



**National Resource Center for
Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning**
at the Hunter College School of Social Work

Information Packet

Family-Centered Practice Models

National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning

A Service of Children's Bureau/ACF/DHHS

By Teija Sudol

July 2009

**129 East 79th Street • New York, NY 10021
TEL 212/452-7053 • FAX 212/452-7475
www.nrcfcppp.org**

**A service of the
Children's Bureau/ACF/DHHS**

Summary

Traditionally, child welfare work focused on providing and caring for children and youth who were separated from their families because of maltreatment or abuse, with minimal or no support to families as a whole. This led to an increasing number of children/youth in care, especially children of color.

In recent decades, federal legislation has shifted the focus in child welfare from child-centered to family-centered practice. The National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning¹ (NRCFCPPP) concluded that jurisdictions are required to plan for and provide services that:

- Help families manage the tasks of daily living, adequately nurture children, and remedy problem situations;
- Make reasonable efforts to keep children and youth in their own homes whenever possible;
- Keep children safe and out of dangerous living situations and protect their right to grow up with a sense of well-being, belonging, and permanence.

The focus of the attention in family-centered practice is the family unit, ensuring the safety and well-being of all family members. It emphasizes the capacity and potential of families to care for themselves, and engages them in decision-making, goal-setting and planning for services. In family-centered child welfare practice, families are linked with individualized, comprehensive and culturally appropriate supports and services that are based in their own communities. The core of family-centered practice is family engagement through a series of intentional interventions, as well as integrated and shared efforts with families and different systems of care to promote safety, permanency and well being for children, youth and families (NRCFCPPP, 2009).

Family-centered practice “acknowledges that there are times in the lives of families when they may be weak from exposure to stressors such as poverty, poor housing, substance abuse, domestic violence, or mental illness” and in need of help and timely intervention. The goal of family-centered practice is “strengthening and supporting all families – birth, adoptive, kinship, guardian, and foster – ... to ensure children’s timely permanence, stability, safety and continuity in family relationships” (NRCFCPPP, 2005).

¹ The National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning (NRCFCPPP) was established in 2004 to continue the work of its predecessor, the National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice (NRCFCP). Some of the material referenced in this information packet and credited to NRCFCPPP originally may have been published by the NRCFCP. NRCFCPPP is a service of the Children’s Bureau/ACF/DHHS.

Fact Sheet

Federally Monitored Practice Principle

Family-centered practice is one of the practice principles that guide the Federal Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR) to evaluate and monitor the States' current child welfare systems. The current services should be evaluated with the family-centered practice framework (among others) in mind and improved as necessary through a continuous quality improvement (CQI) process. The first round of the CFSR completed in 2004 revealed a need for further engagement of families in case planning and more supports for foster and relative caretakers, as well as a failure to engage fathers. Family-centered practice also serves as a model for child welfare practice and utilizes the systems of care approach in that it "builds partnerships to create a broad, integrated process for meeting families' multiple needs" (NRCFCPPP, 2009). The systems of care approach is based on the principles that the Children's Bureau promotes and monitors through the CFSR: interagency collaboration; individualized, strengths-based care practices; cultural competence; community-based services; and full participation of families at all levels of the system.

Defining Family-Centered Practice

According to the federal guidelines for CFSR, family-centered practice means that, "in the delivery of services to children involved in the child welfare system, the jurisdiction's practice is to work with and support the entire family, including fathers, as we address the abuse or neglect of a child within that family" (NRCOI, 2008). The assumption is that "the most fundamental needs of children, such as needs for nurturing, belonging and safety, cannot be addressed effectively without attending to the entire family's needs" (Milner & al, 2005). Engaging and collaborating with the entire family at all stages of the work is critical in the process of achieving safety, permanency, and well-being for them.

Defining Practice Model Framework

According to a working document by two federal child welfare resource centers, NRCFCPPP and National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement (NRCOI), a child welfare practice model is a "conceptual map and organizational ideology of how agency employees, families, and stakeholders should unite in creating a physical and emotional environment that focuses on safety, permanency, and well-being of children and their families" (2008). This practice model should fit the federally promoted framework for child welfare that is child-focused, family-centered, individualized, parental capacity strengthening, collaborative, community-based, culturally responsive, and outcome oriented.

Legislation & Policies

The new *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act* of 2008 P.L. 110-351 was “designed to connect and support relative caregivers, improve outcomes for children in foster care, provide for tribal foster care and adoption access, and improve incentives for adoption.”

For a full discussion and Text of [P.L. 110-351](#) see:

http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/federal/index.cfm?event=federalLegislation.view/egis&id=121.

Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997 made family-centered practice a focus for child welfare systems reform and gave states specific requirements for both safety and family-centered practice in child welfare:

“Child and family services must be designed to ensure the safety and protection of children as well as the preservation and support of families...”

When safety can be ensured, strengthening and preserving families is seen as the best way to promote healthy development of children.

Services focus on families as a whole...family strengths are identified, enhanced, respected, and mobilized to help families solve problems...

Most child and family services are community-based; involve community organizations, parents, and residents in their design and delivery; and are accountable to community and client needs (45 CFR 1357).”

Other federal laws that refocused the scope of child welfare programs to include family-centered services are: *Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act* of 1980 (PL 96-272), *Family Preservation and Support Act* of 1993 (PL 103-66), *Safe and Stable Family Program* of 1997 (funded through ASFA), *Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act* (CAPTA) that was reauthorized as part of *Keeping Children and Families Safe Act* in 2003, as well as *Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendments* (PSSF) of 2001.

Family-centered practice, as one of the four child welfare practice principles, is promoted and monitored through the Children and Family Services Reviews (CFSR) that the Children’s Bureau (ACF/DHHS) administers. It is designed to:

- Strengthen, enable, and empower families to protect and nurture their children
- Safely preserve family relationships and connections when appropriate
- Recognize the strong influence that social systems have on individual behavior
- Enhance family autonomy
- Respect the rights, values, and cultures of families
- Focus on an entire family rather than select individuals within a family

For the Children’s Bureau Child and Family Service Reviews Practice Principles (2007), visit: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/cwmonitoring/tools_guide/hand-2.htm

Best Practices and Model Programs

According to the National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning (NRCFCPPP), the following four components are essential to family-centered practice in child welfare:

1. **The family unit is the focus of attention:** family-centered practice works with the family as a collective unit, insuring the safety and well-being of family members.
2. **Strengthening the capacity of families to function effectively is emphasized:** the primary purpose of family-centered practice is to strengthen the family's potential for carrying out their responsibilities.
3. **Families are engaged in designing all aspects of the policies, services, and program evaluation:** family-centered practitioners partner with families to use their expert knowledge throughout the decision- and goal-making processes and provide individualized, culturally-responsive, and relevant services for each family.
4. **Families are linked with more comprehensive, diverse, and community-based networks of supports and services:** family-centered interventions assist in mobilizing resources to maximize communication, shared planning, and collaboration among the several community and/or neighborhood systems that are directly involved in the family.

The National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement (2008) lists the following practices as examples of a family-centered approach:

- Assessment of the entire family
- Family engagement in the case and services planning
- Work with both mothers and fathers
- Use of family-based rather than institutional placements or temporary shelters
- Focus on the underlying issues affecting child safety, permanency and well-being

Additional resources for family-centered practice approaches can be found at

<http://www.childwelfare.gov/famcentered/overview/approaches/> and <http://www.childwelfare.gov/famcentered/casework/>.

The best practice for child welfare agencies is to develop a family-centered practice framework that fits their unique needs. Child Welfare Information Gateway and the National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning provide examples of state and local practices, some of which are listed below. Click on <http://www.childwelfare.gov/famcentered/overview/values/examples.cfm> and

http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info_services/family-centered-practice.html for further information.

- The child welfare system of **Alabama** was transformed by putting the focus on professional practice, employee quality and support, being family-centered, and performance standards. The 19-year federally overseen process was guided by four principles:
 - Children should live with their families when they can do so safely;
 - Comprehensive services should be provided to children and their families;
 - Regular family planning meetings with the family and individualized community support teams should be held with the focus on reunification, relative placement or adoption;
 - Reports of child abuse and neglect should be investigated in a timely manner.

- With the Congressional relief money to rebuild after Hurricane Katrina, **Louisiana** went through a massive system reform. This reform movement is “designed to help serve children in the best place for them – safe and secure families” (NRCFCPPP, 2008). The six initiatives within Louisiana child welfare are:
 1. Improving intake decisions
 2. Meeting family needs using family-centered assessment and evaluation tools
 3. Offering community-based services
 4. Recruiting foster and adoptive parents and enhancing supports for them
 5. Residential treatment as a short-term intervention
 6. Securing permanent family connections and vocational, housing and educational supports for youth transitioning out of care

- Working with Families Right from the Start initiative in **Massachusetts** identified the following “six core values that describe the specific behaviors and practices that define good child welfare practice” (NRCFCPPP, 2008): child-driven, family-centered, community-focused, strength-based, committed to cultural diversity and competence and committed to continuous learning.

Online Resources

Center for the Study of Social Policy (<http://www.cssp.org/>) is dedicated to creating opportunities for America's children, families and communities. It develops resources and publishes articles to support the strengths-based and family-centered child welfare practice.

Child Welfare Information Gateway (<http://www.childwelfare.gov/famcentered/>) provides resources to support the local, state and Tribal child welfare agencies in creating a framework for family-centered practice, as well as resources on family-centered practice approaches, cultural competence, casework practice, and providing and evaluating family-centered services.

National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement (www.nrcoi.org) is funded by the Children's Bureau (ACF/DHHS), and provides free, on-site training and technical assistance (T/TA) to local, state and Tribal child welfare agencies with the Child and Family Services Reviews, including strategic planning, quality improvement and evaluating outcomes.

National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning (NRCFCPPP) at the Hunter College School of Social Work (<http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/>) is a service of the Children's Bureau (ACF/DHHS). It offers training, technical assistance, and information services to state, local, tribal and other publicly administered or supported child welfare agencies to strengthen their capacity to institutionalize a safety-focused, family-centered, and community-based approach to meet the needs of children, youth and families. NRCFCPPP recently published the Family Engagement: A Web-based Practice Toolkit that provides information on promising practices, programs and resources (<http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/fewpt/index.htm>).

Bibliography

- Child Welfare League of America. (2003, rev. ed.). *CWLA standards of excellence for services to strengthen and preserve families with children*. CWLA Press.
- Costin, L.B., McFadden, E.J., Moore, E., & Whitelaw Downs, S. (2009). Child welfare principles and practice, chapter 4. In *Child welfare and family services: Policies and practice* (8th ed.). Pearson Higher Education.
- Fong, R. (2001). Cultural competency in providing family-centered services. In E. Walton, P. Sandau-Beckler, & M. Mannes (Eds.), *Balancing family-centered services and child well-being: Exploring issues in policy, practice, theory, and research*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hess, P. & Mallon, G. (2005). Overview. Section I: Child and adolescent well-being. In G. Mallon & P. Hess (Eds.) *Child welfare for the twenty-first century: A handbook of practices, policies and programs*, p. 49-54. New York: Columbia University Press. Book retrieved on July 7, 2009 from: http://books.google.com/books?id=7NIovRKGnzC&dq=Child+welfare+for+the+twenty-first+century:+A+handbook+of+practices,+policies+and+programs&printsec=frontcover&source=bl&ots=1YofcH2GQ1&sig=yaY1oB-26111ISIfWCxxlkDTvsY&hl=en&ei=FEvXSvDIDoreMa_s_Z0I&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1
- JBS Child Welfare Review Projects. (2007). *Children's Bureau child and family services reviews practice principles*. Retrieved on July 7, 2009 from: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/cwmonitoring/tools_guide/hand-2.htm
- Mallon, G.P. (2008). From the desk of the director. In *Permanency Planning Today*, Winter 2008. National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning. Retrieved on July 7, 2009 from: <http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/newsletters.html#BPNP>
- McCroskey, J., and Meezan, W. (1998). *Family-centered services: Approaches and effectiveness*. The Future of Children, 8:1(Spring), 54-71. Retrieved on July 7, 2009 from: http://www.futureofchildren.org/usr_doc/vol8no1ART4.pdf
- McDaniel, R. & McKinney, B. (2005). *Family-centered practices*. Residential Group Quarterly, Vol. 6(1). Child Welfare League of America. Retrieved on July 7, 2009 from: <http://www.cwla.org/programs/groupcare/rgcqsummer2005.pdf>
- Milner, J., Mitchell, L., & Hornsby, W. (2005). Child and family services reviews. In G. Mallon & P. Hess (Eds.) *Child welfare for the twenty-first century: A handbook of practices, policies and programs*, p. 707-718. New York: Columbia University Press. Book retrieved on July 7, 2009 from: http://books.google.com/books?id=7NIovRKGnzC&dq=Child+welfare+for+the+twenty-first+century:+A+handbook+of+practices,+policies+and+programs&printsec=frontcover&source=bl&ots=1YofcH2GQ1&sig=yaY1oB-26111ISIfWCxxlkDTvsY&hl=en&ei=FEvXSvDIDoreMa_s_Z0I&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1
- National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement. (2008). *The child and family services review practice principles: Critical principles for assessing and enhancing the service array*. Retrieved on July 7, 2009 from: <http://muskie.usm.maine.edu/helpkids/servicearray.htm> under "F. Training/ Consciousness-Raising Mini-Modules for the Child Welfare Service Array Process Documents"

- National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement & National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning. (2008). *An introduction to the practice model framework: A working document series*. Retrieved on July 7, 2009 from: <http://muskie.usm.maine.edu/helpkids/practicemodel/PracticeModelWorkingPaperIntro.pdf>
- National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice. (2000). *A new era of family-centered practice*. Best Practice/Next Practice, Vol. 1(1). Retrieved on July 7, 2009 from: <http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/newsletters.html#BPNP>
- National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning. (2005). *What is family-centered practice?* Permanency Planning Today, Summer 2005. Retrieved on July 7, 2009 from: <http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/newsletters.html#BPNP>
- National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice. (2009). *Family Engagement: A Web-based Practice Toolkit*. Retrieved on July 7, 2009 from: <http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/fewpt/index.htm>
- The Child Welfare Policy & Practice Group. (n.d.) *Adopting a child welfare practice framework*. Retrieved on July 7, 2009 from: <http://www.childwelfaregroup.org/documents/CWGPracticeFramework.pdf>
- University of Michigan School of Social work. (n.d.) *Philosophy and goals of family-centered practice*. Presenter William Meezan, D.S.W., A.C.S.W. Presentation retrieved on July 7, 2009 from: <http://www.ssw.umich.edu/public/currentProjects/tpcws/permanencyPlanning/PhilosophyAndGoals.html>
- Walley, P.B. (2007). *The next step: Alabama officials hope to continue improving child welfare system*. The Council of State Governments. Retrieved on July 7, 2009 from: http://www.dhr.state.al.us/large_docs/3pages.pdf