



Social inclusion in child and family services

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Overview

- Background to the concept of social inclusion and social exclusion
- How these terms relate to children and families
- How child and family services can, and already do, promote the values of social inclusion
- Questions/comments



What is social inclusion?

- In the Australian policy context social inclusion is viewed as the opportunity to:
 - ◆ participate in society through employment and access to services
 - ◆ connect with family, friends and the local community
 - ◆ deal with personal crises (e.g., ill health, separation) and
 - ◆ be heard



What is social exclusion?

- Defined as the: “restriction of access to opportunities and [a] limitation of the capabilities required to capitalise on these [opportunities]” (Hayes, Gray, & Edwards, 2008, p. 6).
- Not the same as poverty - a more complex, multidimensional understanding of disadvantage



What's the relationship between social inclusion and social exclusion?

- Social exclusion is a way of understanding the nature of disadvantage
- Social inclusion is more than just a means of understanding; it also provides a goal to work towards, a way of “raising the bar and understanding where we want to be and how to get there” (Friendly & Lero, 2002, viii).



How are these concepts relevant to children and families?

Evidence demonstrates that the following factors impact negatively upon children:

- parents not having the opportunity to participate in employment
- families not having the opportunity to access early childhood education services
- maternal social isolation, which can contribute to parental depression, can have a range of adverse outcomes for children including adult-onset clinical depression)
- prolonged stress within the family as a result of personal family crises
- Not being heard and/or respected during decision-making processes



What role can child and family services play in promoting social inclusion?

Some of the ways child and family services are currently playing a role in promoting social inclusion include enhancing opportunities for:

- ♦ parents' participation in employment
- ♦ families' access to services
- ♦ parents and children to make connections with family, friends and the community

And:

- ♦ helping families deal with personal crises
- ♦ providing a space for children and families to be heard



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Participation in employment

- Enhancing parent's confidence through leadership opportunities
 - Providing opportunities for parents to work in a volunteer or paid capacity within a service
- "An intentional part of the design of the program is the employment of parents who are also using [the program] with their own child(ren). This aids the process of building trust and rapport between tutors and other parents (Circular Head Rural Health Services, 2008)."*
- Developing relationships with agencies in the community that specialise in providing opportunities for further education and/or employment



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Connection with family, friends and the community

- Provide opportunities for parents to socialise with one another

"A shared lunch in the last session of [the program] improves and maintains relationships between parents and between children. This provides families [with the opportunity] to interact socially and reduce stressors through conversation and support, particularly for those living in isolation. [The program] is often the only place where families can have adult contact (Uniting Care Wesley, 2008)."

- Providing spaces where parents feel comfortable and accepted (e.g., programs specifically for young parents)
- Providing opportunities for children to interact with one another and make friends



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Space for children and families to be heard

- Proactively seeking feedback from parents and children about programs and responding to that feedback
- Allowing parents to tell their own stories in their own way (e.g., community arts projects)
- Assisting parents to learn about and contribute to decision-making process within their local community

"One group, with assistance from [a staff member], wrote to a politician. They received a letter saying that their correspondence had been received and would be responded to in the future. This generated enormous enthusiasm and confidence among the group, who reported it to the larger group. Eventually, a full response arrived that was unsatisfactory to the group. However, the confidence they had developed enabled them to persevere over several years to ultimately gain the changes to a local bus route, which greatly increased the quality of their life (St Vincent de Paul Society, 2008)."



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Conclusions

- In the Australian context social inclusion is conceptualised as a series of opportunities
- Social inclusion is not only a way of conceptualising disadvantage but also a goal to work towards
- Many child and family services are already promoting social inclusion (but perhaps don't recognise it as such)
- There are a range of ways in which child and family services can promote social inclusion ranging from supporting parents' to develop their confidence through to assisting and encouraging families to get involved in local community decision-making processes



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CAFCA resources

- For more examples of child and family services that are promoting social inclusion see the Promising Practice Profiles database:
<http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/topics/index.html>
- Two publications on social inclusion and child and family services will be released by CAFCA early 2011
- Join CAFCA Alert mailing list and stay up to date with the latest resources from CAFCA!
<http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/subscribe.php>



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Further reading

Questions/comments

- Is the concept of social inclusion a useful way of understanding the circumstances/ experiences of the families you work with?
- Do you know of other examples of child and family services promoting social inclusion principles?

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