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**Let's do it better: A look at how the Department
of Child, Youth and Family Services works with
adolescent girls with problem behaviour.**

The experiences of adolescent girls who have been the clients of The Department of Child, Youth and Family Services because of identified or perceived problem behaviour. This research report explores what has worked for them and their families and what has not worked, in terms of the involvement of this service.

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2000

Abstract

This study was a small, retrospective, qualitative exploration of the experiences of adolescent girls and their families where the young women were referred to the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services for problem behaviour. The focus of this research was the perspective of the young women and their families. Three adolescent girls and four families who had been referred to a large urban office of the then New Zealand Children and Young Person's Service during the years 1993 to 1995 were interviewed in a mainly narrative style. Literature was reviewed covering a broad range of related topics including adolescence, adolescence for girls, problem behaviour, families and family situations, the New Zealand Children and Young Person's Service, the rights of clients, children and young people and research perspectives and methodology. The importance of the rights of children and of participants is a strong thread running through much of the literature. The data is presented and discussed under themes in an effort to preserve the confidentiality of the participants. These themes are: First contact; the problem; what happened; communication; effectiveness and comments and ideas. Generally the comments from the participants were negative about the service they had been given particularly with regard to the homes where the young women were placed, issues around communication with both the parents and the young women and the following up of plans. The research participants were impressive in their ability to relate traumatic incidents, to appreciate assistance given and in the manner in which they made reflective comments and proposals for change. The findings highlight issues such as the importance of the clients' perspective and the need to be able to assess this, adolescent and family problems, resources, the media, the difficult position of the social worker and the need for evaluation of the outcomes for young people and their families. These issues are the basis for the recommendations that relate to evaluation from the client's perspective, the rights of children, using the experience of clients, the need to share information and theory, the collation of resources and the use of the media. The participants were all interested in taking part in what they saw as an opportunity to have input into creating a better service for young people and their families who were going through situations similar to those they had experienced.

Preface and Acknowledgements

As a social worker I have for many years found it time consuming and frustrating trying to obtain successful outcomes for adolescent girls who have had problems with relationships and with behaviour. There have been times when their parents seemed as confused as I have been. I know other social workers have felt similarly when trying to work with two different stories that are both true while lacking the resources to assist in maintaining positive family relationships and with reconciliation. It is often the case that the only outcome we know about is when it has all gone wrong. I have constantly wondered: What has worked? How do we know if we have helped?

When I had the chance to do a research paper I wanted to see if I could get a better understanding of how it was from the other side, from the perspective of the young women and their families. The literature I read in preparing for and working through this research has left me in awe of the valuable work being done by those wanting to make a difference for young people and their families and of those wanting to improve the procedures and processes of what is now the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services.

My thanks to God and to the many people who have supported me in doing this research.

Most importantly I would like to thank the young women and their families who so generously trusted me with their traumatic memories and gave willingly of their time and their ideas because they wanted to help make it better for others in similar situations.

I would also especially like to thank my husband and family who have given me unfailing moral support while having a very part-time wife, mother and grandmother over the time I have been working on this research paper. Their help in putting up with books and papers covering every available surface throughout our home, Nicola's painstaking editing and advice and Sarah's technical expertise has been invaluable.

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Thank you all, I hope that between us we have put together something that will improve services to troubled youth and their families.

The views expressed in this report unless otherwise attributed are mine and do not represent or reflect those of any other individual or organisation.

I would like to dedicate this to my grandchildren. May
God bless them and may they travel safely through their
adolescence secure within their family and their community.

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