



# Some Approaches Used by Child Welfare Agencies To Help Families Reach Their Goals

## The Voices of Darren's Mom, Kate, and Foster Mom, Sally

*(continued from Section 7, page 64)*

### **Darren's Mom, Kate**

Darren is the one who has benefited the most from the way that Sally and I work together. Sally never tried to replace me in Darren's life. She told him that he couldn't be with me because I was sick and was trying to get better. She let me become very involved in Darren's life while he lived in her home, and she came to every court hearing with me. She didn't let him call her mom, it was Mom Sally or just Sally. Now that he is living with me, he calls her Aunt Sally.

Darren has been home for 5 years. He is now 10 years old, and Sally is still a part of our lives. Darren has ADHD\* and goes for a lot of treatment and doctor's appointments. Sally has a medical background so she comes with us on these appointments and for IEP\*\* meetings at school. She knows what questions to ask.

### **Foster Mom, Sally:**

Kate allows me to co-parent Darren, even after he returned to her home. We have the benefits of co-parenting without having to go through a marriage and a divorce. Darren goes with me on my summer vacation. He

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\*Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

\*\*Individualized Education Program

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visits with me one night a week, and he also visits my parents, his "adopted grandparents," at Christmas time. He gets to spend Christmas with two families. Kate and I usually do Easter together.

**Darren's Mom, Kate**

When Darren lived with Sally, we tried to have the same rules for him so he wouldn't be confused. When he came to visit me, I tried to keep the same routine and rules that Sally had established. The three of us went to counseling together. This helped ease the transition for Darren. Now that Darren is older, we are more flexible. He can understand that he has to follow Sally's rules at her house, and my rules in my house. When Darren first came home, I called Sally a lot, probably too much. But I gradually began to have confidence in myself and called less.

**Foster Mom, Sally**

This story is about Darren, not about us. As Kate said, Darren is the one who has benefited the most from our working together. He has not had to leave behind any of the people that he has grown up with. He has a larger extended family than he would have had. He was a troubled little boy when he came into foster care at 2½ years old. He had hearing and speech problems, night terrors, and couldn't be contained for a very long period of time. But he was always loving and smiling.

**Darren's Mom, Kate**

Now Darren is on the honor roll, he plays tuba in the band, and he is on the safety patrol. He is developing self-confidence and social skills. He's also working on building his chest muscles and slimming down his waist.

**Foster Mom, Sally**

I think that Kate and I were able to do this because of who we are and how we were raised. I was raised to believe that every person is valuable and that I should embrace the good part and try to help change the not good part. My years of experience in public health also helped me. I marvel at Kate's willingness to let me be so much a part of Darren's life.

**Darren's Mom, Kate**

I always knew that Sally had Darren's best interests in her heart and that she was working with me and not against me. I knew what I had to do to get Darren back home. Sally didn't make me do any of these things, but she supported all of my efforts.

## What is discussed in this concluding chapter?

So far, *A Family's Guide* has described the nuts and bolts of how the child welfare system works. It has also discussed federal laws that guide the child welfare system. In this final chapter, we will introduce you to some of the approaches that the federal government, states and communities have been using to make the child welfare system work better and to help families reach their goals.

## What values and principles are these approaches based on?

Before we list the approaches, we want you to know that most of them are based on similar values and principles. Even though these approaches may have different names or work a little differently in each community, most of them share the values and principles listed below:

- parents say what help they need to protect their children from abuse and neglect, and the agency listens—services are “family driven”
- families are involved in planning the services they will receive
- services focus on each family’s strengths, instead of weaknesses—building on strengths helps families keep children at home or reunify if their children have been placed out of the home
- services are provided as close to home as possible—they are “community based”
- the whole family is provided the services they need, not just the child(ren) in foster care
- services are flexible and can be changed to fit each individual family
- services consider each family’s culture—they are “culturally competent”
- the family chooses the people to be involved in the service plan—this could be extended family members, neighbors, friends, ministers, or others from the community
- foster parents and birth parents work together
- all the child-serving systems involved with children and families work together—they “collaborate”
- services from different agencies are coordinated to reduce confusion for families—one service plan is developed—so everyone is “on the same page”
- families and youth who are involved in the child welfare system express their opinions about how the system works and offer suggestions for improvement when needed
- sometimes different agencies combine resources to better serve and help families—this might be called “blended funding”

## What are the names of some of the approaches that are based on these principles?

Some of the approaches being used in different parts of the country include the following:

- family centered practice
- family mediation
- family group decision making (sometimes called family group conferencing)
- family-to-family initiatives or partnerships
- child and family teams
- the wraparound process
- systems of care
- community collaboratives for child protection.

## How do these approaches work?

Child welfare systems find that children can be better protected if the full community and the family help provide for the safety of children. They have begun to involve families and other members of the community in more meaningful ways.

We will use the family-to-family initiative as an example. The family voices at the beginning of this section (Darren's mom and foster mom) demonstrate one aspect of this approach. If a community uses a family-to-family approach, foster and birth parents work together to support each other. You can see how helpful it was when Darren's mom and Sally, the foster parent, began working together as a team. Together they were able to ensure Darren's safety and well-being. Eventually, Darren was able to return home to live permanently.

## Where can I get more information about these approaches?

The section, *Terms You May Want to Know*, at the back of the *Guide* has definitions of the approaches that are listed above.

## Has the Federal government encouraged these approaches in states and communities?

Yes. The federal government has done this in several ways. Here are two examples:

- One way is by helping states to improve their child welfare programs. In 2001, a process called the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR) was started. The CFSR process requires states first to study how their child welfare systems are working. Then there is an on-site review. This means that a team of people

(some from the federal government) visits the state. They will read the records and talk with families, agency staff, and other people who are involved with a sample of 50 children in the state. The state must meet certain standards. Based on what the team finds, the state has to develop a plan to make improvements that are needed. States are supposed to involve families in this process.

The CFSR process supports the following:

- family-centered practice
  - services for children in their own homes—or at least near their own homes
  - offering services that are based on each family’s needs
  - helping parents to provide for their children’s needs
- Another way is by offering federal funds to states, communities, and Indian Tribes to develop *community-based systems of care* to serve children who have emotional and mental health problems. These systems of care involve many of the systems that your child might be involved with, for example the child welfare system, the courts, the mental health system, and the school system.

## How can I help make improvements in the child welfare system?

In the approaches listed above, families are encouraged to express their views on how the child welfare system is working. When you feel that you are ready, you can start by asking the agency worker if there is an opportunity to fill out a satisfaction survey or to participate in a focus group. You can express your interest in becoming a member of an advisory group that meets with agency staff.

Many communities have parent associations and/or family-run organizations that you can join. As a member of such a group you will have a group voice. Both parent associations and family-run organizations offer support to families and advocate for improvement in service systems.

### Practical Tips for Families

- ✓ Check with your agency worker or a family organization in your community to find out if any of the approaches mentioned above in this Section are available in your community. (See the section on *Helpful Resources* at the back of this *Guide* for information about national family and parent organizations.)
- ✓ If you learn about an approach that appeals to you, ask if it can be considered for your family.
- ✓ When you are ready, you might want to consider joining a parent organization where you can have input into how services are delivered in the child welfare system. You can help advocate for more resources and also help other families like yourself.
- ✓ Remember that the child welfare system, the court, and your family usually have the same goal—to help your family live together safely, successfully, and permanently.

## Thelma's Voice

*(continued from Section 2, page 13)*

All stories that involve abuse and placement don't have sad endings. Often the child welfare system's interventions help families move to a better place. Certainly, the process is painful, long, and grueling. As I look back on the events that occurred, I know that I am a better mother and my children are better for the time spent on fixing past wounds. These wounds were impeding my chance to be the "good mother" that I desperately want to be.

Shortly after my son was placed into care, our caseworker offered the option of having a service called Family Preservation Service (FPS) as a method of returning my son home. We, of course, agreed to the 24-hour a week intervention so that my son could come home. The service began with an intake meeting where the therapist and her supervisor visited our home to assess our needs. The supervisor became my individual therapist at the end of the FPS intervention. Three years later, I had finally worked through the root of my issues, that being the incest in my own childhood. The thing that was impacting most on my ability to be an effective parent was the fact that I had not experienced good parenting myself. Having never been protected, I had no idea of how to protect my children. Having had a mother that ignored her husband's behavior, I learned to ignore my husband's behavior.

Although, I certainly wished that I had not had to endure the pain and trauma that resulted from the involvement of the child welfare agency, it did in fact help me change my behaviors and become a mother capable of protecting and nurturing my children. I was forced to reconcile my past in order to move forward to a brighter future. I had to recognize that it wasn't about my children's behavior; it was about my behavior and the changes I needed to make. I am better, and now they are better for it.

### Parents' Notes

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### Specific Information about Your State

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