

Factors re debriefing TCKs

1. WHY DEBRIEF CHILDREN?

At a TCK Forum Day conference entitled 'MKs on MKs' some adult MKs offered some 'Tips for Missions' and 'Tips for Churches'. Here I am simply going to show what they said; I think the specifics may be discussed during another workshop here. Some of these tips they offered as suggestions that they would have appreciated themselves and some were being shared as their own experiences which they wanted to extend to other MKs.

If those MKs were a good sample of our TCKs then it is evident that they want to be 'known' for themselves both by the mission agency and in the churches. This in itself is my motivation for doing debriefs with MKs.

At a recent day seminar on 'Debriefing' it was suggested that it would be good for agencies to make it a policy that children of members are debriefed. It was also suggested that the agency personnel correspond initially with parents about the debriefing and gain permission to correspond directly with the children. This seems a good idea so that there is some relationship between agency personnel who will be involved in debriefing and the children or young people before the actual debrief.

2. BLOCKS TO DEBRIEFING

Even just recently I have found there can be blocks to debriefing the children of members. The **attitude of parents** can actually be a block – although within Wycliffe UK each member is required to have a debrief and that is an accepted policy, some parents seem to have the mindset that debriefing their children would be invasive in some way, or they feel they themselves are too busy to bring their children for a debriefing session.

Sometimes **the children themselves**, particularly if they are older (teenagers or near teenagers) might question the need for debriefing. This was the case with the children of one family I debriefed a few years ago four children with the age range of 10-18, one or two questioned the need but the parents felt it would be valuable and so it happened. I was already aware that one or two of the children were questioning the need for the debrief and so explained early in our meeting that this was just intended as an informal 'chat', for them to know that our organisation cared for them as they were returning to the UK, that I was 'there' if they needed to talk to someone other than their sibling and parents and perhaps to introduce them to other MKs who'd been through this same transition. After a short time of chatting it was evident that everyone was comfortable with the situation. Since that debrief most of the children of that family have kept in touch with me and have shown that they feel at ease relating to me about various issues as they have arisen.

Afterwards I wondered if those young people questioned the need for this debrief because there had been no real contact with the children of the family prior to that time. That has encouraged me to take every opportunity to have contact with the whole family at every stage of the family's involvement with the organisation.

One meeting for debriefing purposes is not necessarily much contact but it does provide an opening and I always invite parents and children to contact me as they need; I also give them information about the Re-entry seminars where appropriate or help them to make contact with other TCKs. I have found it is often in the informal ongoing relationships that much of the real debriefing takes place. One of my 'dreams' is for there to be a nationwide inter-agency TCK network – some of our MKs not only keep in contact with their own friends which is so much easier these days with email and Skype but have also made contact with other MKs through MK websites. Not all TCKs need that ongoing contact with the wider TCK world but some do.

Most TCKs like to be able to 'tell their story' or just have others with whom they can talk about their life overseas, particularly in the initial stages of settling in another place. In spite of e-mail and Skype facilities it still seems that young people like to have someone they can relate to on this level just where they are. One MK recently shared with me that just having one person with whom she could share about the place where she had grown up was good. Obviously people are very different and the way they work through transitions may vary greatly but we, the agencies, need to be looking to see what they may need to help them at such times that they will not necessarily realise for themselves as they leave the place they have considered home whether for a short or longer period.

3. FACTORS TO BE CONSIDERED IN DEBRIEFING CHILDREN

Possible times when interviewing children might be appropriate

1. Returning from the field – Home Assignment debrief
2. Preparing for going abroad - for children over 9 (say)
3. For family screening before the application process is begun

How beneficial would interviewing children be?

a) to the child

If the child wants to talk then they could express feelings, to talk to an outsider, to raise questions, hopes and fears

If they are unwilling - very little benefit

b) to the family

At the pre-field stage an interview could be confirmation to the family to go - or not. It could alert them to prepare the children carefully.

We would not normally show the parents the interview but some aspects might be shared.

c) to the agency

It could alert the agency to potential problems in either the child or in the family. This would need to be done at the pre-application stage if it was suspected there might be problems. It could show areas of help and support that were needed. It could indicate what kind of assignment would be suitable for the family.

The purpose of the interview needs to be clearly communicated to the child and the parents ahead of time.

In what context is an interview best conducted?

1. A formal (office) interview is easiest to arrange and handle from the agency side.
2. An informal, natural setting would probably help the child to be more open and relaxed, but how to achieve this?

Possible Debriefing Questions for TCKs Aged 8 - Teenager

Talk about the situation where you have been living:

Friends, studies, family relationships (take care here).

Pastimes enjoyed, church, opportunities for sharing at depth.

Adults who have been helpful as friends or as role models.

What did it feel like to prepare for leaving? Actually leaving?

Saying goodbye to people and places?
Did you look forward to coming to the UK?
How did the travelling go?

Where are you staying now/ where will you be staying?
Do you know other kids there, at school, at church, in the area?
How do you feel about settling into a new school, new neighbourhood, new church?

How do you expect to cope?
Will you talk a lot about what you have been doing, or not talk at all?
Will you mind if others are not very interested?
Will you hold onto the way you talk now or learn to talk like the other kids do?
Are you willing for others to know you are a Christian? (if it has already be seen that they are the Lord's)
What will you do if other kids use words you don't understand?
What will you do if you can't work something, like a public telephone, automatic machines at school?
If you are feeling sad about not settling in quickly enough, or missing your friends from abroad, who do you think you could talk to?

Possible Activities to help kids relax and share more freely

1. Memory Bags – 3 items that are special from field situation
2. Calendar Countdown – helps them think through whole furlough or next year. Might help them to express some fears.
3. Feelings Faces – for younger ones
4. From Here to There Surveys
5. Transition charts – especially for older ones.

*Paper presented by Gill Cheffy at the European TCK consultation at Mosbach, Germany
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