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Evidence-Based Practice: NOT JUST A NEW “BUZZ WORD!”

Trainers would be hard pressed to look through a current social work journal or resource and not come across the term evidence-based practice (EBP). But the term and its meaning have far more ramifications to our field than simply being the new “buzz word.”

EBP is not new to social work or to child welfare practice. Eve Pearlman, often considered the grandmother of social work, implied EBP even back in 1957 when she stated, “The benchmark of a professional relationship is its conscious purposefulness.” More recently, Geraldine MacDonald reiterated Pearlman’s statement when she wrote, “[W]hen we intervene in the lives of others we should do so on the basis of the best evidence available regarding the likely consequences of that intervention” (1998, p. 72).

Definition

To make sure the term is used in a consistent and constructive manner, the Central Steering Committee of the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program recently endorsed the following definition of EBP:

Evidence-Based Practice is the “... conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of current best evidence...” (Sackett, et al., 2000, p. 2) in making clinical practice and policy decisions.

In Child Welfare:

CONSCIENTIOUS means practitioners always maintain awareness of their moral obligation to consider all available evidence and guard against bias and duplicity.

EXPLICIT means practitioners and policy makers are clear about the reliability, validity, and applicability of evidence used in decision-making, and can clearly justify their decisions.

JUDICIOUS means practitioners use practical reasoning and clinical expertise to assess children and families’ unique characteristics, preferences, and circumstances when making case recommendations.

Basic Tenets

There are several basic tenets that the OCWTP holds true in regards to EBP:

1. *EBP is an ongoing and emendatory process (Hughes & Fitch, 2007, in press).*

This means EBP is corrective and improving. New information is constantly assessed to support or improve practice. Although child welfare practice has amassed a significant amount of practice literature over years, practitioners need to constantly work toward strengthening and building onto that base. In order to train to best-available research, trainers are expected to take responsibility for remaining current in their content areas.

2. *Not all change is progress. In fact, program change without supporting evidence is usually contrary to EBP principles, and is often harmful.*

Change for the sake of change should be avoided. Child welfare interventions, by their very mandate, impact the lives of children and their families. Interventions, therefore, must be based on the best available evidence.

3. *EBP requires critical thinking and appraisal skills. Workers must be skilled at finding relevant information and determining its evidentiary efficiency and applicability.*

This is not always easy. This tenet implies an ability to not only effectively search for research, but to be able to effectively and critically read the research that is available to determine if the research pertains to a particular client. This tenet embraces the science part of social work – an aspect of the field frequently overlooked and forgotten as practitioners perform their day-to-day functions.

The benchmark of a professional relationship is its conscious purposefulness.

--Eve Pearlman

4. *EBP recognizes a hierarchy of evidence that is based on scientific rigor from standardized reviews of randomized control trials (most rigorous) to clinical experience (least rigorous).*

As is true in other areas of social sciences, child welfare practices cannot be simply divided into “evidence-based” and “non-evidence-based.” The American Public Human Services Association (2005) encourages professionals to assess evidence along a continuum. Ohio proposes a continuum from rigorously researched practices to those that rely on clinical experience alone. Practices that lack sound theoretical or common sense basis, as well as those that are deemed harmful, should not even be considered.

5. *EBP works best when practitioners help form the questions that drive research.*

As a caseload-heavy, but resource-depleted system, child welfare often lacks the type of practice evidence found at the rigorous end of the research continuum addressed above. As a result, each child welfare professional has a responsibility to pose the types of questions that can drive the research we need. Inside this edition of *Common Ground*, readers will find a list of research consortiums, such as the Cochran and Campbell Collaboratives, which provide rigorous reviews of related research, along with information about Ohio’s research partnership formed to address research questions pertinent to policy and practice issues for Ohio.

6. *EBP requires transparency and objectivity in both intervention and policy decision-making.*

This tenet basically means child welfare practitioners have a responsibility to be straightforward. If research was done, it should clearly state not only the results of the research, but include the research rationale, methodology, applicability, and limitations. The absence of research should also be explicitly stated (e.g., the absence of research on the effectiveness of reducing the incidence of child maltreatment by mandating parenting classes). In the field, this tenet implies that practitioners should be straightforward in informing families about whether or not a proposed intervention has been researched and about the findings of such research. In training, it implies that trainers need to accurately describe biases and knowledge limitations; clearly describe negative findings and controversies; and be straightforward about the research that forms the basis for what is being taught (Gambrill, 2006).

7. *EBP requires adherence to effective methodologies to translate research to practice.*

This tenet relates to the implementation of research findings. It has strong implications for educators, training, and strategies for transfer of learning. There is plenty of literature on child welfare issues and practices, but scant literature on how to move that science to services that benefit clients. Both intervention practices and implementation of those practices have to be measured; the problems can be very different.

There can be good implementation of a bad intervention or a great intervention can fail due to poor implementation. Good outcomes for clients will only happen when effective practices are implemented effectively (Fixsen, et al., 2005).

8. *EBP recognizes “best practice” is practice based upon the “best available evidence.”*

We still want to use the term “best practice.” The term doesn’t change, but what is labeled “best practice” will change [improve] based on emerging research. EBP requires caseworkers to consider best-available research along with unique client characteristics and their own clinical expertise.



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Promoting EBP and Policy

Ohio currently has two research consortiums to help child welfare practitioners analyze available research needed for current policy and practice decisions.

CHILD WELFARE RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP

In 2005, a group of university social work departments, Public Children Services Agencies, the Institute for Human Services, the Public Children Services Association of Ohio, and the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services collaborated to form the Child Welfare Research Partnership. By identifying desired performance outcomes; articulating critical practice needs and questions; using research to identify promising solutions; and performing rigorous evaluations to gather data, this partnership will make recommendations for policy, program, practice, and training decisions based on the best available evidence.

The Child Welfare Research Partnership recently completed a rapid evidence assessment of research on factors pertaining to the re-entry of foster children and on the effectiveness of various interventions. A summary of this review is included in this newsletter. The complete review is available at www.pcsao.org in the research section. Currently, the group is involved in a rapid evidence assessment of screening issues to enable more accurate differentiation and processing of child maltreatment cases at intake. The group will meet in October to discuss findings and make policy and practice recommendations based on what the best available research indicates for improving child welfare screening in Ohio.

ODJFS RESEARCH CONSORTIUM

In an effort to actively support the achievement of Ohio's Strategic Plan and Performance Measures, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services developed the ODJFS Research Consortium. The Research Consortium works to establish a stronger link between practice and research; assesses the effectiveness of current programs; assists in the establishment of research for prevention planning; and researches and evaluates best practices based on information received from service delivery fields. To date, the Consortium has been involved in two projects:

HB 130 Grandparent Forms Evaluation – ODJFS contracted with the Center for Healthy Communities at Wright State University in early 2007 to evaluate the implementation and use of HB 130 Grandparent Caregiver Authorization Affidavit and Grandparent Power of Attorney forms, which provide legal documentation for accessing medical and educational services for the children in their care. The Child Welfare Research Partnership worked with Wright State University to help formulate research questions and design the research methodology.

CFSR Reunification and Re-entry Measures – ODJFS has been analyzing trends and characteristics of children and families that were reunified within the CFSR measure, those that re-entered care, and those that were successfully maintained in the home post reunification. The College of Social Work at The Ohio State University will use the ODJFS data and analysis to seek informative research findings to assist Ohio in timely reunifications and avoidance of re-entry.

Test Your EBP Knowledge

How many years has it been since you last took a statistics or research course? Review the list below and check off the terms you think you can define. To check your knowledge and find definitions commonly used in EBP go to the About OCWTP section at www.ocwtp.com and link to Current Initiatives. Click on Evidence-Based Practice to find a glossary of common terms.

- Anecdotal
- Bias
- Case-control Study
- Empirical Research
- External Validity
- Internal Validity
- Meta-analysis
- Peer Review
- Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs)
- Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA)
- Reliability
- Systematic Review
- Validity

Below are the definitions of two of the terms used in articles found in this edition of *Common Ground*:

Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA):

A tool for getting available research evidence as comprehensively as possible, within the constraints of a given timetable. It differs from a full systematic review because it focuses on published research only and uses fewer criteria on which to evaluate the rigor and quality of research. These types of assessments can be completed in six months or less. (Government Social Research: <http://www.gsr.gov.uk/resources/rae.asp>)

Systematic Review:

A summary of the literature that uses explicit methods to perform a thorough literature search and critical appraisal of individual studies and that uses appropriate statistical techniques to combine these valid studies. Systematic reviews are not all equal, and quality issues are important. (Bandolier: <http://www.jr2.ox.ac.uk/bandolier/booth/diagnos/glossary.html>)



Trainer Question:

*PART 1: If the birth parents of a foster child strongly objects to their child being placed with a family of a different race, color, or national origin,, should the 1688 process be considered?
(Ann Bagley, OCWTP Trainer)*

*PART 2: What if the birth father was Grand Wizard of the K.K.K.? Since foster parents working with birth parents is a significant factor in the likelihood of reunification, could not the case be made that the RCNO of the foster parents may certainly be a significant factor, and that the beliefs of the birth family may decrease the likelihood of reunification in such a circumstance?
(Ann Bagley, OCWTP Trainer)*

ODJFS Response:

PART 1:

The agency should first seek further information and clarification from the birth family to determine why there is a strong objection to place the child with a family of a different race, color, or national origin (RCNO). If there are compelling reasons to justify consideration of RCNO during the placement decision, then “yes,” the JFS 01688 process should be considered. In accordance with Ohio Administrative Code (OAC) rule 5101:2-42-18.1 (re: non-discrimination requirements for foster care placements), only the most compelling reasons may serve to justify consideration of RCNO as part of a placement decision. These reasons emerge only in unique and individual circumstances of each child and each prospective foster caregiver.

ODJFS Response:

PART 2:

If the goal is reunification, this would be a significant factor to consider because it is likely that the foster caregiver and birth family would work together toward this goal. Therefore, pursuant to OAC 5101:2-42-18.1, this could be a compelling reason to refer the child for a JFS 01688. The Licensed Professional would conduct the assessment and make a determination whether RCNO should or should not be a factor (among many other factors) considered during the placement. However, ultimately, the custodial agency has the final say and could accept or reject the Licensed Professional’s recommendation. If, in fact, the custodial agency does reject the Licensed Professional’s recommendation, the agency must provide a statement or statements on the JFS 01688 outlining its rationale for overriding the Licensed Professional’s recommendation.

Questions about MEPA surface often during training. Would you be ready to give an appropriate response? *Common Ground* offers trainers another helpful resource for MEPA issues. Send your inquiries to costerman@ihs-trainet.com.

Re-entry in Child Protective Services: A Rapid Evidence Assessment

In 2005, Dr. Denise Bronson, OSU College of Social Work professor, completed a rapid evidence assessment on re-entry in child protective services. She reviewed the research literature on factors associated with re-entry in foster care and the interventions that have been effective in reducing re-entry to foster care. Most of the research was non-experimental and focused on factors associated with re-entry rather than the interventions. According to the study, the following factors were associated with re-entry:

- Parental ambivalence about reunification and parental requests for placement
- Parental mental illness, substance abuse, or poverty
- Family coherence during separation
- Placement instability
- Children placed in non-relative foster care
- Previous failed reunification attempts
- Number of service goals and tasks for the family
- Children with health difficulties
- Lack of reunification services and case management*

Based on her findings, Dr. Bronson made the following recommendation for reducing re-entry rates:

1. Extend the rapid evidence assessment to include research on the impact of risk assessment methods on re-entry rates.
2. Use the research on factors associated with re-entry to design and evaluate a prototypical intervention for family reunification services using intervention research methods to design, develop, evaluate, implement, and disseminate innovative technology to address the re-entry problem.
3. Develop a two-pronged approach to reducing re-entry rates by combining a) the results of the rapid evidence assessment on risk and family assessment methods and b) the innovative reunification services developed by the intervention research efforts.
4. While waiting for the activities in 1-3 to be completed, disseminate information to practitioners about the factors associated with re-entry to care through written materials or workshops. Encourage workers to assess and address these factors in reunification planning.
5. Work with CAPMIS evaluators to analyze the relationship between the CAPMIS family and risk assessment procedures, decisions to reunify families, and subsequent re-entry rates (Bronson, 2005, p.2).

* Note: The complete report, *Re-entry In Child Protective Services: A Rapid Evidence Assessment*, is found in the research section at www.pcsao.org.

OCWTP Announcements

Trainer Day Rate Increase

We are excited to announce that, beginning July 26, the trainer day rate increased to \$550. A big thank you to ODJFS, PCSAO, and the legislators for passing the increase to fund the trainer raise. The OCWTP values your hard work and is pleased to provide this higher rate.

Trainer Event

The 2008 Trainer Event will be held on March 3, 2008, at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Columbus. The theme, "Making the Connection" will provide the youth perspective of the child welfare experience and help trainers see the link they have to securing permanency for children.

IBackup

Handouts and PowerPoint's for many standardized curricula are posted on IBackup. If you need the password or username, contact Kelley Gruber, kgruber@ihs-trainet.com.

CPS

Einstruction, the manufacturer of CPS wireless remote technology, has released a new version of its free CPS software (version 5.01) that is compatible with the Windows Vista operating system. However, the OCWTP will not officially move to the new version until late September/early October, in order to allow RTCs time to become familiar with the new software. Please review the CPS software information included in the latest Listserv. We have posted a revised version of the blue CPS User Manual in the resource section of the For Trainers link at www.ocwtp.com. Contact Christina Carter, ccarter@ihs-trainet.com, or Tonya Herzog, therzog@ihs-trainet.com, for more information.

LMS (Learning Management System)

In preparation for the LMS launching, we are beginning to enter our training pool into the database. Please make sure we have your current email address, mailing address, phone contact, and approved content areas.

Keep to Schedule

Please remember to stick to the standard workshop schedule. For a six-hour workshop, this means starting at 9:00 am, providing one 15-minute break in the morning and one 15-minute break in the afternoon, allowing one hour for lunch, and ending the workshop at 4:00 pm. We need to be consistent to maintain our status as a provider of Social Work credit hours, and to make sure those attending afternoon sessions do not miss any content.

Clock Hours for Trainers

If you are a licensed social worker, you may qualify to receive continuing education credit for presenting a workshop from the Ohio Counselor, Social Worker, and Marriage and Family Therapist Board. Keep a certificate from the workshop that verifies you as the trainer. Then, follow the instructions for applying for credit hours posted on the Board's website: <http://cswmft.ohio.gov/reqren.stm>

Applause and Recognition

Common Ground is proud to report the many accomplishments of the OCWTP and its trainers who work diligently to make the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program a nationally recognized success.



**Rhonda Abban
Receives 2007 Angel in
Adoption Award**

Each year members of Congress are given the opportunity to select individuals, families, or organizations from their home state, who have demonstrated a commitment to improving the lives of children in need of permanent, loving homes. Rhonda Abban, ODJFS Adoption Section Chief, has been selected to represent Ohio, in recognition of her 27 years as a dedicated policy advocate in the field of adoption and positive child welfare practices.

The ninth annual Angels in Adoption Gala will take place Thursday, October 4, 2007, in Washington, D.C. Ms. Abban will be recognized along with other Angels in Adoption from all fifty states and the District of Columbia for their work in helping the world's most vulnerable children - those without the love and protection of a forever family. In addition, as Ohio's 2007 recipient, Ms. Abban will represent Ohio at an Angels in Adoption awards ceremony on Capitol Hill. This event boasts more Congressional participation than any child welfare event in the nation, with 193 members of Congress participating along with more than 850 guests.



**Eddie Lebron
Receives the Child Advocate of
the Quarter Award**

Cuyahoga County Children and Family Services recently awarded Eddie Lebron the "Child Advocate of the Quarter" for support personnel. This award was given in recognition of his leadership in chairing the agency's annual foster parent conference, as well as his leadership in the agency's partnership with the U.S. Marshal Service's G.R.E.A.T. Program.

As Senior Training Officer, Eddie's hard work and professionalism has long been recognized by colleagues in and out of the agency. This year marked the third foster parent conference chaired by Eddie. The conference trained over 600 attendees. This year's conference also featured the kickoff of a partnership with the United States Marshal's Office to pilot their Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) Program within Cuyahoga's Glenville cluster. Targeting parents and youth between the ages of 10 and 14, the goal of the G.R.E.A.T. Program is to strengthen communities by strengthening families through better communication, decision making, and gang prevention training. Eddie's work with the G.R.E.A.T. Program resulted in his being asked to be a presenter at the G.R.E.A.T. Program's regional training conferences in Cleveland, Albuquerque, Sacramento, and Hartford.

EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE RESOURCES FOR TRAINERS

Here are several web sites that provide great information pertaining to EBP.

General Information About EBP and Child Welfare:

- Evidence Based Practice for the Helping Professions <http://www.evidence.brookscole.com/>
- The California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare <http://www.cachildwelfareclearinghouse.org/>

Research, Systematic Reviews, Rapid Assessments, and Clinical Trials:

- Cochrane Collaboration (Healthcare) <http://www.cochrane.org/index.htm>
- Campbell Collaboration (Social Services) <http://www.campbellcollaboration.org/>
- Education Resources Information Center (Education) <http://www.eric.ed.gov/>
- Child Trends (Child Well Being) <http://www.childtrends.org/>

Model Programs and Practice Guidelines:

- SAMHSA's National Registry of Evidence Based Practices and Programs <http://nrepp.samhsa.gov/find.asp>
- Promising Practices Network <http://www.promising-practices.net/criteria.asp>

Want More?

For a more complete list of resources go to the About OCWTP section at www.ocwtp.com and link to Current Initiatives. Click on Evidence-Based Practice and explore some of the many resources housed there.

SWORTC

In an environment where negative press about child welfare seems to prevail over anything positive that is achieved, recently a glimmer of positive light was shed on one of our southwest counties. On the front page of the *Cincinnati Enquirer* (September 4, 2007), Butler County was heralded for the great work they are doing in placing children for adoption. Butler County was third in the state for percentage of children being adopted and for finding families for African American foster children. In 2006, 69% of those children eligible for adoption were actually adopted thanks to the hard work of the Butler County adoption unit. Positive press always drives home the importance of what we do. Keep up the good work Butler County. For the full article, follow this link: <http://news.enquirer.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070904/NEWS01/709040353/-1/all>.

NEORTC

NEORTC, hosted by Summit County Children Services, is pleased to have Mr. John Saros, Esq., join us as Executive Director of Summit County Children Services. Mr. Saros' past support of training and the OCWTP has been commendable and we look forward to more of the same for NEORTC and the staff of our 14-county region.

NCORTC

Effective September 7th, NCORTC staff have the following new e-mail addresses – be sure to note the changes in your address books:

Tracy Barnes	BarneT01@odjfs.state.oh.us
Gina Callendar	calleg@odjfs.state.oh.us
Christine Cross	crossc02@odjfs.state.oh.us
Robert Kansa	kansar@odjfs.state.oh.us
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HOLD THESE DATES

September 25-26, 2007 Curriculum Development TOT
October 16, 2007 Transfer-of-Learning TOT
November 8-9, 2007 Transfer-of-Learning TOT
November 14, 2007 PowerPoint TOT
December 10 - 12, 2007 Presentation Skills TOT
December 17-19, 2007 Presentation Skills TOT
January 29, 2008 Pre-Training of Trainers
February 7-8 and 25-26, 2008 Culture and Diversity TOT
To register and for location, contact Debra Sparrow at dsparrow@ihs-trainet.com.

www.ocwtp.com

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