CHILD WELFARE AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE: CHALLENGES AND BEST PRACTICE

Judy Blunt, MSW, JD

Substance abuse is one of the most significant problems facing the child welfare system today. Children whose parents abuse alcohol and other drugs (AOD) are almost three times likelier to be abused, and more than four times likelier to be neglected, than children of parents who are not substance abusers (Kelleher, K., Chaffin, M., Hollenberg, J., & Fischer, E., 1994). Historically, child welfare and substance abuse professionals have approached their work with differing priorities. Child welfare professionals focus on the child’s safety and children’s attachment needs, often at odds with the time and effort it takes to achieve sobriety. Many addiction professionals emphasize sobriety, failing to fully include the client’s role as parent or primary caregiver, or the child’s need for a stable nurturing caregiver over time. To compound matters, funding, legislation, and system cultures do not encourage collaboration between these professionals who are working towards the common goal of permanency for children and families.

Given the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) requirement governing state legal proceedings to file termination of parental rights petitions for children who have been in care for 15 of the past 22 months, foster care agencies and other support systems, including drug treatment programs, must reconsider the way they do business. Barriers will have to be replaced by collaborative relationships at state, local, and community levels if children are to be returned home or placed in safe stable homes in a timely manner.

In 1998 state public child welfare professionals estimated that parental chemical dependency was a contributing factor in the out-of-home placement of at least 52 percent of the 482,000 children and youths in the custody of the child welfare system (Child Welfare League of America, 1998). Given these statistics, the barriers and practice tips outlined below are provided to increase understanding of the collaboration necessary between child welfare and substance abuse professionals, and the steps needed to achieve this collaboration.

Existing Barriers between the Child Welfare and Substance Abuse Systems

- Differences in definition of, and focus on, the primary client in each field
- Conflicts in values and philosophies about roles and treatment in the two systems
- Differences in decision-making timing between the two systems arising from...
From the Editor

I want to extend a hearty welcome to members of the Child Welfare Specialty Practice Section. It is our hope that this new section provides an important source of support and becomes a resource you can count on.

In this issue we have four articles covering a range of issues. In “The Face of Adoption and Foster Care Has Changed: ‘What About Our Beliefs?’” Gloria King looks at the need for practice change and suggests introspection of our beliefs about the children and families we serve. The challenges faced by child welfare and substance abuse professionals in serving families in the timeframe set out in the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 are addressed in “Child Welfare and Substance Abuse: Challenges and Best Practice.”

Julio Morales and Marcia Bok share what they learned from a preliminary evaluation of a three-year demonstration project in the article, “Increasing Recruitment And Licensure Of Latino Foster Care And Adoptive Families.” Cynthia Woodside highlights the recently released GAO report on promising practices for creating a stable and highly skilled child welfare workforce, a second child welfare workforce report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and a survey by the Brookings Institution’s Center for Public Service in “New Advocacy Resources: Child Welfare Workforce, Human Services Workforce, and Data on Children & Families.” These reports build a strong case for strengthening all sectors of the human services workforce.

As promised, we now have a publications review column. We have reviewed books, videos, and reports we know will be of interest to you. In the future we would like to include your reviews. Please e-mail a summary of any publication (book, video, report) that you would like to recommend to members of the section, and we will be happy to include them.

We also encourage you to submit articles for publication in future newsletters. Please forward your articles to jblunt@hunter.cuny.edu or ms_crimsonite@yahoo.com We look forward to hearing from you.

Judy Blunt, JD, MSW
Editor
THE FACE OF ADOPTION AND FOSTER CARE HAS CHANGED: ‘WHAT ABOUT OUR BELIEFS?’

Gloria King, MS

Historically, adoptions and foster care did not dominate our nation as primary social problems. They were not part of the national platform agenda. Children were not languishing in care for more than half of their childhood. These children did not severely impact the federal budget, nor were their rights legislated by Congress. These problems were mainly handled by local support systems like missionaries, churches, and other “do-gooders.” However, as the population of the children entering care and languishing in the system increased, this was no longer the case.

Today, there are more than 500,000 children who live apart from their biological families in the United States, with California as the leading state in out-of-home placements. Children of color represent nearly half the foster care population. Although the reasons for removal from their birth parents do not differ from other children, African American children in particular remain in care up to three times longer than other children.

The system that began in the early 1900s did not anticipate the radical social and economic changes to come as children of color entered (and became the majority of) the group of children in care during the latter half of the 20th Century and into the 21st. This new phenomenon greatly impacted the “euro centric” values of family systems. Specifically, in the early 1970s, this country experienced a drug epidemic that also drastically affected communities of color. The introduction of the highly addictive drug known as “crack cocaine” has been a major link to the over-representation of children of color in out-of-home care. Associated with this phenomenon is a myriad of societal ills: High rates of crime and violence; increased poverty; incarceration; mental health issues; physical and medical disabilities; and even death. Without a doubt this epidemic has further compromised an already strained child welfare system.

Decisions around placing children were previously based on rigid guidelines, including age limits, income level, housing, two-parent family make-up, and infertility examinations. This was a value system for the “ideal” family (“Ozzie and Harriet” couples living in homes with white picket fences). Child welfare practice, policies, and theories were not only void of cultural constructs, but were unprepared to adapt to the differences in the value system of children and families of color. These children and families presented a unique challenge to those responsible for administering support services. As a result, the child welfare system has not been able to adequately meet the needs of this population.

The child welfare system is still faced with high caseloads, untimely services, poor planning, and children becoming further at risk in a system mandated to protect and serve them. In “Easing foster care’s pain unites disparate politicians,” published in USA Today on February 25, 2003, Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton and Representative Tom Delay spoke out about foster care, citing an African American male whose life story recently came to the big screen. Using Denzel Washington’s movie, Antwone Fisher, as a backdrop, they wrote: “The compelling story of his life, written by Fisher, is about a child’s hope and resilience despite an uncaring system. While we cheer Fisher’s success against such abysmal odds, the movie also reminds us that too many still suffer needlessly in a foster care system that is inherently flawed...Fisher’s story should spark broad reforms of the foster care system, which needs to be changed, one community at a time, so that no more children fall through the

See Beliefs, Page 4
Beliefs, from Page 3

Our resistance to fully “overhauling” the system has left us, instead, with a “band-aid approach.” There have been a variety of complex modifications, corrections, adjustments, and revisions that have not been responsive to the basic needs of children of color. Their experience in the child welfare system over the years has been accurately described as a one-way entrance—“one way in and no way out.”

In order for child welfare practice to change, we must look at changing our own beliefs about the children and families we serve. How many times have you heard sayings like, “The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree?” This is a belief that impacts how we think about kinship care placements. How about, “They are too old to be adopted?” This influences our service plans for children and limits their possibility for permanency. Casual statements like these come from our inherent conscious and unconscious beliefs.

Our belief systems may be at the root of why we have had such great resistance to changing the child welfare system. Remember, beliefs are nothing more than a by-product of things you have thought for so long that you have bought into them. John C. Maxwell, DD, offers a six-step process for changing your beliefs, which can be applied to social work practice in child welfare.

Step 1—When you change your thinking, you change your belief.
- Every waiting child deserves an opportunity for permanency.
- Siblings are to be placed together.
- Respect the full identity of the child.
- Consider the impact of geographic placement.
- Adoption is not the only option for permanency.

Step 2—When you change your beliefs, you change your expectations.
- There is a family for every waiting child.
- Fictive kin are viable options for placement.
- Expect the unusual.

Step 3—When you change your expectations, you change your attitude.
- All children are adoptable.
- Diversity of family make-up should be considered in placement decisions.
- My assigned tasks are manageable.
- I anticipate working with difficult clients.

Step 4—When you change your attitude, you change your behavior.
- Not afraid to address areas of development with supervisor.
- Risk taker.
- Think outside the box.
- Be flexible.

Step 5—When you change your behavior, you change your performance.
- Show up positive.
- Visionary.
- Sign up for trainings that address unfamiliar territory.
- Advocacy is a necessary skill.

Step 6—When you change your performance, you change your “practice.”
- You have a standard of excellence.
- Good social work practice in child welfare is the minimum standard.
- Children and families deserve our best.
I challenge each of you to examine your beliefs about the current population of children and families we serve. At a minimum, I ask that you consider incorporating this six-step process as a beginning for improved practice.

Reference

Gloria King, MS, is executive director of Black Adoption Placement and Research Center (BAPRC). She has a full background of clinical, administrative and counseling experience. Ms. King produces and hosts a weekly cable television show called “Adoption Today.”

2003 CHILD WELFARE LITERATURE REVIEW

Books
www.naswpress.org
This best seller introduces and explores concepts of protection and resilience in the face of adversity, as often experienced by children and families in the child welfare system. This text features up-to-date information on risk and resilience and a framework for “resilience-based” social work practice.

www.basicbooks.com
In her new book, Dorothy Roberts suggests that the disproportionate representation of black children in the child welfare system is a social crisis. She believes that black children are too quickly removed from their homes, placed into the foster care system, and then freed for adoption. In a strong approach, she compares this kind of racially motivated action, usually taken by well-meaning people on both sides of the political fence, to slavery, which over the years, has twisted these children away from their parents and devastated them forever.

www.cwla.org/pubs
Presenting a body of research addressing what works in child welfare, this book is divided into six sections: Family preservation and support services, child protective services, out-of-home care, adoption, childcare, and services for adolescents. Each section contains information on what works, conflicting evidence, cost effectiveness, and a summary table.

Parent was an emergency children’s services worker in New York City’s child welfare system, part of a team of men and women who, on nights and weekends, investigate calls about children in danger. Parent came to public prominence when a baby died after he and another worker visited a family in a rodent- and drug-infested building, and missed identifying the child as being at imminent risk of death or serious injury. Parent agonized over the judgment for weeks. Turning Stones includes what the author considers the most tragic and dramatic of the hundreds of cases he encountered.

www.basicbooks.com
This book explores the pros and cons involved in adoption. Pertman, an adoptive father, provides suggestions about how to
make the adoption process less perilous and remove policy obstacles, which keep children from entering permanent homes as quickly as possible.


[www.cwla.org/pubs](http://www.cwla.org/pubs)

This special issue is a comprehensive examination and investigation of the permanency planning experiences of children and youth in out-of-home care. Filled with multiple perspectives, it provides grist for further discussion by practitioners and policymakers.


[www.abanet.org](http://www.abanet.org)

This guide is designed to help judges, attorneys, and social workers ensure the well-being of teens under court supervision. It is another step toward continuing efforts to develop standards to ensure that the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act (AFSA), Medicaid’s Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment law, and the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 are used effectively to promote well-being for teens in out-of-home care. The guide provides answers for many questions about case presentation and content.


Murphy believes that state agencies and the legal system don’t always use good judgment when trying to keep families together. He readily admits that even marginally conscientious parents are usually better than the institutional care the state can provide, but claims to have seen many cases of children brutalized by parents who lack skills and concern. He lists practical ideas for rehabilitating the system, such as reclassifying abuse and neglect into three separate categories for legal redress, and restructuring child welfare bureaucracies into two agencies, one to provide services and the other to investigate child abuse.


This text/CD-ROM package covers qualitative and quantitative approaches to evaluation, including conceptualizing and measuring targets and objectives, evaluating designs, analyzing results, and single-system designs. This fourth edition contains integrated material on managed care responses, group evaluation, and primary prevention, and also highlights newer forms of practice, including micro practice. The CD-ROM contains a software package designed to help practitioners assess the effectiveness of interventions using visual and statistical analyses.


[www.nacac.org](http://www.nacac.org)

This guide analyzes child welfare system barriers that result in the overuse of long-term foster care as a permanent plan, and identifies ways to overcome them. A self-assessment tool encourages practitioners to look critically at their systems and challenge themselves to explore alternatives to long-term care.


[www.abanet.org](http://www.abanet.org)

The Adoption and Safe Families Act requires that permanency plans for children be determined at permanency hearings. Judges must make findings that the child welfare agency is making “reasonable efforts” to finalize those plans. What does this mean? How do we do it? This book is designed to
help judges issue orders and resolve disputes so children move more quickly into permanent placements. It guides child advocates in eliciting information on agency efforts to move children into permanent homes. Issues addressed include: Determining the permanency plan; assessing reasonable efforts to finalize a permanency plan for reunification; termination of parental rights/adoptive placement; legal guardianship; relative placement and other planned permanent living arrangements; handling interstate placements (and use of the Interstate Compact); and securing adoption subsidies. It also includes checklists, sample court forms and orders, the text of relevant ASFA regulations, an ASFA timeline chart, and a resource directory.


**www.cwla.org**

Recruiting foster families is a difficult task, even under the best of circumstances. Most agencies, though, are not blessed with the best of circumstances. Yet they can significantly increase their chances of successfully finding foster families and volunteers by designing a carefully planned strategy for engaging the community in foster care. This handbook provides tools to craft effective messages for the public, tips for working with the media, and other research ideas.


**www.nacac.org**

Designed to address social service and legal issues that create foster care drift, this guidebook provides legal analysis and proposes practical solutions on issues including kinship care, open adoption, and termination of parental rights.


**www.nacac.org**

Child welfare professionals are searching for strategies to address the barriers that keep children in foster care longer than expected. In response, this framework explores the interplay between family characteristics and system barriers, and suggests reforms in public policy, program management, and program operations to remove the barriers that prolong the stay of children and youth in foster care.

**Reports**

**The Impact of AFSA on Children and Families of Color,** (CWLA).

**www.cwla.org**

This collection of forum excerpts focuses on all aspects of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA). Participants characterize the strengths and challenges of families and communities of color, and explore the effects of ASFA on kinship care, adoption, and youth in out-of-home care. First-person experiences with the child welfare system are included, as well as extensive recommendations for improvement of child welfare policies, programs, and practices (especially as they affect children and families of color).

**Siblings in Out-of-Home Care: Sibling Symposium,** (2002, Casey Family Programs).

**www.casey.org**

The Casey National Center (CNC) and the Florida-based Neighbor to Family Program co-sponsored the National Leadership Symposium on Siblings in Out-of-Home Care in May, 2002. More than 30 individuals from diverse fields (including foster care alumni, child welfare practitioners and policymakers, legal experts, resource families, and researchers) joined to explore ways to focus attention on issues affecting brothers and sisters in

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foster, kinship, and adoptive placements. The proceedings of the symposium included strategies for good practice in working with siblings in the child welfare system.


Using percentages of mastery as indices of life skills attainment in a variety of skills areas, this study found that youth rated themselves higher in percentages of mastery on a wide range of life skills, compared with ratings by their caregivers.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-357](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-357)

This recently released report presents a compelling case for the necessity of a stable and highly qualified child welfare workforce. It validates the challenges faced by child welfare workers and supervisors; demonstrates how recruitment and retention challenges affect child well-being and permanency planning; and details promising workforce practices implemented by both public and private child welfare agencies.

*Federal Agencies Could Play a Stronger Role in Helping States Reduce the Number of Children Placed Solely to Obtain Mental Health Services*, (2003, U.S. General Accounting Office).

Across the United States, parents have difficulty accessing mental health services for their children. This recently released report documents how some parents choose to place their children in the child welfare or juvenile justice systems to obtain needed mental health services. The GAO report identifies characteristics of children voluntarily placed in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems to access and receive mental health services; factors that influence these placements; and promising practices that may lessen the need for such placements.

**Videos**


From Bertelsen’s personal point of view as a black child adopted into a white family, this one-hour video takes a closer look at how transracial families are faring. The film covers Bertelsen’s adoption, as a 4-year-old boy in the 1970s, by a New Jersey couple who had already adopted children from other races and also had their own biological children. It also chronicles the adoption, in 2001, of a two-month-old African American infant named David by a white Chicago-area couple.


In this 12-part, award-winning PBS television series, teen counselor and comedian Michael Pritchard helps young people discover that they have the power of choice, are responsible for the choices they make, and that they owe it to themselves to choose the best. He covers various subjects including: The power of choice, acting on your values, self-esteem, coping with pressures, drugs and alcohol, sex, and communicating with parents.


Teens are faced with a myriad of changes and challenges that often give rise to new thoughts, feelings, and concerns about themselves, their relationships, and the world around them. Writing about these changes can be very helpful, but the difficult question is, “Where to start?” This journal, by Linda
Kranz, offers young people inspiration and a place to begin expressing themselves.


[www.nacac.org](http://www.nacac.org)

This video series is designed to offer specific, court-endorsed, effective strategies to help meet AFSA timelines and achieve permanency for children in a timely fashion; introduce essential aspects of mediation, family group decision-making, and concurrent planning; and place the approaches in the context of children's emotional development and timelines. Actual courtroom, mediation, family decision-making, and concurrent planning families illustrate the three strategies. Spokespersons include judges, social service administrators, attorneys, program originators/innovators, and experienced case and court workers.

Searching for Family: Moments in the Lives of Children in Foster Care, Kurt Streeter. (1998, A production of KCTS Television/Seattle)

[www.cwla.org](http://www.cwla.org)

This 19-minute video examines the personal stories of Robert, Jamil, and Joaquin, highlighting important issues for children and families in the foster care system. It is designed to stimulate discussions with community and business leaders, educators, policymakers, communities of faith, and neighborhood organizations.

### NEW ADVOCACY RESOURCES: CHILD WELFARE WORKFORCE, HUMAN SERVICES WORKFORCE, AND DATA ON CHILDREN & FAMILIES

Cynthia Woodside

**Child Welfare Workforce: GAO Report**

This spring, the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) released a report on promising practices for creating a stable and highly skilled child welfare workforce. GAO interviewed close to 50 child welfare practitioners and researchers, including many social workers and NASW members; conducted extensive site visits in four states; analyzed close to 30 child and family services reviews required under the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA); and reviewed close to 600 exit interviews completed by child welfare staff across the country. Rep. Pete Stark (D-CA) and Rep. John Greenwood (R-PA) requested the report.

This report builds a case for strengthening the child welfare workforce by identifying:

1. The challenges child welfare agencies face in recruiting and retaining child welfare workers and supervisors,
2. How recruitment and retention challenges have affected the safety and permanency outcomes of children in foster care,
3. Workforce practices implemented by public and private child welfare agencies to successfully confront those challenges.

**Title IV-E Partnerships**

One of the promising practices identified in the report is the use of university partnerships to train current workers and prepare social work students for positions in the child welfare profession. According to the report, more than 40 state agencies have formed training partnerships with schools of social work through the use of federal Title IV-E.
dollars and state contributions. Such partnerships have been shown to improve recruitment, reduce turnover, and improve worker competence.

Other promising practices identified in the report include accreditation, enhancements to supervision and mentoring, use of hiring competencies, realistic job previews, and recruitment bonuses.


**Human Services Workforce: Casey Foundation Report & Brookings Survey**

A second report, by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, together with a survey by the Brookings Institution’s Center for Public Service, builds a similar case for strengthening all sectors of the human services workforce. The Casey Foundation report looks at workers in child welfare, youth services, childcare, juvenile justice, income support programs, and employment and training programs. The total number of human services workers is conservatively estimated at three million.

Providing information about the workers, the challenges they face, and how those challenges might be overcome, the Casey report covers issues like compensation, support, and training.

The report also documents what social service professionals have long known—workers are underpaid, over-worked, and frustrated. They often receive poor supervision, have insufficient education to match the demands of the job, and have limited opportunities for professional growth and advancement. “These widespread problems not only undermine the effectiveness of system reform efforts,” the report states, “they reveal inefficient use of our public resources and present very real risks to the welfare of already vulnerable families and children.”

The Brookings survey provides a more detailed portrait of the workforce, based on a survey of more than 1,200 employees conducted last summer.

The survey lays out two possible futures: “One involves a slow but steady erosion of talent due to inaction and continued under-investment, even disinvestment in the industry’s human capital. … The other future involves a recommitment to the work force, and to the children, youth and families it serves,” (pp. 30-31). Recommitment would require making “long-overdue” investments in recruiting and retaining high quality workers.


A copy of the Brookings survey is available online at www.brook.edu/gs/cps/light20032603.htm.

**Localized Data on Children and Families: New Online Resource**

A new project funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation provides in-depth, local-level data on the well-being of America’s children and families on a single Web site. The new system, CLIKS: County, City, Community-Level Information on Kids, can be a valuable resource for community leaders, policymakers, service providers, parents, and advocates concerned with the lives of children and families.

CLIKS allows users to access state-specific inventories of local data on children from sources including health departments, human
services agencies, and schools. Tools like community profiles and color-coded maps and graphs allow users to create a snapshot of their town, city, or county. Examples of the localized information available include:

- The number of children who are victims of child abuse
- The number or percentage of children who receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, food stamps, and free or reduced-price lunches
- The number of juvenile arrests and detentions

The new CLIKS data is available on-line at http://www.aecf.org/cgi-bin/cliks.cgi.

Reference

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INCREASING RECRUITMENT AND LICENSURE OF LATINO FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTIVE FAMILIES
Julio Morales, PhD, MSW, and Marcia Bok, PhD, MSW

The three-year demonstration project described in this article, now in its final year, was funded by the Children’s Bureau of the federal government. We have now had a chance to partially evaluate our experiences and share what we have learned, thus far, with other interested and concerned social workers. The evaluation is not complete, however, and additional information will be forthcoming.

There is currently an acute shortage of foster and adoptive homes in general, and particularly for placement of Latino children into Latino homes (Zambrana, 1999; Montalvo and Figueroa, 1999). The purpose of this demonstration project is to enhance foster care and adoption of older Latino children into Latino homes. It is based on the need to increase the availability of Latino homes, in response to the Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) of 1994, which prohibits agencies from using ethnicity or culture as a criteria for determining the best placement for a child, and the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997, which expedites the termination of parental rights. MEPA contains provision for recruitment of foster care and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic make-up of the child welfare population, although, according to child welfare advocates, this is not occurring sufficiently. ASFA emphasizes the need to develop a permanent plan for a child within 12 months of placement.

The demonstration project is a collaborative among the state child welfare agency; the Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF); the Institute of the Hispanic Family, a program of Catholic Family Service; bilingual and bicultural MSW students specializing in community organization; faculty from the University of Connecticut, School of Social Work; and the Latino faith-based community in the Hartford, Connecticut area. This project reflects an innovative approach to recruiting, studying, and licensing Latino homes for older Latino children. It is hypothesized that the participation of a strong and diversified Latino component in the project will increase cultural sensitivity and enhance child welfare goals by providing linkages between the Latino community and

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the child welfare system in the region.

This article briefly describes some of the major findings, as well as some of the many learning experiences that occurred. We did, in fact, substantially increase the number of Latino families who became licensed foster homes beyond those that occurred through the traditional system, and we did increase the number of older Latino children and sibling groups who were placed in these homes. We are still assessing whether the project made a difference in decreasing the length of time from initial contact and licensure, and are also assessing the extent of disruptions in the placements of the children. As a by-product of the project we also placed more young Latino children into Latino homes.

We did not do as well in recruiting and licensing Latino adoptive homes. The literature clearly indicates that the majority of adoptive homes occur through foster care, so some foster care placements may eventually become adoptive homes. But our experience suggests that recruitment of Latino foster homes and Latino adoptive homes may require different strategies, and this project did not focus as sharply on the adoption component (Washington, undated; Hollingsworth, 1998).

Perhaps the project’s most innovative component was the participation of the Latino faith-based community. We thought we knew a lot more about the faith-based community than we actually did, and an important learning experience occurred here. We started the project without sufficient preparation for the churches, which we wanted as participants in the project. However, they didn’t understand the project well enough, nor did they understand what was expected of them. More up-front planning and training would have been helpful.

We learned that Pentecostal Latino churches tend to be small, with limited resources. Many of them, however, already provide a variety of social services, such as soup kitchens, food and clothing pantries, day care, hospital and prison visitation, elderly home visiting, after-school programs, etc. Most of the churches with limited resources relied heavily on volunteers for delivering services, and even judged the success of their programs by how many volunteers were involved. While, on one hand, the small churches had limited resources, they also had a more personal approach to their members, which was an important asset. On the other hand, the larger (primarily Catholic) churches with more resources, tended to have more transient membership and were less personalized. Ultimately, it was the leadership and commitment within each church that made the decisive difference.

The attitude of the Hartford-area Latino community toward the state child welfare agency tends to be, not surprisingly, somewhat suspicious and wary. The idea that churches could mediate between DCF and the Latino community turned out to be an oversimplification on our part. While the churches played a major role in linking Latino cultural issues with child welfare needs, they did not want to have to “defend” local child welfare practices. The churches were willing to work with DCF and the community, but were not willing to take on the traditional problems of the child welfare system, such as perceived lack of support and help for biological and foster families. They believed that the onus of change rested on DCF. In addition, the churches sometimes became discouraged when families they helped recruit were turned down by DCF. We are seeking additional information about why some families who initially show interest, later voluntarily withdraw from the recruitment process.

Poverty in the Latino community plays a major role, both in increasing the number of Latino children entering the child welfare system, and in reducing the number of potential Latino foster and adoptive homes. This is an area that needs to be addressed.
more directly. As far as we can tell, concern about religious bias from the faith-based community and lack of separation of church and state did not seem to play a significant role in this project. While most churches supported the concept of “charitable choice,” some expressed concern about government intervention and possible control (Tenpas, 2002; Trulear, 2000).

As a demonstration project, data on comparisons between traditional DCF practices and the process and outcomes of the project were gathered from DCF administrative records. In addition, during the three-year project, in a course entitled “Research in Puerto Rican/Latino Studies,” students and faculty from the University of Connecticut, School of Social Work conducted research studies to gather interview data on characteristics of active and inactive foster families; clergy perception of the role of the faith-based community in foster care and adoption; and an evaluation of the project from the perspective of members of the groups who participated in the project: DCF, IHF, the faith-based community, and students and faculty from the University of Connecticut, School of Social Work.

The collaboration of several different organizations with similar goals, but very different strategies, has inherent problems and strengths. Clearly, the variety and scope of resources that are available are strengths. On the down side, however, most collaboratives with a common goal also have similar missions (such as a group of churches). In the case of this project, however, the mixture of church, academia, mandated child protection services, and a community-based agency created differences in approach that were sometimes difficult to overcome.

The challenge of collaboration is in maintaining and enhancing each agency’s uniqueness, with each participating agency changing somewhat in the process, but maintaining its central mission, and also in developing a new entity (“the collaborative”) created as a result of the partnership. This is difficult to achieve.

This demonstration project fulfilled its function in providing new and innovative ways to successfully address the needs of Latino children in the child welfare system. The challenge is in maintaining and institutionalizing what we have learned. It appears this may require some of the following commitments, if all of the current partners continue to participate:

- DCF will need to maintain a specialized Latino foster care and adoption service within the agency, with augmented staff and a designated project coordinator or director.
- The University of Connecticut, School of Social Work will need to continue to recruit, place, and supervise bilingual, bicultural MSW students to assist in the project and conduct the research and evaluation that continues to document the process and outcomes of the program.
- The churches will need assistance in identifying volunteer coordinators within each church who can recruit, train, and supervise additional volunteers.
- The Institute for the Hispanic Family will need to continue to bring its special expertise in working with Latino families to bear on the foster care and adoption process.

We need to review ways of strengthening the collaborative. While not all current partners need to continue their participation, the presence of DCF and the faith-based community are central to the preservation and fulfillment of the project’s goals.

Marcia Bok, PhD, MSW, is Professor Emerita at the University of Connecticut, School of Social Work and can be contacted at 860-232-2473. Julio Morales, PhD, MSW, is a professor at the University of Connecticut, School of Social Work and can be contacted at 860-570-9150.

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mandates, treatment approaches, the recovery process, developmental needs of children, and treatment approaches

- Differences in staff training, education, expectations for practice methods, and a lack of cross training
- The impact of other forces, such as the courts and managed care companies, over resources and clinical matters
- Funding barriers created by the complexity of categorical systems and gaps in comprehensive funding in both systems

What Impacts on Timely Permanency Decisions for Children from Drug-Affected Families?

- Lack of understanding about the nature and treatment of alcohol and drug addiction
- Limited familiarity with alcohol and drug treatment resources
- Absence of a continuum of alcohol and drug treatment options early on
- Lack of close monitoring of parents’ progress in treatment, which prevents timely decisions about permanency
- Repeated extension of time spent in foster care when alcohol and drugs are the primary problem
- Limited research on best forms of treatment for drug abusers, except for heroin addicts
- Difficulty in predicting parents’ readiness for recovery and potential for relapse

Recommendations for Best Practice

- The child welfare system and the substance abuse prevention and treatment community should direct more resources to helping chemically involved families, who represent up to 80 percent of clients served by child welfare.
- Child welfare agencies should develop and routinely utilize standardized questions regarding alcohol or drug use/abuse in all intakes and investigations of child maltreatment.
- All children and youth should receive a comprehensive health and mental health assessment, including screening for alcohol and other drug use, within three days of entering out-of-home care.
- Child welfare agencies should develop standard protocols to routinely inform and educate male and female adolescents

References


and pregnant women of all ages about the dangers associated with alcohol or drug use during pregnancy.

- Child welfare agencies should require thorough written policy that all direct caregivers (foster parents, kinship care providers, group residential staff) report children’s alcohol or drug use to foster care social workers, so a treatment plan can be developed and implemented.

- Because many youth return home or change schools due to multiple foster care placements, child welfare agencies should develop and integrate alcohol and other drugs (AOD) prevention programming for youth in out-of-home care into their continuum of services.

- Child welfare agencies should support and facilitate intra- and inter-agency collaboration, including joint training, program development, and resource sharing among the child welfare system, the substance abuse community, the courts, and other health service agencies.

- As part of a mandatory orientation program, child welfare agencies should provide AOD training regarding recognizing and dealing with substance abuse problems to all new employees.

- Agencies should also develop and provide periodic in-service trainings or refresher courses on AOD problem identification and management.

- Child welfare agencies should provide AOD training to all caregivers as part of their pre-service and in-service training to ensure that they understand AOD issues and the impact of AOD abuse on family functioning.

- All direct care staff should be trained to develop the skills necessary to recognize and appropriately respond to AOD problems in the children and families they serve.

- Agencies should question kinship care providers and family foster parents about their own AOD involvement as part of the initial screening and assessment process.

- State child welfare services should support foster parents and kinship caregivers through ongoing consultation and other appropriate services, including respite care, transportation, and child day care.

- Agencies should encourage foster parents’ and kinship care providers’ participation in substance abuse training by reimbursing them for transportation, child care, and other related expenses.

- Child welfare workers should establish and maintain ongoing contact with AOD treatment providers who work with chemically involved parents.

- AOD providers should keep child welfare agencies informed about treatment progress, episodes of relapse, and/or unplanned discharges.

- Child welfare agencies should use such information to assure that parents’ treatment plans are consistent with their children’s case plans.

- Child welfare workers should not make a parent’s success or failure in AOD treatment the sole factor in reunification decision-making, because relapse is part of the recovery process.

- Decisions should recognize the parent’s ability to resume care giving and assure the safety and well-being of the child, as well as the presence or absence of back-up caregivers in the attended family.

- Agencies should include a careful assessment of such factors as: Past history of abandonment; inability to locate the parents; prior parental history of child maltreatment; placement of other children in foster care; prior efforts at reunification; history of drug-exposed births; level of motivation to parent a child; and the nature of impairment imposed by any continuing alcohol or drug use.

See Child Welfare, Page 16
Substance abuse treatment models should be designed specifically for women.

Agencies should provide services such as transportation, job training and placement, primary medical care for women and their children, education programs, help with housing, prenatal and Ob/Gyn care, child care, family planning, and legal assistance.

Prevention and treatment techniques used with adolescents should be developmentally appropriate.

The continuum of services should include peer education and counseling, family therapy, recreational activities, mentoring, education programs, and health counseling (including HIV education and family planning).

While we can’t tackle everything outlined here, I am sure there is at least one action that each of us involved in working with families affected by substance abuse can take to serve children and families better.

References


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