

CHILD WELFARE
A SOURCE BOOK OF KNOWLEDGE
AND PRACTICE

EDITOR
FRANK MAIDMAN

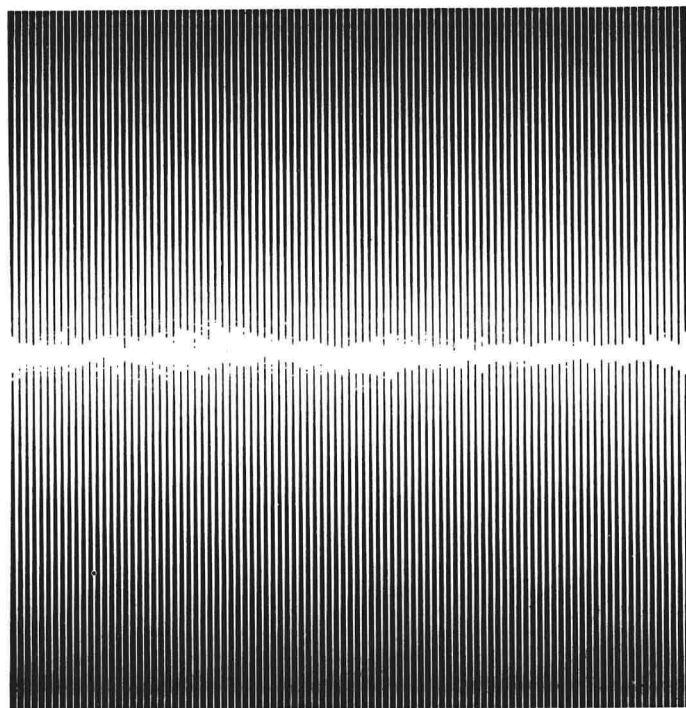
CHILD WELFARE **A SOURCE BOOK OF KNOWLEDGE** **AND PRACTICE**

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Foreword

Dear Reader:

It is well known that the crisis nature of much of child welfare makes it difficult for the practitioner to take time to stop his or her activities, consult the literature, and reflect on how current research and programme development can better inform practice. In addition, reports of new initiatives and treatment approaches are scattered through many journals, and this fragmentation creates yet another barrier to the upgrading of a worker's job skills.

Believing that continuing education in child welfare suffers more from a lack of time and energy than from any lack of motivation, the Children's Aid Society of Metropolitan Toronto has developed *Child Welfare: A Source Book of Knowledge and Practice*. It is a "one-stop", "hands-on" volume to which workers at all levels of experience can turn for the practice wisdom they seek or for references regarding more detailed information, if needed.

The *Source Book* has been put together in a unique manner. Several full-time researchers under the direction of a steering committee composed of academics, supervisors, and front-line workers have produced material that has been vetted by over 100 staff members from one of the largest child welfare agencies on the continent. Their efforts have resulted in a document that can be used as a personal reference manual for practitioners, a resource tool for supervisors, and a basic text for in-service training.

Although not a substitute for professional education, regular supervision, and up-to-date agency procedures, we recommend the *Source Book* to you, believing that it can provide concrete assistance to child welfare practitioners in carrying out their everyday work.

Douglas H. Barr
Executive Director
Children's Aid Society of
Metropolitan Toronto

Edwin F. Watson
Executive Director
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Preface

The reader who begins to use this volume might well pose the six fundamental questions that frame any experience: what, why, how, where, who, and when.

WHAT does the book aim to do? It aims to meet a professional need in child welfare practice for a general source book of up-to-date knowledge relevant to the understanding of client problems and of the main practice issues and options for helping clients. This material is potentially useful for new workers, and can serve as a comprehensive reference and guide for front-line workers, supervisors, managers, and agency policy planners.

The content of the *Source Book* is varied, and includes such diverse topics as the dynamics and contexts of child neglect and maltreatment, adolescent runaways, principles for engaging resistive clients, conceptual frameworks for understanding client problems, the use of residence as a therapeutic milieu, recent issues in foster care and adoption, and many more.

Since an important assumption guiding the development of a source book is that knowledge, however imperfect, must underlie practice, knowledge is offered in the following areas:

theoretical approaches to child welfare practice and child welfare problems
specific research findings

practice roles, phases, principles, and types of intervention, in relation to helping clients in need

practice issues (e.g., working with authority, preparing for court, working in a bureaucracy, stress in residential work) related to the *organizational contexts* of child welfare work

assessment frameworks

further readings

Naturally, this knowledge is based on the cumulative generalized wisdom of countless practitioners and researchers, and cannot be directly applied to the solving of specific problems. Between professional knowledge and actual practice lies the domain of a child welfare worker's creativity, sometimes called artistry. The skilled child welfare worker must learn to combine this book's general knowledge with his or her knowledge of specific client problems and needs.

WHY is there a need for a source book of child welfare knowledge? The need can be traced to (1) the work demands on child welfare workers, (2) the current nature of the professional literature, (3) the organization of child welfare agencies. and (4) the

dilemma of integrating knowledge and practice. Like most professional practitioners, child welfare workers find it difficult to keep abreast of current practical, theoretical, and research knowledge. The crisis nature of the work, plus heavy caseloads, limits the reading and reflection necessary for integrating new knowledge with practice.

Child welfare literature is not organized for easy access. It is dispersed over a multiplicity of journals and books, and is not integrated for practice needs. In addition, the current organization of child welfare agencies, with their diversification of specialized staff members, means that many workers are not conversant with the knowledge and practice issues of their colleagues. Caseworkers and community workers, for example, may be unfamiliar with each other's work. A source book, then, can be a fount of mutual enrichment in a large, professionally and functionally diversified child welfare agency.

Finally, a source book in child welfare should help reduce the long-standing gap between knowledge and practice. No one has solved the problem of how practitioners can use general theoretical and practice principles to guide the specific activities of their work. Everyone is familiar with the frustration of reading a journal article or attending a workshop in which the material is interesting and perhaps innovative, but somehow unconnected with one's daily work.

HOW can this book aid a child welfare worker's practice? It is a useful adjunct to problem solving, the assumed common element in everyone's work. Specifically, the information should:

- introduce new perspectives on problems, including broad theoretical approaches or ideas about specific elements in the dynamics of client problems and practice dilemmas

- suggest a broader variety of problem-solving interventions or solutions

- help the practitioner choose among different approaches to understanding and intervention (e.g., Has a particular approach worked before? With what kinds of clients?)

- help plan the implementation of a particular intervention (e.g., What staff members and how much time are needed?)

- aid the process of evaluating one's intervention solutions (e.g., What objectives were being pursued? Were they accomplished?)

For a discussion of a problem-solving approach to child welfare practice, see Appendix A.

WHERE does the content of the book come from? It was drawn from published literature in the child welfare field. Two bodies of literature were reviewed: (1) material on the causes and consequences of child welfare problems was abstracted from original research monographs or extensive literature reviews; and (2) practice information was drawn from published practice literature written by practitioners or by research and development specialists. Useful practice material also was found in government policy guidelines. In a few instances, staff members of the Children's Aid Society of Metropolitan Toronto volunteered to discuss or write about their own practices (see Appendix C).

WHO participated in the book's development? Three specific groups participated—a steering committee of fourteen people who represent child welfare con-

sultants, agency staff, academics, and management of other service agencies; a team of consultants hired on contract through the Children's Aid Society of Metropolitan Toronto Foundation; and several staff members from the Children's Aid Society of Metropolitan Toronto.

This volume is the product of a complex resource development process, and participation in content formulation also had an especially broad base. An important part of the project's methodology was the extensive participation of front-line staff members who assisted the project team in five ways. First, they were interviewed individually or in groups to identify their information needs. Content ideas were also solicited through a project newsletter. Second, the staff reviewed and criticized drafts of chapters. Third, they attended meetings with the project staff and Steering Committee to discuss drafts and propose revisions. Fourth, a sample group of staff members participated in an evaluation of one of the final drafts. Finally, as mentioned above, several workers wrote about their own practices.

WHEN was the book written? Although there was a definite starting date (August 1981), there is no date of completion because the book is designed as, it is hoped, a dynamic resource, that is, one which will be revised in the future.

One final question: HOW is the book organized? It is divided into twelve chapters, three appendices, and an index. All chapters are organized around a series of relatively independent sections or modules. These are cross-referenced to other chapters where topically relevant material is discussed.

Certain chapters and appendices, (e.g., Chapter 1, Appendices A and B) present general frameworks for thinking about child welfare problem dynamics and practice, and are germane to all professionals in the child welfare field. All three reflect an *ecological* approach to child welfare practice. The remaining chapters are more appropriate for the various specializations: child protection, community work, foster family care, residential child care, youth work, and service to unmarried parents. Despite the specialized nature of many chapters, subject matter necessarily overlaps, and the cross-referencing provides connections. A chapter-by-chapter overview follows.

Chapter 1 presents a brief introduction to an ecological approach to child welfare problems and practice. Some important elements of child protection work are examined in Chapter 2, with special attention given to the investigation process, preparing for court, the therapeutic use of authority, and using volunteers. Community work in child welfare, the subject matter of Chapter 3, is one kind of prevention-oriented practice. The latter part of the chapter introduces daycare as a service in which community workers are particularly interested. Chapters 4 through 6 outline the dynamics of child neglect, physical abuse, and sexual abuse, respectively. Each of these culminates in reviews of practice options. Chapter 7 reviews the range of pre-placement services and practice issues pertinent to social work with foster parents. Chapter 8 attends to casework service after placement, with special consideration of the separation process, fostering adolescents, and the interaction between the foster and biological families. Chapter 9, an introduction to child care in residential settings, sees the residence as a therapeutic milieu within which several traditional treatment options are possible. Because they are important actors in the total milieu, child care workers are urged to reflect on their own place in the system and make efforts to minimize stress. Chapter 10 deals with those adolescent problems most prevalent in child welfare agencies: running away, delinquency, and self-injurious behaviour. The

latter part of Chapter 10 offers treatment options in youth work. Chapter 11 reviews six major phases of adoption work, along with practice principles and selective issues at each phase. The last module in Chapter 11 identifies several trends in adoption work that are likely to have an impact for years to come. Chapter 12 is a general review of the causes and consequences of teenage pregnancy. Practice approaches for unmarried parent workers are summarized in the concluding module.

The three appendices provide several different, though equally important, aids to child welfare practice. The *problem-solving* practice framework in Appendix A is a generalized scheme which can be used to give rationality and order to child welfare work processes. Both Appendices A and B contain recently developed *assessment frameworks* derived from an ecological perspective to social work practice.

Appendix C provides three different *practice statements*, written especially for this book by staff members of The Children's Aid Society of Metropolitan Toronto. The publication of this material is an encouragement to child welfare workers across North America to share their practice experience in a similar way.

We hope that this *Source Book* will be used when workers are thrust into case situations which call for a brief refresher course on the theory and practice of the problem at hand, or when workers have the opportunity to read, mull over, and discuss their ideas with colleagues.

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The completion of this book would not have been possible without the able assistance of many people. Thanks are due first and foremost to the members of the project Steering Committee, whose commitment, patience, and assistance were a constant source of support to the project team.

The members of the Steering Committee were:

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Child Welfare Problems and Practice: An Ecological Approach

SHARON KIRSH, FRANK MAIDMAN

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I. THE ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

A. Introduction

This Source Book is written from an ecological perspective. Human ecology has arrived at the forefront of individual and social analysis, and most recently has influenced professional practice writing in social work [1, 2].

What is the ecological approach? It is a framework for understanding and aiding the individual's or group's adaptation to the environment. As such, it reinforces social work's long-standing commitment to help individuals *and* change their environments.

The ecological approach is a type of "general systems" thinking in that it:

- assumes relationships of interdependence between events and patterns
- assumes circular or multidirectional causality
- looks for the mutual impacts of systems and their component subsystems
- assumes that cause-effect relations are characterized by probability rather than certainty

Closer to the human level, ecological analysis examines how human development, human behaviour, and human problems are affected, and in turn affect biological, interactional, group, societal, and cultural factors. In particular, ecology is concerned with how individual needs are met, and takes the position that the success or failure of this process is affected by individual characteristics (e.g., a lack of knowledge about opportunities) and those of the environment (e.g., limited opportunities).

The concept of adaptation is central to ecological thinking. Humans are regarded as having both passive and active relations with their environments as they strive to achieve their goals and meet their needs. As culture-bearing and symbol-using beings their efforts are not determined by biological, psychic, or environmental factors. However, the choices and decisions may be *limited* by such factors, as when certain types of people are limited by previous socialization experiences and/or current socially structured opportunities (e.g., job opportunities, housing policy).

What individual characteristics affect adaptation? This, of course, is a wide-open question subject to much discussion, research, and speculation. Germain, for example, suggests that human adaptive achievements are affected by the individual's autonomy, competence, relatedness to others, and sense of identity [1]. The contributions of ego psychologists, such as Erik Erikson, have also provided useful information on individual adaptation. With the benefit of such research, this Source Book reviews updated theories about individual factors, including levels of parenting skills and knowledge, low self-esteem, ignorance of birth-control information, a sense of futility, and psychological alienation. The environment limits or opens up opportunities for human need fulfillment in endless ways. Access to human and material resources occurs largely through social interaction. This in turn is affected by the

physical environment, the character of communities, social perceptions and attitudes, beliefs, and a host of institutional characteristics.

The interplay of individuals with environments determines whether and how needs are met; whether “needs” refers to health, safety, food, care, or esteem. The global concept of “stress,” discussed here, refers to an upset in the adaptive balance between the person and the environment. We now turn to a discussion of the general implications of the ecological approach for practice.

B. What Are the Practice Implications of an Ecological Perspective?

Germain discusses the practice implications of the ecological perspective within the following categories: professional objectives, knowledge base, values, problem definitions, structure of worker-client relationships, the nature of professional action, and agency arrangements. This discussion is presented in a highly summarized form, thus inviting the reader to consult the original sources for a fuller discussion [1, 2].

1. Professional Objectives

Practice is directed towards improving the transactions between people in order to enhance their adaptive capacities and improve their environments.

General professional objectives involve releasing, developing, and strengthening people's innate capacity for growth and creative adaptation; removing environmental blocks to growth and adaptation; and positively increasing the nutrient properties of the environment.

2. Knowledge Base

Professional knowledge is based on psychology, sociology, evolutionary biology, environmental psychology, ethnology, and organizational theory.

3. Value Base

The importance of people's ability to adapt to the environment; environmental responsiveness to diverse human characteristics and change; and the value of a society made up of diverse individual, social, and cultural characteristics

4. Definitions of Problems

“Problems in living” are defined as arising from life transitions (developmental and social), interpersonal processes, and environmental issues.

Problems and needs result from person-environment transaction processes.

Emphasis is placed on progressive rather than regressive forces, on health rather than sickness, and on potential for growth.