THE CHANGING ROLE OF FAMILY IN CHILD AND YOUTH CARE PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT: The role of families in child and youth care practice has changed dramatically since the early days when the parents of the family were largely ignored and often considered the enemy by some child and youth care workers and their managers. With the changing perspective that the family is a system and that each member of the family is influenced by every other member, has come a change in the role, focus and activities of child and youth care workers. If the field of child and youth care is to continue in it's evolution, it is important that we understand some of the factors behind this changing perspective and the implications this may have for future practice. This article offers a brief summary of these changes in five specific areas and makes some suggestions for future training and education.

Some observations on the "family"

Before we commence our discussion on the development of a relationship between the child and youth care worker and the family of the individual with whom she works, it is worth making some comments on what the word "family" might mean in 2001. The "family" is a universal phenomenon, but varies significantly from culture to culture.

Up until very recently when one talked about the "family," one generally meant a husband and wife, living together with one or more children. In fact, the understood and accepted societal understanding of a "family" was a sexually cohabiting, economically cooperating functioning adult unit! Described thus, the "family" was considered the basic unit of our society and was recognized as such in legislation (Swift, 1995). In Manitoba, for example, the Child and Family Services Act explicitly states, "the family is the basic unit of society..." (1986). Nonetheless, Canadian and Irish society is changing dramatically. McCarthy makes the point, "there is no longer any such phenomenon as a singular, universal family form" (1995, p. 7). In the Republic of Ireland, for example, the "family" based on a heterosexual, monogamous marriage with children accounted for only 52% of all family units.

The "family" is a complex web of mores, folkways, individual histories and unique dynamics, protected, to differing extents, by legislation. The "family" is a reflection of a collective value system. Its functions have been variously described as procreation, status placement, biological and emotional maintenance and socialisation. Differences in perceptions and organisation of family life, within and between generations, are notable particularly when viewed in a comparative context. The "family" is not, as so often has been claimed, some kind of "natural," "instinctive" and "sacred" unit (Edholm, 1982, p. 177).

There is currently a debate in the United States on whether the word "family" should be replaced by the title "families" and, in Europe, "family" is now being understood more in terms of "household" and "person supporting group." This is seen as a pragmatic response to a rapidly changing social unit (McElwee, 2001). Some sociologists further theorize that the family is what any particular social group "believe it to be" (Bruggen & O' Brien, 1987). This takes into account the fact that definitions have varied over time, between cultures and even within cultures. This recognition is gradually finding its way into formal government documentation. For example, the provincial standards for the Province of Nova Scotia explicitly states, "In those situations where there is an appropriate significant other who fulfills the traditional role of family to a child/youth, then, for the purpose of these Standards and our services, these people should be considered as family" (Province of Nova Scotia, 2001). Any study of the "family" must incorporate an exploration of changing conditions and culture upon the economic and social basis of the family unit and of the interaction of the "family" in a societal context. Thus, *all the actors in the "family" have a story to tell* and it is this recognition, as much as any other factor, which has influenced the evolving Child and Youth Care approach to working with families.

A shifting focus of practice

It is now common to read in descriptions of child and youth care programs that the client population includes families, or that child and youth care programs consider themselves to be family-focused (Garfat, 2001a). Such was not always the case. A review of program descriptions from the middle of the last century (see, for example, Ohio, 1941; Redl & Wineman, 1952) would reveal that the programs were very much focused primarily on the young person. Frequently, no mention was made of family, or family involvement in the program, or with direct service staff.

There is of course, good reason for this shift in focus. Child and youth care, like most "helping" professions, has come to realize that the young person is a member of a social interacting system and that the development of the young person, and the young person's thoughts, actions, values, beliefs and experience of self occur within this system (Garfat, 1998). We have come to realize that lasting change is only facilitated when helping professionals interested in the troubled young

person are involved with the total family system (Garfat, 1998; McConkey-Radetski & Slive, 1988).

Like most changes in our field, this shift to becoming more family-focused has developed organically and one would find it impossible to define exactly when it occurred. However, what is clear is that there has been a dramatic change in how *family* and *family members* are perceived by child and youth care. As this shift in perception has occurred the role of the child and youth care worker, in terms of family involvement and engagement, has also been affected. This article briefly outlines five areas in which the shift is most particularly evident and offers some comments on the implications for training for future development in the role of youth care worker. The five areas of focus are:
- Definition of client and location of problem
- Perception of parent and purpose of contact
- Role of family members
- Role of Youth Care Worker
- Location and types of service provided

Definition of client

While the field of child and youth care has tended to shy away from the use of the word client to describe the people for whom it offers services, the term is used here for the sake of convenience. Historically, the client was the young person who had been identified by society or the social service system as in need of assistance either because of their behaviour or because they were abandoned, physically or emotionally, by their parents (see Arieli, 1991; McElwee, 2000; Pawson, 1983). The focus of the youth care workers activities was solely directed towards this young person. Usually, through basic activities of care, nurturing and control, the youth care worker concerned herself mostly with the behaviour and development of the young person. The young person was the center of the youth care worker's day.

More recently, the client of the youth care worker has become the young person and the parent(s) of that young person. While maintaining a focus on the basics of intervention with the young person, the youth care worker has also come to be concerned with the role of the parent in the young person's development as family ecology has come to permeate child and youth care practice (Pence, 1988). This has been typically manifest through an interest in the parent skills or abilities of the parent as they influence the behaviour of the young person.

With time, we have begun to see the signs of a shift in the definition of the client of child and youth care as programs have begun to expand the roles and functions of youth care workers (see, for example, Durrant, 1993; Province of Nova Scotia, 2001). It is evident from the changing nature of programs and the growing volume of national and international literature, that the future client of the child and youth care worker will

be the family, the whole family, as research demonstrates both the effectiveness and efficacy of total family involvement. Increasingly, programs employing youth care workers are responding to support those workers in developing systemic thinking, providing a range of services to the whole family, and in intervening in how the family lives together as a functioning unit. The characteristics of a child and youth care approach are being applied to thinking of, and intervening with, the family as a whole (Garfat, 2001b).

Thus, during the past 40 or 50 years child and youth care work has shifted from a position of being concerned with the care, control, nurturing and development of the young person to a position of being concerned about the whole family, and its individual members.

Perception of parent and purpose of contact

The field's perception of the parent in a family has also shifted dramatically as it has developed. In the early years, the parent was often seen as the enemy, frequently blamed for the problems of the young person by many helping professionals. As the following quote from Klein (1975) demonstrates, parents were seen as incapable and the "cause" of the problem.

Children come to treatment institutions as emissaries of malfunctioning family systems . . . They [parents] are ill-equipped to provide for the common human needs of their children (p. 240).

A typical assessment of the reason for the young person's current behavioural or emotional problems would blame the parent for the difficulties the young person was experiencing. As Hoghughi (1988) said, in reflecting on perceptions of families, *"parents play a significant part in creating and maintaining their children's problems"* (p. 19). In other cases, assessments would ignore the role of the parents completely evidencing a belief that the disturbance of the young person was independent of the context within which it had evolved. Contact between the child and youth care worker and the parent(s) was infrequent and the purpose of such was information gathering.

With time the field shifted, as did most of the mainstream helping professions, to consider more fully the interactive role of the parent in the evolution of the young person's disturbance. The interaction between the parent and the child, either in terms of early experiences or ongoing parenting history became a focus of assessment and intervention. The parent in this model was still very much seen as the cause of the young person's troubling actions. Now, however, parents, especially mothers, were not so much overtly blamed as they were seen as being deficient or as having, because of their own history, failed to develop the attributes necessary to effectively raise or parent the child (Swift, 1995). The notion of incapable parents developed, which led to the frequently justified exclusion of many parents from the lives of young people. Contact

between the child and youth care worker and the parents was more frequent and while still mainly limited to providing information, parents were beginning to be the focus of the child and youth care practitioner's work in specific areas, such as parent skills training and support (Anglin & Glossop, 1987). Contact might have had the purpose of gathering information, educating the parents and/or maintaining a linkage between the young person and the community or system to which she would be returning.

Gradually parents began to be considered as partners (Whittaker, 1979) and then as a part of a larger system, either that of their original family of origin or of their current nuclear family, as the field was influenced by the work of family therapists and systems thinkers (Kwantes, 1992). Parents are now seen as people, involved in a variety of human and life experiences. They are considered as individuals affected by the larger systems of which they are a part and within the family, for example, they are seen as people involved in relationships of love (e.g., as couples), as parents and as individuals with their own needs and experiences. In essence, the field has begun to recognize the parent as a person in his/her own right. As a result the purpose of contact with the parents has again shifted. Child and youth care workers are now in contact with parents to offer support, guidance and family intervention. Frequently the purpose of contact with the parents is to provide therapeutic services (e.g., counselling) to the parents themselves, not just in relation to the young person. This shift in thinking is not limited to residential care programs. In the Republic of Ireland, for example, a new CYC post was created called Community Child Care Worker specifically to work with the parents and families of children and young people considered to be "at risk." There are now over 80 such posts in the system. This way of working is now considered essential to "best practice."

Role of the Family

As recently as only 30 years ago, child and youth care family roles in the treatment of "troubled" and "troublesome" children were extremely limited and confined mostly to a consideration of the troubled young person and occasionally the parents. On the one hand, there was the young person whose role was that of troubled or disturbed young person. On the other hand there was the role of the parents, usually as cause of the problem. The young person's role as resident of a program and student were the primary focus. The role of the parents was limited to the creator of the young person, occasional visitor and gift giver. Parents were not seen as owning the child, rather the child "belonged" to the institution and made occasional, if any, visits home at appropriate holidays. Other family members were not typically granted a role, unless it was as "those poor other children" being raised, abandoned, or orphaned by these parents. In essence, the family, as a full family unit, was not considered. There was no role for the family as an entity, only for certain members of the family.

More recently, there was not much greater consideration given to roles of family members, with the exception that the young person had begun to be considered as a member of the treatment program, school and community. Parents, as previously mentioned, were considered as persons of some, albeit limited, influence on the young person and to some extent were considered as children of their own parents when the idea of multi-generational parenting effects was considered. They were also considered as important potential influences and visits to the youth in a program were more frequent as the system began to recognize the rights of parents to be involved in the lives of their children. To some extent, as well, parents were considered as having a role in contributing to the intervention or treatment plans of the young person through, typically, recommendations for, or approval of, the areas of focus (see, for example, Garfat 1990). Other family members were still not considered as important players. Thus the family, as a whole, remained without a role in the treatment of the child, except in the sense that family, during this time, was more likely to be considered as context, as we began to consider the child "in the context" of her family.

Now it is more common for the whole family to be considered in the role of client as staff concern themselves with the dynamics of interaction, roles, and positions of all the members of the family in the systems of which they are a part (Durrant, 1993; Barnardos, 1998). Parents are seen as members of an established community and interventions are directed towards the parents, involvement in that community. Couples are considered both as parents and as partners. Parents are frequently seen as collaborators in the development of intervention plans and daily interventions and other children in the family are seen as the potential recipients of services from child and youth care workers (Garfat, 1988). In the Republic of Ireland, this is now standard practice in all residential child care units. No care plans are developed without the input of parents. Children in care now receive care plan booklets informing them that their relationship with their parents is welcome and valued by the child and youth care workers (McElwee, 2000). The situation in Nova Scotia and many other Canadian provinces is the same. The child and youth care worker has become an advocate for change in how the family of the client is contacted and engaged with.

In summary, family members are actively involved in all aspects of a program and all family members are considered for their potential role as co-helpers. The family, as an interacting, dynamic system is considered by many of the more advanced child and youth care programs to be the client, not just the context.

Role of the Youth Care Worker

In the early 1950s the role of the child and youth care worker was clearly defined within limited roles, limited to interactions with the youth. The child and youth care worker was seen as the person responsible for the

basic care, nurturing and development of the young person. In many areas, the child and youth care worker was seen as the conveyor of society's values and they were expected to help the young person develop those values (See Arieli, 1991; Fewster & Garfat, 1993). They were responsible for control, guidance, and behaviour change for the young person primarily in the residential community. The child and youth care workers were typically considered as substitute parents, responsible, as well for running the house for raising the children. This limited role, restricted to the inside of the institution, encouraged child and youth care workers to continue to think of themselves as replacing the parents in all areas.

As previously noted, the child and youth care worker shifted from this role of substitute parent. The child and youth care worker became concerned with the *quality* of the interaction between parent and child and so the worker became an educator of parents in the areas of parenting skills, youth development and child-raising. Still considering in many was that the parent was responsible for the current state or status of the young person, the role of the child and youth care worker as educator was to help the parents change their own problematic behaviours in relation to the young person.

More recently we have seen a change in focus, which has taken the child and youth care worker into new roles and areas (Garfat, 1991). As Anglin (1984) pointed out, the role of the youth care worker was shifting to one of facilitator of the relationship between parent and youth. In other areas as well, the child and youth care worker has gradually developed the role of facilitator; between the young person and the systems of which he is a part; between the young person and other young people; between the other family members and the systems of which they are a part and between the various family members. In this, the role of the child and youth care worker has shifted to that of systems interventionist, representing a belief that young people are a part of a human social system and that changes for the young person will involve changes in those systems and/or others within those systems as well as how the young person interacts with them. In essence, the overall shift in role has been from caretaker, to caregiver to systemic interventionist.

Location of service

Along with the changing roles, perceptions and client definition, has come a change in not only what the child and youth care worker does, but where that activity occurs. It is obvious, for example, that in the early stages of the development of child and youth care work, the location of the practitioner's work was in the residential center. There was some very limited involvement in the areas of school, work or community but this was infrequent and usually limited to arranging placement, employment, or subscription in clubs.

Later the child and youth care worker began to move out into the community and become more involved in offering services in schools or the community. It was not common, but not rare, to find youth care workers based in schools, community clubs or even hospitals (see Denholm, Ferguson & Pence, 1993 for further examples of the expanding locations of service). Work with the family, however, was still very much located in the residential center, the school, or the particular program in which the youth care worker was employed. While families were more involved in the life of the program (Garfat, 1990), staff were not very involved in working with families in the family's environment.

More recently in more developed programs, child and youth care workers have begun to be involved with families in the areas in which they live their lives. The child and youth care worker may be found in the community with the family, as a family advocate, or in the family home, helping family members to live their lives differently in the areas in which they actually live it (Garfat, 2001b). More and more we find programs whose *base* is the family home. Child and youth care workers have moved from working with young people to working with young people and their families.

Table 1 offers a summary of the main points made in the foregoing. For the sake of clarity, the various developments have been divided into beginning, past and recent/future time periods.

See table on following page.

Table 1: Changes Over TIme

	Beginning	Past	Recent / Future
Definition of Client and Location of Problem	• child	• child / parents	• family system
Perception of Parent and Purpose of Contact	• irrelevant; the enemy • blaming; information sharing	• parental incompetence • program input; education; support	• person/ individual as a part of systems • collaboration, relationship, intervention into daily life
Role of Family Members	• none, occasional visitor	• parenting, contact, input into IIP, recipient of support	• client, co-helper, input into daily decision-making
Role of Youth Care Worker	• parent substitute: control, protection of child from parents	• parent support: protection, parent educator, behaviour, change, connection	• family interventionist: engagement, out-reach, facilitation
Location of Service	• none for parents	• in program, community	• in home, community and program

Implications for Education and Training for Future Development

Inherent in the foregoing are implications for the future development of the field as child and youth care moves further into the area of working with families and as the shift continues from residential-based to community and especially in-home-based approaches to working with families in which the child and youth care worker assumes the role of interventionist, not just educator. It is obvious that this is a shift which, now begun, will continue. If child and youth care workers are to continue this movement and become effective family interventionists, certain areas of education and training are needed. These include:

- systems thinking and intervention
- family development and dynamics

- the translation of a child and youth care approach into the area of working with families
- working independently in the home or community
- ways of engaging with families and individual family members
- the inclusion of family values into service programs
- self-awareness in the area of family work
- shifting the perception of family
- redefining the role of child and youth care worker

While there are obviously numerous other areas in which child and youth care workers need education and training, if this shift is to continue, child and youth care workers will need support in moving from the program to the family environment. It is true that there are many skills and much knowledge from the typical residential environment, for example, which are applicable to family work. It is also true that there are many characteristics of working in this environment which are not applicable to family work. We need to look at the areas in which child and youth care workers are currently employed and decide which additional skills and knowledge are required to support them in making this shift.

There has begun to evolve a specific child and youth care approach to working with families based on the child and youth care orientation to change (Garfat, 2001b). It is this evolving approach which will allow the child and youth care worker to become more effective in working with families, while at the same time, maintaining the uniqueness of the child and youth care way. To assume that there is no difference between working with families and working with individual youth, or youth and parents, is to invite failure in this evolving area.

As the definition and role of family in society has changed, so has the role of child and youth care worker in relation to the family. This article has briefly outlined five areas in which the shift from a focus on individuals to a focus on families in child and youth care work. Hopefully, it has offered some food for thought for those programs considering future expansion in the role of child and youth care worker from an individual to a family focus.

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