

❖ PREFACE

Almost three decades ago, Joan Laird and Ann Hartman reminded us that “every society at every time must make some provision for its children in need” (1985:xvi–xvii). When Laird and Hartman, the editors of what many child welfare professionals believe to be a seminal text on child welfare, *A Handbook of Child Welfare: Context, Knowledge and Practice*, wrote this, the field of child welfare was determinedly implementing a new federal mandate that outlined such provisions. The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (P.L. 96-272) identified a range of management and practice requirements intended to prevent the unnecessary placement of children and to reunify families when placement could not be prevented. Laird and Hartman’s *Handbook of Child Welfare* outlined the philosophical underpinnings as well as the policy and practice emphases of that period; it provided detailed discussions that shaped the understanding and commitments of numerous cohorts of students who subsequently entered practice in the field. As coeditors of this volume, it is important for us to acknowledge the influence Laird and Hartman’s text has had in our teaching, in our professional child welfare practice, and in our development of the first, and now second, edition of this text. Our work has been inspired by, yet differed from, that seminal work.

Since 1985, when Laird and Hartman collected the essays in their volume, child welfare as an institution and a field of practice has continued to experience transformation in the provisions for its children, youth, and families in need. Despite the hope associated with the passage of the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act, the field has struggled during the intervening years with insufficient funding, increased public concerns about the safety of children, instability in the public child welfare

workforce, and generally disappointing outcomes with regard to achieving permanency for children and youth who entered care. Throughout the country, stresses within and upon the child welfare system have kept many state agencies on the defensive and in the news. As reflected throughout this second edition, many changes continue to occur in practice and in ideological and planning orientations. Change has perhaps most vividly been seen in the primary legislation that forms the current foundation of child welfare policy in the U.S.: the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA; P.L. 105-89) and, more recently (2008), in the opportunities for further reform provided by the passage of Fostering Connection to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (P.L. 110-351). Safety, permanency, and well-being of children, youth, and their families form the foundation for the ASFA legislation that replaced the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, P.L. 96-272). These principles have been affirmed and further bolstered by Fostering Connections. Both ASFA and Fostering Connections put into place legislative provisions to ensure that child safety is the paramount concern in all child welfare decision making, shorten the time frames for making permanency planning decisions, and promote the adoption of children and youth who cannot safely return to their own homes. These legislative acts also require a focus on positive results for children, youth, and families and promote the strengthening of partnerships between child welfare agencies and other service delivery systems to support families at the community level.

During the first decade of the twenty-first century, numerous changes have taken place in national child welfare outcomes and contextual factors. Some of these are hopeful, such as the decreased numbers of children in out-of-home placements between FYs 2002 and 2011, 523,000 to 401,000, a change of 23.3 percent (Children's Bureau 2013a:2), and a decline in numbers of children in foster care for all major

non-Hispanic race groups (Administration on Children, Youth, and Families 2013:1). Other changes are discouraging, such as CFSR findings that many states that reunified children with their families in a more timely manner between 2008 and 2011 also had a high percentage of children who reentered foster care within 12 months of the reunification (Children's Bureau 2013a: 4, 6). Although during this same period (2008–2011) 24 percent of states improved in performance regarding reunification of children with their families within 12 months of the child's placement, 29 percent of states declined in performance regarding children's reentry into care within 12 months of reunification (2013b:36). Summaries of recent national child welfare demographics and outcomes can be found at the cited websites.

Recognizing the significance of these multiple and complex changes, but especially attentive to the increasingly felt influence of both ASFA and Fostering Connections on child welfare policy, programs, and practice, we have again utilized safety, permanency, and well-being as the conceptual framework for the second edition of this volume. We believe that this framework has permitted our contributors to thoroughly examine both the explicit and subtle challenges in and opportunities for improving child welfare practice and to offer practice and policy guidelines that fall within the broad strokes of the ASFA and Fostering Connections decision-making framework.

We asked our contributors to outline the major assumptions and values of child welfare today in the twenty-first century and to identify and elaborate the expanding knowledge that currently supports practice in a wide range of areas relevant to the field. Contributors have also reviewed recent research as well as the ever-increasing body of literature, which has grown exponentially since the introduction of word processing and the Internet.

Even as the contributors have been writing their chapters, the states and the U.S. Children's Bureau have been engaged in an extensive

review process that has now been completed. The findings from the first two rounds of fifty-two Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs), which have been integrated into the chapters where relevant, provide additional information regarding the current strengths and concerns of child welfare, thereby further informing the agenda for change efforts in the future. (See Children's Bureau 2013b for median state performance and change in performance over time 2008–2011 as well as each state's performance relevant to the seven national child welfare outcomes.) As of this writing the third round of Child and Family Services Reviews has not yet been scheduled.

Both of us, like Laird and Hartman (1985:xxiii), subscribe to an ecological perspective. This perspective provides an excellent framework for understanding and evaluating the nature of social and institutional responses to children, youth, and families in need. Further, we both believe that it is important to stress the importance of family-centeredness in child welfare as well as the need to support and meaningfully engage families. The concepts "family-centered practice" and "permanency planning" are infused throughout this text, thereby acknowledging the complex reality that, while a family is the best place in which children and youth can grow up, families of origin, for some, may be neither safe nor nurturing. Providing as much support as possible to birth families to assist them in being safe and nurturing permanent caregivers for their children, while at the same time planning for another permanency option if these efforts are not successful ("concurrent planning"), must be accomplished through a family-centered orientation. Further, we know that, when planning for another option, we reflect the family-centeredness of our practice by seeking the optimal connection a child can have to family, culture, and community. A text that integrates family-centered practice with the goal of permanence makes a statement that strengthening and supporting all families—birth, adoptive, kinship,

guardian, and resource or foster—is the best way to ensure children and youth's timely permanence, stability, safety, and continuity in family relationships.

Through its provisions, ASFA, which has been strengthened by Fostering Connections, legally reinforces the linkage between families and positive outcomes for children and youth. Although it places the safety of children and youth first, it also provides a framework for child welfare practice that requires strengthening family preservation and family support services to prevent children from being removed from their families, maintaining a commitment to agencies undertaking reasonable efforts to preserve families, encouraging concurrent planning to ensure permanency through either reunification or another permanent placement within shorter time frames, and encouraging the initiation of permanency planning efforts as a child and the child's family has an initial contact with the child welfare system. Almost seventeen years since the passage of ASFA, and five since the passage of Fostering Connections, child welfare practitioners continue working to change their policies and practices to better serve children, youth, and families, while striving to comply with complex legal mandates of other child welfare legislation. An urgent need remains to strengthen the capacity of child welfare practitioners to integrate policy and practices that are designed to increase accountability and demonstrate systemic improvement in services and outcomes for children, youth, and families.

Another orientation that guides our work is that of evidence-based practices (Gambrell 2003; Roberts & Yeager 2006; Wodarski & Hopson 2011). Over the past twenty years, this orientation has increasingly permeated child welfare in ways that have moved the field in new directions. We asked contributors to acknowledge and identify not only promising approaches to child welfare practice but also those practices that are grounded in empirical evidence. In doing so, some contributors have

referenced online resources have been developed to assist child welfare professionals and consumers in identifying evidence-based programs and practices. These include the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP), which is a searchable online database of mental health and substance abuse interventions initiated in 2007 and maintained by the United States Department of Health and Human Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). NREPP is accessed at <http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/Index.aspx>. At www.homevee.acf.hhs.gov, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has launched Home Visiting Evidence of Effectiveness (Home VEE), which provides an assessment of the evidence of effectiveness for home visiting program models that target families with pregnant women and children from birth to age 5, including programs designed to prevent child maltreatment. Another resource, the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare (CEBC), informs the child welfare community about the research evidence for programs being used or marketed in California. Accessed at www.cebc4cw.org, the CEBC also lists programs outside California recommended by a topic expert.

The profession of social work, as well as society more broadly, is placing greater emphasis on evaluating to what degree identifiable outcomes have been achieved; that value on outcomes extends to the field of child welfare. We therefore asked our contributors to address the significant value and ethical issues relevant to their discussions.

With safety, permanence, and well-being as the organizing and guiding principles, this second edition of the text provides a framework for examining child welfare practices and policies in twenty-first century. Within this framework there are clearly differences of perspective among our authors. The field of child, youth, and family services as well as, indeed, the social work profession embrace a wide array of diverse perspectives and practices. While every

edited volume should have a unifying framework to provide structure for the authors and for the readers, it has been our intention that diverse perspectives and practices be incorporated as well.

In Part 1, a historical and legislative overview of child welfare, grounds the text in time and place and provides elements of context critical to all subsequent parts of the volume.

Part 2 explores and examines the varied perspectives that frame what is currently known about child and adolescent well-being. Although safety is given prominence in ASFA legislation and language, we have intentionally situated the initial focus on child and adolescent well-being, which some have argued was the intent of the Fostering Connections Act. Philosophically, we believe that, without adequate attention to well-being, there is a weakening of the foundation for both safety and permanency and important developmental issues will be disregarded. The chapters in part 2 provide a needs-based approach to understanding experiences and services that support well-being. The first chapters address the broader issues of this area, beginning with an in-depth examination grounded in resilience of family support in communities followed by assessment and meaningful engagement of families with children and youth. The section then addresses the various realms of children's and youth's health; child, adolescent, and family mental health; and educational needs. The section concludes with a range of well-being-oriented issues focusing on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans (LGBT) youth and their families and runaway and homeless youth.

Part 3 examines and explores the critical issues pertaining to child and adolescent safety. Drawing from the theoretical literature, research, and best practices in the area of child maltreatment, this section begins with an overview of the salient issues pertaining to prevention of physical abuse and neglect; it then moves into extensive discussions in the areas of child protection and child and youth at risk. Part 3

also provides a comprehensive overview of the policies, practices, and research that provide a foundation for family preservation services and sexual abuse policy and practice.

Over the past two decades, the field of child welfare has recognized the need to develop programs and practice approaches that address particular problems that increasingly place large numbers of children and youth at risk of placement outside their homes. Therefore, part 3 concludes with comprehensive reviews of the practices, policies, and research as these apply to two critical problems confronted daily in serving children, youth, and families: substance abuse and domestic violence.

Part 4 is devoted to a wide array of issues related to permanency for children and youth. This section provides an extensive overview of each major permanency goal—Reunification, Kinship, Guardianship, Adoption, Customary Adoption, and Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA)—and on the primary types of out-of-home placement settings. These include foster family care, relative care, and residential programs. Other content areas

relevant to the selection and achievement of permanency goals as well as to understanding appropriate placements for children and youth are explored in this section. These include sibling connections, adoption disruption, youth development, family visits, and postpermanency services.

The volume concludes with a view of the systemic issues that affect children, youth, and family services. The chapters in part 4 focus on practice-related systemic issues, including placement stability, recruitment and retention of foster families, the role of courts and the legal system in child welfare, the child welfare workforce, and supervision. Attention to other systemic issues follows, including research and evaluation, the process and outcomes of the federal Child and Family Services Reviews, and the roles of continuous quality improvement and accreditation in child welfare. The overrepresentation of children and youth of color, father involvement in child welfare services, and issues relating to immigration complete this section.

Each part of the text is preceded by an introduction to its organization and its authors.

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