



Child Welfare in Ireland

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Ireland is a small country in the European Union that is home to around 6 million people. Cork is one of the major cities in southern Ireland and has around 120,000 people. Like many countries around the world, Ireland is still recovering from the recession and is trying to rebuild its economy. This has had harsh repercussions on working families in Ireland.

Fresh Start

Fresh Start is a nonprofit child welfare agency in Ireland. It has 15 residential homes throughout the country. It began its fostering services program in January 2014 and now recruits, trains, and supports foster carers throughout southern Ireland. Its mission is to find temporary homes for children and youth in Ireland who have been removed from their homes.



Children in Ireland

I chose to complete my global special study in Ireland because I have dual citizenship and hope to work there one day. I wanted the opportunity to examine the way children are viewed and treated in Ireland and how that compares to the United States. I observed many similarities between the countries, such as the goal when children are removed always being reunification and parents being given opportunities to regain custody.

Skills Developed

During my global special study, I was able to develop and improve my skillsets, including:

- Building my assertiveness skills when in an unfamiliar setting and with new colleagues
- Developing rapport with clients and engaging them in a positive manner
- Working on my cultural competence and the ability to connect with clients from a different cultural background and with different values
- Advocating for children's rights and how to improve the child welfare system

Outcomes

The study provided me with a unique glimpse into the social welfare state of Ireland and how the country views and takes care of children. The project included the opportunity to observe the child welfare system in Ireland and how it compares to the United States. Some of my experiences included:

- Assisting at foster home visits with a social worker
- Attending a foster parent support meeting
- Working at an international foster care conference

Lessons Learned

- The resiliency of children is amazing and their ability to remain positive even in unimaginable circumstances is incredibly humbling.
- The parents who become foster carers are dedicated and generous people who want to make an impact on the lives of these children.
- There is not enough federal support for foster agencies in Ireland, and it is something that needs to be improved.
- Families are viewed as sacrosanct and it is difficult to remove children from their homes, so working with the birth families as much as possible is best for the children and the families.

Connections

Classroom:

- SW 730: Child Maltreatment

This course provided me with information on the assessment and treatment of child abuse and neglect, helping prepare me to work with children and families.

- SW 799: Concepts & Techniques of Social Justice

Touching on issues of social justice in Scotland and the U.K., it provided me with information on the welfare state in Western Europe, and ways to advocate for social justice on a global level.

Career:

The global special study allowed me to better understand how children are valued in an international setting. I plan on advocating for children's rights in the global sector, and this experience allowed me to view child welfare through a new lens and compare how children are treated in the welfare state in another country to how they are treated in the United States.

Advice

- Before you head to your destination, do as much preliminary research as possible on the country, including its history, its current economic state, and its cultural values and traditions.
- Be open to new experiences and new people. Try to push yourself out of your comfort zone.
- Take the time to connect with your hosts, colleagues, and clients and develop relationships that you can maintain after you go home.

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