



Quality Foster Care: A review of Australian and international research

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Childaware Approaches Conference, Melbourne

12th April 2013

Research Review



- Conducted a review of national and international research on quality Foster Care and Best Practice recommendations.
- Identify potential list of 'best practice' in Foster Care.

Primary Issues

- What is 'Best Practice' in Foster Care
 - Identifying high quality Foster Care practices.
 - Quality support from Foster Carer agencies.
 - study has a NSW focus.
- General summation identifying potential areas of best practice.

Foster Care services in context



- NSW is embarking on a transition of Community Services carers from government to NGO agencies.
- As of Feb 2013, there are 18,342 CYP in OOHC. (TPO, 2013)

Overview of Australian and international research

- This review was able to identify 35 publications between 1993 and 2012.
- Of these only 12 relate directly to best practice.
- Best practice research
 - Paula Hayden, Dr Marilyn McHugh, Anita Pell, Foster Care Qld.
 - Jill Berrick, Aron Shlonsky, M Skivenes, R Geen, K Malm, J Katz, M Rodwell, M Biggerstaff, C Buehler, K Rhodes, W Orme, G Cuddenback, M Colton, S Roberts, M Williams, M Hansen.

Overview of Australian and international research (cont.)

- No recognised Australian or NSW benchmark for Best Practice in Foster Care.
 - Baseline Standards for OOHC (1996)
 - Australian Foster Care Assoc (2001)
 - NSW Children's Guardian – NSW Standards for Statutory OOHC (2010)
 - NSW Standard for Substitute Care Services (1998)
 - Standards in Foster Care - ACWA (1991)

Potential gap in foster care framework

- This has the potential to create a gap between research and practice knowledge.
- A gap can lead to a breakdown to meet needs of Carers and children alike.
- Best Practice principles not incorporated into Child Protection Practice and Policy frameworks.

Best Practice

A stylized graphic of a human figure in shades of blue and green, positioned on the right side of the slide. The figure is composed of several overlapping, brush-stroke-like shapes in various shades of blue and green, creating a sense of movement and energy.

- Why 'best practice' ?
 - To lift standards and horizons for all stakeholders
 - Act as a stimulus to overall improvement of services and provisions in the sector. (Australian Foster Care Assoc [AFCA], 2001, p. 161)

Best Practice (cont.)

- Identification of problems and provides options for successful processes & outcomes. (Aust Foster Care Assoc [AFCA], 2001, p. 161)
- However ‘best practice’ is difficult to define and can differ from sector to sector.
 - Much of the existing research is derived from both empirical and practice wisdom.

What is Best Practice?

- Best Practice is defined as:
 - 1. Practice Wisdom:
 - To codify practice wisdom into training curriculum; what practitioners say is effective.
 - 2. Emulating similar systems:
 - Emulating what is done in other agencies, regions and systems; learning from others can be helpful.
 - 3. Use of expert advice:
 - Use of experts in reviewing and defining BP; can fill in gaps where knowledge is missing. (Kessler, 2005, p. 245)

What is Best Practice? (cont.)

- 4. Professional guidelines:
 - Most professional bodies have ‘practice guidelines’. Advantageous to use these to lend credibility to agencies’ practice and guidelines.
- 5. Evidence-based practice:
 - This is based on practices which are shown to be effective via controlled experiments. (Kessler, 2005, p. 246)

What is Best Practice? (cont.)

- Need for integration of practice guidelines with research knowledge.
 - Creation of committee responsible for translation of research into practice
 - Researchers asked to present findings and implications.
 - Practitioners asked if practice behaviours are consistent with findings.
 - Result: Collection of practice guides from worker behaviour and research findings. (Kessler et al, 2005, p. 248)

Best Practice: Proposed list

- List broken into 5 categories.
 - Management of Carer and Staff
 - Provision of support to Carers
 - Training for Carers
 - Care and well-being of child
 - Organisational management

Best Practice: Proposed list

- Management of Carers and Staff
 - Provision of more info on child and case work for children. (Hayden & McHugh, 2006, p. 22) (Foster Care Qld, 2012, pp. 8, 23)
 - Agencies need to balance between providing too much negative info about the child. (Geen et al, 2005, p.14)

Best Practice: Proposed list

- Management of Carers and Staff
 - Carer ability to contact a social worker and access to a specialist (Hayden & McHugh, 2006, p. 22)
 - Agencies policy regarding structure and relationships between Foster Carers and social workers must be clear to ensure there is no ambiguity. (Rodwell & Biggerstaff, 1993, p. 415) (Buehler et al, 2006, p. 541-2)

Best Practice: Proposed list

- Management of Carers and Staff
 - Carers should be educated on agency processes and timing and how decisions are made. (Geen et al, 2005, p. 14) (Foster Care Qld, 2012, p. 29)
 - Social worker's assessment of prospective carer/s home and environment is unclear and ambiguous. (Geen et al 2005, p. 15)
 - Matching of children to Foster Carer is open to uncertainty and misunderstanding. (Geen et al 2005, p. 15)

Best Practice: Proposed list

- Management of Carers and Staff
 - The decision-making authority for the foster child at home must be clarified with Foster Carers i.e. carer, foster child and biological parents may have different assigned social workers (Rodwell & Biggerstaff, 1993, p. 415) (Foster Care Qld, 2012, pp. 26, 42)
 - importance of conveying consistency of agency policies and procedures.

Best Practice: Proposed list

- Management of Carers and Staff
 - Foster Carers need to recognise porous lines that separate and connect the foster child to birth parents and foster carers. (Berrick & Skivenes, 2012, p. 1960)
 - Also important to allow child the opportunity to form strong psychological relationships with ‘at least one adult’ who is or will become their ‘psychological’ parent. (Shlonsky & Berrick, 2001, p. 73)
 - Providing support to both birth parents and child and providing info on child’s progress. (Buehler et al, 2006, p. 545)

Best Practice: Proposed list

- Management of Carers and Staff
 - Agencies and staff should inform all Foster Carers of financial entitlements (Hayden & McHugh, 2006, p. 24)
 - Use *Information Technology* to support Foster Carers. (Hayden & McHugh, 2006, p. 23)

Best Practice: Proposed list

- Provision of support to carers:
 - Foster agencies and staff should show more respect to Foster Carers. (Hayden & McHugh, 2006, p. 22)
 - Need to treat Foster Carers as part of a wider team. (Hayden & McHugh, 2006, p. 22) (Buehler et al, 2006, p. 546)

Best Practice: Proposed list

- Provision of support to carers:
 - To recruit and retain Foster Carers with good levels of remuneration, payment systems and payment for skills. (Hayden & McHugh, 2006, p. 22) (Pell, 2008, p. 22)
 - Provide respite care for Foster Carers. (Hayden & McHugh, 2006, p. 22)

Best Practice: Proposed list

- Training for carers:
 - Provide support and training for Foster Carers. (Hayden & McHugh, 2006, p. 21) (Buehler et al, 2006, pp. 549-51)
 - Training in mental healthcare. (Buehler et al, 2006, p. 537)
 - Training in social and emotional development of foster children. Carers need training in handling normative development due to constrained positive identity development of many foster children. (Buehler et al, 2006, pp. 538-9)

Best Practice: Proposed list



- Training for carers:
 - Carers must put an effort to enhance foster caring skills. (Buehler et al, 2006, pp. 542-3)

Best Practice: Proposed list

- Care & well-being of child:
 - Foster Carers and agencies should ensure the safety and physical health of the foster child (e.g. mental and dental).
(Shlonsky & Berrick, 2001, pp. 67, 68, 70)
(Buehler et al, 2006, pp. 535, 537)

Best Practice: Proposed list

- Care & well-being of child:
 - Neighbourhood conditions and dynamics should be taken into account. This can impact on the circumstances of the foster child. (Shlonksy & Berrick, 2001, p. 68).
References to low socio-economic status and educational attainment. (Buehler et al, 2006, p. 535)

Best Practice: Proposed list

- Care & well-being of child:
 - Ensure placements are supported by Foster Carer's social circle and social workers. (Hayden & McHugh, 2006, p. 22) (Shlonksy & Berrick, 2001, p. 68) (Colton, 2008, p. 871-2) (Hansen, 2007, p. 379) (Foster Care Qld, 2012, pp. 6-7)
 - That potential child placements should incorporate a recognition of developmental problems and the level of cognitive stimulation needed by the child from a specific foster carer. (Shlonksy & Berrick, 2001, pp. 72-3)

Best Practice: Proposed list

- Care & well-being of child:
 - Agencies and staff should be sensitive to racial and cultural differences.
 - Where possible a social worker with the same racial/cultural background as the Foster Carer/s, should be chosen. (Rodwell & Biggerstaff, 1993, p. 415) (Buehler et al, 2006, pp. 539-40)

Best Practice: Proposed list

- Care & well-being of child:
 - Foster Carers should attend to the experience of integrating the foster child into a new family (Berrick & Skivenes, 2012, p. 1959)
 - Foster Carers should parent their new foster child as they would their own children. (Berrick & Skivenes, 2012, p. 1959) (Buehler et al, 2006, p. 532-3)

Best Practice: Proposed list

- Care & well-being of child:
 - Foster Carers should organise intentional activities to support a foster child's transition into the new home. (Berrick & Skivenes, 2012, p. 1959) (Buehler et al, 2006, pp. 540-1)

Best Practice: Proposed list

- Care & well-being of child:
 - Foster Carers need to parent with respect and humility particularly in respect to birth parents and their acknowledgement of their unrecognised strengths. (Berrick & Skivenes, 2012, p. 1960-2) (Foster Care Qld, 2012, p. 8)
 - Foster Carers need to rationalise sympathetic reasons for the foster child to explain why he/she is in care. (Berrick & Skivenes, 2012, p. 1963)

Best Practice: Proposed list

- Care and well-being of child:
 - Foster Carers need to adopt a child-centred approach to parenting where actions and behaviours privilege the needs of the child over their own. (Berrick & Skivenes, 2012, p. 1962)
 - Foster Carers have to actively advocate for their foster child especially in relation to services and support needed by the child. (Berrick & Skivenes, 2012, p. 1962)

Best Practice: Proposed list

- Care & well-being of child:
 - Foster Carers need to recognise former maltreated children need additional support in order to attain a basic acceptable standard in adulthood. (Shlonksy & Berrick, 2001, p. 68) (Buehler et al, 2006, p. 531-2)
 - Foster Carers need to intentionally re-parent their foster child, giving them another opportunity to participate in the world differently than what they have previously done. (Berrick & Skivenes, 2012, p. 1963)

Best Practice: Proposed list



- Organisational Management:
 - Administrative backup necessary to facilitate recruitment and retention processes. (Rodwell & Biggerstaff, 1993, p. 413-4)

Conclusion

- Study uses 12 studies out of a bibliography of 35 piece literature review.
- No recognised Australian or NSW benchmark for Best Practice in Foster Care.
 - This has the potential to create a gap between research and practice knowledge.
 - A gap can lead to a breakdown to meet needs of Carers and children alike.
 - BP can potentially lift standards and horizons for all stakeholders.
 - Act as a stimulus to overall improvement to sector services.
- This is a preliminary study with more scope for expansion.

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