



## The Salesian approach to Unaccompanied Minor Refugees

Don Bosco was a man of vision who put into practice an exceptional youth project already some 150 years ago. Since then, Don Bosco's Salesians have aimed to enhance young people's lives, especially the poor and underprivileged who need greater support.

Some of the major perils jeopardising the lives of young people in Don Bosco's time were the same many youths are facing today: rejection, homelessness, migration and delinquency. The great Saint founded the Salesian Congregation in the knowledge that unaccompanied minors need concrete support from caring adults regardless of the country they find themselves in.

Don Bosco's Preventive System remains at the heart of the Salesian calling. The Saint responded to the needs of the youth of his time with a system based on love, the use of reason, a sense of God in life and positive engagement that focuses on the potential of every adolescent.

One can only exercise Salesian pedagogy when the young feel at ease in the presence of the adults around them. Thus Salesians extend a warm welcome to every young person, regardless of their background, gender, creed or level of education. As a Salesian Family we work side by side with youth and for youth for the Salesians' pedagogical style is based on warmth, cordiality, happiness and optimism.

Competence, qualification and individual, social, spiritual and technical expertise are indispensable for all those working under the Salesian umbrella while a process of pedagogical planning and evaluation is today considered necessary.

This mind-set is basic to our work with unaccompanied minors, regardless of whether they are refugees or migrants coming from difficult backgrounds. To help create uniformity of practice we list here some fundamental principles of our work:

### **1. Appropriate support**

We show complete commitment to unaccompanied minor refugees (UMR) by treating them as individuals. Every human being should receive the kind of support he really needs but in practice this should be determined individually by professionals. Support also includes psychological services. We underline the need to provide UMR with long-term support, that commences on engagement and extends beyond the age of 18 until such time as the young adult can effectively rely on his own support network. We also value clarity with respect to legislation affecting migrants and migration.



## **2. Cooperation is important**

Commitment to UMR requires solid cooperation. We work with the relevant institutions to promote community and regional networking, which helps deliver individualised, holistic assistance, as appropriate. Cooperation beyond borders is essential for international intervention programmes to succeed.

## **3. Education is key**

We want UMR to maximize their educational possibilities at the earliest. For Salesians education is understood holistically so we also support the professional orientation and training of UMRs as well as their attempts to obtain an apprenticeship. We foster the development of intercultural competences and try to accompany them as they assimilate a new set of cultural values while promoting the value of active citizenship.

## **4. Unaccompanied minor refugees have Rights**

In accordance with the Christian vision of mankind we promote human dignity and the right to respect it. When we stand up for the rights of UMR we practice a Christian vision of politics by promoting a rights-based approach based on the U.N. Guidelines and the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child. We place ourselves at the service of guardians of UMR who wish to make use of our particular competence in this field.

## **5. Specific inclusion**

We strongly support the concept of small Residential Care Homes that has proven its worth in the past. It is essential to provide an adequate atmosphere in these facilities and promote Homes that accept nationals as well as migrants in order to avoid creating ghettos, so that we include these youngsters right from the start (right after reception). The diverse background and ancestral heritage of UMR is a richness to be valued, not a threat. In an inclusive society, cherishing diversity is a way of showing respect for the culture and values UMR bring with them. We consider permanent substantial assistance and carefully managed integration programmes to be essential to the process of including UMR in society.

## **6. Language is the bridge**

Knowledge of languages is a basic necessity without which there can be no professional formation and integration for UMR. Thus we support UMR to learn the languages they need to integrate. Moreover, when engaging interpreters, we seek to ensure that these are persons of integrity since they often become trusted persons for the unaccompanied minors.

## **7. A qualified approach**

All those working under the Salesian umbrella embark on a process of periodic improvement of their skills in meeting young people's needs. When considering the offering of a new service for UMR we place particular emphasis on flexibility and reliability.

In conclusion, as Salesians of Don Bosco we are engaged in a wide variety of works, but in our work with refugees and migrants our focus is on the UMR. As Salesians we reiterate that the young person needs not only be seen as a recipient of services but as a person with rights and an opinion which needs to be heard and respected. To this end we offer our support and encourage UMR to retain a strong sense of identity and yet engage with the process of inclusion into a new context and culture.