Empowerment and Child & Family Services

A Community Building Process

Cristine Rego

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Empowerment

- Also used by the political right to justify a reduction in state social services so that people will become more self-sufficient
- More oft than not, for social services that, while well intended, are not experienced as empowering by the consumers

Critical Factors of Empowerment

- Specific to Child Welfare
- Since 1980, Manitoba provided a full range of child welfare services
- Now this is widely established across Canada
- In the last couple years, Native Child and Family became a mandated child protection agency

What is Empowerment

- The essential mission of the profession
- Preferred process for good social work practice
- Term used to reflect the efforts of the disadvantaged to address their problems associated with social and economic inequality

Defining Empowerment

- There is a lack of clarity due to the difficulty in conceptually defining it due to it being used to define both the ends and the means of social work practice
- Also because it is applied to dimensions in practice
- Sw's define much of what they do, including adhering to the general goal of client self-determination as empowerment

Staples, 1990

- Empowerment is defined as the process by which power is obtained as an individual or group moves from a condition of relative powerlessness to one of relative power
- The state of being empowered reflects the product or goal of the empowerment process, and that the relationship between the dimensions is often complex

Staples, 1990

- Staples maintains that empowerment must be experienced in both the individual and social domain
- Other authors: skills for personal, interpersonal or social change
- A continuum of empowerment, personal, small group development, community, coalition advocacy and political action.
- Extends to staff in an organization

Empowerment

- What is important is the connection between the personal and the political as an essential and underlying feature of the empowerment process

4 Aspects

- An emphasis on strengths and competencies
- Connected to the capacity for self-action and the ability to achieve a greater measure of control over one's own life and destiny
- Sw's can only assist the one who seeks power or self-determination
- A fundamental realignment of power, values, and relationship of inequality, begins with an analysis of inequality and how it is maintained by the process of stigmatizing

Barriers in Child Welfare

- Legislation and polices that are conflicting between social control and empowering of families
- Resource constraints and an ideology which supports reduced funding and an emphasis on cost-containment make it difficult to address needs which arise because of structural inequalities and the loss of community and social supports

Barriers

- Less collaborative work with families and social networks due to contraints imposed by government, society and agency mandate and structure ie: strengths
- Tendency to adopt single agenda, trendy solutions to a very complex problem. Ie: permanency planning, family preservation, community partnerships ($/results)
- Less comprehensive approaches to evaluation, consideration of different outcome measures from different perspectives and the need to give primacy to client-centered outcomes

Special Factors

- Hx of colonization and subjection to policies and processes of
- Residential schools
- Child Welfare
- Results in separation of community, and ...
- Need judicial control and policy and administrative control

Trust and Cultural Differences

- Significant due to hx
- If Aboriginal run, how do you deal with this issue?
- Takes time and effort with more inclusive working relationships
- Cultural differences: what would they be?
- Holistic and a commitment to family continuity