

2002

Family Preservation in Child Welfare: Its Base and Its Future

Marianne Berry

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.library.tmc.edu/jfs>

Recommended Citation

Berry, Marianne (2002) "Family Preservation in Child Welfare: Its Base and Its Future," *Journal of Family Strengths*: Vol. 6 : Iss. 1 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.library.tmc.edu/jfs/vol6/iss1/2>

The *Journal of Family Strengths* is brought to you for free and open access by CHILDREN AT RISK at DigitalCommons@The Texas Medical Center. It has a "cc by-nc-nd" Creative Commons license" (Attribution Non-Commercial No Derivatives) For more information, please contact digitalcommons@exch.library.tmc.edu

Editorial

Family Preservation in Child Welfare: Its Base and Its Future

This is the eleventh issue of the *Family Preservation Journal*, and we have chosen to focus this special issue on the use of family preservation services in child welfare. While family preservation services, as a philosophy and as a service model, are provided to families in a variety of service settings and sectors, including juvenile justice and mental health arenas, they have their basis and origin in services to children and families. We think it is time, in this 11th issue of the *Journal*, to take stock of the state of family preservation services in child welfare and assess where they might be heading.

Services and strategies to keep children at home and with their families are as old as help itself. Today's formal models of community- and home-based services to preserve families are not young, entering their sixth decade of life in the United States. These service models continue to expand and mature—reflecting the changing nature of families in the United States, the evolving social environment in which families live and work, and the innovative and adaptive qualities of family preservation workers and agencies.

Family preservation services have affected the lives of thousands of families in the United States, one family at a time. In the child welfare arena, these services have been used to keep children out of foster care and with their families, to preserve the bonds of children with extended family, to strengthen adoptive placements for children seeking a permanent family, and to support children and families who have been reunited upon the child's return from foster or residential care. Evaluative studies have consistently found that the majority of families are preserved or maintained after receiving these services.

Family preservation services have affected the national and professional discourse about families as well. The advent and expansion of family preservation services has resulted in an increased focus on the strengths and resources of families and communities, rather than their deficits and dangers. Families report feeling empowered and understood for the first time in a long service history. Family preservation workers pledge to do “whatever it takes” to serve and strengthen families, mobilizing communities and networks of helpers to form safety nets for families. Agency administrators explore creative and innovative ways to pool resources and decategorize funding, to better meet the individual needs of each family and each child. Scholars, researchers, and evaluators now focus on measuring family strengths and well-being, rather than presenting problems and their appeasement.

The four articles in this special issue of the *Family Preservation Journal* help us to take stock and anticipate the further development of family preservation services in the United States. In “Family Preservation in Perspective,” Anthony Maluccio and Edith Fein combine their wisdom and experience in the field of child welfare to offer a contextual discussion of permanency planning principles and the place of family

preservation in supporting those principles. James Whittaker, in "The Elegant Simplicity of Family Preservation Practice," describes the policy content and practice developments that have helped family preservation services to endure in a volatile political and societal environment. Together, these two essays by three renowned child welfare scholars and practitioners serve as resonant touchstones and gently reminders that the fundamental principles and values of family preservation services will and can endure, and that we must continually take stock of whether innovations and evolutions are indeed true to those principles and values.

Following these two essays are two recent research studies that explore relatively new areas of research in family preservation services. In "A Case Study of an Agency's Three Family Preservation Contracts," Mark Ezell uses case study methodology to examine the effect of three different funding structures on the delivery of family preservation services, including caseworker and administrator perceptions of service effectiveness. This is important and illuminating reading for agencies and legislatures contemplating various strategies of managed care. Jill Roberts and Theresa Early examine one site of the Family-to-Family Initiative, a national service innovation demonstration project of family-centered, community-based child welfare services. These authors provide a clear description of this creative program that seeks to translate family preservation principles and values to the arena of community. These two research studies serve to explore and describe new areas of thought in family preservation services within the child welfare context and should stimulate new thinking about previously assumed or neglected structural issues in this service model.

Family preservation services to children and families are based on fundamental principles and values that have endured for decades in an environment characterized by change and innovation. We offer this special issue of the *Family Preservation Journal* in this same spirit: celebrating growth and development while reaffirming the underlying strengths of families and family preservation services.

Marianne Berry