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Type of presentation:
single oeL (90 MINS)

Description

Title: Voices for the Forgotten: Thirty Years of the International Foster Care Organization

Author/presenter: Emily Jean McFadden, Prof. Grand Valley State University School of social Work (retired)

Track: International Social Work

Format: Policy and Program Development

Issues: International Networking--on a shoestring. The empowerment of young persons in foster care. Training and development of foster homes for deinstitutionalization of children in Eastern Europe and emerging nations. A voluntary group of foster carers, social workers, policy makers and researchers banded together to move from a developmental mode to an advocacy stance as they worked together to implement the UN Convention or Rights of the Child in many countries.

Setting. The organization began in the UK, grew to include much of Europe, and North America, then met in New Zealand and expanded through Australia and the Pacific Rim. With Perestroika, the head of the Soviet Children's Fund requested assistance in moving from institutional care to family foster care, and Eastern Europe nations became part of IFCO. Foundation financing supported a network in Latin America which later
became autonomous and which worked to develop foster care programs and policies through South and Central America. Currently IFCO is renewing efforts to serve Africa.

Project. A small, informal network, IFCO has met in many countries over the past thirty years, and through educational conferences has influenced policy and programs across the globe. It has generated research on a variety of topics related to family foster care. It was the center of tremendous international transfer of knowledge, which among other achievements led to development of foster homes and deinstitutionalization in many Eastern European countries as well as other nations. Inclusion of youth in care in all conferences, and in advocacy activities led to the empowerment of many young people. The young people have helped impact policy in their home countries, and contributed input to UNICEF, EUROSOCC and other organizations.

Impact/Outcomes. For one example, over 20 countries have changed the way in which they develop foster homes using the CWLA (Child Welfare League of America) PRIDE curriculum. The New Zealand Children And Young Persons Act, which gave rise to Family group conferences, and family decision-making in child protection, was widely disseminated through IFCO in the very early years (1989). Countries have moved toward keeping sibling groups together, using kinship care, developing community based treatment homes for troubled adolescents, greater understanding of the needs of traumatized children in foster homes, and more awareness of the impact of abuse allegations on foster families.

Implications for social workers. First and foremost, the International Foster Care Organization is unique in that young people in care, and foster parents/foster carers have an equal voice and status in the group as do social workers, policy makers, and program planners. Growing into an empowerment model, IFCO has united all players in child welfare in the common goal of implementing the UN Convention on Rights of the Child as it pertains to the protection of children and the right of children to live in a
family. The history of IFCO involves an understanding of the long term detrimental consequences of colonization; the knowledge that removal of children from a colonized people is a form of oppression that can lead to cultural genocide. Further, many of the Northern European and North American models of child welfare destroy the time-honored traditions and resources of a subjugated people for caring for their young. Learning from countries in which a powerful state placed children in institutions teaches that the state is not an adequate parent.

Finally, the story of IFCO shows that a small band of determined people can extend knowledge worldwide, without significant government funding. Rather, committed individuals, digging into their own pockets to finance participation, can convene to further their deepest held ethics and ideals.
Abbreviated Curriculum Vita

Emily Jean McFadden


Plenary Speaker, conferences in Leeds, England; Jonkopping, Sweden; Hamilton, New Zealand; Prague, Czech Republic; Rouen, France; La Plata, Argentina. Presentations at conferences in Australia, Argentina, Netherlands, New Zealand, England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, Eire, Czech Republic, France, Sweden, Malta, Canada etc.

Speaking tours on child welfare issues, New Zealand (for Maori people and NZ Foster Care Federation), United Kingdom (for British Association for Adoption and Fostering.)

Program Chair, 6th International Conference, International Foster Care Organization, 1989.

Co-Author, with Susan Whitelaw Downs and Ernestine Moore (also Lela Costin initially) many editions of *Child Welfare and Family Services: Policies and Practices*. Several publishers over the years including Longmans, and Allyn & Bacon. Widely used graduate social work text.

Author of foster parent training materials including *Emotional Development: the Foster Child’s Identity; Fostering the Battered and Abused Child; Working with Natural Families and Fostering the Child Who Has Been Sexually Abused*. These have been translated into several languages including Norwegian, French, Spanish, Afrikaans and Zulu


Numerous other publications, available on request.
**Professor, Grand Valley State University School of Social Work, retired. 1993-2008**


**Professor, Social Work Department Eastern Michigan University 1978-1994**

Taught practice courses, developed graduate family and children specialty. Directed federal grants on Kinship Care and Practice in Permanency planning. Worked also with Foster Parent Training Project, National Foster Care Resource Center, Preventing Abuse in Foster Care, Independent Living federal grants (curriculum development, training trainers, management) at Institute for Study of Children and Families, Eastern Michigan University (1976-1992).

**President, Michigan Chapter, National Association of Social Workers, 1998-2000.**


**Member, National Association of Social Workers 1975-present**

**Licensed Social Worker, State of Michigan. LMSW-clinical and macro**

Co-President, League of Women Voters-Holland Area. 2010-present

Member and founder Lakeshore Women for Peace

Member, Curriculum Committee and Teacher. Hope College Academy of Senior Professionals (HASP)

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