

International Alternative Care Conference

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Necessity and Suitability of Foster Care

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Hosts



Partners



Overview

- Foster care – the ‘necessity’ and ‘suitability’ principles
- What we have learnt
- Challenges and questions

What is Foster care?

- Foster care – What the *Guidelines say*- 'Situations where children are placed by a competent authority for the purpose of alternative care in the domestic environment of a family other than the children's own family that has been selected, qualified, approved and supervised for providing such care'
- In reality - foster care is found to be different types of settings in different countries

Necessity and Suitability

- Foster care only to be used when fully informed decision taken that alternative care is 'necessary'
- Most 'suitable' form of alternative care if 'appropriate to each child's specific needs, circumstances and best interests' (Cantwell et al. 2012:14)
- Need for different forms of foster care - short, long, emergency, respite placements; babies and very young children; adolescents; children with special needs; siblings; etc.

What have we learnt?

- ‘Despite the need to adapt foster care to context...some core components that all ...programmes must have to ensure they are safe and effective in meeting children’s needs’ (Family for EveryChild 2014)
- Participation of children in decision making– fundamental and integral to decision making - foster placement for a child is more likely to succeed (Gibbs & Wilson 2003)

What have we learnt?

- Legislation and policy framework – provides clear mandate/regulation - standards and accountability important for quality of care
- Structures and a body with coordination and oversight for development and delivery of foster care services (EveryChild 2011)

What have we learnt?

- Processes - contributing to well informed decision making – assessment, care planning, monitoring (UNICEF & BCN 2015)
- Foster carers - rigorous selection, recruitment, preparation, training (EveryChild 2011)
- Matching - each child with the right carers for them - inclusion of children in decisions making
- Ongoing support –preparation, placement and leaving care
- Regular review - ongoing suitability of placement - changes in circumstances (Hek & Aiers 2010)

What have we learnt?

- Maintaining links with parents, family and community - when safe to do so – increases opportunity of returning home
- Permanency - challenges to foster care placement – evidence of many placement changes - reason cited in research is lack of consideration for children's views (Berridge & Cleaver 2010; Sinclair & Wilson, 2003)
- Quality data - information management systems (Family for Every Child 2014)

Challenges and Questions

Foster Care and deinstitutionalisation

- Linking deinstitutionalisation to development of foster care – some as a ‘quick’ alternative to institutionalisation

Challenges and Questions

Foster care and deinstitutionalisation

- voluntary vocation or paid employment?
- are payment/allowances adequate
- how to ensure motivation of families/individuals to foster vis a vis concerns people are addressing their own poverty / without aptitude for caring?

‘We pay social workers and residential care workers – if someone is paid to care for a child and the child receives a safe and caring environment in which to live is this wrong?’

And I leave you with a question

- I think we can all agree that every effort must be made to develop alternative care for those for whom it is necessary - that provides the most suitable, safe and caring environment - a decision in which they have played an integral role
- However - should we continue to develop foster care if we are not meeting the rigour and the quality of care that is necessary? Can we start to think outside the box?

Moving Forward

- I am sure you have many ideas and many more questions – I am looking forward to the next presentations – through examples of actual practice that will help us answer questions and stimulate further debate on what could work in our own context?
- THANK YOU