

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

