

Child Welfare News #30—Summer 2007

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Studies

Minn-LInK Presents at CJI Conference in May

In May, Anita Larson (Minn-LInK Coordinator) and Timothy Zuel (Hennepin County ICWA Child Protection Supervisor) presented a breakout session at the Children's Justice Initiative (CJI) Child Protection Conference: Connections Matter. Their session, titled "Educational Outcomes of Young Children and Teens Involved with Child Protection: Room for Improvement, Reasons for Optimism, Opportunities for Change," provided an overview of recent research on the connections between educational outcomes of children and adolescents involved in the child protection system in Minnesota. To view the PowerPoint presentation from their session, [click here](#). To view the complete version of the report [click here](#).

Raising Healthy Anishinaabe Children—A Developmental Asset Approach

By Priscilla A. Day, MSW, Ed.D., Professor, UMD Department of Social Work

What does it take to raise healthy American Indian (Anishinaabe) children?" This was the question three child welfare researchers at the University of Minnesota

Duluth (UMD) set out to explore. Typical research on tribal communities often focuses on negative traits rather than examining the positive assets and resiliency within the families. By shifting the focus on developmental assets or rather, “key building blocks in children’s lives that help them grow up strong, capable and caring” (AlaskaICE, 2002) the research team hoped to take a strength based approach to child welfare and document tribal community experiences in raising healthy children. In 2004, the Otto Bremer Foundation provided the team with a three-year grant to focus on Anishinaabe communities in northern Minnesota in order to discover whether these assets could be identified in tribal communities and to document any cultural differences.

The research team composed of an American Indian MSW staff person, an American Indian Professor and a non-native faculty member, at the UMD Department of Social Work worked with the Search Institute, an agency internationally known for its work with youth, family, and communities supporting youth through intentional development of assets. This same agency conducted a 2003 study in over 200 communities across the United States with approximately 150,000 youth in grades 6-12, and found the more assets youth had, the less likely they were to engage in high risk behaviors, in particular, alcohol misuse, illicit drug use, violence, and sexual activity. Forty-five (45) percent of youth that had only 0-10 assets were likely to engage in problem drinking while only three (3) percent of youth who had 31-40 assets exhibited the same behavior (Search Institute, 2005). This protective influence is also seen in other high-risk behaviors affecting many tribal communities.

Developmental assets are divided into two categories; internal and external. Initial research identified 40 developmental assets including 20 internal and 20 external. Internal assets are broadly defined as those values, behaviors, and skills that children develop that assist them in making life choices. External assets are broadly defined as things that surround children to help them feel positive about themselves. Domains, identifiable areas that impact how a child interacts with their environment, can be identified. Those fall into external areas including support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time. External assets include commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity (Search Institute, 2005).

When working with tribal communities, it is important to understand and respect the tribal sovereignty of reservations. Accordingly, a formal request was sent to a tribal council asking permission to conduct interviews with tribal elders. Once official permission was granted, the research team focused on an initial group of tribal elders. Focus groups were conducted utilizing the Search Institute’s developmental assets framework and data was collected and presented to a tribal advisory group for additional input and feedback. Interview questions were then developed and given to a convenience sampling of elders throughout northern Minnesota on two separate occasions.

The preliminary findings conclude the basic tenants of raising a healthy child are the same across cultures (food, shelter, security), however the order of importance or prominence with native children is different. For example, the importance of culture, spirituality, extended family, and tribal connections play a central role for American Indian families and children in this study.

Findings: Raising Healthy Anishinaabe Children

Elders described ways to help children become healthy adults that included things like involving them in daily activities; for example, helping with housekeeping, and taking them along when hunting, fishing, or berry picking. Many expressed the importance of involving children in cultural events such as attending pow-wows, doing arts and crafts, and other such activities. These help native children to “develop a sense of cultural pride” and that “culture reinforces identity”. Elders also spoke about the importance of receiving spiritual guidance and participating in traditional ceremonies. One elder told the story of his son being ill and taking him back home to his reservation. There he was given an Indian name and after that he got well.

Many examples were given of the importance of praising children, not just for the outcomes, but also for making a good effort. This helps children to feel rewarded for trying. Elders spoke of the importance of “trial and error” with children. “Let them make mistakes, don’t be critical, let them figure things out for themselves”. Over time, they will gain more competence with the particular activity instead of giving up for not doing it well enough. The example was given that we are so busy today that we sometimes just tell our children what to do. This robs them of the chance to think about and problem solve for themselves. When this is done repeatedly, children never have to think about how to do things for themselves. At the same time, elders also spoke about making sure that children experience success. “Don’t expect them to do things beyond their ability, praise them when they do well.”

One elder talked about planting a garden when their children were small and how they kept walking over the newly planted seeds. “We decided to give them a corner of the garden that was theirs. They learned on their own not to walk on their plants and took pride in keeping it weeded. They felt good when it grew up and they could harvest it”. This elder also spoke about the importance of allowing children to “explore and learn about the world”. Often today, children do not understand the connection of plants and animals to their survival. “Our children need to know about how we are all connected in order to respect the world around them”.

Parent Behaviors

The elders spoke about parent behaviors that go across cultural lines such as being a good role model and providing a secure home. The importance of caring about and spending time with children and family engaging in activities like reading and playing were also seen as important. Most elders also discussed the significance of teaching our children important values. Examples were traditional native ways of behavior such as how to treat elders, how to behave at ceremonies, and gender

roles. The concept of sharing and generosity was also identified as important. “When I was growing up, even if you have just a little, you shared it with others”. The concept of cooperation and working as a group was also mentioned as an important values to teach children. Respect for the earth and all its creatures, staying close and helping extended family, and practicing traditional ways were identified as “living a good Anishinaabe life”.

Elders also talked about the importance of reading to children and making sure they did their homework. Research has shown that children whose parents care about and are involved in their education do better in school (Strand & Peacock, 2002; Blum & Rinehart, 1997).

Tribal/Community

When asked what the tribe or community could do to help support raising healthy children, the elders spoke about a variety of different things including offering parenting classes, providing day care, creating opportunities for family and community healing, and the promotion of traditional ceremonies, traditional songs, and other traditional activities. Others spoke about community development led by elders invested in retaining traditional values and practices that promote family.

While many of the findings show that tribal people utilize developmental assets in raising their children, the ways in which assets are developed and used may be culturally unique. Assets can be seen as a Native American dream catcher, “...supporting threads in a young person’s life that can keep away harm and invite goodness” (AlaskaICE, 2002). Knowing this should allow counselors, parent-educators, teachers, and others to use tribal activities and teachings when doing prevention or intervention of high-risk behaviors with native children. Promotion of healthy cultural identity provides a protective factor from behavior such as alcohol abuse and can also be used to intervene in high-risk behavior by providing a basis for recovery (Regional Research Institute for Human Services, 2005).

New Populations in Rural Counties: Implications for Child Welfare

The settlement of new populations, chiefly immigrant and refugee families, has added challenges to an already overburdened rural child welfare system. Precise data on the scope of recent settlements are not available. However, seven counties—Freeborn, Kandiyohi, Nobles, Otter Tail, Steele, Todd, Watonwan—have been identified as having a recent increase in Latino, Somali, and Southeast Asian families. These counties are host to meat-packing and poultry processing firms, and the work opportunities in these counties explain the upsurge of their immigrant populations. The schools also clearly reflect these demographic changes, and there are significant portions of school children who speak a language other than English at home. These counties are the focus of our exploratory study.

The well-being of children in immigrant families is of special concern. National data reveal policy and program issues that may be reflected in Minnesota. Note the following:

- Children of immigrants comprise 22 percent of the 23.4 million children under age 6 in the United States.
- Immigrant children are much more likely to live in poverty and to experience food- and housing-related hardship: 56 percent of young children of immigrants are low-income.
- Young immigrant children who are undocumented are not eligible for federal means-tested public benefit programs like TANF, Food Stamps, and Medicaid.
- Immigrant children are more likely to be in fair or poor health and to be without health insurance.

This exploratory study will use several sources of information to identify the impact of immigrant populations on the child welfare system. Among the questions that will guide this study, we note the following:

- What family supports and resources are available that are culturally sensitive?
- What are we learning from the CFSR about the delivery of services to new populations?
- What happens to undocumented immigrants if they are reported to Child Protection for child maltreatment?
- What is the role of collaboratives in recognizing the silencing effect within immigrant communities to repress reports of child maltreatment since the repercussion could be deportation?
- What are the long-term consequences of the recent raids in Worthington and Willmar?

In preliminary discussions with the counties, several issues have already been identified.

- In the search for practice standards, can we arrive at community standards within ethno-cultural groups for abuse and neglect? What level of risk is acceptable? Can we uncover the issues related to family violence and delinquency?
- Do workers have the responsibility to learn eligibility rules for social services and income programs? Are resources available for those who are ineligible due to immigration status?
- Are there training efforts related to the importance of working with clients in a narrative framework—seeking to understand the circumstances of refugee status and the experiences with both emigration and immigration?
- Identifying the issues between the school system and child protection (the response to educational neglect).
- How do workers acquire cultural competence? How do they acquire the knowledge of the history and cultural norms of new population families?

Broad challenges especially relevant to the child welfare system have already been identified in Minnesota and elsewhere. These include grasping the cultural factors in child/parent relationships and the ethno-cultural standards in keeping children

nurtured and protected. The challenge is to reconcile cultural practices with the requirements of a child welfare system that is directed to the best interests of the child as shaped by concerns with safety, permanency, and well-being.

Recommendations will likely be centered on a prevention focus.

- Reducing the language barrier through bilingual services, translators, bilingual documents
- Supporting a network of agencies, programs, and individuals to continue building early intervention responses to children in new populations
- Increasing the availability of immigration attorneys and specialists to county child welfare staff, in order to improve their understanding of the complexities of cases
- Raising awareness in community agencies that serve new populations on Minnesota's child protection standards for safety, permanency, and well-being
- Strengthening the collaboration between schools and child protection
- Strengthening the relationship between the public health, the school systems, and child welfare in order to emphasize and achieve prevention services for health and child well-being
- Working closely with domestic violence advocates to support battered women and their families in new populations
- Developing strategies for early intervention to prevent out-of-home placement of children whose parents require treatment for maternal depression and chemical dependency
- Sharing key promising practices for a prevention focus

A forum in Wilmar, MN on June 28th titled "Responding to Immigrant Families and Children: Rising to the Challenge" brought a national perspective to Minnesota issues. A final report will be available in June 2008.

Esther Wattenberg is the Principal Investigator and Ann Beuch is the Graduate Assistant for this project. Funding for this project has been provided by the Minnesota Department of Human Services.

The Minneapolis Foundation, "Immigration in Minnesota: Discovering Common Ground," October, 2004; and "The Vitality of Latino Communities in Rural Minnesota," Deborah Bushway, for the Center for Rural Policy and Development, Minnesota State University, Mankato, MN.

Capps, R, Fix, M. E., Ost, J., Reardon-Anderson, J. & Passel, J. S. The Health and Well-Being of Young Children of Immigrants. Washington, DC: Urban Institute, February 8, 2005.

CASCW Involved in the Disability and Parental Rights Legislative Change Project

Traci LaLiberte, PhD, U of MN Institute on Community Integration (ICI)

Liz Lightfoot, PhD, Professor, U of MN School of Social Work

July 2007

The Disability and Parental Rights Legislative Change Project was initiated at the University of Minnesota as a collaborative project in the College of Education and Human Development between the School of Social Work and the Institute on Community Integration. The collaboration developed following the identification of discriminatory legislation within child custody and termination of parental rights statutes. The goal of the project is to assist interested groups in removing disability from these statutes to eliminate discrimination, with the ultimate goal of ensuring the safety, permanency and well-being of children.

[Learn more about this project.](#)

Child Sexual Abuse: Understanding the Issues

Jane F. Gilgun, PhD, Professor U of MN School of Social Work
Alankaar Sharma, MSW, PhD Candidate

Child sexual abuse is a serious social problem that affects the quality of life and life chances of uncounted millions of survivors in the United States and internationally. Child sexual abuse hurts all who are victimized, but some survivors cope with, adapt to, and overcome its affects because they have people in their lives who understand the true nature of child sexual abuse and who provide them with the information and support they need to recover.

Events

An Invitational Forum on Evidence-based Practice in Child Welfare in the Context of Cultural Competency

This meeting, held on June 11, 2007, was planned to respond to the problem of increasing pressure to demonstrate positive outcomes in child welfare services coupled with rather sparse evidence on what works for the children and families most likely to be served by these agencies. In addition, while children of color are often disproportionately represented in foster care, there is little information about the actual effectiveness of culturally sensitive and culturally competent approaches to practice. The goal of the meeting was to produce a plan to address this problem nationally and to craft pragmatic strategies that could be immediately applied in practice and policy.

The following is a brief summary of Professor Susan J. Wells' opening presentation about evidence-based practice in child welfare in the context of cultural competency:

To date, evidence-based practice (EBP) and cultural competence have largely been parallel discussions in child welfare. Rarely have they been considered together. With the intent of remedying this, speakers and participants at the forum will consider the question, "What works for children and families . . . of diverse

populations?" Specifically, we will focus on the research we need to conduct, the approaches to practice we need to formulate, and the policy we need to implement.

Some research on EBP includes race or ethnicity as a factor in the clients' experience and effectiveness, but very few studies attend to EBP and cultural competence from the inception of the question; those that do are mostly in health and mental health. Evidence-based practice is the most recent valid and reliable information that results in change for children and families. It is based on the demonstration of the association of cause followed by effect when possible alternative explanations have been eliminated, i.e. did something else create the effect, would it have occurred anyway? Observed associations are helpful additions to our knowledge; but without a control group and random assignment, this evidence is relatively low in the ranking of quality of evidence. By understanding how to judge evidence in practice we can select the most effective interventions available.

When evidence-based practice is well used, it is responsive to a family's race, ethnicity and culture, meets their specific needs and circumstances, and is responsive to diversity within the culture. Very few controlled studies of EBP have been done which attend to race and culture; the outcomes measured in controlled studies are not always helpful. This is exacerbated by barriers to EBP in child welfare such as funding, lack of advocacy or consumer demand, and lack of rewards linking reward to client outcomes (Kauffman Best Practices Project, 2004).

Suggestions for strengthening evidence-based practice in child welfare include a change in funding to support and reward outcomes-based practice, an increased emphasis on EBP in graduate schools, and demonstrating EBP as a practitioner-friendly tool (Chaffin, 2004).

In conclusion, it is imperative for us to include communities of color in the research leading to evidence-based practice. In addition, they should be involved in planning and implementation of evidence-based practice; cultural competence must be defined and required in EBP; and the process of implementing EBP in communities of color must be supported with resources (Isaacs et al., 2004).

Dr. Carl C. Bell, M.D. presented a conceptual model for EBP in the context of cultural competence taken from his national and international work.

The presentations of Professor Wells and Dr. Bell will soon be available online at <http://sww.che.umn.edu/EBP-CulturalCompetence.html> in video, pod cast, and Breeze formats. For questions about the forum or its content, please contact Susan J. Wells at swells@umn.edu.

Chaffin, M. & Friedrich, B. (2004). Evidence-based treatments in child abuse and neglect. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 26, 1097-1113.

Isaacs, M. et al. (2005). The road to evidence: The intersection of evidence-based practices and cultural competence in children's mental health. Washington, DC: National Alliance of Multi-ethnic Behavioral Health Associations.

Kauffman Best Practices Project. (2004). Closing the quality chasm in child abuse treatment: Identifying and disseminating best practices. Charleston, SC: National Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center.

CASCW 8th Annual ITV/VPC Teleconference

On March 28, 2007, CASCW held our Eighth Annual Child Welfare Teleconference: The Signs of Safety Approach to Child Protection Casework, presented by Andrew Turnell. The Conference featured a morning interactive television presentation by Andrew Turnell and an afternoon panel discussion with Andrew and child welfare workers from Olmsted and Dakota Counties who are currently using the Signs of Safety Approach in their practice.

The Signs of Safety approach to child protection casework was developed through the 1990's in Western Australia. The approach was created by Andrew Turnell and Steve Edwards in collaboration with almost 120 West Australian child protection workers and is now being utilized and further developed in many different countries around the world. This approach focuses on the question, "how can the worker actually build partnerships with parents in situations of suspected or substantiated child abuse?" This is a partnership- and collaboration-grounded, strengths-based, safety-organized approach to child protection work. This approach expands the investigation of risk to encompass strengths and signs of safety that can be built upon to stabilize and strengthen the child's and family's situation. A format for undertaking comprehensive risk assessment - assessing for both danger and strengths/safety - is incorporated within the one-page "signs of safety assessment protocol". In addition, the Signs of Safety approach is designed to assist professionals at all stages of the child protection process.

Andrew Turnell's book, *The Signs of safety: A solution and safety oriented approach to child protection casework* (1999), is one of the textbooks used in Professor Ron Rooney's class, *Advanced Child Welfare Practice* (SW 8301). Andrew Turnell, is a social worker, family therapist and child protection consultant from Perth, Western Australia. He teaches regularly around the world and acts as an ongoing consultant to child protection systems in Australasia, Europe, Japan and North America, including in Carver and Olmsted counties in Minnesota.

This is the first Teleconference that CASCW has webstreamed and, in addition to the 350 people at ITV sites in over 30 Minnesota counties, we reached people across the world via our webstreamed broadcast. CASCW received a significant amount of positive feedback on this event and are hoping to plan a more intensive training in the future for counties who are hoping to incorporate the Signs of Safety Approach into their practice.

Staff News

Minnesota Child Welfare Training Center (MCWTS) Transition Update

As many of you may already know, the contract responsible for the administration of the Minnesota Child Welfare Training System (MCWTS) and the Title IV-E Foster Care and Adoption Assistance Eligibility Determination program (EDT) has been awarded to Century College in White Bear Lake. For the past 10 years the University of Minnesota, in association with the School of Social Work and CASCW, has administered the contract.

The Center would like to express its thanks to the MCWTS and EDT staff who have been a pleasure to work with over the past 10 years.

Thanks again for your hard work and dedication to the improvement of child welfare throughout the state!

New Executive Director for CASCW

CASCW Director Marcie Jefferys has decided to leave the Center and take a permanent position as Fiscal Policy Coordinator for the Office of the Senate Majority Leader, where she has been since January during her leave from the University. Marcie had been the Center's Director for over 5 years and during that time taught the Social Policy and Delivery Systems for Child Welfare and Family Services course, was instrumental in developing the Family Policy minor, and brought a public policy perspective to the Center's work on child welfare practice. Marcie has been a valuable resource for the Center and the School and will be greatly missed. We wish Marcie success and happiness in her new position in the Senate!

Nancy Johnston has been Acting Director since January. Marcie's last day was in June and a new Executive Director should be on board by August!

IV-E Student Perspective

Child Welfare Scholar's Experience in Peru

07-08 Child Welfare Stipend

Jamie Schwartz's experience during the School of Social Work's 2 week spring course in Peru.

This past May, I had the opportunity to spend 12 days in Peru through a program of the School of Social Work here at the University of Minnesota. As a part of earning credit for the trip, we needed to choose an area of focus to concentrate on while in Peru. Being a new child welfare scholar and staying in line with my interests, I decided to focus on child welfare and services for children in general. I went on the trip with two main goals, first to learn about Peruvian culture and way of life, and second, to learn about social services and child welfare in Peru. I arrived in Peru

hoping to observe, interact with, and experience the people and the country in order to grow as a social worker, a child welfare scholar, and an individual.

I began reading before leaving for Peru and began to think about the definition of child welfare here in the US and how it may be quite different in Peru. Over the twelve days in Peru, we visited many regions of the country and many social service agencies. Each of the agencies that we visited were focused on a different issue of the country or region. A few of the agencies we visited were Via Libre, an agency that focused on HIV/AIDS, Alternativa, an agency focused on building community in new areas of Peru, and Generacion, an open door home for street children. We traveled to many different parts of Peru and I was able to see and begin to understand the extent of their social issues and the beauty and inspiration of their strengths.

Peru's system of social services reflects the condition of many countries with scant resources and tremendous need: services reside in the non-governmental sector primarily with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are dependent on external funding for day-to-day operations. The notion of "public child welfare" services takes on a very different meaning in a context in which close to 30% of the population lives in extreme poverty (living on less than \$1.00 per day) and in some areas exceeds 60%. The government responds to reports of egregious child abuse and neglect, using the criminal justice system to punish parents who abuse their children. Children may sometimes be removed from parents who demonstrate extreme abuse, but in the absence of a developed system of foster care, they are generally placed with relatives or other families in their communities. The government also uses the criminal justice system to respond to homeless and abandoned youth in large cities, particularly when they engage in criminal activity. These children may be rounded up by police and held in detention centers and juvenile justice centers until they reach majority age. These systems function much like juvenile detention centers in the United States, although they are marked by harsh discipline and are generally closed systems. Small, isolated rural communities frequently have no access to any formal services at all, and rely on community intervention when families are unable to care for their children or actively abuse minors.

Child welfare can be defined in many ways and my biggest learning was the realization that child welfare, especially public child welfare, will be defined differently in different countries. While visiting various agencies in Peru, I listened for information about children and their well being and realized that child welfare was really intertwined with the welfare of entire communities. Many of the places that we learned about and saw were joining together as communities to meet basic needs such as water and food. When a community was getting their basic needs met, the focus then shifted to community building and development. In the end, the biggest thing that I learned in Peru was that the strengths and skills of individuals can be exposed and encouraged and poured into a community that can then reach goals together and create a better life for their children and families.