practice. Elective courses were rich and varied: I took a course in international development that inspired me to eventually volunteer in Lima, Peru. While in Lima, I was able to participate in my Elective course discussion group by way of a local Internet café connection.

The program exceeded my expectations in ways I would never have anticipated. Course work was far more demanding than I had expected. The time I saved in travel was otherwise spent obsessing over on-line discussions that were occurring 24 hours a day, from various time zones. I needed little computer experience, but was grateful for being a visual learner, and for a fast typing speed.

This October, I graduated from Dalhousie University. I have never been to Halifax, but Dalhousie’s Distance learning took me on an adventure that will be treasured.

About the Author:
Lorraine Campbell is a supervisor at the Catholic Children’s Aid Society of Toronto (CCAST) where she currently supervises a team working with adolescents. She is also the emergency after-hours supervisor. In 2010, she will celebrate her 20th year with CCAST.

As front-line service providers whose mandate is to protect children from abuse and neglect, Ontario’s Children’s Aid Societies know first-hand the impact of economic uncertainty, plant closures, job loss and family stress on the well-being of children and youth. OACAS made recommendations to government in the Pre-Budget Consultation: Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs to ensure children and families are not further disadvantaged in the current economic climate.
It's About Time: Rethinking our System of Care for Youth
By Virginia Rowden

"There's a billion people on the planet. What does any one life really mean? But in a family, you're promising to care about everything. The good things, the bad things, the terrible things, the mundane things... all of it, all of the time, every day. You're saying "Your life will not go unnoticed because I will notice it. Your life will not go un-witnessed because I will be your witness"."

Our kids need a witness.

In 1985, the Child and Family Services Act introduced the concept of "extended care" which gave CASs the legislative mandate to provide services to "former Crown wards" up to the age of 21 years. That was twenty-four years ago. At that time it may have been reasonable to think that youth aged 18 would be ready to be "launched" on their own. I remember being a front-line worker with a caseload of youth and worrying about where they would find room and board, where they might get a job, who might "look out" for them. The 1985 CFSA amendments were a positive change, they allowed a continuation of support for those youth who had left foster care and needed a connection to the CAS. The changes also provided some opportunity for youth to continue with school, as long as they were also able to set up their residence, establish credit sufficient to get a phone and pay utilities. While the CASS could do this, there was no policy to require them to offer this to youth. In 1994, the Extended Care and Maintenance policy was introduced to ensure that all youth were offered the opportunity of extended care. Also it was to provide an alternative to welfare, and later when the Conservative government cut welfare rates, the ECM rate was preserved to provide an incentive for the Conservative government cut welfare rates, the ECM rate was clawed back. Youth who needed to complete their high school education were required to do so from a base of "independent living".

Youth have been advocating for changes to the care system for over 20 years. Their common position has been – treat us as you would your own kids. More recently they challenged the government and CASs to revisit policies and programs for youth in care, using one key overriding principle "what would a good parent do?" When recently asked about services that would assist their transition out of the care system, youth pushed back and stated categorically: "You are asking the wrong question! Don't ask how to better prepare for termination. Ask us what we need to help us grow up."

In 2006, over 300 youth in care told government and CASs about the things that most worried them. The fear of leaving care was the predominant concern. Financial, emotional and educational support were at the top of the list, but in the words of a very wise young person "If you don't deal with the issue of age, there is little point in making other changes. We're just not ready."

Since 2006, many CASSs have listened to the recommendations of youth and changes have been made to financial support; more resources have been made available by both government and CASs to post-secondary support. A number of agencies have also changed service models in an attempt for children who are leaving care to have a real chance at a successful transition. I believe the time is ripe for changes to the care system.

Youth leaving care are at risk of not completing their high school education were required to do so from a base of "independent living". Youth who had found employment could only receive ECM if their income fell below minimum wage, and if it exceeded this amount the ECM rate was clawed back. Youth who needed to complete their high school education were required to do so from a base of "independent living".

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The averages shown in the chart below show most participants answered either "agree" or "strongly agree" to the evaluation questions.

It appears there is an overall strong satisfaction with the training content.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th># of Participants</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Collaborations in Child Welfare: Past, Present and Future</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>94.44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Protecting Children and Strengthening Families-Part 1</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>97.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Protecting Children and Strengthening Families-Part 2</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>99.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Understanding and Responding to Children's Needs</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>99.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Engaging Families</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Foundations of Child Welfare

Child Welfare Professional Series
- Collaborations in Child Welfare Past, Present and Future
- Protecting Children and Strengthening Families Part 1
- Protecting Children and Strengthening Families Part 11
- Understanding and Responding to Children's Needs
- Engaging Families
- Permanency Planning and Continuity of Care
- Legal and Court Processes
- Wellness and Self Care

Resource Family Series
- Ontario Looking After Children
- Understanding PRIDE

Advanced Child Welfare Practice
- Forensic Interviewing
- Advanced Child Protection Assessment
- Advanced Service Planning
- Critical Decision Making in Child Protection
- Protection Investigations within the Context of Custody and Access
- Working with High Risk Infants and Their Families
- Working with Adolescents

Management and Leadership
- Management, Leadership and Administration within Child Welfare
- Managing Work Through Other People
- Transfer of Learning
- Supervising and Managing Group Performance: Developing Productive Work Teams
- Organizational Culture and Leadership
- Clinical Supervision
- Supervising Investigative Forensic Interviews
- Project Management

Specialized Training
- SAFE
- Adoption
- Children's Service

Trainer Development
- Introductory Train the Trainer
- Advanced Train the Trainer
- PRIDE Team Training
- Clinical Supervision Train the Trainer
- Regional Trainer Development

Resource Family
- PRIDE Pre Service (Modules 1-9 and Digital Pre-Service)

It's time to deal with the construct we are using to fashion our "system of care" - it's an antique system and by its design creates uncertainty, anxiety, dysfunction, inability to form relationships and is just hurtful. For kids who come into CAS care for the long term, they are clear: the child welfare system has nothing to do with permanency; it is about preparation to be terminated, detached, ejected, rejected...and way before they are ready to leave.

The ages that define "independence" date back to 1897, when revisions to the Children's Protection Act made Children's Aid Societies the legal guardians of all girls under age thirteen, and the new age limit for commitment to the Refuge was set - for girls - at between thirteen and eighteen years.

From the Archives of Ontario:

...the Industrial Refuge for Girls opened in 1880 as a separate unit of the Andrew Mercer Reformatory for Women. Although separate from the Reformatory, the Refuge was administered by the same Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent, and shared the Reformatory's accountant, surgeon and school-mistress. Responsibility for the inspection of the Refuge, as well as for providing rules and regulations with respect to its management, discipline and policing, rested with the Ontario Inspector of Prisons and Public Charities.

The Industrial Refuge for Girls closed in 1905. At that time, homes were found for a majority of the girls, while others were placed with relatives. A few were transferred to various other custodial institutions.

This appears to be when the age of 18 surfaced, and it continues to guide our system of care. Also from this era:
- the start of the Klondike Gold Rush
- Charles Tupper became Prime Minister, and also Wilfred Laurier in the same year
- Ford’s Quadricycle – which pre-dated the automobile
- Nicholas II of Russia’s coronation in Moscow
- the premiere of Puccini’s La Bohème in Turin
- Oscar Wilde’s play Salome which premiered in Paris
- the first modern Olympics since the Roman emperor Theodosius I banned the Ancient Games in AD 393 as part of the Christian campaign against paganism, and
- the “Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus” letter was published in the New York Sun

And women did not have the vote.

It is time to deal with "age" in the statute (CFSA) and there are a number of Ontario precedents for doing so (drivers licensing, mandatory school age, smoking, drinking, consent to sexual activity). Ontario also needs to step up and align with the UN Convention regarding the age of protection. We should be supporting kids until they finish school, rather than rushing them out the door before they are ready. While we can hold out for legislative change, it may not come, and even if it does, it may be years away. There is so much we can do in the absence of amendments.

Essentially, we have a sequence of "encouraging get ready to leave care" otherwise felt by children and youth as a steady and consistent push over a series of steep cliffs. Not only should the ages of protection and extended care be changed but we need to change the philosophy of care. It is possible to move to a policy of treating long-term foster care as a permanency option for those children and youth who are not likely to go on to adoption. It is possible to proceed with adoption
It would mean a shift:

Detachment.

In philosophy and eliminating “programming after Crown wardship ends. This requires a change your own. You can’t stay here beyond your 18 birthday.

The concept of “emancipation” is not introduced. Young people stay with their foster family for at least another 5 years.

If you leave care, then the door is open to return. As it would be in a family.

The liability of having a youth “out of control of the society” is acknowledged, but is not the rationale for terminating wardship.

Your place is with family. Focus on your studies, get a part-time job that will give you work experience, some spending money and hopefully help you decide what you want to do when you finish school.

If you mess up, you can come back.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FROM</th>
<th>TO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At 16 years ...</td>
<td>The concept of “emancipation” is not introduced. Young people stay with their foster family for at least another 5 years.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children and youth are advised (or find out) that they can leave care at 16.</td>
<td>If youth leave care, then the door is open to return. As it would be in a family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The message to youth: “You’re 16. You need to get ready, in less than 2 years you have to be out on your own.”</td>
<td>The liability of having a youth “out of control of the society” is acknowledged, but is not the rationale for terminating wardship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OR:</td>
<td>Your place is with family. Focus on your studies, get a part-time job that will give you work experience, some spending money and hopefully help you decide what you want to do when you finish school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If they do leave at 16, and terminate wardship they CANNOT re-enter the care system. (which they could if they left at 18)</td>
<td>If you mess up, you can come back.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The message to youth who “check out”: if you leave now you can never come back. Sorry.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At 17 years ...</td>
<td>Child welfare programs are not about preparing for leaving care. They are about relationships – family, peers, and other positive relationships. Supports need to be provided to maintain the family based placement. If in foster care, the foster parents are the “responsible adults” charged with caring. As it would be in a family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children and youth are recruited into independent living programs that “program” them to get ready to be out on their own by 17 years or certainly before their 18th birthday.</td>
<td>In terms of milestones, the future focus is not about transitioning out of care, it’s about educational achievement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The message to youth: “Learn fast about how to manage on your own. You can’t stay here beyond your 18th birthday.”</td>
<td>The message to youth: Focus on school, balance work and studies. You are part of our family – a contributing member. What do we need to do to help you succeed? Help with school? Dealing with relationships? With finding a part-time job?</td>
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1. The content of this session met my learning expectation.
2. I will be able to incorporate this new learning into my practice.
3. The information was easy to understand.
4. The content provided relevant knowledge for current practice issues.
5. The materials (curriculum, handouts, PowerPoint presentation, etc.) provided were sensitive to cross-cultural learning needs.

The training will help to facilitate transfer of learning into practice.

Participants were asked to rate the following questions with “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” “agree” and “strongly agree”:

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It appears there is an overall strong satisfaction with the training content.

OACAS Education Services provides a unique program with the necessary knowledge, competencies and tools for child welfare professionals, managers and resource families in Ontario to make critical decisions about child safety while simultaneously working alongside families towards better outcomes for children.

Education Services’ Curricula

OACAS Education Services curricula emphasizes the powerful application of child focused, family centred, strengths based practices that protect children and respect families. Through a unique blend of presentations, case studies, small group discussions, and self-study assignments, OACAS courses are designed to generate practical and action-oriented knowledge about child welfare in Ontario. Critical themes and relevant issues pertaining to the daily practice of child welfare are examined. The programs provide the opportunity to become a reflective professional, an innovative leader or a strong resource family in the province of Ontario.

The curricula promote current research related to child safety and well-being, diversity and anti-oppression, collaboration, resiliency, community development, and permanency planning. Supplementary research materials are provided to learners after the course has been completed. OACAS believes education in child welfare is not a one time event but rather an ongoing learning process.

OACAS trainers are highly skilled, experienced and knowledgeable about child welfare practice. Their role is to ignite a creative and positive learning environment in the classroom, or virtually online.

OACAS believes that the transfer of learning from the classroom to the work environment is vital to the professional development of participants. OACAS demonstrates a commitment to the “transfer of learning” approach by providing a team of training specialists who offer customized support to a group of professionals, an individual child welfare organization, or to a specific region in the province.

Learners in this unique program receive the necessary knowledge, develop the competencies and leave with the tools to perform the core responsibilities of a child welfare professional, manager or resource family in Ontario. The purposeful teaching approach equips learners with the tools to make critical decisions about child safety while simultaneously working along side families towards better outcomes for children.

Learners receive certificates of competencies which can be presented in court as a demonstration of knowledge and skill acquisition related to performing investigations, collaborating with families, understanding the complexities of working with maltreated children and their families, and understanding the legal mandate that governs the practice of child welfare in Ontario.

Participants’ Evaluation of Child Welfare Professional Series

In preliminary analysis of data collected between January 1 and February 20, 2009, participants of the Child Welfare Professional Series were asked to rate six questions regarding course content. The results show that participants felt the content was relevant, easy to understand and would help facilitate transfer of learning into practice.

Participants were asked to rate the following questions with "strongly disagree", "disagree", "agree" and "strongly agree":

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OACAS JOURNAL Winter 2009 Volume 53 Number 1


Legal and ethical implications of terminating family welfare services for young people. In L. Brown and S. Strega (Eds.),cerr-ccep.ca.


At 18 years ...
ECM allowance at $900+ becomes an incentive to disengage at 17 or 18 years old, if they have not done so already.
For youth who continue on with foster parents, they must negotiate a rate. The foster parent faces a significant reduction and youth often feel they are left begging to stay. Those that do are subjected to police reference checks.
For youth ECM rates are a mix of “freedom”, but also being pushed out. Seems like a lot of money, until they are out trying to manage rent, food, transportation, utilities, laundry, etc.
The research shows when youth stay in foster care until 21, they do better – in school, jobs, health, relationships.

18 - 21 years ...
Few youth in care live in foster care while they attend post-secondary because most have already “aged out”. Only 42% of youth in care have graduated by the age of 20.
The small number of youth on ECM who do attend post-secondary “figure out” how to apply to post secondary on their own and have few if any family contacts and/or supports during the school year, and during the holiday period.

In the spirit of “family”, young people in care should be supported to go to school in the same way as a family would help out. If they attend college or university in their home town, the expectation is that they live at home (foster home). Foster parents would support their foster child (youth) at home. It would NOT be reasonable for the youth to have an apartment paid for them in the same town or city (most families could simply not afford that).
If youth go to school out of town and the cost and time of commuting is prohibitive, then foster parents would help the youth find a place to stay, and the ECM allowance would help pay the student’s living expenses. HELP – not completely pay. Before leaving home – just as in a family – the parents would help the student work out a budget, find an apartment, get a part-time job, and would help with applications for university, for OSAP etc.

The message to youth:
Education is important, as is learning to balance work and school. Education is very valuable. As a youth from the child welfare system, you have special help now through OSAP, and we will continue to support you. It is not entirely a “free ride”, you have to contribute too.

3See: When should the state cease parenting? Issue Brief, Mark E. Courtney, Amy Dvosky and Harold Pollack Chapin Hall, December 2007.
Money became an incentive to leave care: $663 - 950/mo ECM and another $3300 through the OCBe. While it sounds like a lot of cash, it’s hardly enough to survive.

The OCBe leaving care allowance is put in trust until the youth is finished high school and starts to plan their move to a more independent lifestyle.

The message to youth:
It’s a Trust Fund, as if it was created by a benevolent aunt or uncle to help open doors to new opportunities.

The family relationship is established, firm and lasting. 21 is not termination. The door is open and youth can plan a semi-independent lifestyle. Part-time job, school, contributing to the family.

And, at 21 adoption is an option. 2

The message to youth:
We are your family, we will support you. The door is open.

The basic approach would be to change the message - one that currently is of cumulative rejection.

Another helpful analogy…

Imagine you have just been hired. Your employer says “Welcome aboard. We’re a tight team here – we do great work, we value you and we look forward to giving you our best – and we will give you great opportunities. But by the way, you have a 4 month contract. And even if you are the best person we have ever had at our company we WILL be terminating your employment after 4 months. Yup – that’s right – we want 110%. And we will terminate you.”

1See: Patrick O’Brien, You Gotta Believe 
http://www.yougottabelieve.org/

References:


there is commitment to follow through with more of this research and work? Perhaps conviction to social justice is the first step that will encourage change both in the research process and child protection practice. To secure an anti-oppressive approach to child protection the call to action is now. How will we know when we have arrived at a collegial approach to child protection service? We will know when parents have penned literature that is quoted in evidence-informed practice; when parents have a presence on CASs boards of directors; when diversity committees include parents as colleagues; when it becomes second nature to include parents as colleagues in research, training and policy development.

Discussion: Implications of the study for anti-oppressive child protection practice

Parents in this study did not recall needing more control. What they wanted most was to be heard, to have a chance for change for their children and to find a way to counterbalance the professional power exerted over them. They wanted help with housing, life skills, racial equality and a connection to others who had a similar experience. The parent participants wanted to have their rights explained more clearly. All of the parents’ desires through the child protection experience suggest a need for an anti-oppressive approach to practice (Campbell, 2004; Dominelli, 2004; Potts and Brown, 2005; Strega, 2005a; Swan, 2009). Parents in this study needed personal help, structural changes and someone to listen to them in order to meet the challenges of parenting. This study highlights the need for further engagement of parents with social workers to create structural change. Parents and social workers in this study are in harmony that change needs to occur. The question now is whether group of parents and professionals. While the study explores familial experience with the mandated aspects of child protection, it is not intended to cover all non-voluntary circumstances. While this current study may not be applicable to other situations, lessons can still be drawn from it (Delong, Black and Wideman, 2005; Ungar, 2007). The steps taken in the study are outlined and could be replicated in another geographical area. At some point, should the study be replicated, the additional findings might be compared using meta-analysis approach (Delong, Black and Wideman, 2005).

While this study pushed the envelope of parent involvement in the research process there is always room to improve. Future studies should include parents in the writing of the research proposal, assisting with the research literature review or writing a specific conclusion. To make these changes more feasible the research study should consider financial reimbursement for the parents’ time and expertise.

Emergent Literacy in Pre-School Children: Findings from the Ontario Looking After Children (OnLAC) Project

By Shaye Moffat and Cynthia Vincent

Literacy is a major part of the basic foundation for lifelong learning. All future academic learning stems from the initial basis of building letters into words, and then words into sentences. Literacy is taught from the initial entry into school, and is a priority for future academic progression.

What is emergent literacy?

The term emergent literacy encompasses everything that comes before an individual actually learns how to read. This includes concepts such as language acquisition, the understanding that letters create words, and that words can be put together to make sentences. It also includes the idea that different letters make different sounds, and that reading happens from left to right.

Emergent literacy may be somewhat genetically influenced, although it has also been demonstrated that one’s environment influences it. In fact, most often a child’s initial contact with literacy occurs in the home environment through shared-reading experiences with adults. It is within this environment that children’s views of literacy are most often defined, and therefore it is vital that children are given these opportunities to explore literacy in a safe and warm environment.

Why is emergent literacy important?

As children progress in their schooling, their initial literacy level is built upon for all of their future learning. All subjects require a degree of literacy, and children who struggle with reading will continue to lag behind in other areas of academia as well. Children become literate by using their acquired knowledge of the oral language and applying it to the processes of reading and writing. Consequently it is essential for the foundations of literacy to be laid out for future success.

What does the research say about emergent literacy?

Research clearly demonstrates the vital importance of emergent literacy-inducing activities. Since the preschool age group has not yet entered into an

Abstract

This exploratory study filled two identified gaps in the research literature: one substantive and the other related to the research process. The substantive gap to be addressed is the identification of success stories of parents who were previously court ordered into service and who are now parenting free from child protection interference. Secondly, this study will also be an addition to the limited number of studies that involve parents at a collegial level of participation in the research process (Cornwall and Jewkes, 1995). The social justice agenda of parent participation in child protection reform is advanced by heavily involving parents in all aspects of the research process. In fact, the study encouraged parents and professionals to reach beyond the limits of collaboration and work in a collegial manner to discuss necessary changes in Ontario’s child protection system. In the end this study was an opportunity to ‘give voice to a story that has not been fully told’ (Thomas, 2005, p.242).

About Author:

Dr. Bernadette Gallagher is the Director of Education Services at the Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies.

- What about stronger support to kin relationships, even if that is not the primary home?
- What about legal guardianship?
- What if we consider that adoption is an option – for older teens, and for your adults?

For a 14 year old in care, the idea of staying at home until 21 is a lot different than having to become independent at 17. Let’s think about what a good parent would do.

The legislation does not prescribe how CASs provide extended care, it just says they may extend care. Let’s focus on the "caring".

About Author

Virginia Rowden is the Director of Social Policy and Mentor to the YouthCAN Program at the Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies.

Summary

This exploratory study filled two identified gaps in the research literature: one substantive and the other related to the research process. The substantive gap to be addressed is the identification of success stories of parents who were previously court ordered into service and who are now parenting free from child protection interference. Secondly, this study will also be an addition to the limited number of studies that involve parents at a collegial level of participation in the research process (Cornwall and Jewkes, 1995). The social justice agenda of parent participation in child protection reform is advanced by heavily involving parents in all aspects of the research process. In fact, the study encouraged parents and professionals to reach beyond the limits of collaboration and work in a collegial manner to discuss necessary changes in Ontario’s child protection system. In the end this study was an opportunity to ‘give voice to a story that has not been fully told’ (Thomas, 2005, p.242).

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Why is emergent literacy important?

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engaged in within foster homes in the province of Ontario.

What was the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study was to explore the extent of literacy-promoting activities that are being engaged in within foster homes in the province of Ontario. It was hypothesized that the more frequent that emergent literacy-promoting activities were provided to preschool children, the more likely their future literacy and academic success would be.

Who were our participants?

The participants in this study were a sample of 114 preschool children between the ages of 1 and 4 years of age, who were in-care in the province of Ontario, and who took part in the Ontario Looking After Children (OnLAC) project. The OnLAC sample was composed of 54 percent male and 56 percent female participants, and the majority (91 percent) were in foster care, with an additional 9 percent living in kinship care. The children had been placed in care for a variety of reasons, including but not limited to physical, emotional or sexual harm, neglect, abandonment, problematic behaviours and domestic violence.

We compared this in-care group of children with participants from Cycle 1 (1994-1995) of the National Longitudinal Study of Children and Youth (NLSCY; Statistics Canada and Human Resources Development Canada, 1995), in which 4,403 parents and children between one and four years of age gave answers to the literacy-promoting activities scale in the NLSCY.

What did we compare?

We choose to examine the sample of preschool children in two age groups. First, we looked at children who were between 1 and 2 years of age, and secondly, we examined the children between 3 and 4 years of age. The emergent literacy-promoting activities being engaged in with the foster parents were analysed by looking at five variables within the Assessment and Action Record (AAR-C2) and NLSCY for 3-4 year olds, and four variables found within the 1 to 2 age group of the AAR-C2 and NLSCY. The items were answered by the main caregiver within the context of a conversation with the child’s social worker for the AAR-C2 questions only.

Professional group. Each group session lasted approximately two hours in length. A prepared research interview guide was used as a framework for the group dialogue. The first focus group involved parents discussing their experiences with child protection services. Members of two facilitation teams assisted with the discussion. The location of the parent focus group was in a community room situated within an elementary school. The school had a drop-in parenting center which was used to provide child care for the participants and facilitation team members. Transportation was provided for anyone who wished to attend the focus group.

Two weeks later a focus group was conducted with professionals discussing their reactions to the recommendations of change proposed by the parents. This group was held at a women’s shelter. The location was selected because it was seen as a community hub, was available free of charge, was a place where professionals were used to meeting, was a safe environment for the facilitation team members, it was child friendly to offer child care services and most importantly, the location represented a reminder of a service that was often used in conjunction with child protection services. The final group was designed to bring parents and professionals together to discuss their ideas on how the current system of child protection can be improved. Although the literature suggests there is a lack of dialogue between families and professionals when introducing change or reform within the child protection system, there is a body of literature recommending dialogue between families, communities and professionals (Callahan and Lumb, 1995; Cameron and Birnie-LeFovitch, 2000; Mannes, Roehlkepartain, and Benson, 2005; McKenzie and Seidl, 1995; O’Connor, Morgenstern, Gibson and Nakashian, 2005; Rutman, Strega, Callahan, and Dominelli, 2002). The joint parent and professional group was in response to this literature.

Findings: Sincere Appetite for Change

Parents suggested eleven recommendations, all of which were supported by the professional participants. These findings suggest that parents and professionals in this study are like-minded in terms of making changes to the child protection system. Further, the study findings suggest there is a need for social workers and parents to continue their discourse about the protection of children. Parents made the following recommendations for change to the current child protection system:

1. Have two social workers assigned to a case to avoid prejudice perceptions about parents.
2. Compile a parent’s rights booklet.
3. Engage in cultural diversity training for social work staff.
4. Hold fathers more accountable for family issues.
5. Locate extended family quicker when looking for foster care placements.
6. Design a program to help teen parents and their parents raise children together.
7. Educate young girls early about self respect to prevent involvement in violent relationships.
8. Teach parents about life skills.
9. Put a package together that outlines all of the support programs available to parents and highlight the ones you expect parents to take.
10. Develop a support group so parents can meet to discuss their experiences with other parents.
11. Create safe chat rooms where parents, children and youth can communicate with others who have similar situations.

There was a balance of negative and positive comments made by parents about the service they received.

Limitations

As with any interpretive study the issue of generalization is a concern (Ungar, 2007). The study provides insights into the child protection system through a limited but rich dialogue with a small
A position taken in this study is that there is a gap in child protection research literature and primarily it is that parents have been excluded as primary creators of knowledge. This social exclusion argument is suggested after examining the role parents have in the research process historically. This study advocates that parents can and should be colleagues in the research process.

Methodology: Research is Both a Change Process and Product

The study expanded the parameters of collaboration and embraces a collegial approach toward research. As such the study is designed to meaningfully involve parents in the research agenda by including them as co-researchers. “It is research that takes seriously and seeks to make the connections between how knowledge is created, what knowledge is produced and who is entitled to engage in these processes” (Brown and Strega, 2005, p. 7). Principles associated with participatory action research (PAR) are used to focus the inquiry and provide boundaries for data collection, analysis and dissemination (Morse, 1998).

In keeping with the principles of PAR, parents were included in all aspects of the study, including the role of co-researchers. Arguments have been made (Beresford, 1999, 2003; Cameron, 2003; Dumbrill and Maiter, 2004; Thorpe, 2007) that expert knowledge in child protection can and should involve parents in the research agenda by including them as co-researchers. “It is research that takes seriously and seeks to make the connections between how knowledge is created, what knowledge is produced and who is entitled to engage in these processes” (Brown and Strega, 2005, p. 7). Principles associated with participatory action research (PAR) are used to focus the inquiry and provide boundaries for data collection, analysis and dissemination (Morse, 1998).

Participant recruitment followed a non-probability theoretical sampling strategy (Charmaz, 2004; Dey, 2004; Dumbrill, 2006; Macnaghten and Myers, 2004; Morgan, 1997; Rubin and Babbie, 2001; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Recruitment was based on individuals having experience with child protection services. Individuals were selected based on their association with child protection, not because they were representative of a larger population. Parents qualified to participate in the study: (1) If they had previously been ordered to participate in child protection services through a court order known as a supervision order. (2) If the supervision order was six months in length or longer. (3) If the family file was marked Child Welfare (Dumbrill and Maiter, 1998). (4) If they had maintained a one-year period free from child protection services. In total eight parents participated in the study.

The only criterion to participate as a professional participant was to have case involvement with the child welfare system. Why invite professionals into the discussion at all? At first glance it may seem contradictory to include professionals in a grassroots, social change study; however, I have learned from previous research (Leslie, 2005; Pain and Francis, 2003) that exclusion of a wider network can stymie social change. There are research studies specific to the field of child welfare that suggest the importance of families, communities and professionals working together to improve the health and well-being of children (Callahan and Lumb, 1995; Cameron and Birnie-Lefcovicth, 2000; Mannes, Roehlkepartain, and Benson, 2005; McKenzie and Seidl, 1995; O’Connor, Morgenstern, Gibson and Nakashian, 2005; Rumon, Strega, Callahan, and Domenilli, 2002). In a collaborative model of research, families and service providers come together with the notion that ameliorating child abuse is a collective responsibility (Bart, 2004; Beresford, 2003; Cameron, 2003; Kufeldt and McKenzie, 2003; Wharf, 2002). In total, thirteen professionals participated in the study representing child welfare, family law and addiction services.

Three focus groups were conducted a parent only group, a professional only group and a joint parent/
Should the State Parent Youth Adults? Evidence from the Midwest Study

By Mark E. Courtney

When children are removed from their homes due to parental abuse or neglect and placed into out-of-home care, the state public child welfare agency, under the supervision of the juvenile court, takes on the role of parent. While a child is in out-of-home care, the public agency is responsible for ensuring their day-to-day care and supervision. This state responsibility continues until the child is returned home, placed with another family through adoption or guardianship, runs away from care and cannot be found, or moves to another care system through institutionalization (i.e., is incarcerated or placed in a psychiatric facility). If youth in out-of-home care do not exit care via any of these routes, they eventually reach the age at which the public agency is allowed under state law to “emancipate” them to independent living, regardless of the wishes of the youth. From the perspective of the state agency, discharging a youth to an emancipated status means that the state ceases to bear any legal parental responsibility towards the youth’s care and supervision. Thus, while a public child welfare agency may voluntarily decide to provide a variety of services to youth after discharge from care, the agency is not obligated to do so and the juvenile court cannot compel the agency to do so. Put simply, when youth “age out” of the foster care system in the U.S., the state ceases to be their parent. In all but a few jurisdictions, states relinquish their parental responsibilities when youth reach the age of majority; the federal government currently only reimburses states for the costs of foster care through age 18 under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act.

In recent years, child welfare practitioners and policymakers have begun to question the wisdom of federal policy that ends reimbursement to states for foster care at age 18. Reflecting continuing interest in improving prospects for foster youth in transition, the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (Public Law 110-351) was signed into law by President Bush in October 2008. The new law amends Title IV-E by giving states an option to extend foster care to age 21 with continuing federal financial support. Whether states will exercise this option may depend in part on whether policymakers believe that remaining in care past 18 is of benefit to foster youth.


opportunity for eight parents and thirteen professionals to voice their collective views on changes they would make to the child protection system.

The findings suggest the study was timely in light of the newly amended Child and Family Services Act, 2006 in Ontario. Parents and professionals alike came forward with suggestions for change that now fall within the realm of the new Act. These suggestions are identified and discussed in this study.

Purpose of the Study: Advancing Social Justice through Inclusion

‘We are no longer just the ‘patients’, the ‘cases’, the diagnostic categories. We come claiming the right for things to be different…We come with contributions to make’ (Beresford, 2004, p. 3). The child protection system in Ontario is currently struggling and has been characterized as being preoccupied with the provision of reactive services (Barter, 2004b; Cameron, 2003; McKenzie and Tрокmё, 2003; Peirson, Nelson and Prilletensky, 2003; Wharf, 2002). Forensic social work practices have prevailed over traditional social justice models of empowerment, prevention, and community capacity building approaches to child protection (CASW, 2003; Peirson, Nelson and Prilletensky, 2003). Proponents of anti-oppressive social work practices suggest the impact of this amended child welfare reform is an inverse relationship between the level of family surveillance and the degree of satisfaction with social justice for children. In fact, as risk management increases, issues of social justice decrease (Barter, 2004b; Cameron, 2003; Lawrence, 2004; Peirson, Nelson and Prilletensky, 2003; Sharland, 1999).

How parents claim a voice in a system, which by its mandated design, is based on power differentials against them (Barter, 1997, 2001; OACAS, 2006a; Wharf, 2002), is explored through involving them in a research facilitation team, focus groups to discuss analysis of content and focus group consultation with child protection workers. This study is about elevating the voice of parents in the child protection reform process. It is a discussion about change at multiple levels from the personal to the broader structural. More importantly, the study is about adjusting how the child protection field views parents: from liability to resource.

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Literature Review: Finding the Voices of Parents in Research

The aim of the literature review was to investigate the degree to which parents were engaged in the child protection research process. The review was concerned with evaluating the scope of power that parents have in the research process. It is clear from reviewing the literature concerning child abuse that parents have a voice but it is often as subjects of research (Cadzow, Armstrong and Fraser, 1999; Cameron and Binie-Lefcovitch, 2000; DIlauro, 2004; Manji, Maiter, and Palmer, 2005; Strega, 2005a). When parents have been consulted about child protection services however, their voice has often been in the form of consumer feedback (Cameron, 2003; Dumbrell, 2006; Rutman, Strega, Callahan, and Dominelli, 2002; Callahan and Lumb, 1995). A more intense form of power in the research process occurred when parents became co-researchers and engaged in pivotal decision making steps (Dumbrell and Maiter, 2004; McKenzie and Seidl, 1995). As the degree of inclusiveness in the research process increased it became more difficult to find research that asks parents to be colleagues (Thomas, 2005). Of course there is a body of literature that is about parents in which they are outside the research process all together (DIlauro, 2004; Miller, Fox and Garcia-Beckwith, 1999; Tрокмё, et al, 2003; Tрокмё, et al, 2003; Leschied, Whitehead, Hurley and Chioldo, 2004). The argument made here is that more involvement parents have in the process, the more potential there is to exercise power over how their situations will change (Adams, 2003; Beresford, 1999, 2003; Cornwall and Jewkes, 1995; Freire, 2005).
The Midwest Study

The Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth ("Midwest Study") provides evidence of the potential benefits to foster youth of extending the provision of foster care past age 18. The Midwest Study is a collaborative effort among the public child welfare agencies in Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin, the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, the University of Wisconsin Survey Center (UWSC), and Partners for Our Children (POC) at the University of Washington, Seattle.

The Midwest Study is following the progression of foster youth in the three states who entered care prior to their 16th birthday, had been in out-of-home care for at least one year at the time of baseline interviews, and whose primary reason for placement was abuse and/or neglect. Baseline interviews were conducted with 732 youth in the three states between May 2002 and March 2003 when all of the youth were 17 or 18 years old. Eighty-two percent (n = 603) of these 732 youth were re-interviewed between March and December 2004, when nearly all were 19 years old. A third wave of survey data was collected between March 2006 and January 2007 (n = 591) when nearly all of the young people were 21 years old.

The Midwest Study describes the experiences of foster youth in transition to adulthood between ages 17 and 21 across a broad range of indicators of well-being.

Policy variation across the states involved in the Midwest Study allows for an examination of the potential effects of supporting states to extend foster care past age 18. Foster youth in Iowa and Wisconsin are generally discharged from care around the time of their 18th birthday and almost never after age 18, whereas Illinois’ foster youth are allowed to remain in care until their 21st birthday. While some anecdotal reports suggest that many foster youth would not choose to remain under the care and supervision of the public child welfare agency and juvenile court past 18, our study findings from Illinois suggest the opposite; most of the young people in Illinois remained in care past their 20th birthday with many remaining to age 21. The difference in Illinois does not appear to be solely due to case management differences or differing state policies, but rather the different experiences; Illinois youth remained in care an average of over 20 months longer than their peers in Iowa and Wisconsin.

What do our study findings suggest regarding the potential benefits of extending foster care past age 18?

Higher Education

Our data suggest that foster youth often carry pre-existing educational fee deficits into their early adult years. Nearly one-quarter of the young adults in the Midwest Study had not obtained a high school diploma or a GED by age 21. In fact, these young adults were more than twice as likely not to have a high school diploma or GED as their peers. Conversely, only 30 percent of the young adults in the Midwest Study had completed any college compared with 53 percent of 21 year-olds nationally.

To provide a test of the effect of allowing youth to remain in care past age 18 on college enrollment and attainment, we compared between states the percentage of youth at 21 who had (1) ever been enrolled in college and (2) had completed at least one year of college. Youth in Illinois are 1.9 times more likely (58 percent versus 30 percent) to have completed at least some college and 2.2 times more likely (38 percent versus 17 percent) to have completed at least one year of college than their peers in Iowa and Wisconsin.

We also conducted multivariate statistical models of both of these higher education outcomes, controlling for the characteristics of the youth in the study as assessed during our baseline interviews at age 17-18. These analyses also show strong between-state effects on the likelihood of college participation by the foster youth in the Midwest Study. Even after controlling for observed differences in the characteristics of the youth in our study, the estimated odds of foster youth in Illinois attending college by age 21 were about four times greater than those of foster youth in Iowa and Wisconsin; the estimated odds of foster youth in Illinois having completed at least one year of college by age 21 were about twice as high as those of foster youth in Iowa and Wisconsin.

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of college by age 21 were approximately 3.5 times higher than those of foster youth in the other two states.

**Earnings**

Data from the Midwest Study provide a sobering view of the employment and earnings of foster youth in transition to adulthood. When interviewed at age 21, only about half were currently working, which is lower than the employment rate among 21 year olds nationally. Although more than three-quarters of the young adults in the Midwest Study interviewed at age 21 reported having any income from employment during the past year, their earnings were very low. Median earnings among those who had been employed were just $5,450.

We chose to examine the potential relationship between remaining in care and earnings by estimating the effect of each additional year of care on self-reported earnings during the 12 months prior to our interviews at age 21. First, we estimated a statistical model of earnings in the year prior to the wave three interviews, controlling for the characteristics of the youth in the study as assessed during our baseline interviews at age 17-18, and focusing on the effect of each additional year that a youth remained in care on their later earnings. We found that each additional year of care was associated with a $470 increase in annual earnings. Using an alternative estimator of the relationship between remaining in care and earnings, one that attempts to control for unmeasured differences between youth that are associated both with their likelihood to remain in care and their likelihood of having earnings, we found that each additional year of care was associated with an increase of $924 in annual earnings.

**Pregnancy**

Despite declining overall pregnancy rates among adolescents, teenage pregnancy and childbearing remain significant problems, particularly among youth in foster care; 71 percent of the young women in the Midwest Study had been pregnant by age 21, and half of those who had been pregnant by age 19, rates much higher than for the general population. Considerable costs are associated with teen pregnancy, both to the young women involved and to their children, implying that delayed pregnancy among female foster youth making the transition to adulthood should be considered a worthwhile goal.

In order to assess the relationship between remaining in care and the timing of pregnancies among the young women in our study, we estimated a multivariate statistical model of the timing of pregnancies between our first wave of interviews at age 17-18 and our last interviews at age 21. These statistical models allowed us to assess the association, if any, between being in state-supervised out-of-home care and becoming pregnant, while controlling for the baseline characteristics of the young women in our study. Our analyses suggest that being in care is associated with a 38 percent reduction in the rate at which the young women in our study become pregnant between ages 17-18 and 19.

**Implications**

Our findings provide support for state-level efforts to implement the recent amendments of Title IV-E of the Social Security Act that provide federal funding for states that choose to allow young people to remain in state care past age 18. In Illinois, where remaining in care until age 21 is already an option, foster youth are more likely to pursue higher education. This policy also seems to be associated with higher earnings and delayed pregnancy. As remaining in care on its own is an important predictor of those outcomes, more state efforts to support remaining in care are needed.

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Individually, systems such as child welfare, criminal justice and education, struggle with oppression. As a result of the relationship between these systems, they each impact the outcomes of the others. For example, the child welfare system receives a significant portion of its referrals from the education system. In both systems, racialized children are negatively perceived and thus negatively impacted. The bureaucratic culture in social services, which renders criticism and challenge between services unwelcomed and unsolicited, contributes to these oppressive outcomes. The result is that each system remains unchallenged about its oppressiveness and marginalized groups continue to experience oppression. The structural and institutional issues currently found in child welfare need to be addressed collectively and collaboratively in order for substantial change to occur.

**Why Now?**

There is no shortage of research that demonstrates how child welfare practice often contributes to oppressive outcomes. Through the adoption of an anti-oppression framework, the system can begin to recognize and address the negative impacts on marginalized groups. The legislative and policy framework created through the Child Welfare Transformation initiative provides an ideal context within which to integrate an anti-oppression framework. Such a framework will also compliment and enhance other provincial initiatives such as the continuing efforts to develop a Collaborative Model within which to integrate an anti-oppression framework. The following members of the Child Welfare Anti-Oppression Roundtable contributed to the development of this paper: Meeta Bains, Cris Calley Jones, Sheryl Cohen Shetner, Sue Dale, Sharon Evans, Bernie Finnigan, Bernadette Gallagher, Shelley Garratt, Deh Golnick, Indeçjit Grewal, Christian Hackbusch, Robin Lelièvre, Nicola Jones, Daniel Kaikulwe, Heidi Kiang, Elizabeth Milligan, Kike Ojo, Sharren Richards, Sally Rivers, Jean Samuel, Marna Shetner, Arjana Tomicic, Samantha Venize, and Regina Whelean.

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**References:**


**OACAS Celebrates National Social Worker Week**

National Social Work Week (NSWW) is celebrated annually across Canada during the month of March.

The Ontario Association of Social Workers (OASW) recognizes the social workers in child welfare who provide services and supports to children, youth and their families. Their tireless efforts on behalf of children and youth are appreciated. Social workers providing child protection services have a repertoire of clinical skills and experience to improve the well-being of the children and youth they serve.

**Ontario Association of Social Workers**

L’Association des travailleuses et travailleurs sociaux de l’Ontario

March 2009

In recognition of National Social Work Month, the Ontario Association of Social Workers salutes Ontario social workers in child welfare. We commend your tireless efforts to protect and improve the safety and well-being of at-risk children and youth, and the critical role you play in supporting vulnerable families in difficult times. The enthusiasm, passion and dedication you demonstrate in providing services and supports to children, youth and their families are especially noteworthy.

Social workers providing child protection services possess a highly valued repertoire of clinical skills, expertise and knowledge regarding factors that have resulted in contact with the child welfare system. You give the assistance and guidance children and youth need to successfully transition to adulthood.

As social workers, you help families deal with life stressors and challenges. Ultimately, you make a significant contribution to the lives of children and families. Your impact is meaningful and long-lasting and your commitment is inspiring.

OASW extends best wishes to all social workers in child welfare during National Social Work Month and throughout the year.

Sincerely,

Joan MacKenzie Davies, MSW, Res.Dip.S.W., RSW

Executive Director

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Anti-Oppression in Child Welfare: Laying The Foundation For Change

By the Child Welfare Anti-Oppression Roundtable

An Excerpt from the discussion paper:

Anti-Oppression and Child Welfare

The child welfare system continues to be implicated in the oppression experienced by marginalized groups in society. Marginalized groups include those who are First Nations, Aboriginal, not white, single mothers, people living below the poverty line, people with disabilities, immigrants, people for whom English is a second language, people who do not identify as heterosexual, etc. Their experience is marginal in that it does not reflect the dominant or mainstream experience which is centred within the child welfare system and the larger social context.

Historically, we have the example of the Sixties Scoop which saw First Nations and Aboriginal children stolen from their families and cultures, with devastating impact, the extent of which most of us can never fully appreciate. Today, one of the most critical impacts and indicators of the oppressiveness of the child welfare system is the over-representation of marginalized groups within the system. For example, Aboriginal youth aged 0-19 represented less than 3 percent of the total child population in Ontario (Census 2006), but 14.4 percent of the numbers of children in care (OACAS, 2008). In an urban centre of Ontario, where the Black population totals 8 percent, Black youth represent 65 percent of the youth in group care.

Although the child welfare system is made up of individuals who want to make a positive impact, some theorists argue that the nature of child welfare practice is in itself oppressive. Through the Child and Family Services Act (CFSA), child welfare workers are entrusted by the state with the legal authority and mandate to protect children from maltreatment and abuse by their caregivers. With that authority, child welfare workers have the ability to apply sanctions on service users if they are not compliant with direction and orders. Further, child welfare agencies have the support of other state agencies such as the police and the court, all of which can be used to add further reinforcement to these sanctions.

In exercising their authority, child welfare workers, if not critically examining their own lens, can create a power-over relationship between themselves and the service user. The outcome, however unintended, can often be an oppressive experience.

Dumbrill (2003) observes that the practice of child welfare predominantly adopts a power over approach to practice, rather than a power with approach. The power over approach allows agencies and workers to use their social positions to control the power dynamics of relationships. Conversely, the power with approach relinquishes a certain amount of power and privilege so that more collaborative, open and empowering relationships can be constructed.

When the power-over approach to practice is exercised by an agency and its workers, it often forces the caregiver(s) to play the game with the child welfare system and its counterparts. In such a scenario, playing the game can include how the caregiver(s) provide workers with information and answers that they feel will help protect their children and themselves from the child welfare system, even if that involves lying or deception (Dumbrill, 2003).

Turnell (1997) goes so far as to suggest that child welfare workers have the statutory capacity to initiate investigations, remove children, etc., actually precludes any ability to have a power-neutral relationship between an agency and the parent.

The power-over dynamic is further solidified by the ability of the child welfare system to draw upon the extensive network of resources at its disposal. A child welfare agency will have substantially greater resources or access to resources than will the children and families it is involved with. Additionally, workers have the ability to control what information can be made available to a child or caregiver(s). This often prevents children and families from challenging the child welfare agency or the legal system, while conversely reinforcing the power being exercised by the workers and the agency (Dumbrill, 2003).

Turnell (1997) observes that at the roots of child welfare is a history of paternalism, where the professional assesses the nature of the problem, the risk and harm to the child. The professional then formulates the solution required to resolve the problem. Through this process, and using the granted authority, the worker is seen as the expert. This approach to practice is often seen in the context of a service users access to information and when workers use their social position to take on the role of the expert as it relates to the life of a service user.

The System

The child welfare system is often criticized for using dominant or mainstream values which further institutionalize the othering of the marginalized groups. Some critics wonder if the system is even capable of doing what most assume it is doing: keeping children safe. Certainly, the literature would suggest that the system is not designed to keep children safe from the social and structural problems which pose a profoundly more universal risk to their health, well-being and, indeed, survival than that posed by those parents who are truly unable to safely parent their children. Yet, child welfare continues to intervene as experts only after there has been a perceived parental failure.

In the role of expert, the child welfare system and its representatives employ the values of the dominant group to evaluate and make judgments. Service users who do not share the same set of cultural values are defined as different and those differences are perceived as inferior within child welfare. The over-representation of marginalized people in the system is a direct result of the values placed on difference.

As a part of the process of defining service users, the system has relied upon binary language such as good/bad, fit/unfit, safe/dangerous, and normal/ abnormal. Those defined as abnormal are a threat to the dominant social order. Karen Swift (1995) argues that the attempt of child welfare to help children has its origins in an effort to reduce threats to the existing social order. Dumbrill (2003) supports Swift in suggesting that the over-representation of marginalized children and families in child welfare is further proof of how difference is defined as inferior within child welfare.

The structure of child welfare practice also serves to reinforce oppression. Child welfare agencies, like other human service organizations, work and operate within a bureaucratic framework. Workers are subjected to the formal rules set by management or the government. Fleming et al (2003) call this corporate [agency] influence on workers a form of cultural engineering whereby organizations ultimately control workers, regardless of their personal values. Weinberg (2006) argues that those workers, for example, who would like to address systemic oppression and marginalization, are caught between an ethic that informs social work as a vehicle of social justice, and a bureaucratic regime in which workers are responsible for social regulation and the discipline of others.

Expanding upon Weinbergs idea, a similar argument could be made about the impact of the larger social service system on any attempts by individual workers or particular systems to address oppression or make change. The constraints of conformity prevent workers or individual systems from challenging the status quo which, in turn, reinforces oppression. The constraints usually manifest in the form of sanctions or discipline for disrupting the social order. Yet, when we consider the impact that each system has upon the other, it is clear that challenging the status quo will be necessary to change the outcomes of oppression.

It is difficult to talk about the need for an anti-oppression perspective in child welfare without addressing the same need in other systems.