



THEME 9

Appropriate Policies

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Related survey items

- Workplace policies and procedures take the needs of staff members and volunteers into consideration. (Staff and Volunteer Survey #4)
- The policies of this centre reflect family support principles. (Staff and Volunteer Survey #5)
- The policies of this centre provide clear guidance and direction to staff and volunteers. (Staff and Volunteer Survey #6)

Related family support principle

- Family support programs continually seek to improve their practice by reflecting on what they do and how they do it.

Principle-based practice

Effective family support organizations use family support principles to guide the development of their vision which they then weave throughout all their policies and procedures (BCAFRP, 2004; Dunst,

1995; Gabor, 2003; Malcolmson, 2002). Kyle and Kellerman (1998) note that successful family support organizations require a common vision, a well-used statement of values and a program philosophy. More and more service systems are using family support principles and practices (Family Support America, 2002), perhaps because of current research showing that their use can result in a doubling of the size of positive effect (Layzer et al., 2001). (Family support principles are available at <http://www.frp.ca/KeyDocuments>)

Moving from principles to practice requires diligent efforts to integrate the principles into every policy, every action and every decision. This involves taking time with staff and volunteers on a continuing basis to ensure awareness, understanding and adoption of these principles (Dunst, 2004). Policies will then guide workers to focus on the family as the unit of attention, apply a strengths-based perspective, be culturally sensitive and maximize families' abilities to make decisions (Petr & Allen, 1997).

Considering the needs of staff and volunteers

Policies and procedures in family resource centres also take into account the needs of staff members and volunteers, thus avoiding possible problems with program implementation (McCurdy & Jones, 2000). The needs of workers include adequate pay, some

security of income and employment, a supportive work environment, chances for professional development and opportunities to contribute to planning and decision-making.

- **Adequate pay and job security** - It is not always possible to reflect the importance of family support work in the salaries paid to workers, however desirable this might be (BCAFRP, 2004). Family support organizations can find it difficult to retain staff when demand for services is expanding at the same time as resources are shrinking. Low staff turnover is nonetheless crucial to the creation of long-term connections between staff and the community (BCAFRP, 2004; Case, 2002).

Whatever the level of their pay, workers need to know that the organization they work for will have the funds to continue to employ them. Lack of adequate funding restricts the ability of family resource organizations to reach their potential for early intervention (Silver et al., 2005). The uncertainty of funding also tends to have a negative impact on staff morale (Kyle, & Kellerman, 1998). Finally, if the workload expands, organizations that offer lower wages and fewer benefits may experience increased staff turnover and a higher burnout rate (Kyle & Kellerman, 1998).

Organizations take the pay and job security needs of staff members into account and use a number of strategies to obtain adequate and stable core funding (Kyle & Kellerman, 1998). They apply for funding from multiple sources. They focus on longer-term stable funding (BCAFRP, 2004).

In addition, policies must provide for activities by staff members that raise the awareness of the public and governments about the work done by community family support organizations. Such advocacy initiatives aim to bring about system changes

that will increase the effectiveness of family support (Kirwin, 2001).

- **Supportive work environment** - In addition to providing sufficient pay and stable employment, family resource organizations strive to give workers a supportive work environment. In particular, they recognize the importance of policies that facilitate positive interpersonal relationships and the continuous flow of information. Procedures therefore recognize the time required to develop quality inter-disciplinary teamwork (Pilkington & Malinowski, 2002).

The creation of an integrated system requires communication across all levels of the organization, from volunteers and first-line staff to coordinators, members of the board of directors, funders and policy makers (Toronto First Duty Research Team, July 2003). Kyle and Kellerman (1998) observe that an emphasis on flexibility, accommodation for staff needs and continuous information flow can prevent staff burnout. They also point out that worker satisfaction can be increased by policies that promote clear staff roles, boundaries and job descriptions. Pleasant working conditions, opportunities for professional development and treatment with respect are some of the more important staffing practices for family support organizations (BCAFRP, 2004).

- **Professional development** - Training for staff who work directly with families is a critical feature of policy (Case, 2002; Lang & Krongard, 1999; New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2003). Well-educated workers, with knowledge and skills in family support practice, are essential to ensuring better outcomes for families (Groark et al., 2002; Family Support America, 2002). The planning process must consider staffing

requirements for each program, including adequate expertise (McCurdy & Jones, 2000). In addition to their previous professional training (for example in health, social service, or education), family support workers also require preparation in collaboration skills (Hallam, Rous, & Grove, 2005). Ideally, staff are involved in a culture of continuous improvement (Knapp-Philo et al., 2006) and understand that high-quality service is the expectation (Kyle & Kellerman, 1998).

- Contributing to planning - While an organization's board of directors is responsible for governance, programs are most effective when workers are involved in creating policies and procedures, as well as in delivering and evaluating programs (BCAFRP, 2004).

Policies that provide guidance

The guidance offered by policies and procedures must be clear to all involved and backed up with supportive and regular supervision (Groark et al., 2002; New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2003). Clear human resource policies and procedures include role descriptions, an organizational structure that promotes information flow, quality performance reviews and practices that ensure confidentiality (BCAFRP, 2004; Case, 2002; MAFRP, 2005). Relationships among staff members are strengthened when an organization's policies provide time and motivation for reflective supervision, coaching and employee self-evaluation (Malcolmson, 2002; Pilkington & Malinowski, 2002).

Family support organizations favour policies that base program planning and practice on evidence, whenever possible (for example, see <http://www.promisingpractices.net/programs.asp> or <http://www.preventiondss.org>). For example, parent education is more successful when the approach taken focusses on strengths and solid decision-making (CSSP, 2004). Effective outcomes are obtained when programs

related to children with special needs target parenting attitudes and knowledge (Layzer et al., 2001). Family resource programs that provide opportunities for peer support among parents tend to have a more significant impact on parenting attitudes and knowledge than those that don't (Layzer et al., 2001). Child maltreatment can be reduced when programs help to: 1) increase parental resilience, 2) build the social connections of parents, 3) increase knowledge of parenting and child development, 4) provide concrete supports in times of need, and 5) support the social and emotional competence of children (CSSP, 2004).

The role of evaluation

A robust evaluation process provides the feedback that validates an organization's policies and procedures and their contribution to the well-being of children, youth and families. Everyone concerned learns whether a program was implemented as planned, how well it is working and how to improve its effectiveness (Ellis, 1998; Gabor, 2003; Gilliam & Leiter, 2003). Continuous strategic planning, in line with family support principles, ensures that the organization is working towards its objectives (Pilkington & Malinowski, 2002). For this to happen, each component has clear goals with indicators for evaluation (Toronto First Duty, 2005). Successful organizations use systematic monitoring and appropriate measures of evaluation to continuously improve programs and benchmark progress, in the short and long term (Brady & Coffman, 1997; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1999; Groark et al., 2002). A conceptual framework and core indicators, based on family support principles, can also help to embed principles into the ways an organization measures both its own performance and the well-being of children and families (Dunst, 2004; Dunst & Trivette, 2005; Family Support America, 2006).

Consideration of the cost of a program is also part of determining its effectiveness (Brady & Coffman, 1997). In addition, research and community feedback forums can help maintain quality services (Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention, 1999; Kyle & Kellerman, 1998). Both staff members and participants can help evaluate the success of programs (BCAFRP, 2004; Ellis, 1998; Lopez, 2004/2005; New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2003). The complex nature of family support initiatives requires that outcome evaluation policies allow for the capture of the unique aspects of each organization. Qualitative and narrative data often prove useful (Silver et al., 2005).

Annotated References

Dunst, C. (1995). *Key characteristics and features of community-based family support programs*. Commissioned Paper II. Chicago: Family Resource Coalition, Best Practices Project.

This is a helpful overview of the broad range of paradigms and principles for family support. At the end of the article, practical checklists are provided to help staff members reflect on how their organization aligns with community-based family support principles.

Dunst, C. (2004). TrAAAvelling the TransCanada highway: Mapping the adoption, application and adherence to family support principles. *Perspectives in Family Support*. FRP Canada, 1 (1), 41-48.

Dunst describes principle-driven leadership for family resource programs. Moving from principles to practice requires diligent efforts to integrate the principles into every action taken. Being responsive to feedback from participants leads to evaluation guided by family support principles.

Dunst, C. & Trivette, C. (2005). *Measuring and Evaluating Family Support Program Quality*. Asheville, North Carolina: Winterberry Press.

The first in a series of three monographs, this publication summarizes research relating to one organization over approximately 30 years, with emphasis on measuring adherence to family support principles.

Ellis, D. (199B). *Finding our way: A participatory evaluation method for family resource programs*. Ottawa: Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs.

This practical workbook provides background and a framework required to increase participation of families and staff in the operation of family-serving organizations. A step-by-step guide through the process provides family support organizations with an excellent manual for participatory evaluation.

Gabor, P. (2003). *The Evaluation of family resource programs: Challenges and promising approaches*. Ottawa: FRP Canada.

In this report, the author describes a study of the evaluation process in family resource programs across Canada. The report also discusses the current evaluation issues in the field and suggests possible improvements, moving towards approaches that are more compatible with family support principles and practices.

New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect (2003). *Standards for prevention programs: Building success through family support*. New Jersey Department of Human Services. Retrieved March 21, 2006 from <http://www.familysupportamerica.org/downloads/FinalNJDoc11-14-03.pdf>

This New Jersey State report describes standards for prevention programs in the field of child abuse and neglect. Since they use a strengths perspective, the standards presented are useful for guiding family support organization

policy. The report also defines prevention in a family support context and provides a useful summary of factors that contribute to effective prevention programs, including best practices for universal prevention programs.

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This literature summary is one of ten that have been prepared in conjunction with the FRP Canada e-Evaluation project. Each literature summary addresses a theme or indicator from the Participant Survey or Staff and Volunteer Survey.

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