

Does a perfect system exist?

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Australian Government
**Department of Innovation, Industry,
Science and Research**



Working together to enhance the lives of children

Reflections on the title

- Why ask this question?
- Critical challenges that are seemingly intractable
- Presumption that our system is not perfect
- Scan the globe looking (and hoping) for alternatives



Sweden



The Swedish Model

- Local municipalities have primary responsibility for protecting children – do investigations and assessments
- Also non-government and private sector agencies
- Broad mandatory reporting system
- Compulsive OOHC – SW makes rec. to Court
- Care may be voluntary or compulsive – consent central
- Principle of reunification



Child protection and Family Service Orientations

Characteristic	Child Protection Orientation	Family Service Orientation
Framing the problem of child abuse	The need to protect children from harm.	Abuse is a result of family conflict or dysfunction stemming from social, economic and psychological difficulties.
Entry to services	Single entry point; report or notification by third party.	Range of entry points and services.
Basis of government intervention and services provided	Legalistic, investigatory in order to formulate child safety plans.	Supportive or therapeutic responses to meeting the needs of children and families or resolving problems.
Place of services	Separated from family support services.	Embedded within and normalised by broad child welfare or public health services.
Coverage	Resources are concentrated on families where risks of (re-) abuse are high and immediate.	Resources are available to more families at an earlier stage.
Service Approach	Standardised procedures; rigid timelines.	Flexible to meet clients' needs.
State-parent relationship	Adversarial.	Partnership.
Role of the legal system	Adversarial; formal; evidence-based.	Last resort; informal; inquisitorial.
Out-of-home care	Mainly involuntary.	Mainly voluntary.

Source: Allen Consulting Group (2003, p. 14, Table 2.1)

The Swedish Social Service Act

- Social Service Act
 - Broad, early intervention and family support best way to protect children, no compulsory measures
 - Outline law, gives little guidance as to how social workers should act
 - Interpretation of Social Service Act by local municipalities
- Very broad client group
- Assessment guided by holistic perspective requires
 - Cooperation across social services; and
 - Consent of families involved



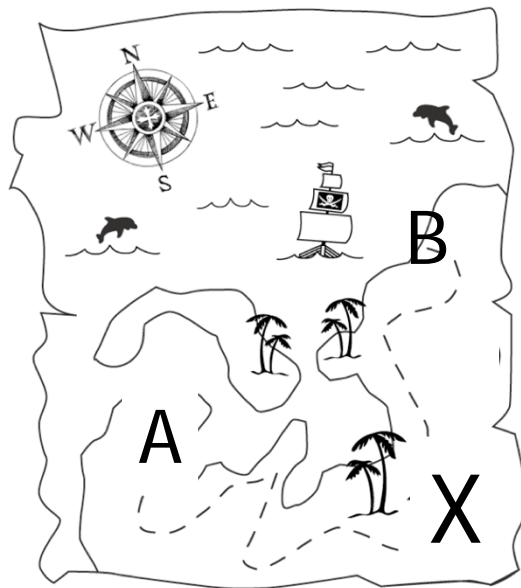
A convergence in child welfare orientation

- A social welfare ethos
- Signatories to UN CRoC
- Recognition that both under- and over-intervention in family life may bring unintended consequences
- Shared central idea that early intervention be promoted; but an effective system to protect children from serious abuse was also necessary



Shared destination; different origins

- Convergence in terms of destination
- Pathway to that destination varied greatly
- Dependent upon the point of origin:



Marked differences between child protection and family services orientations

To illustrate ...



Mandatory reporting

- The Australian Experience
 - Expansion of mandated reporting laws, reporting 'the response' to protecting children
 - NSW raised the threshold for mandatory reports
- The Finnish Experience
 - Lack of compliance was normative, often due to concerns about breaching confidentiality
 - Provisions were introduced to allow notifications to be made cooperatively with families as a request for assessment



Centralised or localised

- Australia
 - Prescriptive legislation, a single statewide model. Focus on consistency of provision across a jurisdiction. Concern as to whether there is sufficient localisation
- Sweden & Finland & Germany
 - Outline laws, local responsibility to interpret those laws. High degree of variability across municipalities. Concern about variable quality of service provision – esp in small municipalities with limited budgets



Policies & Procedures

- The UK Experience
 - Documented procedures describing expectations of practitioners exceed the cognitive capacity of most people
- The German Experience
 - Until recently there have been no practice manuals outlining expectations and minimum standards for practice resulting in inconsistent and variable quality of care



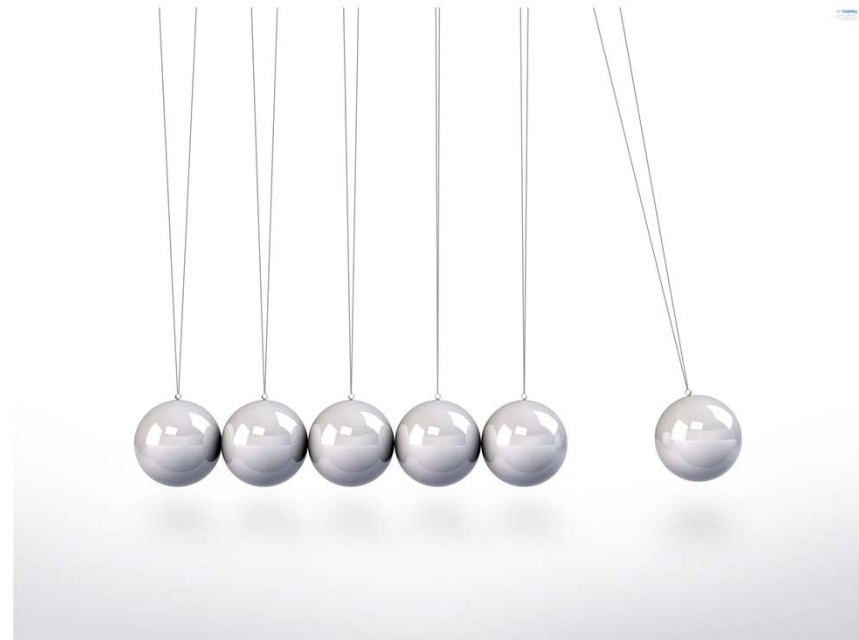
Removal and Family Preservation

- The Australian Experience
 - Infants and younger children are more likely to be removed into care than older children and adolescents as young children are at greatest risk of harm, including fatal abuse
- The Swedish Experience
 - The majority of children who enter state care in Sweden are teenagers between 13-21 years old.
 - The majority of placements were made with consent – only one third were the result of a compulsory care decision



What can be learned from unique challenges of different orientations?

- Unintended consequences
- Avoid extremes
- Aim for balance
- Cautious adoption



Some cautions for moving forward



Evidence-base for reform

- Inquiries tend to use evidence well to
 - Understand the problem
 - Identify problems with past approaches
- Systemic solutions tend to be experimental
- Growing international evidence-base for effective interventions and programs



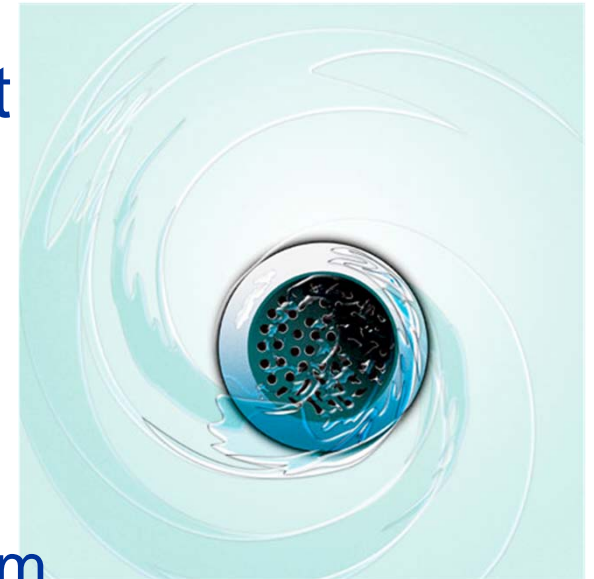
Evaluate the quality of the evidence

- Just because it's written ...
- To be "evidence-based" it must have been evaluated
- When looking across borders, ask:
 - Is there an evidence-base?
 - Is it just that it is done elsewhere?
 - What is it effective for?



Beware throwing out the baby with the bath water

- If a strategy or intervention has not produced outcomes ... do we know why?
- Two parts to achieving evidence-based practice
 - 1. Evidence-based practice or program
 - 2. Effectively implemented solution
- Are we rejecting something as a failure or 'bad idea' because it was poorly implemented?



The science of implementation

- Implementation Science is a field of practice and research which aims to overcome the "... paradox of non-evidence-based implementation of evidence-based programs"
- Landmark review of evidence Fixsen et al (2005)
 - Propose a model with 6 stages of implementation
 - Say 3-5 years of sustained effort to be fully operational
 - If you have the core components or *drivers* of effective implementation
- Set and forget training or policy approach to implementation – not effective



Seeing the forest through trees

The real evidence for success or failure is client outcomes



What challenges remain?

- For practitioners:
 - Consent
 - Action rather than assessment and referral
- For policy makers:
 - Is reform addressing causal problems or unintended consequences?
 - Implementation
- For all: Success measured by real changes for families



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