



Editor's Introduction

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Seymour J. Rosenthal, MSSW

Child welfare in the United States has been and continues to be a major arena for employment and professional practice of social workers and, as such, continues to present opportunities and challenges to continuing professional education. The journal has served as one of few venues for the academic and practice professionals to disseminate their research and practice innovations. Fortunately, additional journals are now available to provide publication opportunities for work concerned with public child welfare. However, Professional Development continues to be directed to research and innovation in professional continuing education, staff development and training, and the related area of organizational development.

State public child welfare organizations are facing ever increasing challenges. The federal government's recent review of children and family services found problems in every state. While public organizations put forth their best efforts to adequately train workers, widely considered to take up to two years of direct training and practice supervision, their best efforts are frequently defeated by workers leaving public service for other opportunities. Opportunities which now include privatized child welfare service formerly the exclusive province of public agencies. When changes in critical leadership positions, swings in public attitudes toward public child welfare services, funding crises which never abate and a belief among some social work educators that public child welfare is not professional social work are added to the issues above, preparation and retention of child welfare staff demand our serious attention.

It is to this relationship between organizational contexts and professional staff that this special issue is directed. *Volume 6 Numbers one and two* — a special double issue of the journal — marked the starting point for exploration of one critical issue in public child welfare — the issue of the role of first line supervision in worker preparation and retention and the quality of services provided to

vulnerable children and the families. The first line supervisor is the critical link between individual professionals and the organizational mission. The front line supervisory must insure that workers meet organizational demands while preserving the professional autonomy necessary to quality decision making at the case level.

Volume 6 (1 & 2) discussed the beginnings of an experiment in development and organizational change directed to improving first line supervision and service quality. The Children's Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, began the experiment by funding four Quality Improvement Centers as new structures to support the development of evidence based practice. The Southern Regional Quality Improvement Center (SRQIC) at the University of Kentucky obtained funding to test models of supervisory training which would lead to better clinical supervision and thus to worker retention and better outcomes for children and families. The SRQIC subsequently funded the projects described in our journal. That volume became one of the most requested and widely circulated in the *Journal's* history.

Now, four years later, I have asked the guest editors of that volume to again develop another special double issue to be devoted to the experiments. Dr. Paul Sundet, Professor Emeritus, and Dr. Michael Kelly, Professor, both at the University of Missouri School of Social Work have worked diligently to produce this current issue. Paul Sundet was the principal investigator and project director for the Missouri demonstration and Michael Kelly served as the project's evaluator. They have been working together in applied research projects to improve social work services for a combined total of seventy years.

Sundet is widely known for his work in juvenile justice, rural social work, and child welfare. He was the originator of the "role demonstration model of supervision" which was tested in the Missouri demonstration. Paul continues to contribute even

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though, like your editor, he is "emeritus." The SRQIC project has ended but Sundet continues to work on sustaining the innovations introduced in the demonstration project. He currently consults with the state child welfare agency on moving the best practices from the demonstration into the agency's training and development program. Most recently Sundet served as project director on a Pew Charitable Trust funded project in cooperation with the University of Illinois's Children and Family Research Center to bring data based collaboration between juvenile dependence courts and the state child welfare agency. He continues to be a sought after speaker and author.

Kelly is a long term member of the *Journal's* editorial board. He has continued his work with the Missouri's state child welfare agency and private agencies as director of the evaluation team working with privatization in several of the metropolitan circuits in Missouri. He recently continued his work with Sundet on the Pew Charitable Trust project

mentioned above and currently is a board member of the advisory committee of the national Quality Improvement Center on the Privatization of Child Welfare Services (QICPCW). The new QIC will continue the new Children's Bureau funding approach to applied research this time at the national level.

This issue presents some of the critical findings from the national evaluation of the QIC efforts and with important findings from the models of improving supervision. In addition, this issue takes a larger look at the Children's Bureau QIC efforts and links some related projects which were not part of the SRQIC efforts but provide important findings related to staff quality, training and retention.

I am gratified that we can continue to provide dissemination opportunities for the dedicated and faithful social workers serving children, their families and society in public child welfare. They truly deserve our best efforts and our grateful thanks.