Building pathways of engagement as a means of strengthening families involved in the child protection system

Child Aware Approaches, Melbourne May 2015

Mary Ivec
Regulatory Institutions Network (RegNet)
Australian National University
Canberra, Australia
Overview

1. Vignettes: Amanda & Annie
2. Styles of regulatory encounters
3. Mechanisms for engagement & trust building
4. Restorative justice, responsive regulation & relational theory
Regulatory authoritarianism (Braithwaite, V. 2014)

- Regulatory harm
- Encounter with authorities traumatic
- Institutional processes which are investigative adversarial & adjudicative
- Rules not relationships are at the core
- Bureaucratized formal systems which fail to engage with other professionals & informal systems of care
- One way communication, low engagement and low trust within and between affected parties
- $3 billion per annum (AIHW 2012)
Envisioning an alternative

• Can we rethink the command and control lens and practice which characterizes most statutory child protection intervention?
• Can we have a conversation about child protection in terms of people and relationships?
Types of webs of influence

- **Webs of control**: hierarchy of power, system of rules, enforcement of rules, accountability translates into consistency, protocols, assessment tools

- **Webs of dialogue**: empowerment of participants, identification of shared values, persuasion as to how values are translated into action, recognition of needs, assistance and support

Mechanisms for engagement & trust building

Parents and Family Members Matter: A Charter of Rights and Responsibilities for Parents and Family Members with children in the care of child protection policies in Australia

Sharynne Hamilton & Valerie Braithwaite Sept 2014
Guiding Principles – in the best interest of the family

Your rights and responsibilities

• Respect
• Diversity
• Consultation and Dialogue
• Transparency and Accountability
• Strengths and weaknesses
• Privacy
Blenheim Beach, Jervis Bay, New South Wales South Coast
Key operating principles for responsive & restorative regulatory approaches

• Relationship focused – not only the individual
• participation and inclusion in processes even if decisions are not in their favour;
• subsidiarity – decisions are taken as closely as possible to the citizen
• effective communication, listening;
• respecting rights (including cultural);
• shared decision-making for solutions; and
• sustained support and time to change.
A more responsive, restorative and relational approach in child protection

• Focuses on altering child protection processes to minimise adversarial processes that can be both traumatic for the child and damaging to the relationship of the parents

• Impacts on the emotional life and on psychological wellbeing of children, their families and communities
What does it take?
What does it take?

• Creative, inspirational, strong leaders
• Developmental networks of trust
  – networks of influence
  – networks of dialogue
  – networks of persuasion
• Modelling
• Learning through doing
What sort of footprint is being left on child-parent relationships for Amanda & Annie as a result of child protection practices & interventions?
For more information

mary.ivec@anu.edu.au

http://ccb.anu.edu.au/
• be collaborative in capacity building — shared responsibility requires shared decision-making. The key to the success of many of the models of engagement is to think through all major decisions and to bring the authority for decision-making as close to the family as possible; and

• learn, evaluate and share what is learnt.
• embrace systemic approaches — multiple decision-makers and problem-solvers (networked governance) make better decisions than sole decision-makers removed from the front lines.

• community collaborations with a coalition of key and diverse partners can assist at a family or a systems level;
Effective parent and family engagement

• think in context (be it the family, the community or the wider system) and do not impose a preconceived theory;
• listen actively by engaging all stakeholders;
• be clear on what is to be expected;
• be outcome focused and problem-solving;
• build commitment by having families find their own motivations to improve;
• communicate staying power and belief that change is possible;
• engage fairly and respectfully including with dissenting voices, whose experiences can often lead to improved ways of operating;
Pyramid of engagement

- Court & legal
  - Statutory authorities
    - Foster carer/birth parent relationship
      - Parent peers / consumer advocates
        - Families
          - Individual parents, children & young people

- Practice First
- CWOP, Rise, FINA
- Home visiting
- Family drug treatment court; ABA
- Visit coaching
- FGC