

“A fine balance”[†]—how child welfare workers manage organizational changes within the Norwegian Welfare State

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Abstract

In 2004, the Child Welfare Reform (CWR) was introduced in Norway. One of the most important goals of the reform was to strengthen State level authority in public child welfare and establish equal child welfare services across the country. The aim of this article is to study how this new reform affected the work of municipal child welfare professionals and led to the development of a regional project called *New Child Welfare* (NCW). Based on qualitative interviews with central actors in NCW, regarding the interaction between state and local child welfare professionals, the article shows how professionals within local child welfare reacted on the CWR. The NCW was established as a consequence of the professionals' reaction on state governance and represent a new type of network. Inspired by Michel Foucault's concepts of *governmentality* and *self-work*, the article focuses on the development of the NCW as a result of child welfare workers' confrontation with state governance and their fight for innovative solutions, knowing that the reform had direct impact on vulnerable children, youths, and their families. The local and collective self-work in NCW is an expression of a new form of productive power based on equality and cooperation, as well as a particular form of dependency between municipal and state levels of governance. The article highlights the importance of studying how reforms introduced by the state actually influence local child welfare work, policy, and professionalism within municipal child welfare.

Keywords: *Governmentality; equality; innovative self-work; power; New Public Management*

Child welfare work in Norway is regulated by the Child Welfare Service Act of 1992 (CWSA). The overarching goal of child welfare is to provide for children's and young people's needs, interests, and rights in their best interest (cf. CWSA§

4-1, Brottveit, 2013) and support them in their transition to independence. The Act of 1992 was first and foremost legitimized by referring to the need to strengthen the rights and participation of child welfare service users (NOU, 2000,

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[†]The title is inspired by Rohinton Mistry's (2004) book title: *A Fine Balance*.

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p. 12), and led to the Child Welfare Reform (CWR) in 2004. As part of this reform, Bufetat¹ was established to represent national child welfare services in five regions of Norway. The main goals of the reform for child welfare services is to ensure a better professional and financial management of child welfare and equal services for children and young people in need of services regardless of where they live. Furthermore, the reform seeks to develop better cooperation with the municipalities and better quality at all levels of child welfare (Rundskriv Q-08/2007 Q 06/2007), and to contribute to the professional development of services in child welfare. The CWR must be understood in light of New Public Management within the health and social services system in Norway. As a result of growing economic pressures within the Norwegian Welfare State, as in other European countries, the public services became subject to a demand towards greater efficiency (Eriksen, 1993, 2001; Vike, 2004; Vike, Bakken, Brinchmann, Haukelien, & Kroken, 2002). This resulted in a turning point and a search for new solutions, inspired by models from New Public Management, the so-called discourse of efficiency (Eriksen, 2001, p. 35; Vike, 2004, p. 27). This new discourse was inspired by economic and normative theories that had decisive consequences for the development of the Norwegian Welfare State (Bukve & Offerdal, 2002; Christensen & Læg Reid, 2002; Eriksen, 1993; Vike, 2004). Governance should be based on incitements and directed by users (Christensen & Læg Reid, 2002; Vike, 2004). One of the major effects was a repositioning of responsibility from that of a political question to one of managerial and pro-

fessional responsibility. This transition represented a shift from direct to indirect management by governing through values, visions, and economic frames (Neumann, 2003; Sørhaug, 2003; Vike, 2013). New Public Management represents new forms of governance that involve more invisible and indirect forms of power (Neumann, 2003). Despite the reform and due to the introduction of New Public Management, municipal child welfare workers throughout Norway experienced decision-making that was not in line with child protection assessments, a reduction in residential care offered to vulnerable children and young people, as well as restrictive and radical decisions on a regional level. Responsibilities were moved from institutional care to the front lines of child welfare prevention activities (Bakketeig, Gautun, & Backer, 2011).

One expression of this was that preference given to evidence-based methods. A gap between supply and demand in relation to children's needs for services and institutions emerged and contributed to a crisis for children and young people, as well as to conflicts and communication problems between the state and local child welfare authorities (Bakketeig et al., 2011). Eventually this situation led to an explicit protest among local child welfare workers in one particular municipality and resulted in New Child Welfare (NCW), a regional project characterized by a new type of collaboration between the Bufetat and the local Child Welfare services.

The protest and the type of solution may be related to distinct characteristics of Norwegian society—being a small country of 5 million people, classified as a social-democratic welfare regime strongly influenced by egalitarian values, and where the state assumes primary responsibility

for the welfare of its citizens (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Such protests from below have to be handled in a legitimate way by the state. From this descriptive start, we will now move further into the analytical approach.

BETWEEN BEING GOVERNED AND DOING INNOVATIVE SELF-WORK

To understand the municipal welfare workers' protest and their ways of reacting, we have found inspiration in two concepts from the French philosopher Michel Foucault: *governmentality* and *self-work*.

Foucault's concept *governmentality* directs analytical attention to how the subjects, in this case, child welfare workers, are formed by power in direct and indirect ways (Foucault, 1980). *Governmentality* draws attention to how the State, through the Norwegian CWR, makes child welfare worker's act in certain ways due to technologies of power that are forced upon or embodied within the workers. The reform has, for instance, given the local child welfare workers less influence over their own work and a limited overview of their own working conditions, giving less time per client, and has resulted in a fear of not being able to work in the best interest of the child (Brottveit, 2007, 2013). They govern their positions to reduce harm both on their clients and on themselves and tries to handle the situations as flexibly as they can. Some of them experience less energy to meet and speak with clients; they slowly adapt another understanding of their clients as members of categories rather than as individuals (Kroken, 2012).

The State has, through the CWR, directly and indirectly challenged the child

welfare workers in ways which reduce their ability for independent child welfare assessments.

Although Foucault's concept *governmentality* directs analytical attention to how child welfare work is formed by power in direct and indirect ways (Foucault, 1980), the concept *self-work* opens up for seeing how child welfare workers in innovative ways deal with the power forced on them (Foucault, 2002a; Fransson, 2009; Fransson & Storø, 2011).

By drawing upon the concept of *self-work*, it is possible to see that child welfare workers find surprising and innovative solutions to maintain themselves as moral actors in the interests of vulnerable children, youths, and their families.

NEW RESEARCH

Recent evaluation reports FAFO & NOVA (2011) raise important questions about whether the CWR from 2004 has worked as intended.

In particular, they address the promises of better professional and economic governance of child welfare, to assure equal services nationally, to assure good quality at all levels within child welfare, and to make an active contribution to furthering professional development within child welfare services. Evaluations show that the service has become more equal on a national basis. Placement in foster homes is favored over placement in institutions as a result of the reform. Closure of institutions and reduced measures for children and youth show that the services are not sufficiently differentiated to safeguard the various needs of vulnerable young people (FAFO & NOVA, 2011). The report from NOVA stresses that the trend of reducing the use of

institutions—which was an intentional effect—has led to a striking adverse development in the relation between the municipal and the state level in child welfare services, despite the need for flexible and coordinated services. To establish coordinated actions between the municipal and state levels has been especially problematic because of lack of time and resources, both at the municipal level and the state level, and the waiting time for services has been too long. Moreover, some child welfare services seem to have become more limited and have provided less room for individual adaptations. Other evaluation reports (Deloitte, 2011) show that the lack of suitable foster homes is a great challenge for Bufetat and confirm that the most difficult issue, after the establishment of Bufetat, lies in the lack of concrete services, such as lack of foster homes, lack of institutions for placements, and evidence-based programs such as Multisystemic Treatment and Parent Management Training Oregon (NIBR & Telemarkforskning, 2011).² These methods are directed towards improving children's and young people's behavior through interaction with their parents. MST is directed towards youths over 12 years old and PMTO towards younger children (St.melding nr. 17, 1999–2000, p. 34).

Another criticism is that the professional teams in Bufetat have not been able to accommodate the demands and financial requirements from the municipalities (Neumann, 2010; PWC,³ 2011). PWC (2011) suggests injecting more economic resources into the municipalities at the expense of the Bufetat, to give them greater capacity and competence to fulfill growing demands. The consequences of lack of funding might have

weakened the municipalities' ability to prioritize the child welfare work within their own budgets. An extended case study of child welfare preconditions, for action in the Norwegian Welfare State (Kroken, 2012), shows how the reform of 2004 gave the municipal and county child protection agencies unlimited responsibilities in contrast to the responsibilities of the state child protection bureaucracy, which has become more limited and specialized. The evidence-based methods, MST and PMTO, as mentioned above, reflect how specialization is a matter of priority, whereas experience-based practice has not gotten the same status. This represents a distinctive dynamic whereby an increasing distance between the top and bottom of the welfare state hierarchy has created a foundation for reinforcing this division. The welfare state goals are seldom confronted by the practical consequences of public governance. In this case, child welfare workers experience being overwhelmed by their responsibility for concrete children and youngsters that is difficult to handle (Kroken, 2012).

METHOD

The study is based on a qualitative design containing individual and group interviews with participants from NCW. These were the people who formed the project and recruited users and professionals from the field. The project participants came into the project from various positions—as rebels from the practice field, leaders from state and municipal child welfare, and user representatives. They all became constructors of the NCW project, and all of them followed the process from the start.

Data collection and data analysis

The study started with a meeting with representatives from the NCW's steering committee and project manager in the autumn of 2011. In this first meeting, all three researchers met and talked with the members of the steering committee. This gave us a possibility to create a common context and a common frame of reference that we felt was fruitful. For the other meetings, one or two researchers spoke with our interview subjects. After we had conducted a few interviews, some interesting opinions, positions, and concepts were brought forward that became the crucial issues. These issues were related to the way our interview subjects talked about the process and important turning points and how they talked about their positions within the project and the contextual frame of the project. From December 2011 to March 2012, we conducted seven interviews with people that had different positions in the project; one user representative, the manager of the project, leaders, and members from the steering committee, who represented either the municipal or the state level. We used an open thematic interview guide and focused on the background for the turning point, the creation process behind the NCW project, and the participants' experiences of cooperation. During the interviews we noted information as precisely as possible. These notes were transcribed as soon as possible after the interviews, and shared among the members of the research team. In this way, all of us were invited to make corrections and contribute to the analysis.

FINDINGS

A difficult situation emerges

The story of NCW began in 2008 when a local child welfare leader in one of the country's municipalities sent a message of concern to the BUF agency about the condition of the Norwegian child welfare services. At this time, 30 emergency care places had been closed down during recent years, and the leader was concerned that vulnerable children and young people were not receiving help and support measures they needed. The child welfare leader had the support of several child welfare workers in the county. The rebellion among child welfare leaders and workers, in this particular county, resulted in an article in a major daily newspaper in which two child welfare leaders made their concerns public. They argued that the state CWR, which was intended to strengthen the professional services available to vulnerable children and young people, in reality, had led to a reduction in the services available to a very vulnerable group. In a second article in a local newspaper, one of the child welfare leaders expressed that the state financial support to the municipal child welfare was not adequate. These objections led to a turning point, and the heads of municipal child welfare mobilized to protest state governance. A leader from the regional Bufetat invited the municipal leaders for child welfare to a meeting. The critique of Bufetat was strong. One of the consultants expressed the situation in this way:

The municipal leaders fired at everything; small things and big things and about individual cases and principles. But the really big issue was the closure of the smaller

local *institutions for vulnerable youth*. I cried when I left the meeting. How in the world would we be able to cooperate? I carry with me a qualitative way of thinking and my experience as a clinician. As a professional it is important to know how I can contribute ... Nothing was falling into place. There was frustration and powerlessness. It was really terrible. It's not often I cry. I had to debrief myself. What kind of wild west was this? I realized I was balancing my loyalty internally in Bufetat, but I also understood the municipal leaders' frustration.

The consultant's experience of the protest from the municipal leaders made a strong impression. Also she was occupied by the children, the youths, and their families, and felt bad both about the situation and the climate of the discussion, but even more important she felt that she had to balance her loyalty internally in Bufetat with her loyalty to the field. This dilemma, her ethical considerations related to the field, and her way of communicating came to be important for the process. The consultant further says:

They started to trust that I was the "guard." I am concerned with how one can create authenticity in relationships when we meet each other as people and not as roles. I said something like the state is a *large and unwieldy* system. It was something more than just our roles. We got to know each other.

The consultant expressed that she felt the account presented in the newspaper was neither fair nor true, although she expected that the stories they told were true. After the meeting she felt that she had been governed by emotions whereas,

as she said, the leaders in Bufetat used their heads. She gives credit to her manager for this and emphasizes the importance of "not losing sight of the aim." She also emphasizes the importance of holding on to one's own feelings. She goes on to say:

We were summoned to the County Governor. We explained the situation. The Governor acted as a mediator. We had to put everything aside and provide answers. This has changed our focus towards looking at how we are going to work with these children we are responsible for.

The consultant emphasized the importance of behaving rationally and controlling emotions. This "calmed the storm," as she expressed it. Her observation tells something important about this particular field—a field so full of emotions and feelings, high expectations, being an honest and moral actor, and the importance to be able to find a way of talking about the problems. One of the consequences of being able to behave rationally and control emotions was that focus turned towards the municipal child welfare leader that had reported about the problems in public. This transformed the stress and the objections were presented in a proper way. The consultant explained:

The child welfare leader played a specific role in the process. He was authoritative in his role as coordinator, both formally and informally (...). Personal features, safe and stable. He was the same person in different contexts and he spoke on behalf of all leaders. He did it in a tidy, fair, unbiased, and reliable way. Therefore he got a strong position. But also one of the

other leaders came in a very important position. He was also very important. And these two guys had a good relation to each other. Each of them knew that the other one would support oneself. Together they found a support in each other relation. Several of the municipals got the same attitudes as these two. And then we organized and go to a joint seminar. *Then we saw the light and we said Halleluja! It was a matter of legitimacy and money. We received capital.*

The consultant from Bufetat states that the process was based on what she calls “a balance” between the municipal and state child welfare authorities and she emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the participants’ own experiences, and never hesitating to defend others when she finds it appropriate. She explains that she went as far as she felt the government guidelines allowed her to. However, there were also times when the consultant did not obey the demands placed upon her by local child welfare leadership. Especially she remembers one case where she experienced that she had a certain flexibility to handle the situation in her way. She declared that she believed in “authenticity” in the case, and that she hesitated to act against her own principles. If she had been demanded to act against her convictions and will, she would have quit the job. Again, she explained, “it is a matter of balance,” and the challenge is to “express yourself in the role.” According to the consultant, one of the barriers in the cooperation between the state and the local child welfare was that the regional Bufetat had no direct experiences of realities on the ground. They tried very hard to maintain a distance between their own reviews and

concrete cases in an attempt to safeguard the state guidelines. However, professional team leaders from Bufetat occasionally telephoned the regional leaders about acute cases, forcing them to interact directly. Another consultant from Bufetat elaborated:

We represent the Act, and we have a shortcut to the department. We engaged a lawyer, who investigated the legality of terminating appointments between private institutions and the State. Employees from a small local institution, which is a private institution that supply the state level, was also very engaged against the department. The department changed their minds quickly. Bufetat had an obligations to help. This was in contrast to the usual experience towards the department. It’s rather unusual that the department moves that quickly. But the directives of payment according to, for instance, mother and child services weren’t clear enough. The former services weren’t seen as child welfare services, so a change of Act was necessary. And the 2004 reform led to that the municipals and the state got more attached to each other.

Immediately after the newspaper article was published, the Minister for Children and Families visited the county in question to calm the situation, and therewith opened a basis for communication. The municipal leaders asked for a meeting with Bufetat management in Region South in the beginning of 2008. This meeting took place approximately 6 months later. The meeting resulted in a challenge to the head of the professional teams from Bufetat and one of the municipals child welfare leaders to cooperate to identify strategies for avoiding conflicts. Both worked

towards a timetable for meetings with the different agencies, which resulted in the aforementioned workshop.

From conflict to cooperation – negotiating creates new preconditions’ for interaction and the basis for a New Child Welfare.

An initiative to host a joint seminar for all those involved in child welfare in the county arose out of the conflict. Here we will briefly describe how this seminar contributed to a shift in the communication between the municipal and state child welfare services in the county. Indeed, one of the participants stated specifically that this meeting led to a shift. The background for and events leading up to the conflicts created rigid roles for those involved, but the seminar forced them “to communicate as human beings.” One of the former municipal child welfare leaders, who was both a project manager and member of the steering committee, stated:

The Directors attended with professional team leaders and child welfare leaders. They participated on an equal basis and they showed a balanced approach to the municipality and state. They were open to communication, body language and posture radiated equality and enthusiasm to achieve a common solution as developing good measures, information, communication, and cooperation. The directors seemed genuinely interested in overcoming the challenges.

The project manager’s statement stressed that Bufetat was in a situation that required them to be strategic in relation to the Government’s plan for child welfare. They were dependent on including the child welfare services as a true cooperative partner. For their part, represen-

tatives from the municipal child welfare services attempted to achieve a good dialogue with the state authorities. It was perceived as an important and strategic signal to send the directors of Bufetat to participate in the seminar. The second thing that happened was that two county child welfare leaders initiated a national meeting with all child welfare leaders in the whole country in collaboration with KS (municipal employers’ interest and membership organization). This was the start of a national mobilization within the municipal child welfare services. The mandate was to build on experiences from the county we have described. This process can be understood as building a counter-power to the growth and governance of Bufetat. One result of the national mobilization among childcare workers was that municipal child welfare received earmarked funds in 2011.

Governing by values of equality

The seminar established a common motivation for change and collaboration between the state and the local child welfare. Project participants in NCW, who represented the municipal child welfare, talked about different stages in the process and used words such as “confrontation,” “risk of chaos,” “negotiation,” and “communication as a means of achieving a fine balance to strengthen cooperation between the municipal and state child welfare services.” Those working at the municipal level of child welfare expressed themselves in different ways, for instance, by expressing notions such as: “We have a vision of a revolution.” We interpret such statements as an expression of an intention to break with excessive

state control and as a move towards equal positions in a future collaboration.

People involved in the creation of the local project (NCW) share a history, a practice, and a language, and they identify with a new kind of interaction. The construction of this new project was a relational process, which was based on equality and a balance between responsibilities and tasks. This perspective became clear to us when we spoke with members of the steering committee. Two of the members, one representative from Bufetat and one from the municipal child welfare, talked about how they created their common “baby” over a bowl with chocolate. The concept of NCW was indeed their baby and they fell in love with it long before it was born. Extending the metaphor, the parents continued to cooperate. As one of the informants said, “It is also possible to think that the collaboration maybe hasn’t changed, even if it has changed in the steering committee.” It became clear to us that some representatives felt that they had created their own project and developed their own mandate.

A fine balance between power, equality and innovative self-work?

So far this article has shed light on how local child welfare workers talked about how they as professionals related to organizational changes in the Norwegian Welfare State. In the article, we refer to this as innovative self-work (Foucault, 2002a; Fransson, 2009, Fransson & Storø, 2011), directed by strongly related ideals of the self as a moral actor, and of acting on the basis of equality, trust, and a deep responsibility for children and families in crisis (Brottveit, 2013; Kroken, 2012).

Despite much work and an eagerness to succeed in creating quality based on equality, unequal power relations can be detected. The leaders from Bufetat, who were represented in the steering committee, were positioned in different ways in the field and had different perspectives regarding what was in the best interests of vulnerable children and families. Their positions were closely related to the allocations made by the central government and a corresponding distance to the clients. As one of the leaders at the regional level in Bufetat explained:

Finances are an issue, but maybe not discussed constructively. The municipalities are concerned with those who are worst off. We will provide clients with the best possible, but it limits in the economy. Such situations are often in conflict. Municipal child welfare and Bufetat often have different reviews and different interests. The municipal child welfare can argue for institution for older children, while Bufetat think that money can be used differently when youngsters are near 18 years and have a bad prognosis. The point is not the institution itself, but that it may be wasted funds. According to Bufetat it is a more important goal to put into early intervention and investment in the young, while the municipal child welfare wish both.

The problems that emerge in the interview are a lack of differentiated services and foster homes. There were a large number of acute cases and insufficient funding to achieve objectives. One of the users stated: “We have three main focus points, but if we aren’t able to try out the measures we don’t have any results.”

This informant’s comment is illustrative, and rephrases a similar comment

from one of the leaders who said that “the reunions are nice,” emphasizing nice, but maybe not useful to the extent that services can be adapted to children’s needs. This informant also confessed that some of the new suggestions and services were not properly suited to children and families. This is an expression of the gap between supply and demand within child welfare in this region.

The lines of conflict are also related to the distinction made between Bufetat and municipal child welfare at a national level (Deloitte, 2011; FAFO & NOVA, 2011; Kroken, 2012; NIBR & Telemarkforskning, 2011; PWC, 2011). Bufetat has strict limits that affect how municipalities can manage their financial resources. In individual cases where there is talk about financing and distribution, the old conflicts often surface. “We are thrown back and old stories come alive,” as one of the child welfare leaders expressed it. But something has changed as a result of the project. One of the users expressed it this way: “We are not discussing money anymore in front of clients.” The will and intention to cooperate is greater, but the distribution of work between central and local governments is still unclear. From a user’s point of view it looks like this:

Process is important and it is important to sit down and talk together, but it does not necessarily benefit the child. A focus on results is essential. They have had a process of cooperation and information has improved, but it is expensive to talk.

This statement is an expression of the gap that could emerge between talk and action, as well as an expression of a loss of resources. Below we will analyze how

we can understand how lack of resources became a source of mobilization for the different actors in their self-work to handle the situation.

DISCUSSION

The way the child welfare management system was affected, as a result of the CWR, and under pressure of New Public Management, can be interpreted as an expression of micromanagement of employees. It seems to have involved far more than a change in structure, financial management, and leadership. The CWR from 2004 also involved a change in responsibilities in the sense that the State came to rule the child welfare field and those employed in it.

The reform is an illustrative example of how the State has governed child welfare workers, directly and indirectly, through a modernizing (the modern liberation) of the public sector in Norway, towards acting in particular ways in order to deal with a hard-pressed situation and yet still experience themselves as moral and responsible actors. At this point, and in cases where child welfare workers experience themselves as being professionally overruled and forced to make decisions that are against their own convictions (Brottveit, 2007), a conflict arises between the State and municipal child welfare services. The consequences of the reform were expressed in different ways by the child welfare workers. They talked about having less energy to meet and speak with their clients and that they slowly began to talk about and regard their clients as a “them” who were different from “us.” Some told us that they were unable to see what was happening initially. This process and the change in

their approach to clients can be seen as a result of governmental guiding principles and indirect state control.

We want to emphasize that this is not an intended effect of the CWR, but should be understood as an unintended consequence of it. Governmentality, in the sense we are referring to it here, draws attention to a power relation between the State and local child welfare services. On the one hand, this power relation forces child welfare workers to act at the expense of their own convictions and professional judgment. On the other hand, the study shows that these workers are able to identify different ways of responding to state control. This reveals another side of the power relation between local child welfare workers and the State. Namely, how child welfare workers confronted power in innovative ways, including rebellion, to force other solutions. This is an expression of innovative self-work. This concept is not only related to power relations, but also to a certain freedom and creativity for the employees (Foucault, 2002a, 2002b). Drawing on the concept of self-work, it is possible to focus on how child welfare workers, in the New Care Welfare project, identified innovative and surprising ways to solve conflicts in emergency situations. This self-work is not only an expression of the power relations they were exposed to, but the development of NCW also creates a new basis for relations between the State and municipal child welfare services.

Using Foucault as an interpretive framework, the power shift that occurred between the State and municipal child welfare authorities as a result of the reform in 2004 may be seen as an expression of a power relationship wherein the

national level of government controls more and more of the child welfare field of activity. We have seen how rational forms of governance seem to affect local child welfare authorities in an indirect and to some extent invisible way. Ironically, attempts to gain control seem to have resulted in the opposite effect in the county we studied. We have also seen how child welfare leaders compensated for a lack of adequate resources. Indeed, a safeguard within child welfare lies in the child welfare workers' personal initiative, involvement, and mobilization. For local child welfare workers, it is important to ensure that governmental guidelines are adapted to professional child welfare assessments and actual site conditions. The process to safeguard the individual circumstances of child welfare work and simultaneously deal with the governmental guidelines constructed conditions for child welfare workers' professional self-work. Child welfare work is dependent on the individual case officer's ability to exercise professional judgment in the best interests of children and young people and balancing this with the demands of national guidelines (Brottveit, 2013). In this way, the professionals self-work is crucial as a mechanism for managing government control.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we have identified conflicts that led to the development of NCW, and presented different positions that influence our understanding of and the future of the project. Drawing on Michel Foucault, we have read the protest and the development of new forms of child welfare as an expression of a particular type of state governance.

The study shows how innovative ways of acting stimulate welfare workers to identify solutions to new forms of dependency and public management between municipal and state levels of government, as a result of the CWR. Child welfare workers objected to their positions in the system in a way that could not be disregarded. Their actions led to a turning point and a NCW system emerged in the relation between the municipal and the state levels. Municipal child welfare workers need to communicate in a more egalitarian way with the state level to be able to choose the best solutions for their clients. This article demonstrates three important points. First, it highlights the importance of studying how reforms, introduced by the state, actually influence local child welfare work, which in turn has a direct impact on vulnerable children, youths, and their families. Second, it shows the importance of local protests, engagement, and a need to develop analytical tools for studying the transformation of power and responsibility in municipal and state bureaucracies. Third, this research raises questions about the ability of child welfare services to safeguard the best interests of children when local child welfare practices are subjected to governmental priorities that are not always in line with local professional assessments of what is the best course of action for a child. It is worth asking how growing structural gaps in power between the state and local child welfare services had an impact on daily child welfare work. It also remains to be seen whether the creation of NCW was situational and person-dependent or if the common project has helped to create new forms of cooperation and a greater balance between the State and

municipalities that can be maintained in the long term. Whether or not the concept of NCW will succeed in the future is an empirical question that is important to follow in future research.

Notes

1. The Child, Youth and Family Unit.
2. Cf. MTS and PMTO. (NIBR & Telemarksforskning, 2011).
3. PwC is the brand under which the member firms of PricewaterhouseCoopers International Limited (PwCIL) operate and provide professional services. Together, these firms form the PwC network. 'PwC' is often used to refer either to individual firms within the PwC network or to several or all of them collectively <http://www.pwc.com/structure> (lastet ned 9.1.15).

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