Establishing a Permanent Placement Through Therapeutic Practice

Martina Bernal, Psychology B.A. Candidate
California State University, Stanislaus

Introduction

I am examining the foster care system in order to determine a therapist's role in such an environment. I am curious about their role because I want to figure out if adding an involved therapist to each child's case would help speed the process of reunification/adoption.

Many foster children have a hard time adapting to the outside world after foster care and I am hoping that with the help of a therapist the child can bring stability into their lives. About 75% of children who remain in foster care will end up dropping out of high school. This statistic is far too large and I believe therapeutic involvement will help lower it.

Research Question

- Will more interaction with a therapist increase the likelihood of reunification or adoption for foster children?
- Why would more therapeutic involvement be beneficial for a foster child?
- How can we get a foster child the right therapeutic help appropriate for them?

Although placement is a key goal when dealing with foster children, I believe adding therapeutic help would increase their chances of staying in their placement as well as being able to start to function like a normal child instead of having to worry about the legal process that comes with being in foster care.

Background and Literature Review

There are several programs already in place that involve a therapeutic relationship. These programs steer away from a deadline driven model to one that focuses on the emotional stability of the child. Some programs include:

- The Treatment/Therapeutic Foster Care Program: This program introduces co-parenting with a seasoned foster parent and the biological parent in order to establish better parenting skills. Together they evaluate what the best route for the child is.
- The Family Group Decision Making Model: After the withdrawal of the child, parents meet with a therapist, foster parent and if necessary the child/children to discuss the child’s safety, permanency, and well-being.

Although there is therapist involvement with foster children, the therapist typically has minimal power within the larger foster care system. The programs above are a start but much more needs to be done in order to achieve more progress.

Methods

Study of journal articles and legal documents will be used in order to get a better picture of how the foster care system functions. Once an established image is set, interviews will be conducted in order to gain opinions on whether or not such actions of adding therapists would be beneficial.

Interview personnel will include therapists, social workers, and people who were previously in foster care. The interviews conducted will explore personal experiences with the foster care system as well as personal feelings towards the involvement of therapists.

Expected Results

Through this research I hope to find strong evidence that therapists are needed and that they do in fact help establish a faster placement. I also hope to find a way to establish a program to encourage more therapy for children in the foster care system. By assigning a therapist to each foster child, I hope to bring stability into their lives so that their placement could become permanent. I hope that through the help of the therapist, the child will not have to return to the foster care system.

Significance

By implanting therapists I hope to improve the negative feelings that are created when in the foster care system. It is not easy to be separated from one’s family and being dealt with in terms of deadlines and mandates could not be easy for a child who is experiencing something new and strange. The young mind is a fragile one and if damage is done with no help or guidance than that child could remain damaged forever. It is easier to build up and guide a young child than it is to repair a damaged adult.

Through this research I want to see an increase in high school graduation for foster children. I want to see an increase of importance to the role of therapists as well as the increase of awareness of the importance of mental health. Most of all I want to see children who are not failed by the system they trust in when things do not go according to plan.