ABA Commission on Homelessness and Poverty

Report on the International Summit on the Legal Needs of Street Youth

August 1, 2015

Starting in 2008, the Commission began work on the International Summit on the Legal Needs of Street Youth and, last year, dedicated the bulk of last year focused on making it a success. The Commission collaborated with the Section of Litigation Children’s Rights Litigation Committee, the Center on Children and the Law, the Commission on Youth at Risk and a coalition of international partners to convene the Summit on June 16-17, 2015 in London, England—on the heels of the ABA’s Magna Carta festivities. The Summit drew over 150 experts from nearly 40 countries and all continents (with the exception of Antarctica) to provide the first ever comprehensive international discussion about the legal rights and policies that affect this vulnerable segment of the homeless population—street youth. The experts attending the summit, including youth from all over the world, work on these issues in over 100 nations.

More than 50 experts divided into international teams to draft case studies, issue briefs and model laws and policies on human needs, child welfare, cross-border issues, education and employment, and criminalization to develop a framework for standards that incorporate best practices from around the world. The law firm of Baker & McKenzie generously provided use of their London office meeting rooms and audio-visual equipment as well as use of several of their offices around the globe for virtual summit participation. The firm also secured extensive pro bono legal research from their offices and partners around the world, resulting in 10 comprehensive country-specific reports. ABA President William Hubbard and President-elect Paulette Brown were kind enough to join us to welcome the participants and kick off the two-day working Summit. Three key representatives from the United Nations attended the Summit. This is critical given the UN’s current efforts to draft a general comment on street children. The UN Special Rapporteurs on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, and on Adequate Housing, Leilani Farha attended, along with Bernard Gastaud of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. We will be working with the Consortium on Street Children to contribute to the United Nations’ General Comment on Street Youth.
Next Steps

The Summit materials are available on the Commission’s website, and moving forward, we will build a global site organized by regions and countries with the goal of highlighting organizations and programs, research and data, law and policy, and multimedia and videos.

The Summit will serve as the foundation for an ongoing global initiative aimed at fostering greater collaboration on legislative advocacy and pro bono legal services—both domestically and abroad.

This winter, the Commission will co-host a session with the U.S. Family and Youth Services Bureau (HHS) on lessons for the U.S. from the International Summit. The Commission will then work with the experts to finalize the standards that were drafted for the Summit. The standards will both inform the U.N. general comment, as well as stand on their own for use by in-country policy and practice experts.

The Commission has requested and received approval from the ABA Board of Governors to allow us to coordinate future work through an ABA Coordinating Committee on the Legal Needs of Homeless Youth. Given the volume of exciting initiatives related to homeless youth and the enthusiasm from other ABA entities with related substantive expertise, we hope to foster greater collaboration and coordination as well as maximize resources and increase the impact of our respective ABA initiatives.