Introduction

No one is an island. Everyone is part of the human continent. (John Donne; 1572 – 1631)

With these simple words the British poet and contemporary of William Shakespeare expressed what characterizes humans as social beings.

Accordingly, it is very important for professionals not to consider single clients and families with complex needs as small islands alone in the huge, stormy ocean. Instead, their respective various relationships to people outside the core family should be recognized and taken into account.

Purpose of the project was to train professionals in valuing these relationships outlined above as social resources.

Theoretical background


Wraparound: nearly the whole social network of the family comes together regularly, planning how to support the family (Van den Berg; c.f. Clark).

A resource coordinator leads the session.

FamNet (Family Network Activation): An adaptation of the original concept to the German welfare setting. A family assistant supervises the parents how to activate their social network by themselves.

The German Welfare System

The German child welfare and juvenile justice system guarantees the legal guardian a legal claim on federal support in the case that adequate education and wellbeing cannot be ensured.

Families must have free choice of support options and ownership of the support plan.

The legal guardian keeps his/her parental authority.

Youth Welfare Department examines conditions and decides about options in type and amount of support.

Purpose of Empirical Study

Not much - even though it is demanded by the child and youth welfare law (KJHG).

At best, professionals focus on the social integration of clients into the community (school, kindergarten, sports club, therapy etc.)

but mostly do not encourage their personal relationships.

Social integration, without doubt, is very important for everyone because it creates social identity.

But personal relationships is an equally important part of a functioning network because they offer various possibilities to receive social support.

To develop network-oriented intervention methods for the social education work.

Participating families are those that have complex needs and are actually supported by a social welfare program.

For a certain period (9 months), their family assistants focus on the respective families’ (either existing or lacking) social resources.

Goal is to enable them to extend and use their network on their own.

To examine the intervention’s effectiveness and the actual degree of application of the intervention methods by the trained assistants.

To promote the application’s sustainability.

To develop the concept continually, based on the study’s results.
**Investigation Plan**

- 20 family assistants of eight welfare organizations in Hamburg were trained in network-oriented intervention methods.
- 26 families with complex needs participated in the nine-month program.
- A comparison group (N=26 families) received traditional assistance.
- The data collection for network analysis took place at the beginning and end of the intervention period via the "Mannheimer Interview on Social Support" (MISU, Veiel 1987).
- Additionally, qualitative interviews were held.

**The Network-oriented Intervention Methods**

- Different handouts were given to discuss the respective social network with the family;
- Furthermore, handouts to develop so-called "network goals" in cooperation with the family. These network goals refer to the establishment and use of social contacts.
- To let families reach their aims, family assistants supervised them how to focus on their resources (personal strengths, experiences, coping strategies, social resources).

**Research Hypotheses**

- Research hypotheses were that the families would profit from the network activation in so far as
  - social support from family members, neighbours and friends would increase.
  - The need of further support was supposed to decrease.
- No change was expected in the comparison group.
- The new intervention (network intervention) should be more effective in achieving the goals stated in the support plan.

**Quantitative Results**

**Practical Support in Daily Life**

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**Emotional Support in Daily Life**

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**Emotional Support in the Situations of the Crisis**

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The Most Important Result of the Qualitative Interviews with the Family Assistants (Research Group)

- Implementation of the concept has not been satisfactory. The different reasons are:
  - It was difficult to implement the network-oriented intervention methods in the daily social education work because of administrative problems.
  - Application of structural methods, (i.e., documentation of every goal, and every step to pursue this goal), felt strange to most of the participating professionals.
  - To change professionals’ point of view, so that they consider families with complex needs as being able to organize social support within their own network, is a long way and needs time.

The Most Important Result of the Qualitative Interviews with the Family Members (Research Group)

- two-thirds of the participating clients (mothers and fathers) report that their network has changed in the last nine months.
- Specifically, they feel more supported now.

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In sum, the family assistants rate the project as a success.
- Because they feel that activation of networks and successful development of clients have taken place in several cases.
- In addition, a lot of the participating professionals report that they could profit a lot by getting to know new methods.
- For several professionals it was completely new to focus on the private network of the clients - instead of understanding networking as sufficient cooperation between different care systems.
Continuing Research

- April 2004 – February 2005: Pilot project in cooperation with an organization that trains unemployed persons to find a job (“Hamburger Arbeits- und Beschäftigungsgesellschaft”)
  - FamNet intervention for young single-mothers
    Analysis and Activation of their Social Networks in order to support them in managing their daily life and finding a job.
  - Improvement of intervention methods (according to the received results of the former study) in order to make methods more applicable.

Thank You for Your Attention!

Dipl. Psych. Sibylle Friedrich

Office:
University of Hamburg
Department of Psychology
Division of Training and Consulting
Von-Melle-Park 5, R 4099, 20146 Hamburg, Germany
+49-40-42838-5499
FriedrichSibylle@aol.com