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INTRODUCTION

0.1 Impact of social and economic conditions on children and their families

Social and economic conditions are severely affecting the quality of life for children, young people, and their families, and have heightened the need for child welfare services, including family foster care.

Children, young people, and their families are increasingly experiencing the negative effects of social and economic conditions. Societal stresses include unemployment, poverty, racism, alcohol and drug abuse, violence, and neighborhood and community deterioration. Economic stresses can involve the loss of a job, business difficulties, or the impaired ability to earn a living because of chemical dependency, mental or physical illness, or other disability.

The quality of life for children and their families in the United States has deteriorated over the last decade. Communities of color, in particular, have been affected. In 1991, 24% of children under age six lived in poverty, a higher percentage than for any other age group. Thirty-two percent of these children were children of color [National Center for Children in Poverty 1993]. In 1992, almost 22% of children under age 18 lived in poverty [Children's Defense Fund 1994].

Children continue to suffer abuse and neglect in alarming numbers. Between 1976 and 1992, the number of reports of

child abuse and neglect increased 333% [Child Welfare League of America 1994]. Widening abuse of alcohol and other drugs by family members has exacerbated child abuse and neglect, which affects all children, and especially those exposed prenatally to alcohol and other drugs [National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse 1994]. Very young children constitute a growing population coming to the attention of the child welfare system, in large part due to parental chemical dependency, and many of these children enter the out-of-home care system [U.S. General Accounting Office 1991]. At the same time, the number of economically and emotionally willing and able foster parents has decreased, dropping from 147,000 in the 1980s to approximately 100,000 in 1992 [National Commission on Family Foster Care 1991].

0.2 Making children and families the centerpiece of public policy

A comprehensive national plan for children and their families should be established in the United States and Canada to encourage the healthy development of all children and their families.

The healthy development of all children and their families should be a national goal, and efforts to achieve that goal should be organized and strategically planned. A national child and family policy should be developed to maintain a system of services and supports that are comprehensive and inclusive, child centered, family focused, preventive, outcome oriented and accountable, coordinated, flexible, respectful of human dignity, empowering, and culturally sensitive [Child Welfare League of America 1993].

0.3 Importance of parents* to children

Children should grow up with their own parents whenever possible.

* Throughout this book, the term *parents* is used whenever reference is being made to a child's biological parents, guardian before placement in care, or family of origin.

Parents give their children life, assume financial responsibility for their children's care, and have legal authority over their children, including the right to make major decisions on their children's behalf. They generally also provide love and discipline, meet daily needs, teach life skills, and transmit values and spiritual guidance. All aspects of parenting are critical to the growth and development of children and should be provided by children's parents whenever feasible.

0.4 The value of permanency in the lives of children

All children should be part of, or have connection with, families intended to be permanent.

Families offer children and young people opportunities for permanence and family relationships intended to last a lifetime. Permanency affords the stability and security that children must have for building competency and self-reliance and for maximizing their physical, emotional, social, educational, cultural, and spiritual growth. Most children's need for permanency is best met by family relationships.

0.5 The roles and responsibilities of the family

The family should provide children with safety and protection, and should meet their physical, social, emotional, cultural, and spiritual needs from infancy to adulthood.

The family is the primary means by which children are best prepared for adulthood. Families transmit society's values, establish and maintain cultural identity, and transmit knowledge from one generation to another.

0.6 Values and assumptions in serving children and their families

The provision of any service to promote the health and well-being of children and to strengthen and preserve their families should be based upon a common set of values and assumptions.

The following values and assumptions provide a framework for services for children and their families:

- Children's development and their ability to cope with life situations are enhanced by healthy parent-child relationships and the positive functioning of the entire family unit.
- All families need support at times, although the kind and degree of support needed may vary.
- Most parents want to be successful and effective parents, and to help their children grow into healthy, well-functioning adults.
- Families are influenced by their cultural and ethnic values.
- Parents are likely to be better parents when they feel confident about their ability to parent and feel competent in other important parts of their lives, including work and social relationships (SSPF: 0.7).

0.7 The role and responsibility of communities in supporting children and their families

A network of services to support children and their families should be established in every community to help develop permanence in the lives of all children. The network of services should be proactive, preventive, and developmental in its approach; comprehensive in its delivery; flexible and responsive to the needs of children and their families; linked closely to the neighborhoods, communities, and cultural, ethnic, and religious groups of the children and families it serves; and based on an effective public-voluntary agency partnership.

All families need support at some time, whether they are families of origin, blended families, extended families, kinship families, foster families, or adoptive families. Current economic and social conditions mean families must confront ever-increasing stresses and complex problems, generally with fewer supports available than in the past from family members, friends, informal networks, and community institutions. The community as a whole must

recognize its responsibility to invest in the support now required to assure the well-being of all children and their families, including the children and young people receiving family foster care services.

An effective, comprehensive network of services would include child welfare services and a range of other services that children and their families often need, such as income support, housing, child day care, education, job preparation services, health care, alcohol and drug prevention and treatment services, and employment opportunities.

0.8 The role of child welfare services in community-based services

Child welfare services, including family support, family preservation, child protection, a range of out-of-home care options, and permanency planning options, should be available in every community to ensure the safety and care of children.

Child welfare services begin with prevention. Thus, child welfare services should include supportive, early intervention services for at-risk families to avoid crises that would result in more intrusive interventions. When abuse or neglect has occurred or children are at imminent risk of abuse or neglect, child protective services should respond immediately and provide the services that ensure children's safety and, when possible, keep children and their parents together.

Out-of-home care is the appropriate service for some children and their families. For certain periods of time, some parents are not available or able to protect or care adequately for their children. Some children may have special needs that require professional supervision, monitoring, or treatment beyond what their families can provide. An array of out-of-home care settings should be available for these children and their families within every community.

Every community should support a full range of out-of-home care settings to provide temporary care for children away from their parents, including kinship care homes,

emergency shelter care and day treatment facilities, family foster care homes, specialized or treatment family foster care homes, community-based and self-contained group homes, residential treatment facilities, and secure and nonsecure facilities. Children and their families should be able to obtain services for immediate problems as well as services to help them achieve permanence.

0.9 The role of in-home services in preventing the unnecessary removal of children from their parents

In-home services should be available in every community so that reasonable efforts can be made to maintain children safely with their parents whenever possible.

In-home services include early intervention services as well as services for those children and their families whose needs require more intensive and often more specialized and/or therapeutic help. They include in-home aide services (homemakers/parent aides), child day care, respite care, substance abuse treatment, family-centered casework services, and intensive family-centered crisis services.

0.10 The role of informal kinship care in supporting and strengthening families

Informal kinship care, that is, caregiving arrangements with kin in which child welfare agencies are not involved, should be recognized and encouraged as an arrangement for supporting and strengthening families while protecting children and meeting their needs in noncritical situations.

Families have always used kinship networks as informal support systems to sustain family stability and to avert crises. When kin take full-time responsibility for nurturing and caring for children, the arrangement is called kinship care. The child welfare system should take full advantage of these natural helping networks and offer services kin need to support and strengthen their families. Services may

include helping kin obtain legal status in relation to the child, providing financial assistance or assistance with medical services, and counseling regarding the relationship of kin with biological parents.

0.11 The role of kinship care in preventing the unnecessary removal of children from their kin

When it is determined that a child cannot remain safely with his or her own parents, that a child must be placed in the legal custody of the child welfare agency, and that the child's needs can best be met in a family setting, placement with kin should be the first arrangement considered for the child's care and protection.

Formal kinship care, that is, placement of children with kin after a child welfare agency has assumed legal custody, has an essential function in the array of child welfare services. Through formal kinship care, members of children's tribes or clans, godparents, or other adults who are ascribed a family relationship provide children with full-time care and nurturing. When appropriately assessed, planned, and supported, kinship care for children in the legal custody of child welfare agencies provides family continuity and support for children.*

0.12 Removing children from their parents

Children should be removed from their parents and placed in out-of-home care only when it is necessary to ensure their safety and well-being.

Except in emergency situations when children are in imminent danger, removal of children from their parents and

* This volume of standards does not attempt to address issues specifically related to kinship care. CWLA's guidelines for kinship care at the time of the writing of this edition of standards are contained in *Kinship Care: A Natural Bridge* (Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America, 1994)

placement of the children in out-of-home care should take place only after reasonable efforts have been made to maintain children safely with their own parents. These efforts should include in-home services when appropriate, and consideration of care by members of the extended family.

0.13 The role of family foster care in meeting the child's special needs

Family foster care should be utilized when it has been determined (1) that a child cannot be properly cared for and protected by parents, family, or kin; (2) the child must be temporarily removed from the parents; and (3) a family setting can best meet the child's needs.

Family foster care is an essential child welfare service in the array of out-of-home care services. Family foster care responds to the needs of children and young people in family settings. For children and young people whose needs cannot be best met in a family setting, an array of residential group care and treatment settings should be available [see CWLA's *Standards of Excellence for Residential Group Care Services* 1991]. For children and young people whose needs can best be met by a family, but return to parents and/or placement with extended family is not feasible, adoption offers the best alternative for meeting their needs for permanence within a new family structure [see CWLA's *Standards for Adoption Services* 1988].

As with services for children living with their parents, in kinship care, or in residential group care settings, family foster care services should emphasize a philosophy and practice oriented to strengthening and preserving connections with family, with the goal of early reunification of children with their parents whenever possible. Family foster care should be seen as a support service for families, designed as a temporary service while efforts are made to resolve the problems that led to the child's placement in out-of-home care, or when that is not possible, to support planning toward other permanency options for the child.

0.14 The role of family foster care in meeting the special needs of children and young people

Family foster care services should respond to the diverse and increasingly complex problems that children and young people are experiencing.

Most children who enter family foster care have been abused, neglected, or abandoned prior to placement. Many have special health, mental health, or developmental problems that must be met outside of their family's care. All children and young people in family foster care have physical, emotional, and developmental needs that must be met with services and supports.

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