

Australian Centre
for Child Protection

Creating Intergenerational Change

Building a Culture of Care



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for Child Protection

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Introduction

The Australian Centre for Child Protection:

- Conducts rigorous research to meet the needs of children and families at risk of maltreatment and/or out-of-home placement, and those who work with them.
- Provides knowledge and skills for workforce development with high-risk communities.
- Focuses these research and workforce development efforts on building and sharing the evidence base.



Objectives for Today

- Describe an international qualitative study of eight community family support centres.
- Discuss what families saw as critical to creating change.
- Note some differences between centres, perhaps reflecting cultural differences.



How we did the Study

- Members of the *International Association of Outcome Based Evaluation and Research and Family and Children's Services*.
- Based in Padova, Italy.
- Researchers meet for one week every year to plan, conduct and discuss research on family and children's services.
- Opportunity to do cross-national and cross-cultural research.



Method

- A subgroup of researchers were interested in the "essential elements of change".
- We agreed to study family support centres:
 - Based in an urban neighborhood
 - Preventive of problems
 - Promoted positive outcomes
 - Model of flexible, variable services



Similarities of Centres

- Outcomes of centres focus on:
 - Prevention of child abuse
 - Promoting family safety
 - Reducing truancy and crime
 - Reducing family poverty
 - Promoting family relationships
 - Promoting social, emotional and academic development
- “Treatment” is fluid and variable.



Aims of the Studies

- Given that a “treatment protocol” is not fixed for community centres:
 - A cross-site study should allow us to understand what and how services are provided; and
 - Develop “sensitive outcomes”, “essential elements” or “steps-on-the-way” to the broader, longer-term outcomes sought by these programs.



Method of the Study

- Sites: 8 sites, as mentioned. Each scholar partnered with a centre in their country of origin.
- Data collection: Participant-action research, in partnership with practitioners and families.
- Measures: Qualitative interviews focusing on “steps-on-the-way” to the larger outcomes of: family wellbeing, abuse prevention, truancy and crime prevention, health etc.
- Analysis: Look for commonalities, differences.



General Findings

- The most important element mentioned by both families and workers is:
 - a “Culture of Care”
 - The agency is viewed by its members (workers, families, community members) as a caring, non-judging, non-punitive environment.
 - The centre acts to “contain” the feelings and actions of all members.



Effective Practice Components

- One-on-one learning and practicing of skills: parenting, social skills, negotiation.
- Shared within a strong, caring relationship.
- Worker and/or carer models these same skills in his or her interactions with others.
- Praise, praise, praise!
- Clear and concise information, not lengthy or complicated.



The Importance of Engagement

The best predictor of good outcomes is engagement:

- Include staff and carers that “look like” families, eg including community members in recruitment and delivery of services.
- No judging or blaming parents or children.
- Listen without turning against parents/children.
- Be honest and encouraging even when the assessment and/or news is less than positive.



More on Engagement

- Help with concrete needs, eg health care and financial support.
- Work toward goals with the same sense of urgency as the family.
- Provide support such as transportation, child care for meetings.
- Have flexible funds for creative solutions.
- Meet with families at their homes and/or centre.

And engagement is critical to a relationship aimed at learning and practicing new skills and information.



The Nature of Family Support

- Families feel safe, supported, creative.
 - Families can express anger, fear, sadness without being judged.
 - Staff of centre “look like” families.
- All helping members feel safe, supported, creative.
 - Can express when they are stuck, frustrated.
- A network for referrals was not central.



The Importance of Social and Cultural Context

My involvement in comparative international research on services to high-risk families has amplified the importance of social, cultural and political context.

Where does the family stop and the community begin?

- Differs by country or culture:
 - Religion
 - History
 - Meaning of “The Individual”



Final Thoughts

- We must consider the social and cultural context when attempting to replicate an evidence-based model in another setting.
- That means we can't just import "evidence-based models" or "evidence-based practice" from another culture and expect it to be effective.
- Think in terms of "essential elements."





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