

Journal

For services to children and Families

 Spring Edition

Journal Vol 4



The Alberta Association
of Services for
Children and Families

Journal

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The AASCF Journal for Services to Children and Families (the Journal) is published two times a year by AASCF; a membership based provincial organization of child and family service agencies. The AASCF works to strengthen member agencies and promotes attitudes, practices and conditions that contribute to quality services for vulnerable children and families. Articles are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of AASCF.

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**The Alberta Association
of Services for
Children and Families**



Aims and Scope

This AASCF Journal for Services to Children and Families (Journal) will provide an environment for the child, youth and family service sector and other professionals to reflect on policy, practice, training and research in the sector. This Journal will maintain a practice focus using research. It is intended to focus on local and Canadian content. We want to promote best practice in areas that people are working in, and provide room for critical inquiry into some of the promising programs, practice and research that is occurring in the community.

This Journal particularly encourages papers from people who are working in the field, students who are doing some interesting research and as often as we can we would like to hear from children, youth and families that have experienced a particular program, a challenge or great success and feel that it is worth sharing with the sector in order for all of us to learn from.

At this time we are planning on having the AASCF Journal for Services to Children and Families published two times per year. We ask for your help in this effort. We have brought together a group of academics and practitioners to be our Editorial Committee. As the Editorial Committee reviews articles we are looking for academically sound work that is well written and relevant to our sector. We welcome contributions in the form of research and practice papers, case studies, brief communications and correspondence from readers.

Guidelines have been developed that the editorial board follows and those are available to anyone who wishes to contribute to this Journal. The editors are conducting blind reviews, and will encourage content experts to review articles that are within their areas of expertise. Authors should follow guidelines as outlined in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (5th edition). Authors should not simultaneously submit a paper to more than one publication. The editors will edit papers for length, clarity and consistency. The Journal editorial committee reserves the right to alter the format of all articles to ensure that they are formatted consistently within the Journal. More complete guidelines can be requested from Rhonda Barraclough at RBarraclough@aascf.com.

Articles are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of AASCF.



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Editorial

One of the things we need most in our lives is a sense of accomplishing something worthwhile. We need to reach goals, win victories, and taste success. This accomplishment fuels our souls and leaves us yearning for more. In this journal there are many examples of how caregivers have worked with children, youth and families; programs that have worked hard to reinvent themselves for better outcomes; and research that is conducted to make sure we are working in the right areas- all are interesting and thought producing ideas that really show the authors' innate need to strive for excellence. Dutton (2004), in responding to the fundamental principles of human achievement states, that excellence is as natural as the pursuit of happiness. Each of the articles identifies a sense of vision, purpose; autonomy; and structure. Are these the fundamental pieces that fuel the energy for accomplishment?

“*If we did all the things
we are capable of doing,
we would literally
astonish ourselves.*”

- Thomas Edison

I would argue that they are. With these things, accomplishments turn to excellence!

Rhonda Barraclough, BSW, RSW
Executive Director, AASCF



Differences Between Runaway and non-Runaway Youth Investigated for Maltreatment in Canada

Bruce MacLaurin and Danielle Budgell

Introduction

Street-involved youth live on the streets of most major Canadian cities (MacLaurin, 2005). The literature generally defines street-involved youth as being young people 25 years of age or younger who do not have a safe home or are under-housed (homeless); have been forced to leave their families of origin (throwaway); who have run away from their homes without the consent of their parent or guardian or who left foster or group care placements (runaway) (Hammer, Finkelhor, & Sedlak, 2002; Kufeldt & Nimmo, 1987). An expanded definition includes youth who are not living on the street, but who experiment and engage in street-involved activities and identify with street culture and street peer groupings (Worthington, et al., 2008). A significant proportion of street-involved youth identify that they initially left home as a result of family conflict, disruption and maltreatment (Cauce, 2004; Chen, 2004; Hyde, 2005; McLean, 2005). In addition, many youth leave home because they were thrown out or forced to leave (McLean, 2005; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006). North American studies on street-involved youth report that rates of maltreatment range from 12 to 50% for sexual abuse, and 30 to 90% for physical abuse (Adlaf, 1999; Cauce, 2004; Chen, 2004; Hyde, 2005; Janus, Archambault, Brown, & Welsh, 1995; MacLaurin, Worthington, Dittmann, & Kitt, 2009; Rotheram-Borus, Mahler, Koopman, & Langabeer, 1996; Thrane, Hoyt, Whitbeck, & Yoder, 2006; Worthington, et al., 2008). Abuse among street-involved youth is rarely a one-time occurrence (Worthington, et al., 2008). Children who experience maltreatment within their family may resort to running away from home as an alternative to the abuse or neglect. More than 11 percent of children and teens who experienced substantiated maltreatment in Alberta in 2003 had a history of running away from home at the time of the child welfare investigation, and the percentage of teens (12-15) was significantly higher (MacLaurin, et al., 2006). Little is known about why some children and youth alleged to have experienced maltreatment run away from their home while others experiencing similar events do not.

The purpose of this research was to compare child maltreatment investigations for youth with a history of running away behavior (Runaways) to those youth with no history of running away (non-Runaway), using the 2008 cycle of the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (Trocmé, et al., 2010b). This paper focuses on a comparison of individual child factors, caregiver and household factors, and maltreatment or case factors associated with a history of running away from home. The definition of running away from home was defined for the CIS-2008 as “the child has run away from home or another residence on multiple occasions for at least one overnight period without the permission of responsible adults” (Trocmé, et al., 2010b).

Methodology

This paper is based on a secondary data analysis of the CIS-2008 (Trocmé, et al., 2010b). The CIS-2008 involved a multi-stage sampling procedure that included 112 child welfare services areas across Canada. Child welfare workers in each of the selected service areas completed a 3-page Maltreatment Assessment Form on child protection cases opened during the case selection period (October 1st – December 31st, 2008). The CIS-2008 Maltreatment Assessment Form includes questions about a range of case information including child and family characteristics, information about the type of maltreatment and substantiation decisions, as well as short-term service dispositions. Annualization and regionalization weights were applied which resulted in the estimated incidence of child maltreatment in Canada. For further information on the CIS-2008 methodology, please refer to the methodology chapter of the CIS-2008 (Trocmé, et al., 2010a).

This analysis was conducted using a sample of 64,556 child investigations for youth who were 12 years of age or older in Canada. A total of 8,345 child investigations noted multiple runs away from home (referred to as Runaway) while an additional 56,211 investigations noted no history of running from home (referred to as non-Runaways). Ages of youth ranged between 12 and 19 years. In some provinces and territories, child welfare legislation limits investigations to those young people under the age of 16, while in other jurisdictions, the legislated age can extend to 17, 18 or 19 years of age. Investigations involving children under the age of 12 were omitted because this group represented a different population with respect to the act of running away from home. Pearson chi-square test was used to examine the relationship between Runaway and non-Runaway groups with respect to relevant child, family or household, case and maltreatment characteristics.

Results

Child Factors

A higher percentage of investigations involving Runaways were female (65.5%) and older adolescents 15 years of age or older compared to investigations involving non-Runaways (see Table 1). Thirty-eight percent of Runaway investigations were of Aboriginal heritage, compared to 16.2% of non-Runaways. Child welfare workers were asked to report on a total of 17 child functioning concerns in addition to runaway status. Investigations involving youth described as Runaway had a higher percentage of multiple (2 or more) child functioning concerns (88.6%) compared to non-Runaway investigations (38.5%).

| Child Factors | Non-Runaway % | Runaway % |
|--|------------------|----------------|
| Sex of Investigated Child *** | | |
| Male | 46.7% | 34.5% |
| Female | 53.3% | 65.5% |
| Age of Investigated Child*** | | |
| Younger adolescents (12 - 14 years of age) | 71.0% | 53.2% |
| Older adolescents (15 years of age and older) | 29.0% | 46.8% |
| Child Aboriginal Status *** | 16.2% | 38.0% |
| Multiple Child Functioning Concerns Noted *** | 38.5% | 88.6% |
| Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS-2008) | n= 56,211 | n=8,344 |

* p less than or equal to .05
 ** p less than or equal to .01
 *** p less than or equal to .001
 NS not significant

Household Factors

Little difference was noted between Runaway and non-Runaway investigations with respect to the primary caregiver's sex or age (see Table 2). A significantly higher percentage of Runaway investigations noted that the primary caregiver used alcohol compared to the non-Runaway group; however no significant differences were noted for drug/solvent use. Forty-two percent of the Runaway investigations noted that there were multiple caregiver concerns in the home compared to 34% for non-Runaways. A significantly higher percentage of the Runaway group noted that the household regularly ran out of money for necessities as well as that the primary caregiver was not cooperative with the child welfare investigation. No significant differences were noted for whether the child's family had at least one move in the previous year, or for the level of household safety related to weapons or drugs in the home, or other home health or injury hazards.

| Family/ Household Factors | Non-Runaway % | Runaway % |
|--|------------------|----------------|
| Caregiver Risk Factors | | |
| <i>Drug/solvent abuse NS</i> | 11.4% | 13.8% |
| <i>Alcohol abuse ***</i> | 15.9% | 23.9% |
| <i>Multiple caregiver risk factors ***</i> | 34.4% | 42.1% |
| Family Lives in Purchased Home *** | 45.5% | 37.3% |
| At Least One Move in Past Year NS | 21.7% | 24.5% |
| Household Regularly Runs Out of Money for Basic Neecessities *** | 8.8% | 11.2% |
| Caregiver Not Cooperative With Investigation *** | 8.7% | 11.3% |
| Housing Safety | | |
| <i>Weapons/drugs NS</i> | 5.1% | 5.3% |
| <i>Other home health/injury hazards NS</i> | 3.2% | 2.2% |
| Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS-2008) | n= 56,211 | n=8,344 |

* p less than or equal to .05
 ** p less than or equal to .01
 *** p less than or equal to .001
 NS not significant

Case Factors

A significant difference was noted in the source of referrals for Runaway and non-Runaway children investigated for maltreatment in Canada (See Table 3). A higher percentage of investigations for Runaways were referred from non-professional sources (referral from the child, family member, extended family or neighbor), while a higher percentage of non-Runaway youth were referred from professional sources. Over 80% of Runaway investigations had a previous family level child welfare opening compared to 63% of non-Runaways. Runaway investigations were also more likely to have the case remain open for ongoing child welfare services as well as multiple child or family referrals to other support services. Significant differences were noted in formal child welfare outcomes as a child welfare placement occurred for more than 18% of investigations for Runaways compared to 3.8% for non-Runaways. An application to child welfare court was noted for a higher percentage of Runaways (8.5%) than for non-Runaways (3.3%).



Table 3: Case Factors for Runaway and Non-Runaway Youth Over 12 Investigated for Maltreatment in Canada in 2008

| Case Characteristics | Non-Runaway % | Runaway % |
|--|------------------|----------------|
| Source of Referral | | |
| <i>Non-professional referral</i> *** | 24.8% | 43.8% |
| <i>Professional referral</i> *** | 70.3% | 54.0% |
| At Least One Previous Family Case Opening *** | 63.7% | 81.4% |
| Case Remained Open for On-going Child Welfare Services *** | 24.4% | 43.3% |
| Multiple Referrals to Child or Family Support Services *** | 26.6% | 42.9% |
| Formal Child Welfare Placement *** | 3.8% | 18.8% |
| Child Welfare Court Application *** | 3.3% | 8.5% |
| Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS-2008) | n= 56,211 | n=8,344 |

* p less than or equal to .05
 ** p less than or equal to .01
 *** p less than or equal to .001
 NS not significant

Maltreatment Factors

Significant differences were noted for the primary investigated maltreatment categories for the Runaway and non-Runaway groups (see Table 4). A higher percentage of investigations for Runaways involved physical abuse and neglect while a lower percentage involved sexual abuse, emotional maltreatment, and exposure to intimate partner violence in comparison to investigations for non-Runaways. Maltreatment was substantiated in 56% of investigations for Runaways compared to 50.2% for non-Runaways. As well, a higher proportion of investigations for Runaways occurred multiple times, and noted serious physical harm and emotional harm when compared to non-Runaway investigations.

Table 4: Maltreatment Factors for Runaway and Non-Runaway Youth Over 12 Investigated for Maltreatment in Canada in 2008

| Maltreatment Characteristics | Non-Runaway % | Runaway % |
|--|------------------|----------------|
| Primary Maltreatment Category *** | | |
| <i>Physical abuse</i> | 24.3% | 29.5% |
| <i>Sexual abuse</i> | 6.5% | 4.7% |
| <i>Neglect</i> | 24.0% | 33.4% |
| <i>Emotional maltreatment</i> | 9.3% | 7.5% |
| <i>Exposure to intimate partner violence</i> | 11.4% | 1.7% |
| Primary Form of Maltreatment Substantiated *** | 50.2% | 56.5% |
| Multiple Events of Maltreatment *** | 33.4% | 46.1% |
| Serious Physical Harm Noted *** | 1.1% | 6.3% |
| Serious Emotional Harm Noted *** | 10.9% | 25.5% |
| Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS-2008) | n= 56,211 | n=8,344 |

* p less than or equal to .05
 ** p less than or equal to .01
 *** p less than or equal to .001
 NS not significant

Discussion

Children who have experienced child maltreatment are over-represented in the runaway and street youth populations in Canada (MacLaurin, et al., 2009). There is less clarity regarding why some children who have

experienced maltreatment run away from home while others do not. Based on secondary analysis of 64,555 child maltreatment investigations for children 12 years of age or older in Canada during 2008, significant differences were noted for investigations abuse and neglect while a lower percentage involved sexual abuse, emotional maltreatment, and exposure to intimate partner violence in comparison to investigations for non-Runaways. Maltreatment was substantiated in 56% of investigations for Runaways compared to 50.2% for non-Runaways. As well, a higher proportion of investigations for Runaways occurred multiple times, and noted serious physical harm and emotional harm when compared to non-Runaway investigations. involving children with a history of running away from home compared to those youth with no history of running.. A higher percentage of maltreatment investigations for Runaways are female and have multiple child functioning concerns compared to non-Runaways. Fewer significant differences were noted for family and household characteristics however the presence of caregiver use of alcohol and multiple caregiver risk factors were seen to be a greater concern for the Runaway group. Significant differences were noted for several case factors as children with a history of running had a higher rate of previous child welfare reports as well as more intrusive forms of intervention for children (case to remain open, formal placements and applications to child welfare court). Forms of maltreatment differed by runaway status with physical abuse and neglect being noted more frequently for Runaways. In addition maltreatment investigations for Runaways were more likely to be substantiated, to note multiple events of maltreatment, and to note the presence of serious forms of physical and emotional harm.

This bi-variate analysis identified key differences between child maltreatment investigations for children with a history of running compared to those with no history of running. Further research is needed to examine how a history of running may impact decisions that are made with respect to the well-being of these young people. In addition, gaining further understanding of how this running behaviour may be continued for those youth placed in the care of child welfare is critical given the overrepresentation of youth with a history of previous child welfare placement in street youth populations (MacLaurin, 2005).

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Look Staff -- No External Controls!

Donna Barker and Lindsay McLintock

Abstract

The START Program (also referred to as START House) is a shelter program that serves homeless and at risk youth between 16-20 years old. The youth in the program are not in immediate crisis, are actively involved in day programming activities, and are working towards independent living. It is considered a Client-Directed program because the intervention strategies are not based upon the use of external controls. This way, the youth learn to draw upon their internal controls and become motivated to be more responsible and independent. This article demonstrates that, as practitioners, we can achieve positive outcomes for youth without having to rely (solely) on the use of external control methods of intervention.

In order to understand the purpose of this article, it is important to share background information about the START Program, and how it evolved from a traditional residential program to a Client-Directed program focused on youth developing and strengthening their internal controls. Historically, the behavior management techniques of the START Program were based on external control methods, such as groundings, early curfews, extra chores, and logical consequences. These methods were counterproductive in supporting youth who were preparing for independence. The restrictive atmosphere resulted in superficial staff-youth relationships, an environment that was too controlling, and issues of power and control between staff and youth, resulting in regression and deterioration of their behaviors. Youth were discharged from the program for the following reasons: staff's illusion of their readiness for independence, youth's lack of follow-through of program expectations, no noted progress (stagnation), or deterioration of behaviors that resulted in staff-imposed discharge. After their transition into the community, many youth experienced breakdowns in their placements, often requiring them to return to the familiarity and structure of the START Program. It soon became apparent that following discharge, the majority of youth lacked the responsibility and accountability required to be independent; they lacked the necessary skills, knowledge, and internal motivation to succeed on their own. The conclusion was that if youth were to be successful, staff would need to work with them differently to minimize their dependency on staff and on the social reinforcements that were associated with the program.

Our conclusion is consistent with Jack Phelan's (2008) article, *Deciding to Relax External Controls*. Phelan claims it is well-known by "experienced practitioners that there is a point in the treatment process in residential care when a youth 'peaks', and after this point, deterioration starts to occur, which is sometimes described as the youth becoming institutionalized." (2008, p. 38). He suggests that youth lose motivation to change because the environment is too controlling, and that it is easier and more rewarding for them to fit into the routines than to become independent and self-reliant. His theory is that the use of freedom to support self-control should be present in an effective therapeutic environment.

Phelan's theory evoked curiosity about our practice. It caused us to critically analyze how our use of external controls was counterproductive to youth progress and their preparation for independence. In 2004, after months of research and consultation with partners, stakeholders, youth, agency staff, and community members, the organization took a leap of faith to validate Phelan's theory. The START Program underwent a complete restructuring, and adopted a new philosophy of being 'Client-Directed'.

The START Program consists of two phases- Program Introduction and Client-Directed. The Program Introduction phase is a four to six week period to assess and identify a youth's readiness for the program, including their level of internal controls and ability to manage household expectations. Staff provide hands-on support and cueing to assist the youth with daily routines and house management; the youth gradually assumes more responsibility. After the four to six week assessment period and based on the youth's response to the program, one of three things will occur: an extension of the Program Introduction, transition to the next phase, or withdrawal from the program.

Youth in the Client-Directed phase are expected to assume more responsibility within the program, such as the daily upkeep of the house, menu planning, and assigning chore responsibilities. The overall concept of this phase is to create a positive peer culture, where youth are expected to hold each other accountable. They engage in problem solving and conflict resolution processes when problems arise within the group. Supported by staff, the youth are given the freedom to make decisions that impact their goals and future plans. They are provided a safe environment to practice transferable life skills that will assist them in becoming autonomous once they are on their own. During this phase, staff adopts a less directive approach, with minimal interference.

Changing the program required a shift in the staff's theoretical lens; relinquishing power and control became essential to achieving the desired outcome, i.e., for youth to become internally motivated to make positive changes and become independent. It required individuals to reflect upon their own philosophies of working with youth, and their own attitudes, values, and beliefs in regard to restrictive interventions vs. being free and creative thinkers (Berube, 1984). Essentially, staff had to learn to 'let go'.

Before considering making program modifications, it is essential for a supervisor to ensure that the entire team is committed to making the shift because they genuinely believe that this method will work, essentially dispelling any ambivalence within the team. The supervisor must identify whether or not the individual team members are invested in taking advantage of 'teachable moments' (Treischman, 1969), rather than engaging in power struggles.

In our opinion, external control methods of intervention are often used as leverage, giving staff the illusion of control and bargaining power. While we understand staff may feel leery, uncomfortable, or fearful of relinquishing their perceived power, it is crucial for the supervisor to support them in getting rid of harmful habits formed by false idealisms about how to effectively work with youth. Each staff must genuinely believe that the youth have the potential to make positive changes without the use of external controls. Staff must accept that evidence of change will not be immediate, and that the desired outcomes occur over time (Treischman, 1969).

According to Trieschman, Brendtro, and Whittaker (1969) stopping a behavior and replacing it with nothing is a difficult task for both the child and the practitioner. Essentially, when you stop a behavior, you must replace it with something that provides similar satisfaction; behavior that is more socially acceptable and age-appropriate. We believe that this idea can also be applied to working with youth to draw upon their own internal controls vs. relying on external control methods of intervention (i.e. reward and punishment techniques). We must replace the youth's reliance on practitioner control with the acquisition of self-control and decision-making skills.

The external control philosophy uses a certain set of tools for certain results. Internal control philosophy cannot use the same tools. To illustrate our point, imagine trying to use a hair stylists tools to do a gardener's job. Although the hair stylists tools are in perfect working order, it is futile for a gardener to use them to perform their duties. Similarly, practitioners must acquire the right tools to work with youth in a client-directed program. Tools that have proven to be effective in assisting youth to rely on their own internal controls are: reframing youth behaviors (Appelstein, 1998), problem ownership, again and again learning (focusing on strengths and skill mastery), insight learning, proximity control (Appelstein, 1998), planned ignoring, identifying virtues, life space interviews (Brendtro & Shahbazian, 2004), positive peer culture (Vorrath & Brendtro, 1974), and taking responsibility. Other verbal intervention techniques include supportive comments, reasoning responses, connecting statements, empowering messages and explorative response (Appelstein, 1998).

The intent of our shift in programming was to provide youth with autonomy so they could learn to be responsible for managing their independence, and to develop and practice sound decision-making skills. However, the youth perceived this autonomy as an opportunity to revolt. When this new Client-Directed approach was first introduced, the youth interpreted client-directed as meaning they had free rein of the environment. To them, client-directed meant they directed their life course in the home, and staff could not tell them anything. When staff attempted to provide direction, their response would be "You can't tell me what to do, I'm client-directed". Their new-found freedom produced a range of out-of-control behaviors such as refusal to meet the program expectations and complete other household responsibilities. The tone of the house became aggressive and hostile (e.g. posturing and verbal abuse towards staff), the condition of the house deteriorated (e.g. garbage overflowing and dirty dishes piling up), and participation in programming was nonexistent (e.g. youth refused to attend their day programs, the mandatory house meetings, and key worker meetings). Based on their behaviors and their attitude toward staff, it appeared that they felt the expectations of the program did not apply to them anymore. The youth dynamics were destructive, and their interactions fluctuated between banding together against the staff and turning against each other. They formed cliques and unhealthy alliances, and ostracized those who didn't fit, scapegoat the weak and forcefully initiate newcomers. They aligned to intimidate and manipulate staff. This unhealthy dynamic remained in the program for approximately six months. If we could use an analogy to demonstrate the chaos within the environment, we would reference *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding (1954) - It appeared as if the tables had turned in favor of the youth, and they retaliated against what, in their view, was formerly an imbalance of power. They had formed their own social order, and took total control of it.

The tension present in the environment during that transition created a lot of difficulties for the staff, because they did not know how to respond and de-escalate. Staff felt unsafe, helpless, and disempowered. They had no influence over the youth, not even with those with whom they thought they had formed relationships. There was infighting within the team, as some members chose to revert to using external control methods of intervention, and rationalized that they were trying to regain order. Some staff argued that the youth needed consequences in order to comply with program expectations, which created inconsistencies in staff approaches to working with the youth. Staff expressed doubts about the effectiveness of a client-directed approach.

After surviving the turmoil, staff and youth eventually became stable and the program reached a state of equilibrium. Staff was supported through this crisis with hands on supervisory support. The program supervisor worked alongside the staff to model the use of these new techniques. Through bi-weekly team meetings, incidents were re-visited and situations that staff had encountered were discussed in a manner

that facilitated learning and provided staff with feedback. Frequent individual supervisor-staff meetings allowed the supervisor to check-in, debrief and provide feedback specific to each individual's approach. In addition, the staff participated in regular training (e.g. role playing) to practice these skills in a simulated environment. As staff mastered these new techniques, additional tools were slowly introduced to expand their skill set.

After the staff became confident and consistently applied the new techniques, there was a turnaround in the overall attitude of the group. Change was observable in individual behaviors and attitudes; however, more interesting were the changes within the entire group. There was noticeable camaraderie amongst the youth group, and between the staff and youth. The youth seemed to look forward to their staff-youth scheduled 1:1 meetings, and approached staff about spending time together both within the house and off-site. The conversations were more light-hearted and purposeful, and less focused on advice-giving to the youth. It seemed as though staff and youth had established common ground, where there was nothing to lose. It became more about negotiating responsibilities within the house, and getting input from the youth about the overall operation of the program and the house. The youth started holding each other accountable and taking ownership of the operation of the house, and were less reliant on the staff assuming that role. They started to take pride in their environment, as the house became noticeably cleaner and the atmosphere more inviting. The quality of the relationships between staff and youth improved, because the youth in the program seemed to set the tone for the newer ones. There appeared to be an unspoken rule amongst the youth that START House is not a place where we fight with or disrespect staff, because of the risk of damaging the relationships. The message conveyed was that the youth placed a high value on the relationships they now shared with staff.

Changing the program resulted in improvements in many areas. Staff assessments of the level of youth functioning incorporated various theories of development. The interactions between staff and youth became more purposeful because staff was forced to use their skills; they sought opportunities to teach, spend quality time with the youth, work from a developmental framework, meet youth at their level, individualize treatment approaches, and focus on community connections. The program changes resulted in more youth successes such as an increase in planned discharges (graduations), and decreases in re-intakes (of the same youth) and staff-imposed discharges. Youth were successfully reintegrated into the community, with less reliance on outreach support after discharge. They reported feeling more connection to community supports, and maintained long-term placements beyond the START program.

We tried it, we lived it, and we believe in it because it works. The results of our program changes affirmed Jack Phelan's position that the use of freedom to support self-control should be present in an effective therapeutic environment. We are challenging Child and Youth Care practitioners to examine their current practices. If your current approach in working with children and youth is one that relies on the use of external control methods, then reflect upon your practice, analyze your results, and assess the benefits to the youth and yourself.

We challenge you to:

- Replace advice giving and direction with learning that focuses on strengths and skill mastery.
- Replace punishment with problem ownership and insight learning.
- Replace time-outs with proximity control.
- Make effective use of peer culture.
- Recognize the developmental differences in each youth and modify your approach accordingly.
- Focus on therapeutic relationship building, rather than power and control (Garfat, 2008; Mann-Feder, 2003).

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Outcome Based Service Delivery: Launching, Learning and Looking Forward

Susan Gardiner and Aaron Hachkowski

Abstract

The authors are Lead Staff within pilot sites now operating Outcome Based Service Delivery in Calgary, Slave Lake, Athabasca, Lac La Biche and Lethbridge. The following represents some initial thoughts, musings and fierce discussions as we work to clarify our own thinking. We have begun to meet and realize we have many similarities in philosophy, clinical practice, choice of outcome measurements and indeed growing pains. We also realize that we have many differences related to unique regional needs and pressures; conceptual frameworks and our organization's structures and histories. Our intention here is to share early perspectives based on twelve to eighteen months of experience. As such, the following should be seen as limited by our relative beginnings in a challenging and dynamic process that will unfold over time.

Introduction

Initial Outcome Based Service Delivery Pilot sites began over the past two years in Alberta. This initiative began as a result of an ongoing commitment of Alberta Children, Youth and Family Services to create and sustain a collaborative approach to improving results for vulnerable children and families. The original emphasis in tender opportunities focused on designing and implementing Outcome Based Services in order to achieve improved outcomes for vulnerable children, youth and families. In addition, quality improvement over time was considered critical as were changes in the business relationship between the Ministry and Contracted Agencies. These changes were directed at creating greater flexibility and more effective use of resources. Emphasis was also placed on working collaboratively towards achieving clearly articulated outcomes. Engagement of Families, Ministry Staff and Agency Staff was recognized as an important driver of change.

Outcomes Based Service Delivery (OBSD) is often first considered and most often discussed in relation to changes in financial systems, contracting processes or outcome measurement. As the work is underway, these issues become necessary but not sufficient aspects of the change needed to successfully improve the current Service Delivery System. Core aspects of how the work is done or the practice are emerging as significant delivery challenges and opportunities which also must be looked at. The following will describe what we are learning as OBSD pilot sites.

Infrastructure Development

There has been considerable progress from the onset of this initiative in developing what could be called infrastructure. Infrastructure here is defined as the basic physical and organizational structures needed for services to function. Infrastructure needs related to Outcomes Based Service Delivery include the development of new outcome measurement systems, data management systems as well as financial models and processes. It also relates to new staffing models and training processes and in some cases, facilities.

There has been considerable work done by contracted agencies across Alberta over the last 10 years to develop outcome measurement systems. There is an existing commitment to assess the impact of the work we are doing and to work towards continuous improvement. This history and commitment has been an important base from which to build and expand on for Lead Agencies. Our effort has been to develop outcome systems that are tied to practice. That is, instruments which inform practice and measure results. The development of new outcome measurement systems has included the selection and training demands of new instruments as well as the building of data management systems to support the data collection process.

The development of new financial systems has meant more complex processes and activity related to monitoring the costs of individual children over a broader array of services. Over time, capacity in both areas is developing and these systems are now just beginning to provide interesting data. There has been a lot of attention directed at developing consistency in definitions, in client tracking and in cost comparisons between agency costs and ministry costs. Here the work can be described as learning to track costs and understanding the real costs of providing services while considering case rate formulas. Real costs and case rates are being examined with a view to understanding what variables are in play and how these variables effect risk management. Efforts to understand the risks are being informed by emerging practice and time is the key element. Experience over time is needed.

We have also spent considerable time assessing and addressing the staffing needs of this new area of service delivery. The work in the pilots is different than past service delivery and different approaches are being used particularly with new cases. Staff training is needed related to many aspects of new service delivery. Agency capacity is being built as our understanding of case needs increases. Responsive services, that can address crisis as well as a range of supports over an episode of care, will take time to evolve. In addition, given either the adoption of existing case loads in some sites or escalating growth in other sites, developing capacity to provide seamless service delivery systems and to meet growing caseloads are critical areas of focus.

Developing capacity to provide seamless service delivery systems is recognized as an endeavor that will take time. Start up issues, concerns related to the timing of rolling this initiative more broadly and change management concerns are factors in developing seamless service delivery systems. Across our sites, there is a range of developing relationships using contracts and sub contracts. Here again, what might have been anticipated at onset is changing as a result of new experience with case needs. Innovation is being driven by the needs of the families and efforts to develop new approaches to service delivery. In many cases, the services that have been supporting families are still necessary. In some cases, our initial understanding about what services will be needed is changing as a result of working with the families and seeing new solutions. In other cases, our initial plans are affected by regional pressures and the shortage of critical services such as foster care. Work is in process to develop portfolios of evidence based interventions. It is fair to say, these are early days. It is expected that new ways of coordinating services will emerge and supporting structures such as subcontracts or other service partnerships will develop over time.

New ways of working together to coordinate services will be centered on new ways of working together managing protection and family strengths as well as new ways of engaging families. These areas could be considered not so much as supporting structures but rather foundational pieces that will determine how and what work will be done. Perhaps, this is where the greatest change and potential in this initiative lies. Across our sites, there is important work being done to engage community stakeholders towards strengthening an integrated system of services. Developing strong community supports to support families as they grow,

develop and struggle has been recognized as important in many efforts to improve child protection outcomes. Holding a broad view that looks beyond the immediacy of the current crisis and keeps the future in mind is critical. Changing our frames of reference to consider entire episodes of care and beyond has challenged us to think much more broadly across time and across our community.

Systems of Care: Roles and Responsibilities

As we develop joint practice to support family engagement while addressing child protection concerns, a key area of development has been to develop clarity about roles and responsibilities. While the initial focus of this effort has been on the roles and responsibilities of the ministry staff and agency staff, there is also a need to consider roles and responsibilities related to multiple service providers.

Contracted agencies have traditionally been responsible for focusing on child well being and now have to meld with the world of child protection. Agencies that have provided services long after the initial crisis has been dealt with are now involved at the crisis stage. The need for understanding of our respective roles and responsibilities is very clear. As we gain experience and learn practically how our roles and responsibilities need to work together and complement each other, the work with the families becomes more collaborative.

With core practice issues comes the need to develop common language and understanding. Training has been required and helpful in reviewing the strong and clear structures that exist such as the legislation, delegation training and case work practice model. Initial tension related to these areas is being addressed as we gain experience and competence in working together. Sometimes making the obvious simple is a very hard job. Our work with families is instructive as the issues emerge. We are developing training strategies to support the development of clarity. In addition, there is interesting potential in job shadowing between supervisors and front line staff from the Regional Child and Family Services and Lead Agency. Getting to understand each others' organizations and organizational cultures will speed up the collaborative process and support greater understanding of the different points of view that must work together to support vulnerable children and families.

Much work is underway related to communication and collaboration between the Lead Agency and sub-contractors with Regional Child and Family Service Staff. In addition, there is also work between multiple service providers that are not contracted services. Schools, Mental Health providers and an array of other supports are also needed to support these families. The Lead Agency Model is a new model for the coordination of Outcome Based Services. There has been considerable discussion and debate about the Lead Agency model with great emphasis centered on accompanying changes to the relationships between multiple service providers. For the most part initially, this emphasis has been centered on changes to the business relationships as it relates to contracted agencies. Attention must also be paid to the case practice issues related to the coordination of services. The Lead Agency model is intended to reduce the need for families to negotiate multiple services and agencies and to increase access to services (Paulson, Armstrong, Jordan, Kershaw, Vargo & Yampolskaya, 2004).

Collaboration between services is an important component of this model. Systems of care approaches embrace the notion of a service delivery system that operates seamlessly across multiple services. These services agree to work collaboratively on single case plans. There is progress to be made in developing new ways of working together and new processes. Developing mechanisms to promote interagency collaboration

is a very compelling concern. Constructive relationships between professionals have been identified as best practice in achieving the best outcomes for vulnerable children (Government of Western Australia, 2008). Mechanisms to support inter-agency collaboration are based first on the availability of time, maintaining respectful and non-judgmental attitudes and a commitment to consistent communication (Armstrong, Vargo, Jordan, King-Miller, Sowell & Yampolskaya, 2007). Working agreements with input from frontline staff are being developed to assist with this process. Consistent practices related to working together with families are being examined.

There is also considerable interest in strengthening the ability of communities to support their members and to develop collaborative strength across broader systems such as Education and Health (Ott & Pinard, 2010). Emerging thinking suggests that new solutions for vulnerable children and their families will lie in the development of stronger communities and leadership here is also needed. An ongoing commitment to engaging the larger community is necessary as part of improving outcomes for vulnerable children and their families.

While we concentrate on developing infrastructure and systems of care, we also have come to recognize the real meat of the matter. Changing our focusing on outcomes and developing new systems of care that work more effectively to help families will improve services. Perhaps the greatest potential lies in changing how we do the work together.

Family Engagement

Embedded in the Outcome Based Service Delivery principles is the notion of engaging families in more collaborative ways. These ideas come from child protection reform in many other jurisdictions. There is agreement that the best way to facilitate change is to build a cooperative relationship with a family (Turnell & Edwards, 1999). Creating strong partnerships with families to find the best solutions for vulnerable children is recognized as a key strategy under Outcome Based Services Delivery. Family engagement is accepted as an essential part of best practice in child protection service delivery (Armstrong et.al., 2007). Family engagement includes ensuring full inclusion and participation for families in identifying and achieving family based outcomes.

Much excitement has been generated by the possibilities of service delivery changes to support families in improved ways. Services provided under the OBSD model are being provided earlier to families and are more visible to families than they have been in the past. In addition, there is a greater emphasis on the coordination of services.

The nature of family engagement within the context of child protection concerns is a complicated business. Engaging families while addressing safety issues is work that demands skill, good communication and clear strategies to support shared practice (Turnell & Edwards, 1999). Meaningful engagement of families is challenged by the often adversarial nature of child welfare involvement and urgent concerns related child and family problems. For families, many parents feel that they are not authentically involved in decision making and that their most pressing needs for help are not addressed (Kemp, Marcenko, Hoagwood & Vesneski, 2009). Family engagement in child welfare services is challenged by multiple barriers including the stigma of child welfare, difficult histories with service systems, poverty and many other factors. Critical work lies ahead in developing successful engagement strategies that are well articulated and understood.

There is beginning research that looks at how parents involved in the child welfare system define satisfaction. Themes related to communication, availability, parent involvement, respect and parent rights have been identified (Armstrong et.al., 2007). Mechanisms such as Family Group Conferencing, Family satisfaction surveys and meeting rating scales are being used to promote family engagement and address these issues. There is significant evidence to suggest that how families are engaged initially is associated with continued involvement and active engagement. (Kemp et.al., 2009)

What Lies Ahead

Initial work suggests that access to services for families has been improved as a result of the service delivery shifts imbedded in Outcome Based Service Delivery in the urban areas. Agency services are available to families within days of their first contact with CFSA staff. This change has meant that services are provided closer to the time of crisis for families. It is estimated that there has been a six week improvement in the wait time that families would have previously experienced in accessing services such as in home support. This reduction in wait times has been achieved by a simple repositioning of the services. Services are no longer accessed through central distribution points that manage multiple locations. Rather, services can be accessed immediately as a result of the connection between the lead Agency and the related Regional Ministry office.

In the rural offices, many strong working relationships have been formed by the proximity of the people and sometimes out of necessity. These sites continue with this, by learning how to work together understanding and collaborating on the roles and responsibilities within Outcome Based Service Delivery.

Early results suggest more children are receiving services in their homes as their families receive support to better care for them. Families are reporting high levels of satisfaction with the services they are receiving, including support to help them focus on what their children need.

Achieving improved outcomes depends on many factors and our understanding of these issues is just beginning. There is a strong interplay between the mandated Child Intervention System including legislated issues and service delivery issues. There is a shared responsibility for clearly defining roles and responsibilities and also clearly defining clinical approaches to the practice. The work is compelling, challenging and dynamic. There is a clear and shared culture developing between the Ministry and Lead Agency and many service providers in pursuit of innovation. Doing better seems to hold considerable promise.

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Giving Children a Voice

Heather Forsey, Tara Reilly, with assistance from Dawne Clark

Introduction

The purpose of the *Giving Children a Voice* study is to discover the gaps and barriers in Child Welfare systems that hinder children's ability to have their thoughts, feelings, and opinions heard in court when involved in high conflict custody and access situations. For the purpose of this study, a high conflict custody and access situation is defined as a court case in which there is a high degree of conflict between the parents/guardians who are fighting for custody of their child (ren). The term does not necessarily imply domestic violence is a concern for the family; however, for many families involved in high conflict custody situations, domestic violence is present. The ultimate objective of this project is to bring a greater awareness to the gaps and barriers for these children and effect change, so that they may have a voice in court and receive a higher quality of care.

The Research Study

Literature Review

When parents engage in custody and access/parenting disputes, particularly in the context of domestic violence, their children experience significant trauma, which can include high stress and anxiety, depression, social isolation, challenging and aggressive behaviours, difficulties in school, suicidal ideations and self-harming tendencies (Jaffe, Crooks, & Poisson, 2003; Dowd, Singer, & Wilson, 2006). Children who have witnessed domestic violence are at greater risk of becoming targets of violence – up to 60% of children of fathers who abuse their partners are more likely to be abused (Dowd et.al., 2006). This is significant as the child must process and deal with the violence they have witnessed in the home while dealing with the violence they personally experience.

It has been shown that stress arising out of domestic violence in a child's life has the ability to increase the amount of cortisol (i.e., stress hormone) which may damage three areas in the brain: the hippocampus, amygdala, and prefrontal cortex (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2010). Toxic stress in a child's life, arising out of domestic violence, interrupts the developing brain circuitry and diminishes a child's emotional well-being as well as impairs full functioning of a child's ability in early learning, exploration and curiosity, school readiness, and later school achievement (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2010). Research shows later cognitive impairment of victims of abuse in terms of having lower verbal skills, lower quantitative skills, immaturity, developmental delays, poor socialization skills, and greater approval of violence for conflict resolution (Martin, 2002).

Many custody and access/parenting disputes are decided within the family law system involving the courts, lawyers and judges. The Canadian Constitution Act outlines the division of powers between the federal government and the provincial governments. Two important powers for child custody cases are the powers of marriage and divorce and the power of criminal law; the federal government holds these powers. The family law system, however, is considered a provincial matter (Department of Justice Canada, 2003). Often such decisions are made with insufficient information about the children and their situations and with few

resources being made available to the children to support them during this difficult time. In addition, court decisions are usually made in the context of a contest between parents; the needs, interests, opinions, and thoughts of the children involved are often not taken into consideration.

The Department of Justice Canada (DJC) addresses the issue of separation and divorce on its website and states that custody and access disputes only become an issue for the federal government once a divorce application is made. The DJC encourages parents to resolve custody issues without court involvement and states, "Court litigation tends to increase the amount of conflict between people, making the separation or divorce more stressful for them and their children" (Department of Justice, 2009). It is unclear in the Canadian Constitution Act what the process is for sharing information between the different court systems. If several court systems are involved with a family, it is difficult to be certain that all information related to a family is getting heard and shared appropriately. Lawyers working with the children often do not have sufficient resources, information, or skills to adequately understand the impacts on children's development and health to be able to effectively present the children's needs and perspectives to the parents and the court. Additionally, the courts frequently operate with limited knowledge of the children's specific situations, the nature of the conflicts, and the impacts on the children of their parents' disputes, which can contribute to and confound the barriers to addressing children's needs and serving their best interests (Hensley & Dunbar, in press).

Research Question

The Giving Children a Voice study is trying to answer the following research question: What are the barriers in accessing and gaps in services in the child protection and custody systems for children 12 years of age and younger involved in high conflict custody cases? By interviewing professionals working within the child protection and custody systems (e.g., social workers, lawyers), diverse perspectives on the barriers and gaps in the various systems can be gathered and analyzed. From there, recommendations for change and future directions can be made and put forward to the governing bodies of these organizations to create awareness and, ultimately, positive changes for the future of children involved in high conflict custody and access.

Method

The research assistants used a qualitative research approach for this study in the form of structured interviews. Nine interviews were conducted during September and October 2010 with 11 different professionals working in Calgary, Alberta. The participants included lawyers, directors of non-profit agencies, family court mediators, and front line workers. Participants had direct experience working with families involved in high conflict custody and access disputes, and/or were in a supervisory role of front line workers, working with these families. The participants were asked questions pertaining to family cases they have worked with, results of these cases, their perception of the gaps and barriers within the systems, and suggestions for the types of changes they see necessary (see Appendix A).

Themes

Need for Communication among the Court Systems

Several participants expressed that the court systems are not effectively communicating and this is directly impacting high conflict families because these cases are not being dealt with appropriately. If several court systems are involved with a family, it is difficult to be certain all information related to a family is being heard and shared appropriately. Several participants commented that better communication among the court systems needs to occur but it was not determined how this could or should be done.

It was discussed by several participants that many women fleeing domestic violence situations end up being re-victimized by the court system, through the custody dispute. One participant stated, “How do you assess safety for a child in a relationship that's so conflicted? How do you separate the domestic violence between the mother and father and that risk to the child?” It was repeated by many participants that these high conflict custody cases continue to escalate outside the courts. This increasing tension may result in the family being investigated by Child and Family Services because, after years of litigation, court orders, and verbal disputes, the protection and safety of the children is compromised. It is believed by most of the participants that if the court systems communicated more effectively, intervention services could be mandated to high conflict families earlier. However, a broader sample and more defined sample population are required before any concrete recommendations can be offered.

Need for Early Intervention

One of the key themes throughout the interview process was the need for early intervention when dealing with families in high conflict custody and access situations. Many of the participants had similar thoughts on this matter, including the need for Child and Family Services to become involved with these families, early identification in the court system, and early parenting courses. The idea of being able to identify which families will use the court system as a means of continuing the cycle of abuse, or to execute power and control over another party, appears to be a daunting task; however, is not necessarily impossible. One participant pointed out that, “what [the courts are] doing now, which I think is helpful, is they're trying to identify the case, the files that are high conflict and case managing them which is very good; one judge for one family.” Having a unified family court system has potential for reducing the number of times a family attends court, which will reduce the trauma and stress on the children. The common theme of a need for early intervention led many participants to discuss the lack of resources available for families and professionals; this issue is addressed next.

Need for Formal Resources for Families and Professionals

As Calgary's population continues to grow, additional services may be required to support families involved in high conflict custody situations, as noted by the participants. One participant stated, “...about 50% of my calls are from high conflict custody and access disputes. Mothers, fathers calling on behalf of their children, looking for services, looking for someone to step in and assist besides the courts, I guess.”

As part of the study, participants were asked to describe cases they had worked with and in almost every case a lack of formal supports for families and professionals was identified as a major gap and barrier to the service

their clients received. One participant stated, “But other than [referring to CLERC], we used to refer a lot of people to the program, Speaking for Themselves, and then when it lost its funding of course there was nowhere to refer them to”.

High conflict custody situations are not explicitly dealt with under the Child, Youth, and Family Enhancement Act (C.Y.F.E.A.). The C.Y.F.E.A. states, “a child is in need of intervention if there are reasonable and probable grounds to believe that the survival, security or development of the child is endangered” (Government of Alberta, 2007), and unless the child is at serious risk, caseworkers are not required to get involved. The dispute about Child and Family Services' involvement led many participants to discuss the lack of education for families and professionals involved in these cases.

Need for Parental and Professional Education and Information

A common thread among the interviews appears to be a lack of education of the impact of high conflict custody and access situations on children. A participant suggested increasing parental education, acknowledging the importance of awareness for parents, “the education of knowing what a huge impact it has on children to be around heightened conflict constantly... when it's a constant exposure I don't think parents understand the damage that's being caused.”

In addition to becoming aware of the impact on children, parents may also benefit from having information about how the Justice and Child and Family Services systems work. Several participants noted this was a gap in supporting the children. For example, one participant commented, “educated parents know that they can ask for counsel for their children... judges often seem to identify [the need for counsel], but probably most parents don't realize their children can have it. So that's a matter of public education.”

There is a need for the professionals who work with the children to have an understanding of how these situations can impact child development. It is essential that all professionals involved with high conflict families have the same knowledge, so the same level of services can be delivered. A participant stated, “We need to make sure that all of the people in Justice, Children's Services and the groups like shelters, that we all have really up to date training on family violence; the judiciary, everybody. We need more training to better understand the complexity of this issue”. If professionals have the same information, there would be consistent concern and services to meet the developmental needs of these children – which would ideally reduce or even eliminate the long term effects.

Recommendations

On November 1, 2010 the research assistants held a round table discussion with 17 participants from agencies directly involved in or concerned with this issue at the office of the Alliance to End Violence. The following list summarizes the recommendations gathered from both the research and the discussion session.

1. Empowering Child and Family Services to become involved with high conflict custody and access disputes before an intervention is required.
2. Financial assistance from the provincial and federal governments to develop and implement programs designed to specifically target families who are at risk of high conflict situations.
3. After parents complete the Parenting After Separation Program through Alberta Family Justice

Services, a mandated parental screening of both parents should be completed by a third party to determine if the family is at risk of high conflict situations.

4. Greater recognition from professionals that exposure to high conflict and domestic violence constitutes child abuse, prompting Child and Family Services to intervene.
5. When screening children exposed to domestic violence, professionals should also screen for high conflict custody and access situations.

Future Directions

1. Changes to the provincial and federal court systems to allow for better communication between them, to ensure the systems are not being abused, and at best changes made to accommodate a one judge per family at all levels of court system.
2. Changes to the Child, Youth, and Family Enhancement Act to specifically address children involved in high conflict custody and access situations; if this is not a possibility, for the provincial or federal governments to create a service to address these needs.
3. A collaborative movement by all agencies serving children and families involved in high conflict custody and access situations to create a service designed to provide both legal counsel and appropriate therapy to allow for the children to have their voices heard in court.

Conclusion

Given this research, it has become clear that there is a need for supports and services for children experiencing high conflict custody and access situations. Another point of interest is the recommendation for collaboration between agencies serving these children and their families to provide consistent services. It is also important for both the federal and provincial levels of government to be aware of this concern so they can act to make appropriate changes to policies and procedures that affect justice and child and family services departments. Having all parties involved with children experiencing high conflict custody and access with the same understanding and level of service will begin to alleviate the stress and trauma for these children – which will give them the chance to grow up as successful, balanced adults.

Significance of the Research

The significance of this study, *Giving Children a Voice*, is to provide information to professionals working in child welfare systems and with custody issues about the damaging effects of high conflict custody and access on the children involved, as well as the gaps and barriers related to services for these children. There is a limited amount of information available in regards to the effects of high conflict custody and access situations on children, the appropriate procedures in handling cases of this nature, and recommended types of services and resources for children, families, and professionals. By having access to the information provided in this report, professionals may become more aware of these concerns and begin to make more informed decisions on the best interests of children.

Society will benefit by having strong, healthy, happy children (i.e., less strain on justice, criminal, and social support systems in the future). Providing early interventions to high conflict families will reduce the number of court appearances therefore reducing the cost to society. Stronger and more effective communication between the courts would also reduce court appearances and police involvement. A preventative measure,

suggested by the participants, to reduce high conflict custody and access situations, potential police involvement, as well as Child and Family Services involvement is to provide more education and resources for families and professionals. The results of this study indicate there is a need for further research on the immediate and long-term effects high conflict custody and access cases have on children.

Limitations of the Research

The Giving Children a Voice project incurred several limitations during the research process. Initially, the research team wanted to interview adults who had experienced high conflict custody and access as children to learn more from a child's perspective, but there were concerns around finding willing participants and ethical considerations. Also, during the interview process there was limited information on families experiencing high conflict custody and access cases, which hindered the researchers while completing the recommendations portion of the report. Having a better understanding of the families and their backgrounds would have been useful to make more specific recommendations on types of interventions and services for these families. Finally, the research team wanted to conduct a cost analysis of high conflict custody and access and compare the cost of using dispute resolution services and the cost of using legal services. However, there is little information available to complete a thorough analysis, which the research team felt would have been critical information to help advocate for development of effective dispute resolution services that also involve affected children.

The research team would like to acknowledge the kind support of the Centre for Criminology and Justice Research which enabled the completion of this study.

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Cause for Concern: A Preliminary Report on the Location and Accreditation of Day Care Facilities in Edmonton, Alberta

Myron Belej

Preamble

During the summer of 2010, several media outlets, including the CBC (2010), reported on a story about a day care west of Edmonton being investigated by provincial authorities for allegations such as biting, shaming, and hitting. While driving around Edmonton shortly after learning about the incident, the author observed a child care facility located immediately next door to a drinking establishment. As both a parent and a professionally certified urban planner, the author was left with a very uncomfortable feeling about the questionable compatibility of this arrangement, and decided to investigate further.

Methodology

Leaders in the urban planning field have long stressed the importance of field research in the pursuit of positive changes to policy and the urban environment (Jacobs, 1961; Lynch, 1962; Whyte, 1980). Field research involves visiting locations of interest in person, looking at them critically, noting observations about each location, and then typically analyzing the observations collectively as a group, at a later date.

In July 2010, the author obtained a list of approximately 100 accredited child care facilities in Edmonton from the Alberta Association for the Accreditation of Early Learning and Care Services website (AELCS, 2010). The author reformatted the list into a spreadsheet, removed the duplicate entries, added the street address information for each, and sorted the results by neighbourhood. The author then, while running different errands around Edmonton between July - October 2010, visited and photographed the exterior of forty-four day care sites which were on the way to, or very close to, the reason for the author's trip (e.g., to buy groceries, to visit the hardware store). Notes from the field survey, on the surroundings of each day care, for instance, were collected in a booklet, and then transferred into digital documents and spreadsheets.

Of the forty-four day care locations surveyed, nine are in central Edmonton; eight are in northwest Edmonton; 17 are in northeast Edmonton; nine are in southwest Edmonton; and one is in southeast Edmonton.

Field Research and Discussion

The preliminary field research revealed that several accredited and non-accredited day cares in Edmonton are in locations of potential concern. 45% of the locations surveyed were in strip malls, with 90% of those appearing to have no direct access to adequate green space. At least 25% of the day care facilities visited were adjacent to, or within 100 metres of, activities or uses of questionable compatibility, such as bars / pubs, liquor stores, bottle depots, or pawn shops. An additional 14% of the day cares visited were located either in the same plaza as a gas station, or across the street from one, which as discussed in *Scientific American* (2009), poses a significant health risk to children.

Many of Edmonton's day cares are located within or beside school buildings and their accompanying green space, often with playgrounds and sports fields. However, the day care facilities located adjacent to uses of questionable compatibility, and often with limited park space nearby, tend to be located in areas designated for commercial land uses.

Commercial Land Use Zoning

The commercial designation comes from the type of land use zoning applied to the particular site. The first zoning bylaws in Canada, which date back to 1924, generally allowed for three land use categories: residential (single-family/multi-family), business/commercial, and industrial (Smith, 2010). Day homes may fit well into the residential category, but day care facilities, potentially with larger numbers of children, a need for larger outdoor space, and requirements for larger parking or drop off areas, may be more difficult to place.

When zoning bylaws were enacted, few day care facilities were in operation in Edmonton (Langford, 2011, p. xiii), and undeveloped land would have been more abundant. Today, however, as Edmonton has become more built out, finding undeveloped and inexpensive land in existing older neighbourhoods has become a challenge. This has likely been a factor in the trend toward more day care facilities located on commercially zoned sites, rather than sites zoned for residential, institutional or community purposes.

The child care facility which started the author's inquiry is situated on a property zoned for commercial uses. As specified in the *Edmonton Zoning Bylaw 12800* (City of Edmonton, 2011), the Low Intensity Business Zone (CB1 zone) may include the following uses, in addition to Child Care Services: Bars and Neighbourhood Pubs, Restaurants, Secondhand Stores, Hotels, Nightclubs, and Recycling Depots, for example. This means that any child care facility in a CB1 zone in Edmonton with a space for lease next door could end up with one of the above listed businesses as the new neighbour, and as already stated, many have.

Many other land use zoning categories are available in today's cities, such as for environmental or historic preservation, or for institutional purposes. As recently as 1984, it has been recommended that "zoning laws should stipulate the same zoning regulations for day care centres as for schools and churches. For zoning purposes, day care homes should be considered as any family home, so that they can be available in sections where children live" (Child Welfare League of America, p. 12). The Child Welfare League of America further recommended that "the need for day care services should be given consideration in planning new community developments, in redevelopment projects, in erection of new public buildings, in planning residential neighbourhoods, and in establishment or modification of zoning laws" (1984, p. 12).

Locally, an Edmonton Social Services report entitled *Policy Guidelines Regarding the Expansion of Day Care Services in Edmonton* (Day, 1975) recommended "that a parcel of land be set aside in each new community as the location for a subsidized day care program and that this site be integrated with the central park and school reserve where possible and appropriate" (p. 21).

Other sound recommendations in the report included the following:

In locating day care programs in developing communities several factors have to be considered. The centre should be in relatively close proximity to the potential group of users of the service. Access to the centre must be convenient both by car and by public transportation and finally there is benefit in

locating the centres close to public services, such as, health clinics, parkland, school facilities, and public housing. A site integrated with the combined parkland and school reserve would in most situations meet the above requirements (Day, 1975, p. 21).

Parents with multiple children, especially children of different ages, could certainly benefit from having day care facilities located with or beside a school attended by their children. It could save considerable travel time between home and work, and, factoring in the number of parents dropping their children off at day cares in Edmonton every day, could represent a significant reduction in the amount of traffic on the city's road network.

Likewise, the recommendation to situate day care facilities near public transportation connections could help families save time and money. However, few day cares without nearby uses of questionable compatibility appear to be located near Edmonton's Park 'N Ride lots (City of Edmonton, 2011), which are parking lots adjacent to the light rail transit system, potentially resulting in more road traffic as parents have little option but to drive their children to day care, then drive to work; and vice versa on their way home.

The author has encountered little academic research on the issue of incompatible land uses with specific reference to day care facilities, although many municipalities have reviewed this matter or addressed it in policy to some degree. As a recent example, the City of St. Albert, located just northwest of Edmonton, recommended that day care facilities not be added as an allowable use in the Business Park Land Use District (City of St. Albert, 2010, p. 1), due to concerns about high levels of traffic, potential health hazards, limited green space, and safety issues (pp. 3-4). The report further noted that "...uses in the adjacent Commercial and Industrial Service (CIS) district include such uses as Bingo Halls and Drinking Establishments which could potentially pose the potential to bring individuals into the area who may not be considered desirable when dealing with vulnerable individuals including young children..." (pp. 3-4).

Additional Policy Research and Discussion

Individual parents may have different feelings about what would constitute an ideal or even an acceptable environment for young children to thrive in. However, certain basic rules and expectations should apply; a Government of Alberta publication entitled *Choosing a Day Care Centre: A Guide for Parents* (1993) suggested that "all children have social, physical, intellectual, creative and emotional needs and the daily program in a day care centre must be designed to meet these needs" (p. 6).

To meet the children's needs, the publication included several recommendations in a 'Checklist for Parents'. Parents were encouraged to check whether day care facilities were: "cheerful and bright; organized; fresh and clean; pleasant; spacious, warm and inviting" (p. 14). The publication further recommended that parents look indoors for "a generous amount of space that is well lit" (p. 21), and outdoors for several items including a safe fenced play area close to the centre, a grassy area, and a shaded area (p. 26).

An updated version of this publication, *Choosing Child Care: A Guide to Licensed and Approved Child Care in Alberta* (2010), available online from the Alberta Government, continues to recommend that parents check prospective child care environments for 'natural light' and 'outdoor space for different activities'.

The understanding of the importance of outdoor space for the well-being and healthy development of children has been well documented for the better part of a century, including within a 1922 *Handbook for*

Parents, Nurses and Workers for Child Welfare (MacCarthy, p. 2); and in a 1919 *Child Welfare Manual*, as follows:

As the child grows older and can run alone, we emphasize it once more – fresh air – and again, fresh air! Bundle up the toddler and let him run out-of-doors; keep him out just as long as is possible. You are storing health, strength, and vitality for all of the years that are before him (Farwell, p. 271).

The emphasis on the importance of outdoor play opportunities also has some history in Edmonton and the province of Alberta. For instance, the *Alberta Day Care Regulation* (Government of Alberta, 1990) included a four-page section on “Outdoor Play Space” which stipulated, among other things, that a shaded area was required, and that overcrowding was to be avoided, with proper scheduling and presumably with proper location of the facility in the first place (section DL-02-12-06).

Richard Louv, in the book, *Last Child in the Woods* (2005), compiled an array of scientific research and coined the term “nature deficit disorder” to describe the effects of children's limited exposure to healthy outdoor environments. A 1972 national survey of day cares by the Canadian Council on Social Development revealed this situation, noting “the lack of an outdoor play area constitutes a serious deficiency in [day care] facilities, especially for centres offering full day programs. Sixteen per cent of the centres had no outdoor play area” (p. 88). However, that was considerably less than the roughly 41% of Edmonton day cares surveyed which appear to have no direct access to adequate green space.

Accreditation Process and Discussion

One might expect such issues to be addressed by the organization in charge of accreditation. When concerns exist about the location of several different day care facilities, one might likewise examine the accreditation process for gaps.

As stated on their website, “The Alberta Association for the Accreditation of Early Learning and Care Services [AELCS] is proud to offer on behalf of the Alberta Government the first province-wide accreditation program for early learning and care services in Canada.” (AELCS, 2011). Their *Accreditation Parent Brochure* indicates that: “Programs [seeking accreditation] engage in a self-study process and undergo a site visit by external examiners to demonstrate they meet ten quality standards” (2007, p. 1). Although the self-study materials only appear to be available to agencies seeking accreditation (AELCS, 2010), one can assume that any organization charged with evaluating itself for a passing grade for accreditation will give itself that passing grade.

It is also possible to view both the summarized and expanded versions of the ten quality standards. Many of the standards leave room for interpretation, including the lone reference to the word “outdoor” in the document, as follows: “Planning to meet developmentally appropriate outcomes through indoor and outdoor play is intentional” (AELCS, 2010, p. 3).

In evaluating how easy or difficult it is to meet the standards, one can look to the accreditation stats posted on the AELCS website (AELCS, 2011). The posted statistics indicate that there are 733 accredited programs; that 14% of programs had an unsuccessful first site visit; and that 98%, presumably of those 14%, had a successful second site visit. If the author's interpretation of the statistics is correct, it would mean that only 2 of 733

programs (0.3%) didn't gain accreditation by the end of the second visit.

Author Tom Langford has a negative view of the accreditation process. He writes in *Alberta's Daycare Controversy: From 1908 to 2009 – and Beyond that*, “far from guaranteeing excellence, accreditation in the Alberta system simply means that a program exceeds the rock-bottom quality that is possible given lax licensing standards related to staff training” (Langford, 2011, p. 305).

Perhaps the accreditation process has a scope which is too limited. As pointed out on the Alberta Child Care Association's website, “when a program is accredited it shows that they have reached a higher level of quality programming, staff qualifications and policy development” (2011). Although these factors are important, they do not necessarily reflect the potential risks or concerns of situating a day care facility in an environment which may expose the children to individuals under the influence of alcohol, to chemicals at gas stations, or to limited amounts of park space and natural sunlight.

Moving Forward

Despite the present legislation, licensing and accreditation systems, parental checklists, and body of research for selecting, managing and improving child care facilities, several Edmonton-based day cares are located in commercial zones, adjacent to uses and activities of questionable compatibility such as bars, liquor stores, gas stations, and recycling depots. As a result, there may be risks to the health, safety and well-being of children who attend such facilities.

In an Edmonton Social Services report more than 35 years ago, Day wrote that: “a good deal of public attention is presently being focused on the delivery of day care services. This public review is in no way unique to Edmonton. It is a local reflection of a national concern” (1975, p. 1); and the author believes this is true today; the widespread use of zoning as a land use control throughout both Canada and the United States (and beyond) may mean that the location of day care facilities adjacent to incompatible land uses is also prevalent in many other cities. Little academic research is available on this matter although additional funding and research will allow this to be determined.

More than 25 years ago, a report entitled *Day Care in the City of Edmonton* stressed that “the ideal solution to the current problems in the day care field would be a provincial program based on uniformly high standards of care and available and accessible to all children in Alberta” (1985, p. 20), and uniformly high standards are still what our children deserve.

More than 20 years ago, an Alberta Family and Social Services white paper proposed that “any time there is a problem identified, either by government or parents, action will be taken to ensure that quality of care and the safety of children is not compromised” (Government of Alberta, 1990, p. 27). This was reaffirmed in a Government of Alberta *Guide for Parents*, which stated that “if you believe that standards are not being met or that children are not being properly cared for, take action” (1993, p. 37).

Therefore take action we must, to conduct further study to evaluate the red flags raised in this article; and to change the policies, systems and practices that need revision to ensure that our children are all receiving the best care possible from our local day care facilities.

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