respect to the refugee minor's own family members has been taken by the latter as indication that the foster family does not intend to replace his/her natural parents. Furthermore, a feeling of guilt on the part of the minor might be accordingly alleviated. The following case vividly sums up these intricacies involved in a successful placement:

Two minors were placed with a foster family in late 1980. They have two brothers living nearby. The foster family was aware that in a matter of months, the minors might want to reunite with their brothers.... However, the minors and their brothers were realistic about the situation and they expressed it openly to the foster parents who in turn expressed a positive attitude towards the eventual reunification. As well, the foster parents told the minors and the brothers that the family would maintain a supportive attitude.... The minors received letters from parents in Vietnam telling them that it was very important that both should remain with the foster family to continue their education and make a good life for themselves so that they could in turn assist the parents constructively.... Added to this supportive environment, the foster family's natural son accepted these two minors as his real big brothers and he enjoyed their company as natural siblings.... The minors stayed in the family as of May, 1983....

In sum, the combined effect of the above-mentioned factors would enable the minors to feel at ease with the new environment and at home with the foster family. In turn, a supporting and relaxing atmosphere would be encouraged for the minors to explore and gradually to learn the language. Eventually, they could express themselves clearly, so that dependence upon the sometimes unreliable interpretation services might be minimized. Success of placement involves a set of conditions which in combination contribute to an overall outcome. No single factor alone is a guarantee.

Concluding Remarks:

It will be recalled that the unaccompanied minors program in Ontario was constructed to respond to urgent needs. Overall, the program accommodated some 175 minors in the full program, with ancillary services being extended to more than 60 other children. This number falls considerably below that targetted as an upper limit: i.e., 400 cases. The burden of this chapter fell to a discussion of the resettlement experience of those cases who were placed in the framework of the program.

Based on available cases, albeit from secondary sources of information, it is extremely difficult to define what factors are crucial in accounting for successful placements or breakdowns in the placement of minor with sponsor family. Common patterns of breakdown did emerge, however. Basically, they revolved about misinterpretations of the respective roles of sponsor and minor. Often the expectations had been pre-set well before the two parties met. Perhaps a further assessment of foster families, in attempt to assess the degree of success of this program might probe the personal experience both of sponsor and refugee, in order to obtain a more precise understanding of interpretations of respective role obligations.

For the present, it has been established that the concerted efforts of the foster families, governmental personnel, including COMSOC, CIC, and homefinders have given some 175 unaccompanied minor refugees a start in this country as well as an opportunity to rebuild from their shattered past. Not only have the minors benefited from

the program, effects have been noted for family reunification in certain instances. Moreover, the experience has enriched the lives of foster parents, who volunteered time and devotion in accepting unaccompanied minors into their home.

(to be added to Section (B), page 16)

"Breakdown" and Age of Arrival:

The experience of older youth being resettled as unaccompanied minors in Ontario differs sharply from that of their younger counterparts. As Table 2 indicates, the frequency of "breakdowns" is markedly higher among minors who arrived at age 17 or older. (It will be recalled that "breakdown" follows the classification used in the case records. While it is impossible to define the exact criteria used in that decision, it is clear that the minor left the household after a relatively short period of time. The reasons for leaving have been classified as "breakdown" and not for any other reason such as illness in the family or alternative living arrangements with kin or on one's own. These latter cases have been classified as "other", even though one of the parties might have considered that a minor leaving to join friends would constitute a breakdown. Thus the count of "breakdowns" is conservative: it is used only in cases where that term was explicitly entered on the case record.

While the overall rate of "breakdown" stands at about 14 percent according to the classifications on file, the rate for minors age 17 and above is three times greater than that for younger children. Upon inspection of the data, it was clear that the dividing line in rate of breakdowns occurred between arrivals aged 16 and under, in contrast with those age 17 and over. Although tangible case evidence is insufficient, there is indication that the older youth wished a more independent lifestyle. They apparently found that family arrangements in a household were

inappropriate for them. Obviously, foster parents found such circumstances very difficult for their household and were required to terminate within a few months. The median length of stay for all "breakdown" cases is between four and five months. Moreover, certain instances were found (nearly as frequently as "breakdown") of older youth who stayed for short periods of time, eg., less than five months, with their foster families. After that period, they either left the household to join relatives or decided to live on their own. While these cases are not "breakdowns" according to classification, there is clear indication that these youth desired other living arrangements and had made early efforts in that direction. Thus it appears that nearly two-thirds of the minors arriving at age 17 or older left their foster family situation before five months had elapsed, whether for breakdown or for other reasons. This experience contrasts markedly with those of younger minors, for whom the record indicates either continuing to live with foster parents or a fairly long duration of stay before separation (eg., more than 12 months).

Table 1

Unaccompanied Minor Arrivals, Ontario, by Year and Sex

Year, period	Males	Females	Total
1979	4	3	7
1980 January-June	46	25	71
July-December	24	15	39
1981 January-June	8	4	12
July-December	7	2	9
1982 January-June	7	3	10
July-December	13	2	13
1983 January-June	4	5	9
July-December	2	1	3
Total	115	60	175

Table 2

Breakdown of Sponsor Arrangement, by Age of Arrival

Draft

	10 - 15	16	17	Total
Disposition				
Breakdown ^a	11%	13%	18 35%	14%
Other ^b	89%	87%	82 65%	86%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
Cases	121	32	40 20	175