

development. It is estimated that around 51,000 children and young people are currently in the care of social welfare departments in England alone with an additional 12,000 in Scotland and 2000 in Wales.

In 1996, Barnados initiated a monitoring exercise of the moves experienced by 145 children and young people. One child had more than 40 moves. The information provided the impetus for Jackson and Thomas' publication which explores the factors contributing to stability/instability and suggests improvements for policy and planning.

Jackson and Thomas state that, while sexual abuse harms children, the instability that can follow is 'just as harmful' for children removed from home:

...the system often inflicts further damage on their development by its failure to provide a place of safety and care where they can stay for any length of time.

Reviewing the evidence available, Jackson and Thomas found a universal impression that 'the whole care system has become chronically unstable'. Furthermore, few studies have examined the child's experience. The literature tends to focus on family preservation, family reunification and the first foster placement.

The authors discuss the influence of attachment theories on modern social work. On the one hand, they can imply that

separating children from their families is to be avoided at all costs and, if it is unavoidable, children must be returned home as soon as possible. This can result in frequent breakdowns of placement and chronic instability. The theories can also imply that children separated from parents need to form new and lasting relationships with good substitute carers. The tensions between these versions of attachment theory appear in discussions and policy and the decisions that social workers make relating to individual children. The authors summarise the factors needed for the provision of stability as well as the factors that contribute to instability.

Consisting of only 124 pages with an 11 page bibliography, the publication is both readable and useful in its capacity to highlight key messages for case managers and those responsible for decisions that profoundly affect children's lives.

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Foster care Theory and practice

John Triseliotis, Clive Sellick and Robin Short

B.T.Batsford Ltd, London (in assoc. with BAAF), 1995

This book is one in a series on Child Care Policy and Practice edited by Professor John Triseliotis from the University of Edinburgh. Professor Triseliotis has had longstanding international recognition as an authority on foster care and adoption. In producing this book he has been joined by two other authors Clive Sellick from the University of East Anglia and Robin Short from the Derbyshire Social Services Department. They bring to the task a powerful array of experience in practice, management, research and teaching.

Their collaboration has provided a very useful text for students and a reference work for practitioners by bringing together the elements of foster care policy and practice and presenting them in a very readable and accessible way. It relates to British legislation and practice, and draws substantially on the research and literature from the United Kingdom and North America generated since the seventies. It does however provide a clear view of the policy issues and dilemmas of the nineties and makes a real effort to link research with practice.

The book begins with a brief examination of the institution of foster care, touching on its connections with ancient practices, the Poor Law and the French system of wet nurses in the 15th century. It describes the main types of statutory foster care in terms of relief, emergency, short stay, medium and longer term/permanent care. It acknowledges the various routes out

of short term foster care – return to family, residential care, independent living, long term foster care (with the same or new family, with or without family contact), custody (with or without payment), adoption in its various forms. A brief review of outcome studies results in a summary of the percentage of children experiencing the various forms of foster care and what is known of breakdown rates and benefits over time. This also results in a very useful table of factors which may influence the probability of better or worse outcomes. The factors are related to the child, the foster home, social work inputs and natural parent(s).

The remaining eight chapters emerge as a very practical guide to foster care practice. In the chapter which overviews practice, the needs, roles and relationships of workers, carers, the child and birth parents are considered. The complexities inherent demand attention to clarifying of roles and expectations. The use of contracts is suggested with regular feedback and reviews. Misperceptions and ambiguities will threaten the stability of placements. A chapter follows on recruitment and training touching on motivational issues and concerns about professionalisation and payment. Arguments around professionalisation have gained weight since foster care has been called on to take in more adolescents and children with special needs. There is interesting discussion (pp39-42) on the rethinking of policy around pay and,

although debate remains about the form of financial support, it seems that realistic allowances may help in recruitment and retention in a climate where there are often not sufficient carers in time and place to allow appropriate choice and matching. In the section on training, topics said to be at the core of the different approaches to training include: child development; the causes of low self-esteem/building self-esteem; attachment theory; socialisation and/or institutionalisation; the effects of separation and loss; managing difficult behaviour; the child care system; working and planning as part of the team; the role of social workers; the role and significance of the child's parents and origins, including the importance of racial and ethnic identity; the role of foster carers; attitudes and awareness with regard to issues such as race, gender and disability; the impact of fostering on the foster family; awareness with regard to child sexual abuse (knowledge of signs and symptoms, how to make placements safe for the child and the family, handling disclosures, etc); HIV and AIDS (p46).

Assessing foster carers in terms of legal requirements and beyond goes into the value of the task centred approach, the Cautley questionnaire and the systemic model. The well tried tools of social work practice, ecomap, genogram and structural map, form the systemic model. Equal opportunities and cross cultural issues are also raised. The latter theme appears at various points through the book as a crucial concern for foster care in various ways. A chapter on the working relationship between foster carers and social workers follows, covering the importance of accountability for the safety and wellbeing of the children and family members. The distinction between link workers (workers who supervise the carer) and the children's caseworkers is also covered. There is a useful diagram of worker qualities and competencies valued by carers and children (p95). The responsibility of agencies for the support so pertinent to aid retention and minimise placement disruption also has a chapter. Again an effort is

made to link research to practice and the significance of payment, training, respite and opportunities for mutual support do appear to make a difference.

Two chapters are devoted to providing practical tools and approaches to working with children. The first works through a number of key concerns for children – the experience of separation; verbal and non-verbal communication with children; the main tasks involved when children move; matching children and foster carers; the introduction of the children to carers; support within the placement; tasks while within foster care (developmental, identity, life story and life skills work); and factors related to leaving care. The second provides a wealth of techniques for facilitating communication and understanding.

Finally, in keeping with the major policy shifts towards inclusive foster care and acknowledgement that family of origin usually remains important and is a frequent destination, a chapter is devoted to working with families toward reunification. Themes covered include – maintaining links, developing partnerships, pre-fostering preparation work, preparation for reunification and post reunification support. All up, this is a useful text for practitioners in child and family welfare which draws well on available knowledge to create a very practical guide. It is informed by both practice and research and acknowledges current limitations in both. Anyone interested in foster care and related areas of activity will find it an accessible and informative means of being acquainted with this sometimes rewarding and often challenging field.

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What works in family placement?

Clive Sellick and June Thoburn

Barnardos, Ilford, Essex, 1996

Clive Sellick and Professor June Thoburn are members of a highly regarded research team in the School of Social Work at the University of East Anglia in the UK. They have wide experience of research in foster care and permanent fostering and adoption.

What works in family placement? is their contribution to a series of publications by Barnardos which seeks to review research in various aspects of child care to address the question of how confident practitioners can be that their interventions in children's lives are making a difference in the desired direction.

The series attempts to apply academic rigour to a generally untidy subject by summarising the sources, quantity, strength of evidence and gaps in research. It seeks to do so in a form that is easily accessible to practitioners, researchers and all who are interested in evidence based social work practice.

In Section 1 the authors stress the importance of considering whether the 'certainties' of today are value statements of what should happen or whether they are based on what has been shown by research to be more effective. They explore the difficulties in reliably linking long term outcomes to what are often short term interventions, given the complexity of the interventions and the situations to which they are applied. They attempt to put some structure on this complexity by outlining measures commonly used in research and providing a typology of studies undertaken in the family placement field. A key message drawn from this analysis is the value that parents and caregivers place on skilled short term interventions in the context of a dependable long term relationship with a worker who cares about them.

Section 2 looks at short term or task centred foster care, which in the UK, mainly involves looking after children under ten for short periods during a family crisis, or to give