



NEW GUIDANCE FOR PARENT AIDE PROGRAMS

George M. Bryan, Jr., M.Div. and Ruth O'Neal, M.D.

As the tragedy of child abuse continues to victimize millions of children each year many strategies have been tried to prevent and treat this problem. Parent aide programs began simultaneously in several sites in North America in the early 1970's as a way to help families. Parent aides are trained, professionally supervised individuals, volunteer or paid, young and old, who assist parents under stress and those whose children are at risk of abuse or neglect.

The National Parent Aide Association has surveyed 262 of the estimated 600 + programs in the United States, Parent Aide programs are clearly playing a vital role in society's response to child abuse. The evaluation of these programs is critical in improving this resource to help families.

EXCHANGE/SCAN

Exchange/SCAN (Stop Child Abuse Now) of North Carolina is a private non-profit parent aide agency located in 3 counties that work interdependently with the Department of Social Services (Child Protective Services), hospitals, Parents Anonymous and other agencies and individuals serving families. The program was initiated in 1981 (over 300 families have been served) and is located in Winston-Salem, N.C. Exchange/SCAN is a treatment program aimed at the prevention of child abuse/neglect through intensive support in the home, by volunteer parent aides. The program also provides a 24-hour hotline for problems around abuse and neglect, runs support groups, and does child abuse prevention awareness and trainings. There is an executive director, 3 1/2 case supervisors, and 1 1/2 secretaries that comprise the paid personnel involved in our Exchange/SCAN offices. All professional staff have masters degrees in counseling and experience in working with families.

Guidelines similar to 50 other Exchange Centers in the United States have been used. The National Exchange Club Foundation for the Prevention of Child Abuse contracted in 1979 with SCAN of Arkansas to help develop a treatment modality that could be replicated around the United States. Now all Exchange centers use this modality and are reviewed on a yearly basis to insure case management guided by this modality. Exchange/SCAN has been successful in terms of numbers of families served, expanding its volunteer parent aide service, keeping families intact and in terms of the low reoccurrence of abuse or neglect in the families served. The clients served are largely representative of the United States demographically and in differing levels of risk or abuse to the children.

EXCHANGE/SCAN PARENT AIDES

Parent aides involved in Exchange/SCAN of North Carolina Center are recruited, screened, and trained by professional staff. The volunteer parent aides receive 15 hours of training prior to visitation of the family. Weekly supervision of cases is provided by professional staff. Every three months treatment plans are done with the family, parent aide and staff present. Notes are taken on every contact with the family by the parent aide or staff. Monthly in-service trainings are provided to increase volunteer cohesiveness and ability. To date family units have been analyzed at 3 months, 6 months and yearly following service.

In requesting parent aide service, the referring individuals describe the client, essential case issues and problems and possible roles for the parent aide. The trained community volunteer will visit in the home frequently (2 times a week) as a friend and helper and will assist the family in problem solving over a period of months in order to lower the stress

level in the home. The parent aide will help to build the confidence level and feeling of self-worth of the parents. Parenting information will be available to enable the parents to learn to discipline without abuse and learn to relate to their children in a healthy way. The first 3-6 months are dedicated to encouraging the family to bond to the parent aide. In the next period of months cognitive skills and networking with other resources and supports is encouraged. Gradually, through the process of re-parenting and education, the potential for child abuse is lowered. Further aims are (1) community awareness in order to encourage calls before abuse occurs, (2) to help parents and children avoid abuse, and (3) to encourage reporting abuse.

EVALUATIONS OF PARENT AIDE PROGRAMS

While there have been several evaluations of parent aide programs, none (in this search of the literature) have dealt with a substantial sample or review progress over a period longer than two years. Krell, Richardson et.al. ("Parent Aides as Providers of Secondary Preventive Services- An Assessment") studied 58 families after two years of program operation. However only 6 had terminated as planned. One third were reported for abuse or neglect while being assisted. Hornick ("A Cost/Effectiveness Evaluation of Lay Therapy Treatment for Child Abuse and High-Risk Parents") studied 27 families and a control group. After 1 year 74% of the lay therapy subjects were still involved with services compared to 50% of the families working with social workers. He concluded this ability to maintain contact was an important result. In addition, families served by lay therapists showed significant differences in the ability to empathize with the child and express pleasure when with the child as compared to the control group. Miller et. al. ("A Parent Aide Program: Record Keeping, Outcomes, and Costs") studied 37 cases which had completed within a two-year period. The study only rated goals achieved by their internal standards. It was concluded that the parent aide program was efficient in spending 4.6 months in service to a family at a cost of \$1096 per year (1982). The Center for Policy Research studied the Denver based Child Abuse Prevention Volunteers Program (unpublished). However, out of 150 cases assigned 60% left the program before or after one meeting with the parent aide and only 22 completed the prior and post testing during a 6-month period. Carroll and Reich studied 22 families ("Issues in the Implementation of the Parent Aide Concept") after 2 years of programing. They found that 85% of the mothers were not re-reported for abuse or neglect. Lastly, in a major study of home visiting by nurses Olds et. al. ("Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect: A Randomized trial of Nurse Home Visitation") studied 216 families where nurses visited "at risk" new mothers and provided help very similar to parent aides. This study found improvements in parents of not punishing their children as frequently, providing more appropriate play materials and being seen in the emergency rooms less often. They also found that only 4% of the nurse visited families were reported for abuse or neglect while 19% of the comparison group were reported. All of the studies discovered strengths that parent aide services provide. Social support seemed to emerge as the major element that enables families to nurture their children and provide success.

EXCHANGE/SCAN EVALUATION

When the Exchange/SCAN Center was founded in 1981 a data form was designed to track families. It was hoped that computer capacity would eventually enable the use of this data for evaluations such as this. 63 facts about the case and an average of 75 facts about each family were recorded on each case opened. The information includes standard demographic information, socioeconomic information, initial problems, special needs of the families, and success and follow-up of the cases. This information is entered in a database which makes it possible to answer many questions about the parent aide/family relationship. Most of the information on the form was gathered when a case supervisor conducted the initial assessment of the family. The assessment interview usually takes in excess of two hours. The assessment is typed and included in the case file. The data has been entered under the supervision of the same Executive Director. The supervisor of the local Protective Services for Children and the Child Medical Examiners have all remained the same over the 8 years. There has been, as a result, a remarkable stability in perspective when completing forms.

The original purpose of data collection was to analyze case success and to help guide the program to better family assessment and treatment. Much of the data, such as factors present, past reports, income, and religious participation, has been considered as variables in studying abusing and neglecting families. In addition to the data on the form a review of the County Protective Services for Children's records was completed to discover any re-reports of abuse or neglect since the case was closed by Exchange/SCAN.

For this study the first 200 cases served and closed were used. 60 of these cases were studied in a 1985 internal evaluation ("Can We Claim Success?" G.M. Bryan, Jr., unpublished). Over the eight years there has been an increase in cases where the parents called for help (increasing from 29% to 43%) rather than cases that were agency referred. The cases studied do not reflect families with only minor problems. 61% had been reported to the Department of Social Services and of these 22% had more than one report. Often cases were referred where internal efforts at D.S.S. had failed to help the family.

The families served were screened and categorized as appropriate using the philosophy and the criteria of the program. Families using alcohol/drugs were not accepted unless involved in substance abuse treatment. Families with psychiatric problems were not served unless under treatment (including in some cases medication). And parents with low I.Q. (generally under 70) were not served if it was determined the situation needed "long-term management". Participation was "voluntary" in that a parent had to agree to be served. Often this meant not seeing one's children unless one participated or refusing to follow a court order unless one participated. Under 1% of the families referred have refused service in 8 years.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Exchange/SCAN has served cases that are reflective of North Carolina statistics for families that abuse or neglect their children. Forsyth County, in which the program is located, has a population comprised of 30% Black and 70% Whites. The study showed the majority of Exchange/SCAN abusers are white (68%) married (52%) females (87% of perpetrators) between the ages of 20-30 years (avg. 26 years) who are unemployed (48%) with some high school education and are the natural mothers of the abused or neglected child. The average family is composed of 3.7 people with the average age of the child being 5.3 years. About half of the families have 7 or more factors present which often are related to abuse or neglect (see data form). Over half show marital discord, abuse as a child, insufficient income or unemployment, lack friends and have unrealistic expectations of their children.

The Exchange/SCAN center works with families where the targeted children are 12 or under 39% are under age 3, 56% under 5, and 94% under age 12. 54% were male. Of the children served 94% had been physically abused, 35% neglected, 31% emotionally abused and 22% having other types of mistreatment. As reflected, many were victims of more than one type of mistreatment. 27% of the children referred required some kind of medical intervention. 33% had some legal or contractual (usually with the Department of Social Services) action taken to protect them.

All of the families studied first received a needs assessment then were served by parent aides. While parent aides are supposed to visit twice per week and maintain telephone contact, the average telephone and face-to-face contact per year was 82. The average family was served for 13 months. The shortest case was one week and the longest 2.9 years. Volunteers commit to 18 months of service so that they can continue with the family until completion. However, 17% of the families had two volunteers. There is a general commitment that the program will work with the family until goals are achieved as long as the family remains "appropriate" (see above) and agrees to continue.

The study found that the majority of parent aides were white (76.5%) females (91%) averaging 34 years of age, married (56%), working, with a median family income of \$30,000. On the average volunteers worked with a family for 318 days. Many volunteers continue with a new family after finishing with one family. Occasionally a parent aide will work with more than one family at one time.

There are four goals that must be reached and maintained for 3 months before case termination. 1) No further danger to the child. 2) Proven ability to problem solve. 3) Parenting skills improvement. 4) Existence of a social support network. Rating each of these goals is partially subjective. In the areas of problem solving and parenting skills achievement is reached by showing that the parent has not only improved but is continuing to learn and apply their new skills. Each case is staffed by professionals at termination to determine if the goals were reached. 61% of the cases terminated were categorized "Goals Achieved".

Most of the remaining 39% of the cases terminated because of factors that the volunteers and staff could not control. 11% moved and 7.5% became unavailable (for lack of a more descriptive term), that is, did not meet with the

volunteer or staff after repeated attempts for at least one month. 11% of the families terminated on their own decision. Several of these families were resistant to service initially and several did not want to be associated with "child abuse treatment". 6% of the families were deemed inappropriate after the case had opened. They were inappropriate because of not pursuing treatment for substance abuse or psychological problems, or that they no longer were going to have children in their home (not just temporarily). One family had their child (at Exchange/SCAN's insistence) terminated from parental rights. While the above families were not served as long as needed, many, 49% were served for over 6 months. Many of these families had made progress toward nurturing their children.

On the other hand, 3% of the families served were categorized "unsuccessful" by professional staff. These 6 families were provided services for an average of 15 months yet made no progress. Each family was referred to other community services.

RESULTS AS OF 1989

There are two distinct ways that Exchange/SCAN measured success with the families served: 1) "goals achieved" 2) no substantiated re-reports to the Department of Social Services (DSS) after at least 6 months of service. Of those cases categorized as "goals achieved" 6.2% were re-reported and substantiated by DSS. Although there is no comparable control group it is significant that 22% of the families had already been reported to D.S.S. more than once.

Using the second measure of success 6.5% or 13 families that Exchange/SCAN had served for at least 6 months were re-reported and substantiated. The period, 6 months, is used because in Exchange/SCAN's modality it may take 6 months to develop the helping relationship. While this represents all the cases re-reported and substantiated there were an additional 3% that were categorized "unsuccessful". Most of the cases marked "unsuccessful" represented more than the average time and casework given a family. It is speculated that this energy committed combined with casework that insured that the case be followed by another resource at our termination may have affected the lack of further reports. This second method of determining success has some positives and negatives. First, it is a "bottom line" in child protection not to have a child reinjured. Secondly, once families are known to "helping" agencies there is more likelihood that if children are reinjured or neglected that they will be re-reported. Some families may, however, escape detection or move from the area (most of the families served remained in the area).

Two studies of similar parent aide programs have used re-reporting to judge effectiveness. One program studied 22 families after 2 years of operation. This study found that 15% of the families served abused their children again. Another study by Olds et al, found that after two years only 4% of the mother had been re-reported for abuse and neglect while an "at risk" control group of 90 had a re-report rate of 19%.

Exchange/SCAN's results are comparably favorable. In their 1985 study after 4 years no families which had completed treatment had been re-reported and substantiated. In that study the discussion concluded that success would be that more families would continue until planned termination. In 1985 58% went to planned termination while in this study 64% went to termination. Another measure is the percentage of cases categorized "goals achieved". In 1985 47% achieved goals and in this study 61% achieved their goals. Both figures represent a substantial increase in success in the past 4 years. In this study only 7% were re-reported after 6 months of service or only 6.2% were re-reported after completing treatment. In addition, it should be noted that while in the Olds et. al. study the control mothers were chosen by "at risk" characteristics, in this study 61% had already been reported for abuse and neglect and many of the other families felt themselves to be at risk.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Families worked with for 6 months and were not re-reported substantiated were compared to the average case. The two groups were remarkably similar in age, employment, education, income, special problems, and how the case terminated. There were some distinct differences in race, 32% Black compared to re-substantiated 54% Black, twice as many men involved in the abuse and twice as many had been reported to DSS more than once. In addition, twice

as many families had mental health problems. In terms of support 54% of the families were in contact with relatives, day care was provided twice as often as normal, twice as many families had more knowledge of child development than average, and 54% participated in religious activities. These comparisons provide a beginning basis on which to critique difficult cases.

Other results from the study which bear mention include: the result that only 77% of families clearly had abuse or neglect in their past (that is self reported some type of abuse or neglect). Neglect cases took an average two months longer than abuse cases. There has been apprehension by staff that matching a second volunteer after a first volunteer was unable to follow-through would be detrimental to case outcome. While 13% of families terminated early compared to 11%, remarkably 81% of the cases ended with goals achieved compared to 61% overall. As Exchange/SCAN has been involved in a project to use older adults with families there was interest in their success. The American Association of Retired Persons involved Exchange/SCAN in a project to recruit and use parent aide over the age of 55. Of cases served by a volunteer over 55, 85% terminated their cases successful with only one case re-reported substantiated. The older volunteers finished cases slightly faster with their average of 375 days compared with the average of 388 days of service per case. Volunteers under 30 terminated 46% of their cases with goals achieved. The average length of service was 358 days.

CONCLUSIONS

It is clear from this study that Exchange/SCAN has improved service delivery over the past eight years and further, that when compared to similar studies, the results are clearly favorable. In reviewing this program and its style of operation there are a few areas that may be related to the success. First, this program is very structured from its initial assessment of families, through notes on contacts, in its treatment plans, terminations and follow ups. Having professionals in weekly contact with the volunteer parent aides and out advocating for the families provides maximum support. Secondly, there has been a great deal of staff/Board stability at the Center. The Executive Director has remained with the program since opening and there have been only two assistant directors. Thirdly, the program has grown from a \$56,000 budget to a \$230,000 budget and from serving 24 families/year to serving 105 per year with parent aides.

Fourthly, the Department of Social Services has been supportive of the program since its initiation. They have involved Exchange/SCAN staff in weekly reviews of court cases. They also continued to refer cases and to coordinate treatment efforts with Exchange/SCAN. There has also been a great deal of community coordination via a Juvenile Justice Council which organized multidisciplinary teams to review cases.

Lastly this program is an efficient way to provide treatment to families. In combination with the success above services are delivered for \$1431/family per year.

This report on the data analyzed only begins to draw conclusions. There remain many lessons that can be learned from querying the information collected. It is hoped that others will ask these same questions in their own programs and that others will want to research further questions from Exchange/SCAN's data.

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