

# The Origin and Growth of Parent Advocacy in Child Welfare

International Parent Advocacy Network

*Uuden edessä*

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# 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 <https://www.risemagazine.org>
  - 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





# The Child Welfare Fund: the catalyst


## 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)

<https://www.parentadvocacy.net>

- 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!

