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A Holistic View of Family Preservation Services

One of the hallmarks of family preservation services is that they are holistic and attend to multiple dimensions of family life. In that spirit, this issue of the *Family Preservation Journal* provides a holistic view of these services, by offering research from the perspective of children, parents, caseworkers, and students of social work. These articles focus on the effectiveness of services, parents' perceptions of services, and the knowledge, attitudes and behavior of child welfare caseworkers. There should be something here for everyone who serves children and their families.

This issue contains two studies of the effectiveness of family preservation services. The first, by Rofuth and Connors, uses a time-series design to examine the effect of family preservation services when the length of services can be extended for those families with chronic problems. Using empowerment-oriented case management services, families' scores on the Child Well Being scales decreased in risk factors over time. The second study of service effectiveness, by Hanssen and Epstein, uses retrospective investigation of case files to examine the particular service components that are associated with positive program outcomes. The researchers find that empowerment, education and advocacy for families were most effective in reducing unmanageable child behaviors. These two studies together demonstrate the effect that holistic services that do not focus solely on parent or child behavior can have important effects on those behaviors.

From a parent's point of view, those families receiving family preservation services are more satisfied with services than those receiving family maintenance services, according to the study by Lee and Ayon. These parents also perceived family preservation services to be most helpful in improving child discipline, emotional care of children, and help with housing, despite the fact that those families receiving family preservation services were more likely to be Spanish-only speakers and have more children. Logan's qualitative study with child welfare caseworkers demonstrates the importance of concrete supports to family success as well. These studies together point to the continuing need for family preservation and child welfare program to attend to the holistic needs of parents, especially concrete needs such as housing, transportation, financial aid, and child care.

The next two articles in this issue concern the training of, and decision making by, child welfare caseworkers, so that services to families are delivered in the most respectful, collaborative and positive ways. A training program delineated by Love and Campbell focuses on the attitudes of child welfare workers who are pursuing their masters degree in social work. When attitudes about birth parents are shifted to be more positive, birth parents are more motivated to participate in services. Meek explores how decisions are made whether to serve families in the office or in the home, and finds that these decisions are rarely thoughtful or purposeful. She provides a framework for making this decision more meaningful to program outcomes.

Lastly, an article by Cheung and Queen discusses the lack of consistent measures on service effectiveness in human service organizations. In an attempt to fill this void, the authors present their findings from a national survey of 250 not-for-profit family service organizations in the United States. The survey yielded results relevant to client identified needs and agency effectiveness measures in serving today's families.

This issue of the Family Preservation Journal adds to the evidence-base for family services, and demonstrates how much is added to our knowledge when a variety of perspectives are sought and included in the research.

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