



Fact Sheet N° 5

A global policy for Children and the Family

ELABORATING A PERMANENCY PLAN: GETTING TO KNOW THE REALITY OF THE CHILD IN RELATION TO HIS/HER FAMILY OF ORIGIN

The knowledge of the family of origin and its relationship with the child is fundamental for elaborating a permanency plan in the best interests of the child and in respect for the family. However, if the permanency plan decided upon for the child is not reintegration in the family but another type of project (adoption, foster home or a residential institution), it is important to know that international experience shows that a great number of people are required to know, like any other person, his/her history and origin in order to rebuild his/her identity, as well as his/her psychological and social balance. For that it is of paramount importance to have data available about his/her history, origin, family, including health disorders existent in the biological family.

Identifying instances of vulnerability

In the first place the child should be cared for by the parents and only as a contingency in the absence of care or when the care they can give him/her is inadequate should protective measures be taken. Such instances are called vulnerability cases and some of the main indicators are maltreatment and abandonment. Once the presumption of vulnerability is established by detecting risks, or strictly speaking, defencelessness, the main issue the social worker should deal with is verification of the facts and gathering information in an effort to understand the child's *reality, the conditions that he/she lives in and the context in which they occur.* The sort of information which should be collected is as follows:

With regard to the child: his/her behaviour and type of activity; level of development achieved; interactions with the parent(s) and other relatives; interaction with brothers and sisters.

With regard to parents: level of awareness of the child's needs. How do they react to the requests and demands of the child? How and with what in

mind do they begin to interact with the child? How do they set limits and impose discipline on the child? How do they manage stress? Do they look for or reject the support of their family, their friends or professionals?

With regard to the family and community environment: the child's interaction with the extended family; the child's interaction with other adults; his/her interaction with peers. Does the child have adequate stimulation in his/her environment? Is his/her security assured in his/her life style? What possibilities are there for help for the parents and the child?

Evaluation criteria

To acquire an adequate knowledge of the child's family and of the kind of options that it might be offered, the study in its entirety should respond to a multidisciplinary approach *so that criteria stemming from various different disciplines may be considered.*

Criteria stemming from social work : The socio-economic circumstances of the family, the state of their accommodation, the level of education,

employment situation, social environment in which the family lives, its social networks, the service networks of the community, the family dynamics.

Criteria stemming from psychology: The relational patterns built up between different members of the family, the awareness of the problems by members of the family, the significance of the difficulties for each member and for the family as a whole, positive elements that could bring about change in the family's references. The family member's openness to change and to the support of professionals.

Criteria stemming from the law: Analysis of the legal interventions that the family has

experienced, checking the legal relations between the members of the family.

The family is not an independent statistical structure. It is subject to the *influences of the context* (cultural influence of society, economic conditions, urban or rural environment, religion, specific employment or unemployment circumstances among the members of the family, relations with neighbours, etc.). Knowledge and analysis of this environment that surrounds and conditions them will provide us with valuable information, about their present reality and their prospects for future development.

For further information:

ISS/IRC, *Focus on the Family of origin: Knowing it Better to Improve National and Inter-country Adoption Practice*, Documentation Review, Geneva, ISS/IRC, 2004, 10 pp.

HERST Beth (Ed.), *Permanency Planning in the Child Welfare System*, Canada, Sparrow Lake Alliance, 2002, 187 pp.

CHILD WELFARE LEAGUE OF CANADA, "From Permanency Planning to Family Preservation", *Canada's Children*, N° 1, Vol. 2, 1995, 32 pp.

We are interested in your opinion! To tell us your experiences, ask us your questions about the themes addressed in this file, or to send us your suggestions for changes, don't hesitate to write to us at irc-cir@iss-ssi.org. We also invite you to share this file with other interested persons in your country. Thanks in advance!

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