The Impact of the Care Setting on Child Rehabilitation

Better Care Network

VIDEO SUMMARY

In many contexts, a common approach to supporting child victims of trafficking or sexual exploitation has been the provision of shelter-based rehabilitative services. Such services seek to meet the child's need for safety and psychosocial support by clustering services inside residential care settings. The growing awareness of both the negative impacts of residential care on child development and the importance of family has led to practitioners questioning the effectiveness of shelter-based rehabilitation.

In this video, you will hear Sreyna and Chenda, two practitioners from Hagar Cambodia, discuss their learning regarding the impact of the care setting on child rehabilitation. By comparing the differences observed in the rehabilitation process for children supported in Hagar's family-based care versus in their shelters, Sreyna and Chenda outline the rationale for Hagar's decision to close their shelters and expand their family-based care and community rehabilitation programs. Sreyna and Chenda further discuss the difference between employing an individual versus ecological and family systems approach to child rehabilitation and protection, in particular with respect to the sustainability of impacts.

DISCUSSION TOPIC

Unintended consequences

In the video, Sreyna speaks about the stress caused by removing a child from their family in order to receive residential-based rehabilitation services. She notes that the stress of separation ultimately compounds trauma and impedes the recovery process, which makes the service counterproductive to the overarching goal of rehabilitation. By highlighting this, Sreyna is drawing attention to unintended consequences that can occur when programs are designed to meet one specific need without due consideration given to the child's holistic needs, development, rights and children's views. Sreyna points to the impact this has on a child's emotional and psychological wellbeing, and poses an important reflective question to practitioners; 'How does it make the child feel?'

In your context:

? How has your organisation or service sought to engage children and other stakeholders in program design to ensure their views and perspectives are taken into account?

? How could you ensure children are given more opportunities to participate to ensure evaluations of program efficacy take into account children's perspectives and wishes?

? What specific need or right/s does your service or program/s seek to fulfil?

? What impact does your approach have on other needs and rights and are there any unintended consequences- positive or negative?

? Discuss whether there are other approaches that could **(a)** prevent rights regressions or **(b)** increase the positive impact of your services on children's rights and holistic needs.

The strengths of an ecological and family systems approach

In the video, Sreyna and Chenda discuss the benefits of providing support to the whole family and engaging in awareness raising in the whole community rather than just providing rehabilitation services to the child. They argue that such an ecological approach results in sustained impacts for children undergoing rehabilitation and aids in the prevention of further violence against children. This is in part because such an approach strengthens the long-term social support network of the child, and also addresses root causes that create vulnerability and risk in the family and broader community.

In your context:

(?)   In what ways do your programs employ an ecological model, working with families, communities or at the societal level, for the benefit of the children?

(?)   Are there ways that this could be enhanced and what further benefits to children would you anticipate?

(?)   Reflect on the root causes that lead to risks to children and create vulnerability, focusing on the specific children your organisation supports. To what extent do your programs target root causes of risk, violence or vulnerability, and what could be done to further enhance this?

(?)   What changes would have to be made to increase the degree to which interventions target root causes at different levels and what would the resource implications be?

Kanika's Experience in shelter and family-based care

Kanika was a young girl when she was sexually abused. Her parents had migrated for work and Kanika had been sent to live with her grandmother. Her step father's brother, Kanika's uncle, also lived with the grandmother. When Kanika was 13 years old, her uncle assaulted her. He threatened to harm her and her family if she told anyone, and as a result, Kanika stayed silent. When her parents returned, they noticed Kanika's behaviour had changed significantly. After asking many times, Kanika finally told her parents what had happened.

After discussions between the family, Kanika's grandmother banished the uncle from her house and local authorities referred Kanika to Hagar for support. A report was made to the police, however as the perpetrator had fled, there was no judicial proceeding.

Kanika was referred to Hagar and was taken to live in one of Hagar's shelters where she received counselling and rehabilitation. It took time to for Kanika to adjust to the difference between family and community life and life in the shelter. She experienced a loss of independence and sense of individuality. She no longer moved around the community freely and only left the shelter on group outings. School was provided on site, and she no longer had responsibilities as all meals and chores were taken care of by the staff. She became disengaged and difficult to motivate.

Kanika made friends with the other girls at the shelter, however, conflict and fighting between the children was commonplace. This was typically due to the children's challenging behaviours that stemmed from their trauma.

After a period of time in the shelter, Hagar decided to close the shelter and reintegrate all the children into family based-care. After conducting assessments, it was deemed in Kanika's best interest to be placed with a foster family. Kanika's foster parents worked with Kanika to help her readjust to life in a family and community and to regain independence. Kanika continued to access counselling support from Hagar and daily support from her foster parents who had been trained by Hagar to work with traumatised children and those with challenging behaviours. After a period of time in the foster care setting, Kanika showed a marked improvement in her motivation, resilience and independence. She remained with her foster family for many years until she completed high school and moved to the city to study at university. Hagar continued to provide follow up support until Kanika achieved full independence.