



Perspectives on Family Involvement in Therapeutic Foster Care

Source: Jivanjee, Pauline (1999). Professional and Provider Perspectives on Family Involvement in Therapeutic Foster Care. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 8(3), 329-341.

Jivanjee, Pauline (1999). Parent Perspectives on Family Involvement in Therapeutic Foster Care. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 8(4), 451-461.

Over the last two decades, there has been an increasing emphasis on family-centered services for children with serious emotional disorders. The two articles presented here offer a unique viewpoint in introducing different perspectives on family involvement for children that have been placed in Therapeutic Foster Care (TFC). Historically, in an effort to protect children from abuse and/or neglect, parents have had limited involvement when their children are in foster care. In light of that, the author presents findings from a qualitative study of child welfare professionals, TFC providers and parents in two articles, one that presents the perspectives of parents, and the other, the perspectives of professionals and providers. Topics addressed include parent-child contact, parent-professional communication and information sharing, and family involvement in decision making regarding children that reside in TFC.

The first paper contains an analysis of professional and provider perspectives regarding family involvement in the design, planning, implementation, and evaluation of services for children. Relationships and practices with parents concerning their involvement were "shaped by professionals' values regarding family involvement, attitudes toward specific parents, and TFC providers' willingness to communicate with parents and facilitate parent-child contact." Overall, professionals and TFC providers expressed positive values toward family involvement in TFC. It was found that facilitating the parent-child bond, having empathy for parents' struggles, appreciation of the parents' strengths, and building positive relationships with parents (i.e. sharing information) all supported family involvement. There were also challenges presented that professionals and providers felt hindered family involvement. Negative attitudes toward the parents (i.e. fear or dislike), uncooperative relationships and various organizational barriers such as lack of training, professional's limited time, program philosophy and bureaucratic constraints all acted as obstacles to parent participation in the care of their child.

In the second article, parent perspectives were evaluated regarding their involvement in their children's care. Parents identified strengths and weaknesses characterizing their relationships with professionals and TFC providers that either enhanced or inhibited their ability to participate in decisions involving their children's care. As with the professionals and providers in the first study, the parents viewed the key elements to positive relationships as information sharing, trust, the providers offering support and advocacy, providers facilitating contact with their children, and the provider's ability to communicate an understanding of the parents' hardship. However, as expressed by providers and professionals, there were some cases where relationships were strained and parents verbalized resentment, lack of trust, and examples of deliberate exclusion from involvement in their child's program. Organizational barriers that were viewed as further complicating parental involvement included transportation, meeting times and locations and constraints placed on them by professionals.

By looking critically at what parents, providers and professionals see as successful in negotiating relationships amongst themselves, these articles present valuable information for strengthening family-centered services in the system of care.