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Editorial

Broadening Our Vision, Refining the View

This issue of the Family Preservation Journal combines two emerging interests in the fields of family preservation and family support. First, contemporary forces are making the world a smaller and smaller orb, and we see the plight of families and children around the globe on a daily basis. Our vision of families' needs is broadening, bringing with it questions about how services and systems support families in different cultures and under different governmental structures. Accompanying this global awareness is a greater emphasis on making service delivery and the evaluation of services more transparent to families. True to the original vision of family-based services, more and more agencies are incorporating consumers' perspectives into the design of services and are seeking their perspectives on what works and why.

In these pages are descriptions and evaluations of family preservation and family support services around the world, including Australia, England, Italy and the United States. We have much to learn from these about the essential elements of helpful services. The essence of a caring, helpful relationship with families is consistent across these cultures, despite differing service systems, government mandates, and social safety nets.

These studies are particularly illuminating as to the nature of help because they dig deeper into understanding both consumers' perspectives and the particulars of the services provided. The first two articles in this collection focus on describing the specific and individualized services delivered in family preservation programs. These detailed examinations of services and treatment integrity exemplify the necessary evolution of family services research to unpack the "black box" of services, rather than assuming that the interventions delivered are faithful to a model and drawing conclusions from a doubtful assumption.

The three remaining studies in this collection use mixed methods to explore and describe the services that families need and appreciate in family preservation and/or family support services. Both service providers and service consumers are queried as to the essential elements of a successful partnership. In the studies from Australia and England, quantitative outcome measures are combined with qualitative interviews with both caseworkers and families to identify the effectiveness of services, the types of families most helped, and the beliefs of families and caseworkers as to the specific elements of services that most contribute to case outcomes.

Finally, we are fortunate to include in this issue two contributions from Professor Emeritus Anthony N. Maluccio of Boston College. He has penned an essay very relevant to this collection concerning the inclusion of consumers in the evaluation of services. This is followed by his review of an Italian study of family preservation services. As a scholar who has observed the evolution of child welfare services and research, and as a forefather of the move to more global awareness of family services, his perspectives in the collection are valuable and timely.

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Editorial

By broadening our vision of family preservation and family support services to the global village of families raising children, we can learn so much about the nature of caring across cultures and settings. By listening to families about the specific behaviors and services they find helpful, we can refine our vision of preserving and supporting families everywhere.

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