



The Origin and Growth of Parent Advocacy in Child Welfare

International Parent Advocacy Network

Uuden edessä

Valtakunnalliset lastensuojelupäivät® 5.-6.10.2021

5 October 2021

David Tobis, Ph.D.

The Original Idea of involving parents

- New Zealand
 - Maori Family Group Conferences
 - Made into law in New Zealand in 1989
- The Idea spread to other countries and New York City

New York City in 1990s:

- Parents had no voice and almost no rights
- Parents organized in other social welfare systems
 - Developmental Disabilities, Mental Health, Education, Cash Transfers
- Parents organized in child welfare for the first time

NYC Child Welfare System in 1990s

- 20 class action law suits filed against the city and child welfare agencies
- Almost 50,000 children in care
- 7 years for an adoption to occur
- Terrible legal representation for parents
- 40% of confirmed abuse/neglect no help provided
- Parents had no voice



Parents fight back in New York City

- Parents were trained to become parent advocates
 - A parent advocate is:
 - Parent with lived child welfare experience, trained to be an advocate and an activist
- Parents were trained and paid
 - Class room training
 - Field experience
 - Support groups
- Parents began working with their allies
- Work of Parent advocates:
 - Coaching other parents [EXPERIENCED COMPANIONS]
 - Attending Initial Child Safety Conferences: evaluated by Lalayants
 - Writing their stories: Rise Magazine <u>https://www.risemagazine.org</u>
 - Speaking and testifying
 - Teaching in schools of social work and law schools
 - Organizing in the community
 - Demonstrating





John Mattingly Commissioner NYC Administration for Children's Services (2004-2011)

> "Everywhere you look in this city, where we are doing our best work, you find parent advocates around."



What Changed in New York City

- 1992: almost 50,000 children in foster care
 2021: Fewer than 8,000 children in foster care
- Excellent legal representation: Interdisciplinary legal teams
- More services and supports for families
- Parents have a voice:
 - on their own case (Initial Child Safety Conferences)
 - Employed in child welfare agencies as coaches
 - Advisory Boards to influence child welfare policy



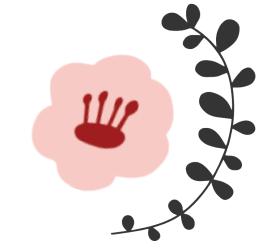


Foundational Beliefs

- People have a right to participate in the decisions that affect their lives
- People working together and organizing can be a powerful force for change

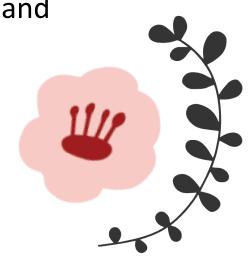
Strategies

- Changing Minds: Awards, publications, contact
- Employing parents in child welfare agencies
- Grass Roots Organizing



The example of New York spreads to other countries

- 100 parent advocacy and activism programs in other high Income Countries
- Government
 - Advising the Minister: Queensland, Australia
 - Parents coaching parents: Local Authorities in the United Kingdom
- NGOs: Service providers
 - Family Rehabilitation Centre Lauste: Experienced Companions: Finland
 - Family Inclusion Networks (FIN) in Australia
- Grass roots organizing
 - Fearless R2W, Canada
 - Grandmothers Against Removal, Australia

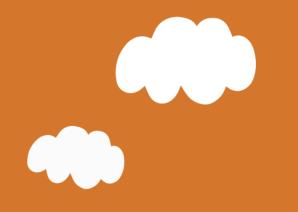


International Parent Advocacy Network (IPAN) <u>https://www.parentadvocacy.net</u>

- A parent-led movement to transform child welfare
- Origin, structure, composition of IPAN
- Toolkit for Transformation
- Supports parent advocacy and activism with:
 - Training, technical assistance, webinars, a newsletter

Finland is leading the way to transform child welfare





Kiitos!

