
Vitenskapelige
Høgskole



Partnership with Parents whose Children are in Care

International Symposium on Child and Youth Services
FH Münster
University of Applied Sciences
25.09.2020

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Outline of the presentation



- Personal background and interest in the field
- Overall ideological orientation of child protection
- The Norwegian Child Protection Services, and parents' experiences
- Services to parents are usually in the best interest of the child
- Vulnerable families with many challenges
- Being deprived of the right to care
- What type of services do they need?
- Why do the CPS come short?
- Important professional skills in providing services to parents
- References

Personal interest in the field



- User Participation Project 2003-2007
- PhD dissertation, parent participation in CPS
- State of art report and national guidelines for services to parents with children in care
- Advocacy: Assisting in establishing an interest group for parents with children in care
- Governmental involvement: Developing support services outside the CPS
- Research projects: Evaluations of:
 - Group work services to parents in CPS & FCS
 - Family group conferences in Emergency Situations, CPS
 - Family group conferences in high conflict cases, FCS

Child protection and child welfare orientation



Child protection model	Child welfare model
<p>Best interest of the child are focused on protection and parents need as secondary</p> <p>Law-led rather than discretion-led</p> <p>Assessment based on standardized tools</p> <p>Aim at objectivity</p> <p>Centered on difficulties and problems, detect hamr</p> <p>Treats difficulties as signals of risk</p> <p>Restrict professionals' discretionary powers</p> <p>Individual rather than community oriented</p> <p>Remedial rather than preventive</p> <p>In Norway a</p>	<p>Best interests of the child are broadly defines to include the welfare of the family</p> <p>Discretion-based</p> <p>Assessment based on interaction between family and social workers</p> <p>Acknowledges different perspectives</p> <p>Considers difficulties as well as strenghts and resources</p> <p>Seek to understand difficulties in order to fin ways to provide support</p> <p>Enhances professional strength</p> <p>Community orientated</p> <p>Preventative rather than remedial</p> <p>(Fargion, 2012, p 25)</p> <p>mix between the two</p>

Norwegian Child Protection Services (CPS)



- The responsibility for the provision of services lies with the Municipal CPS
- 82 % of the the children receive in-home-services whild 18 receive out-of-home services (SSB, 2019)
- The CPS should have routines and methods that provide the parents with guidance and services shortly after the removal
- The overall aim is reunification or helping the parents in accepting that the child will live outside the birth-home and the best interest of the child matter most
- The parents may also have their independent needs
- In Norway many of the CPS lack routines for providing services to these parents and the services are often random, dependent on the professional and lack focus

The parents' experiences with child protection services in general, Norway



- A study based on 697 participants show that:
 - 41 percent reported exclusively positive experiences
 - 31 percent solely negative experiences
 - 24 percent both positive and negative experiences
- The experiences were related to characteristics of the child welfare workers, the quality of the relationship, the help offered and the parents' feelings of insecurity and fear. New CPS users were more positive than the experienced ones

(Studsrød et al, 2012)

Parents with children in care lack support



- National and international studies show that birth parents remain largely neglected in practice, research and policy (Memarnia et al 2015, Slettebø, 2013), especially parents who have been compulsorily separated from their children.
- Court reports are often filled with deficits and a source of trauma, shame and frustration for the birth parents who find themselves publicly branded as bad parents'
- In order to support these parents (mothers) it is essential to understand their needs and experiences, particularly in relation to their emotional well-being as this will have some bearing on the welfare of the child.

Services to the parents are usually in the best interest of the child



Many of the children feel shame and that they are responsible for the situation at home and they are worried about their parents

Children feel more at ease if they know that their parents are being cared for

Adequate services to parents increase the childrens' ability to develop relationships with their fosterparents

Biological parents are important to children even though they have not provided the with the care that children need

Vulnerable families with many socio-economical challenges



- Financial problems
 - Unemployment
 - A history of affective and/or material deprevation
 - Abuse and violence
 - Subjected to child protection precedures
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- The child protection workers find it difficult to combine effectively child protection and co-operation with parents who are facing adwers social conditions

(Fargion, 2012, Slettebø, 2013)

Being deprived of the right to care



Emotional challenges: Powerlessness, sadness, worry, lack of self-esteem, nervousness, emptiness, anger, bitterness, guilt, isolation, loneliness, left on their own, crisis, devalued, uncertainty about their parental role

User participation: Lack of information and participation, not being respected, unheard by the services

Unsatisfactory systems for supporting parents

But some are also grateful and relieved (usually if the reason for the removal is not related to the parents themselves)

(Slettebø, 2013)

Parents don't understand why



- The parents' don't understand why the children are taken away from them
- How can they then understand what is required to be reunified with their children?

(Syrstad & Slettebø, 2019)

Shame and stigma



- Parents who are not capable of providing good enough care for their children breach with one of the central norms in society, namely that children should be brought up with their biological parents
- The stigma of having one's children removed may cause lack of professional and societal interest in providing services and support
- These are the parents who nobody send flowers to

The parents call for:



- Information about their rights and duties, how the child is developing
- More focus on the parents, not only the children
- Respect and acknowledgement about their knowledge about the children
- A more open and responsive CPS
- Better access to and continuity with their social worker
- Help in developing a working relationship with the foster parents
- Help in preparing for and carrying out and evaluating visiting arrangements with their children
- Help in dealing with accusations from their children
- More participation, fathers as well

(Slettebø, 2009)

The need for social support



- In addition to emotional and welfare problems many of the parents experience social difficulties; shame facing the children, the family, friends and network
- Not being met by sympathy
- Feeling lonely, socially isolated and indifferent
- Difficult in finding a sense of coherence

Why do the CPS come short?



- Lack of time and resources
- Having to focus on the needs of the child
- High level of conflict and parents lacking trust
- Difficult to get hold of the parents and some do not want contact

When services are difficult to provide



- Drug abuse, psychological problems and violence represent difficulties for engagement, in addition to shame, guilt, fear, anger, despair, stigma, earlier experiences with the CPS etc
- But also characteristics related to the organization and the professionals.
- Could the overall ideology of the organizations and the focus on children at risk create less focus on providing help to the parents?
- To which extent is the overall aim of an out-of-home placement reunification as stated in the Convention of CR?

Lack of communication skills



- The professionals often have an confronting style in communicating with the parents, and they tend to make accusations (Gallagher et al 2012).
- Lack of communicative skills create resistance among the parents (Forrester et al 2008)

Resistance among parents



- May result in non-involvement, denial and unfriendly and threatening behaviour
- Could be caused by earlier contact with the CPS, or related to individual or family characteristics
- General experiences of discrimination, oppression, poverty, neglect in childhood etc
- Differences in age, class, ethnicity, power, fright of losing their children , uncertainty of how they will be regarded as parents
- These matters make it difficult for parents to be open about their problems

The parents therefore may:



React defesively and project their feelings due to stress and pain, resist making changes

The feeling of shame and stigma makes them afraid of being suspected of abuse and neglect

Abivalence and contradictory feelings (need help but don't know how)

Lack of confidence (ability to enter change processes)

Denial of having let the children down, trivialization of incidences, retention of information and manipulation

Different styles of communication among the professionals



- Lack of ability to discuss the concerns about the child with the parents (The parent perspective)
- Focus on the protection of the child without involving the parents (The child perspective)
- Focus on the protection of the child and the parents need for help (both/and perspective), being able to discuss concerns about the child but also show empathy for the parents, acknowledge them and try to establish good relationships

Alliance with the parents



- The professionals should be able to:
- Make an alliance with the parents where they try to understand and relate to the parents' difficult emotions, while simultaneously trying to motivate and find hope, ie through the parents love for their children and wish for reunification
- Communicate without making accusations, show empathy, pose open questions, invite the parents to reflect around their thoughts and feelings, acknowledge their capabilities and successes
- Open and reflective communication create less resistance and denial of problems

(Forrester et al, 2012)

The first contact



- Most of the parents are in a crisis. Do they have people around them that will provide them with emotional support?
- The parents usually have immediate need for help, ie money for transport, food, housing and these obstacles ofte prevent them from participation,
- The support will vary because the needs and problems are different, but also the aim of the placement of the children
- The first contact must chart what the parents need of help and they have to be involved. Furthermore, the parents need information about services available and offer help in making contacts
- How are they going to maintain contact with their children?

Important skills



- Acknowledge that parents and the needs differ
- When norms about good parenthood are being challenged, it will create tension and conflicts within the family
- An individual understanding and condemnation of the parents is not sufficient
- The professionals must be able to identify family feelings and ties, as well as the parents and families need for improved communication, collaboration and handling of conflicts
- The family's interpretation of the situation must be obtained and acknowledged
- In other words a systemic perspective is required

A model for providing support



- Many parents are not able to develop their parental role right after the child has been removed. The feelings of loss and anger prevent them from thinking constructively
- The first phase is often dominated by denial and anger. The second with depression, and the third consciousness and responsibility.
- Necessary to offer help according to the different phases: First therapy and then the group work activities with other parents. In addition to therapy, the parents need information about what are their rights and duties. They must know how to cooperate with the system. After this introductory course, they are offered to take part in self-help and empowerment groups
(Frame, Conley & Berrick, 2006)

Available services



- International Child Development Program, supervision program
- Family consultants
- Family counselling services outside the CPS
- Peer mentors
- Groups offering social support
- Interest groups and organisations
- Family Group Conferences

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