

Who advocates for parents in child protection processes (and why)? A perspective from Australia

Elizabeth Reimer

Southern Cross University

The primary rhetoric throughout Australia's history regarding parents who struggle to adequately care for their children, to the extent that they are deemed neglectful, has been one of blame; where parents have been either considered immoral or psychological reprobates (Jamrozik & Sweeney 1996; Dickey 1987). Despite this, a small number of parent advocates have continued to speak out on behalf of these parents. These advocates have included workers involved in family work, especially in family service agencies established nationally in the late-1970s to provide professional home-based intervention to struggling families (Wolcott 1989). This paper reports on doctoral research that utilised hermeneutic methodology to explore relationships between parents and family workers in four rurally based family services agencies in New South Wales, Australia. The parents, workers and supervisors involved in these relationships engaged in semi-structured in-depth interviews to "tell the story" of their relationship. This presentation aims to explore the variety of ways in which these family workers utilised the working relationship to advocate for parents where child neglect is an issue, and why they did this. Implications for practice and policy will be developed, both for the local Australian context (in light of an increasingly child rights-focused approach to service delivery in child protection work) and more broadly for the development of appropriate advocacy skills for professionals working with parents where children have been removed. References: Dickey, B. (1987). *No charity there: A short history of social welfare in Australia*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin. Jamrozik, A., & Sweeney, T. (1996). *Children and society: The family, the state, and social parenthood*. South Melbourne: Macmillan Education. Wolcott, I. (1989). *Family support services: A review of the literature and selected annotated bibliography*. Melbourne: Australian Institute for Family Studies.

Keywords: family support, parent advocacy