

ACWA CONFERENCE

Barnardos Find-a-Family

***“DON'T EVER CONTEMPLATE A 'DULL'
STRETCH”***

Permanency Planning and the involvement of birth parents.

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Find-a-Family -

Adoption and Permanent Family Care



- ↓ ***This integrated Permanent Care and Adoption Program has been operating since 1985.***
- ↓ ***The Program only accepts referrals of children who have an order of Parental Responsibility to the Minister to the age of 18 years.***
- ↓ ***Over 320 children have found permanent families.***
- ↓ ***One third of these children have been adopted and the average age at adoption is 10 years.***

Permanency for Children in Out-of-Home Care until 18 years

- ↓ Find-a-Family specialises in services to children under 12 years on referral.*
- ↓ Find-a-Family recruits and assesses families to match with 'hard to place' children.*
- ↓ Children are almost always maintained in sibling groups and we make every effort to place with culturally appropriate carers.*

Characteristics of the Parents

- ↓ *All are highly vulnerable.*
- ↓ *Many have been in welfare care themselves.*
- ↓ *Many have mental health, D & A and disability issues.*
- ↓ *Most are economically disadvantaged and socially isolated.*
- ↓ *All have a long history within the Welfare and Court Systems.*
- ↓ *Most feel angry at the system.*
- ↓ *Many are abusive and hostile to social welfare workers.*

At the beginning.....

Barnardos only becomes involved after finalisation of long-term orders and the child is referred by the Department.

- ↓ Knowledge of family is second-hand*
- ↓ No involvement in decision-making*
- ↓ Some understanding of past areas of tension with authority figures*

Therefore, this provides opportunity for new beginnings.....

Initial contact with parents

Mixed emotions are present at the time of a permanent order - from disbelief to relief.

- ↓ Feelings of anger, powerlessness, guilt and shame*
- ↓ Anxiety about frequency of contact*
- ↓ Anxiety about role of Barnardos - will the relationship be different?*

Depending on the parent's knowledge of Barnardos in the broader context, there is a period of establishing a basis of trust and understanding.

Period of adjustment

Barnardos responds to this by providing:

- ↴ Written and verbal information*
- ↴ Consultation*
- ↴ An early meeting between the family and the new carers*
- ↴ Consistency and predictability*

Contact

The way in which contact between the parent and child is arranged is crucial in the parent's ongoing relationship with Barnardos.

- ↓ *Facilitation of the parent's positive contribution*
- ↓ *Transportation to/from visit*
- ↓ *Range of suitable venues and activities*
- ↓ *Record of the visit eg photographs*

Maintaining relationships

Barnardos relationship with the parent is to support the permanent placement, rather than in a family support role. This is achieved by

- ↓ Accommodating individual needs eg mental health/ D&A*
- ↓ Written and verbal communication*
- ↓ Providing information about the child's progress*
- ↓ Negotiation of the next visit*
- ↓ Consultation prior to LAC reviews*

Carer issues

A positive relationship between the parent and the carer can enhance the care experience for all parties. This is supported by the carer

- ↓ Being introduced to the parent as early as possible*
- ↓ Being involved in contact and providing food and activities*
- ↓ Encouraging children to acknowledge significant dates*
- ↓ Providing photographs and information between visits*

Outcomes for children

- ↓ *Enhancement of contact*
- ↓ *Facilitation of discussion between parents and their children on major issues, including adoption*
- ↓ *Acknowledging family history and identity*
- ↓ *All parties working in partnership for the best interests of children*
- ↓ *Parents agreeing to sign consent to adoption or decide not to contest the adoption*

Benefits for parents

- ↓ *Are able to play a positive role in their child's life*
- ↓ *Can work in partnership rather than as adversaries*
- ↓ *Can help train new carers*
- ↓ *Can have a more global say through being involved in research*