

# RAP Sheet

RESEARCH ADVANCING PRACTICE

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• **SPECIAL ISSUE OF JOURNAL FOCUSES ON FAMILY FOSTER CARE**

The journal *Child Welfare*, published by the Child Welfare League of America, has printed a special issue on family foster care in the next century. One article is summarized in this issue of the *RAP Sheet*, but many others are worth reading as well. If you do not have access to the journal at your agency or library, you can order a copy on line at [www.cwla.org](http://www.cwla.org). The publication item number is 7416 (January/February issue, Volume 78, No. 1), and the cost is \$20.

• **1999 EDITION OF THE REDBOOK - NEBRASKA REVISED CHILD WELFARE STATUTES**

This complimentary reference manual containing selected provisions pertaining to child welfare and juvenile justice, is available from the Center on Children, Families, and the Law. If you would like a copy, please contact Gerry Konoski at 402.472.3479.

**HOW DO THE CHILDREN IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE EVALUATE THEIR SITUATION?**

The empowerment model adhered to by most social service agencies suggests that input from individuals can help them feel in control. Unfortunately, most children are not asked about their happiness in out-of-home care. Interviews (including both close-ended and open-ended questions) were conducted with 1100 children in out-of-home care in Illinois (86% who were in family foster care) each year from 1993 to 1996. Most of the children reported always feeling "loved" (82-87%) and "safe" (84-90%). Additionally, significant differences between their ratings of "before entering care" and "after entering care" suggest that most thought their quality of life had improved since entering care. Most (76%) also reported being happy or very happy with their caseworkers. Responses to open-ended questions revealed that children most often complained about caseworkers who were inaccessible, who did not visit often enough, and who did not keep their promises. Only 29% of the children reported that they had been involved in decision-making about their placement, a statistic that is not consistent with an empowerment model. The 1995 data were also compared across different types of placements. Children in nonrelative foster care and in kinship care were more likely to report always feeling loved and safe than children in group care. Children in kinship care tended to report their experience as better than children in nonrelative foster care, but the differences were not statistically significant. The authors suggest that other states do similar interviews to determine the satisfaction of children in their care.

Wilson, L., & Conroy, J. (1999). Satisfaction of children in out-of-home care. *Child Welfare*, 78, 53-69.

• **NATIVE AMERICAN SOCIAL WORKERS PROVIDE INSIGHT INTO "CULTURALLY COMPETENT" SERVICES**

A nationwide sample of Native American social workers and social work students was surveyed to gain a greater understanding of their definition of culturally competent services to Native American clients. Sixty-two surveys were returned, representing a wide variety of tribal backgrounds. A review of the responses suggested that social workers should be aware of and acknowledge not only the diversity between Native Americans and other ethnic groups, but also the diversity among different Native nations, and diversity among individuals within a particular nation. Knowledge of the treaties in and among nations, as well as Federal policies specifically impacting Native Americans, is also of primary importance. Cultural knowledge (about communication patterns, values, beliefs, and the importance of family, tradition, and appropriate respect) is vital, along with an understanding of the contemporary realities which affect Native American populations (tribal politics, federal agencies, tribal sovereignty, and the structure of reservations). The necessary skills included general communication and problem-solving skills (especially when used in light of the knowledge discussed above), and most especially patience—inhibiting the need to fill silences. A few themes surrounding the workers' values also emerged. Social workers must understand their own culture and spirituality before they can be effective helpers. Social workers must be willing to listen to their Native American clients and learn from them, as well as pay them the respect they deserve. They must further understand the concept of social justice: the special rights of Native Americans are based on the theory of redress for past injustices, not on the theory that they are inferior or need a handout. It is relatively unsurprising that themes of this study are similar to those that have arisen from studies of other populations. Still, the author argues that cultural competence cannot be generalized across "other cultures", and input from individuals within the specific culture must be included in the definition of culturally competent services.

Weaver, H.N. (1999). Indigenous people and the social work profession: Defining culturally competent services. *Social Work*, 44, 217-225.

• **ADOLESCENTS WHO "AGE OUT" OF CARE MAY BE ILL-PREPARED TO EXIT**

Older adolescents in state custody continue to be a special concern for social workers. Some who do not achieve permanency often simply get too old to remain under the care of child protective services. Others have self-sufficiency as their permanency plan. Ideally, both types of adolescents would be adequately prepared to leave the protection of the state and become self-sufficient. However, studies suggest that the ideal is not often achieved. A random selection of case records in Missouri in the early 1990's was examined to see how well prepared many young adults were when they left out-of-home care. The sample consisted of 252 youths who were at least 17

years old when their case was closed; three-quarters of the youths were Caucasian, two-thirds were female, and over a quarter were from urban areas. Administrative records revealed that only 38% of the youths were employed at the time their case was closed. Further, 29% had never held a job before being discharged from care. Only 40% had completed high school or received their GED, and minority males were particularly likely not to have earned either type of diploma (only 17% of them did). The residential situation for these youths was most likely to be the home of relatives (26%), or a place of their own (22%--includes own apartment, college dorm, or military barracks). Records suggested that more of these youths left care because they refused further services than because they had achieved their goals (26% vs. 20%). This is in contrast to the official reasons for case closure, which stated that 60% left care because goals were achieved. Finally, most of the cases (63%) were closed due to "unplanned" exits from care. The authors conclude that these adolescents (and probably many others) are not adequately prepared when they leave state custody. Since many of them return to their families, social workers can help them prepare for this return by continuing to encourage visits and communication between the adolescent and the family before discharge, even if reunification is not officially included in the permanency plan.

McMillen, J.C., & Tucker, J. (1999). The status of older adolescents at exit from out-of-home care. *Child Welfare, 78*, 339-360.

• **CONFLICTING VIEWS OF THOSE INVOLVED IN PARENTING SKILLS CLASSES FOR PARENTS OF JUVENILE OFFENDERS MAY DECREASE EFFECTIVENESS**

Mandatory parenting skills classes taught to parents of juvenile offenders at a juvenile probation department facility in northern California were critiqued. Three conflicting points of view arose from the classes: the justice system's view—that delinquency is caused by bad parenting, and that parents simply need to control their children; the parent's view—that parents want respect and love from their children, not just obedience; and, the view held by both the probation officials and parents—that today's adolescents are generally "bad", disrespectful, and out of control. Parents seemed to benefit from simply meeting other parents of juvenile offenders and understanding that they were not alone. However, the author suggested changes for future classes: avoiding the tug-of-war of blame which often occurred between officers and parents, and stressing different material (such as mediation counseling, literacy and job training for parents and youths, etc.) Instead of the "get control of your kid" message presented in these classes.

Schaffner, L. (1997). Families on probation: Court-ordered parenting skills classes for parents of juvenile offenders. *Crime and Delinquency, 43*, 412-437.



**IMPORTANT DATES!**

Y2KIDS: PROTECTING NEBRASKA'S CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN THE 21ST CENTURY  
OCTOBER 26-29, 1999, KEARNEY, NE

This statewide conference, sponsored by the Governor's Commission for the Protection of Children and the Nebraska Court Improvement Project, is being planned by faculty and staff at the Center on Children, Families, and the Law. A number of nationally recognized speakers and trainers will address many aspects of child abuse and neglect. Protection and Safety workers, administrators, attorneys, judges, law enforcement personnel, health care providers, educators, child advocates, and policymakers will be invited to attend. Brochures and registration materials will be mailed sometime in August. Plan now to attend all or part of this great training opportunity with colleagues from across the state. For more information call Gerry Konoski, 402.472.3479.

**BOOKMARKS**

- ▶Bazon Center for Mental Health Law  
[www.bazon.org](http://www.bazon.org)
- ▶Center for Law and Social Policy  
[www.clasp.org](http://www.clasp.org)
- ▶Child Trends  
[www.childtrends.org](http://www.childtrends.org)
- ▶American Bar Association's Juvenile Justice Center  
[www.abanet.org/crimjust/juvjus/home.html](http://www.abanet.org/crimjust/juvjus/home.html)
- ▶Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse at Florida State University  
[www.fsu.edu/~crimdo/jjclearinghouse/jjclearinghouse.html](http://www.fsu.edu/~crimdo/jjclearinghouse/jjclearinghouse.html)
- ▶American Academy of Pediatrics  
[www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)
- ▶Kids Count  
[www.aecf.org/kidscout](http://www.aecf.org/kidscout)



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