

THE CHANGING ROLE OF RELIGIOUSLY-AFFILIATED CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICE AGENCIES

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Religiously-affiliated child and family serving agencies (RACFSAs) are often categorized with congregations and other service organizations as “faith-based organizations.” RACFSAs were the first and largest group of private providers of services to children and families since the beginning of formalized social services. Yet, there is little systematic knowledge about what is distinctive about RACFSAs and their services.

Social, political, and cultural shifts have impacted the services provided by these agencies. This report summarizes findings from a study of child and family serving agencies in thirteen states, identifying differences and similarities between RACFSAs and other child and family serving agencies and describing how RACFSAs have changed over time. Specifically, findings describe (1) the services RACFSAs provide and how they are provided, (2) the role of religion and faith in their services, and (3) emerging trends and possible implications for the larger child welfare field in policy and practice.

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LITERATURE REVIEW AND BACKGROUND FOR THIS PROJECT

Religiously-affiliated child and family service agencies (RACFSAs) are often categorized with congregations and other service organizations under the term “faith-based organizations.” RACFSAs were the first and have historically been the largest group of private providers of services to children and families since the beginning of formalized social services. Ursuline nuns in New Orleans founded the first orphanage in 1727 and in 1739 the Bethesda Orphan House was established in Savannah, Georgia, by the Methodist Church (Boudreaux, & Boudreaux, 1999). Early orphanages showed a strong religious commitment, many were either established or supported by individuals and church contributions, though local governments and municipalities also contributed to the support of the orphanages (Olasky, 1999). The free foster care movement was established by the Reverend Charles Loring Brace, an ordained Methodist minister, who established the Children’s Aid Society in New York City. Appealing to the notion of Christian charity, the Children’s Aid Society between 1853 and 1900 placed 22,000 children into foster homes, primarily in the South and West regions of the nation (Boudreaux & Boudreaux, 1999). Today, in many rural and urban communities, RACFSAs provide a majority of the services available (Garland, 1994; Hall, 2001; Salovitz, 2001). These religiously-affiliated organizations have been and continue to be essential partners in many communities’ child welfare services. In Texas, five of the 28 agencies (18%) accredited by the Child Welfare League of America and Family Service America are religiously affiliated.² Nationally, nearly one of every six child-care centers is housed in a religious facility (Salovitz, 2001).

THE CONTRIBUTION OF RACFSAs TO THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

Nevertheless, we have little or no systematic knowledge—only anecdotal evidence-- about what is distinctive about the services delivered by RACFSAs, especially as they compare to public and other private child and family services. We do not know how many there are, what proportion of the child welfare system they represent, or what services they provide. Only preliminary studies indicate the extent of their effectiveness (Modesto, 2003; Rom, 1999; The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2001; Trulear, 2000). We do not know how they contribute to the development of spiritual and social capital in communities and in congregations for the sake of the most vulnerable children and families in their communities, both within and beyond their own faith group. We do not know how faith acts as a mobilizing force in developing, supporting, and sustaining the services of RACFSAs. In recent national discussions about faith-based initiatives, there has been almost no attention given to these traditional child welfare agencies, even though some RACFSAs are already serving significant roles as government-contracted service providers themselves. Alternatively, we do not know the extent to which congregations and people of faith contribute to the welfare of children and families through RACFSAs—through financial giving, volunteer hours, and becoming foster care and adoptive

¹ Jewish Family Service of Greater Dallas, Associate Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Galveston-Houston, Children’s Home of Lubbock, St. Peter-St. Joseph Children’s Home in San Antonio, The Methodist Children’s Home in Waco. There are many other faith-based organizations (and other private nonsectarian and public organizations as well) that have not sought accreditation by CWLA.

homes. Yet given their presence in large numbers and important roles in the array of services available in many communities, this contribution appears to be significant. The project is designed to find out the extent of what they do and how their resources can be leveraged even more effectively on behalf of the needs of vulnerable children and their families.

Our own professional networks indicate that many RACFSAs are serving as intermediaries between large government entities and smaller faith-based organizations and congregations that otherwise do not have the infrastructure to make connections to government and other funders. Not only do these organizations develop financial support from faith communities for child and family services, therefore, but they also make possible the transfer of resources to these smaller organizations and service programs so that they can serve the needs of children and families in their communities. Our experience as consultants with and observers of these organizations is that they are coupling financial resources for services to vulnerable children and families with the social capital of social networks, informal support, and volunteers that characterize faith communities.

They serve as bridges with benefits going both ways. Not only do they connect government and other financial and technical resources to grassroots religiously-affiliated organizations and congregations, but they also link families and communities to the resources available to them and, alternatively, provide an infrastructure for delivering services to children and families that otherwise are inaccessible to large public agencies (Greenburg & Osafo, 2000). RACFSAs put a familiar and positive face on the child welfare system for families and the public; their programs and services are “owned” by congregations; it is *their* work with children and families described in newsletters, publications, and worship bulletins. For families that have been disrupted and alienated by a public agency’s intervention and forced removal of a child into foster care, the caregiving RACFSA can be a less daunting, more trusted professional resource. For example, Campbell and his colleagues found that faith-based organizations working with TANF recipients are able to reach and successfully equip some of the hardest to employ (e.g., parolees, recovering substance abusers, the homeless) and have greater legitimacy in the eyes of the community than public agencies (Campbell et al., 2003). And benefits also go in the other direction—for the child welfare system—as RACFSAs leverage in-kind services, volunteers as mentors and foster parents, and neighborhood-based family resource programs in congregations. RACFSAs build on the religious beliefs that such service to vulnerable children and families is inherently worship of God, a way of living out one’s faith (Hugen et al., 2003). Religious faith motivates and sustains the services of faith communities and families responding to the needs of vulnerable children and parents (Unruh, 1999).

On the organizational level, the “faith factor” has recently received much attention in the development of theoretical models of religiously-affiliated organizations, from “faith-saturated” organizations such as congregations and organizations that are steeped in faith traditions in everything from their mission statements to hiring practices to methods of intervention—to “faith-implicit” organizations in which religious programmatic elements are implied, perhaps by name or affiliation, but are not conspicuously present (Sider, 2000; Sider & Unruh, 2004; Unruh, 2004) see also (Jeavons, 1994, 1998, 2004). However, there has been little to no research to actually determine the prevalence of these factors in religiously-affiliated organizations, much

less the impact of those factors on the nature of services offered or on the clients themselves. In addition, we do not know (but hypothesize) that there is already the potential for a significant, mutually helpful link between many of these agencies and congregations; many congregations can (or do) provide the agencies with a variety of resources, such as financial gifts and resources. In turn, the RACFSAs can work with the congregations, providing prevention programs to the community through them, as well as infrastructure and expertise for mutually-supported community projects that the congregations could not do alone.

Using the theoretical models in existence (Jeavons, 2004; Sider & Unruh, 2004), as well as our own previous work, this project examined the extent to which religious faith is a resource in RACFSAs that gives direction to mission, shapes services, motivates staff and volunteers, and generates resources for the sake of providing care for vulnerable children and families.

Over the past 40 years, the child welfare field as a whole has broadened its attention from providing care for dependent and neglected children through residential services, foster care, and adoption to include community-based services, preserving, and supporting vulnerable families through a whole range of family support services. For example, Peter Benson and Eugene Roehlkepartain at the Search Institute have identified 40 community assets that can be the focus of helping vulnerable children thrive (Benson, 1997, 2004; Roehlkepartain, 2004a, 2004b). Emerging programs of family support that focus on these assets need to be situated in communities rather than in centralized agencies. Some RACFSAs have decades (and some a century or more) of experience in providing community-recognized family support services. They have moved from residential care of children on campuses and group homes into community-based and community-building models to strengthen the families of children vulnerable to family stress and disruption and reduce the need for placement outside the home (Garland, 1994).

THE ROLE OF RACFSAs IN THE CHILD WELFARE FIELD

The field of child welfare has been virtually blind to any role RACFSAs can and do serve in the continuum of child welfare services. For example, a recent publication of the Child Welfare League of America studying the impact of the privatization of child welfare services does not address the fact many of the organizations that are serving as service providers are religiously affiliated and what the implications of that affiliation might be (Freundlich & Gerstenzang, 2003).

Therefore, this research project sought to describe (1) the professional and financial resources of RACFSAs, (2) the services they are providing and how they provide services—traditional residential vs. community building to strengthen families, (3) the role of religion and faith in their services, (4) the variables that make them effective in preventing the need for long term placement of children out of their homes, and (5) emerging trends and their possible implications for the larger child welfare field in policy and practice.

We know that these agencies have responded at least in some measure to the changes in the field of child welfare that have affected *all* child welfare—e.g., the privatization of services, changing

funding streams and the devolution of social services, the increases in illegal drugs and their impact on parenting and on fetus development, and changes in professional child welfare knowledge and skills. What we do not know is the extent to which these changes were buffered—or not—by the religious affiliation of these agencies. Nor do we know what *other* factors have created change and supported resiliency (in the face of significantly greater challenges) in these organizations *because* they are religiously affiliated—the declining identification of congregations with denominations, the growing religious right and decline in the mainline churches, denominational politics, the availability of funding through new government “faith-based initiatives,” technological changes that makes connectivity easier, and so on.

Anecdotally, we know that the support of congregations, denominations, and religious orders is instrumental in buttressing the work of the RACFSA, either in terms of providing financial or in-kind resources, and/or the provision of volunteers and other forms of social capital, without which many RACFSAs would struggle to survive. Often, this support is quite creative. For example, Hoyleton Youth and Family Services, a faith-based agency based in Hoyleton, Illinois, provides a wide array of community-based services for children and families. Hoyleton began discussions with the Bethel United Church of Christ in Cahokia, IL, when the members of that congregation decided that for both economic and mission-based reasons, it wanted to donate its church building and property to an agency that could provide valuable social services in their community. As a result of that discussion, Hoyleton has since taken on ownership and maintenance of that site from which, without the considerable costs of rental or mortgage payments, it can launch a series of low-cost community services. In turn, the congregation can continue to meet there for weekly services and special occasions.

In an important new emerging model, RACFSAs and congregations work together as equal or near-equal collaborators or partners in the delivery of services to children and families in their communities. Under this model, both the RACFSA and the congregation(s) contribute components essential to the service being delivered. For example, Missouri Baptist Children’s Home (MBCH) helps congregations interested in providing children in need of foster care with loving homes and a congregation committed to providing community support for both child and foster family. The participating churches formally commission participating families in whatever role they take on, and commit to being a nurturing, supporting community for the foster families. MBCH provides orientation, training, and on-going, professional mental health and case management services for the participating children and families.

In some cases, organizations that clearly would not consider themselves “faith-based” (such as state child welfare services or secular agencies) have begun working successfully with congregations and religious communities in the provision of services to children and families. One example has been the proliferation of the One Church/One Child programs run by numerous state agencies. Another example is Covenant to Care, a nonprofit organization in Connecticut that works with religious communities of all denominations to provide goods and services to abused and neglected children that are supported by the state. It operates several programs supported by Connecticut congregations including programs that:

Match religious communities with CT's Department of Children and Families (DCF) social workers to support the needs of children on the social workers' caseloads;

Recruit foster and adoptive parents through religious communities;

Operate a food bank program that provides DCF social workers with emergency supplies for the families they serve;

Recruit and train mentors from religious communities to work with teens (Spigel, 2002).

Buckner Child and Family Services, a historic Baptist agency in Texas, has launched an extensive neighborhood and community development initiative, placing social workers in key congregations to leverage their resources and linkages with other congregations and religious groups to develop safer, more family-supportive neighborhoods and communities for children and families. Their work includes not only family support services and resource centers but also economic development, substance abuse treatment, and the building of affordable housing for families most vulnerable to homelessness (Fuller, 2004; see also Tapia, 1994).

Other evidence indicates, however, that many RACFSAs have not capitalized on the opportunity for partnerships with congregations, leaving congregations with only their own resources and vision for renewing and building family-supportive neighborhoods and communities (Harper, 1999). How much more could congregations in resource-deprived communities do if they had expertise and support of RACFSAs available to them?

Unfortunately, we have only anecdotal evidence about these models, gleaned from our network of connections and the consultants who have guided the planning of this research project. There has been *no* study specifically looking at RACFSAs, and a search of doctoral dissertations identified one that focused on religiously affiliated orphanages (Friedman, 1991). We do not even know how many there are, much less what they are doing. They have no network among themselves to learn from one another, or to share models or innovations of change over time. The study sought to point to how other RACFSAs can pursue the development of services that are increasingly preventive, emphasizing the development of strong and resilient families and communities at the front end of the child welfare continuum rather than focusing only on receiving children from the child protective services system.

ISSUES OF RACIAL DISPROPORTIONALITY IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

African American children comprise less than 20% of the nation's children but 40% of the foster care population. First Nation (Native American) children are only 1.1% of the nation's children but 1.7% of the foster care population, 15-65% in states with large First Nation populations (Clark, 2002; Roberts, 2002). Religiously-affiliated agencies do not usually provide services directly related to removing children from their biological homes; rather, they receive children referred by public child protective services. Their role in addressing the problem of racial disproportionality in the child welfare system includes both providing services that strengthen

and support families, protecting children from abuse and neglect *in their own homes*, and then, when removal becomes necessary, providing appropriate services that keep children in their own communities and move toward reunification or adoption as quickly as possible. These services—both preventive and foster care/reunification—need to be culturally competent (Cohen, 2003; Suleiman, 2003).

The previous section described some of the anecdotal evidence that RACFSAs may be (or have the potential to be) major contributors to the prevention of family disruption. They have the ability to connect with vulnerable families and their communities to build on strength and competence in parents and their communities for raising healthy, successful, hope-filled children. Andrew Billingsley's research with historically African-American congregations indicates that these faith communities collaborate extensively with social agencies and also provide a broad array of family support services to keep community children out of the child welfare system (Billingsley, 1992, 1999; Billingsley & Caldwell, 1994) John Perkins (1999) has provided compelling models of family support programs in his Detroit congregation. Examples of prevention services and building family strengths through congregational programs include:

The development of parent education courses such as *Parenting by Grace* (Garland, Chapman, & Pounds, 1991), a program steeped in the values and texts of the faith community that focuses on building children's—and parents'—self esteem and sense of efficacy, and that focuses on “encouragement-focused” discipline and rationales for avoiding physical punishment. The power of programs such as this is that they are offered in the neighborhood and faith community of families themselves, providing ongoing support for more effective parenting after the course has long ended.

Providing resources for congregations to be “safe” communities that speak boldly, out of their own values and sacred texts, against family violence and for more constructive ways of dealing with frustration and conflict in parenting and spouse relationships (e.g., (Clark-Kroeger & Nason-Clark, 2001; Garland, 2001; Nason-Clark, 1997; Wallace, 2002). The journal *Family Ministry* has published sermons and congregational guidelines on the topic of family violence and the corporal punishment of children, providing resources for neighbors and pastors who can be the front line of identification of families vulnerable to abuse and neglect.

The engagement of congregations as advocates for children. In 1997, the Woman's Missionary Union of the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Protestant denomination in the country, adopted the book *Precious in His Sight, A Guide to Child Advocacy* (Garland, 1996) as its focus for ministry for the year. The book addresses practical ways congregations can be involved in responding with prevention and resource programs to the needs

of children at risk of neglect and abuse, school failure, substance abuse, and pregnancy.

The provision of supports for long-term economic viability of families in poverty. The Woman's Missionary Union also has developed the program "Christian Woman's Job Corps" that has opened centers all over the country to train women receiving TANF funds with the job skills and other supports they need to become self sustaining. A core component of the program is the provision of other women as friends and mentors to these mothers seeking self sufficiency; they are not alone but are enveloped in a community of support.

The Children's Defense Fund offers a week of training in child advocacy each summer for African-American church leaders at the Haley Farm in Tennessee, the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Institute.

An agency in San Antonio is developing a mentoring program for at-risk teen mothers, pairing them with a team of mentors for two years to provide a network of support and mentoring as new mothers. A congregation in Chicago takes baskets of "joy" to new teenage mothers in the hospital, with coupons for a free night of child care, making possible the connection to a community of support for these new, vulnerable families that can develop into a long-term friendship/mentoring relationship.

Many congregations offer infant and child care programs and after-school programs. These are ideal settings for RACFSAs to partner in providing family resource centers that include a diversity of programs such as fathering classes and mentors, budget and job skills programs, parent education and support groups, toy exchanges, and many other family support services. For example, one congregation provides a father's play group on Saturday mornings that begins at the McDonald's, where many single fathers begin their only day with their children, and then move to the congregation's facility nearby, where they have the support and conversation of other dads, learn parenting skills, and hear about the significance of their role in their children's lives (Garland, 1999).

Congregations are transforming their communities into safer places, with affordable housing, safer schools, and scholarships for at-risk teenagers, giving them hope for higher education and a way out of poverty and a life on the streets—or worse (Freedman, 1993).

These are anecdotes of some of the prevention and family-strengthening activities that faith communities are involved in. RACFSAs can be the impetus for this involvement, but we do not

know how often they serve in that role. Again, we have only these kinds of stories as evidence that they develop the training and resources materials (e.g., the training kit for Christian Women's Job Corps and the training materials that accompany *Precious in His Sight*); and they provide the training and the ongoing support for volunteers and communities.

If RACFSAs are effective and working with families in poverty, particularly families of color, then they are contributing to the amelioration of the problem of racial disproportionality. Moreover, they are characterizing the two fundamental premises that (1) there is no substitute for strong families to ensure that children grow up to be capable adults; and (2) the ability of families to raise their children is often inextricably linked to a community that is an environment fostering strength and efficacy. Moreover, these services have the potential to counteract the problems public systems designed to serve disadvantaged children often face:

Instead of “serving at a distance,” RACFSAs can work with congregations located in the neighborhoods and communities of vulnerable children and families. Congregations work best with those with whom they can have enduring relationships—over the long haul—whether in their own neighborhood or in the larger urban or rural community (Cosgrove, 2001; Dudley & Roozen, 2001; McCarthy & Castelli, 1998).

Instead of focusing narrowly on individual problems, faith communities can come to know the whole family in its larger context, both strengths and life narratives as well as moments of crises (Garland, 1999).

Instead of intervening only when problems are severe, RACFSAs and faith communities related to them serve best in ways that prevent severe problems, that come along side families in crisis to help them cope and develop resilience (Garland, 1994).

We know this from stories and experiences we have had consulting with congregations and working with networks of congregational and denominational leaders in family ministry. What this study attempted to document was the extent to which RACFSAs are—and *can be*—supporting the preventive services of faith communities with vulnerable families to which they may have access when no other service entities do, describing models of those services.

The number of children in out-of-home care of the child welfare system has continued to grow. Faith communities have values and beliefs that challenge them to regard all children as *our* children—our responsibility. For example, Christian texts teach that Jesus taught his followers to seek out children and did so himself. He taught that caring for children is the prime expression of our love of Jesus and of worship—of welcoming God's presence (Mark 10). Deeply rooting services in the values of the community provides strong, ongoing support for prevention and fostering programs.

The number of foster families nationally has dropped. Increasingly, however, public agencies are turning to faith communities to help them recruit foster parents. RACFSAs are potentially more effective in this recruitment effort than public agencies because they may have close ties with the congregations and speak the same language of faith. As in the case of Missouri Baptist

Children's Homes' program, they can recruit and train not only foster parents but a whole supportive community for that foster family.

The training of whole congregations as caring communities for children and families provide neighbors and biological and "fictive" aunts, uncles, and grandparents for vulnerable young families. These community members can intervene early and informally as mentors and "friends" to prevent abuse and neglect (Garland, 1990).

Potential foster families embedded in communities of faith are often more capable of taking children with special or exceptional needs. In our congregation, a family provided foster care for two children with profound special needs, avoiding placement in a more restrictive institutional setting. A call was put out for volunteers to commit themselves to provide support for this family and, as a consequence, a large group went through training in how to care for these children in order to provide respite and other support care for the family, making it possible for them to become special needs foster parents. The congregation saw the children as "our" children and a significant ministry defining the congregation's identity.

By working with congregations, RACFSAs can provide more neighborhood-based, culturally sensitive care for children who have to be placed in foster care.

Of course, there is no research other than this kind of anecdotal evidence about the *extent* of RACFSA involvement in leveraging the involvement of faith communities in serving vulnerable families in this way. This project provides the first baseline of data from which we can gauge the extent to which these agencies are actually reducing the number of children who may wind up languishing in the child welfare system, the extent to which these agencies are shifting their resources to family foster care and family-centered services, and the extent to which they can increase the reunifications of families, prevent recidivism, and when reunification is not possible, arrange permanent placements.

NEED FOR MODELS OF PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

This study will address a prevailing problem in the education of professional staff in RACFSAs, which is that they have been educated and equipped to provide quality services to children and families, but they have not been educated on how to provide services in a distinctively religious context. In fact, it has only been recently that social work as a profession has recognized faith-based organizations as a unique context for the provision of social services, along with the particular challenges, constraints, and opportunities for professional practice that exist in these settings (Garland, 1992). Many social workers today were educated in an era in which faith and religion were either ignored or considered inappropriate issues for integration in professional practice. The congregation or church-related agency has not been a focus of social work education about organizations. As a result, many professional social workers and educators have had relatively little understanding of the potential contribution of a distinctively faith-based context for the provision of child and family welfare services and, worse, they do not know how to work in such a faith/mission-driven setting using the language and values of that setting. As a consequence, they may, at the very least, not be able to effectively leverage the human, in-kind,

and financial resources that could be available for caring for children and families. At worst, they may abuse the faith community's goodwill and callous them to further involvement (Garland, 1995).

OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

This project was originally designed as a planning grant, with the goal of planning a national research study exploring the following hypotheses:

- Traditional religiously-affiliated child welfare agencies that are more closely tied to congregations or to their denomination for financial and referral resources will be more likely to develop community-based intervention services for vulnerable children and families.
- Religiously-affiliated child welfare agencies that more broadly define their mission will be more likely to develop community-based prevention and intervention services for vulnerable children and families.
- Religiously-affiliated child welfare agencies that provide community-based child welfare services to vulnerable children and families will define religion, faith, and spirituality as having a significant and defining role in their identity, services, and processes.
- Agencies that have closer or stronger relationships with local communities and external professional services will be more likely to develop community-based intervention services for vulnerable children and families.
- There are significant and differing models for providing services to children and families that are identifiable and measurable.

METHODS AND ACTIVITIES

The first six months of the project were used to recruit a national research team of six persons. We also recruited an advisory board of nine national leaders and met with this team in June 2004 to shape the project. The advisory board worked with us to refine our hypotheses, research questions, methodology, instruments, timeline, and sample.

When expected funding was not received, we revised the project to use remaining planning grant funds to conduct a national survey. We developed a survey instrument, field tested and refined it, and gained approval from our Institutional Review Board for its use.

We developed and cleaned lists of agencies in 10 states representing the Federal regions. We developed a data base with agency names and addresses. Agency lists were received either through the mail or by fax, requiring each to be manually entered into the agency data base for a particular state. Once entered in the data base, the lists were sorted and manipulated to check for duplicate names or to identify agencies that had multiple sites, such as the Presbyterian Children's Home and Services that has 18 group homes in five locations in Texas, or that were

obviously not basic child care facilities (i.e., day and child care centers). As the lists were “cleaned,” the number of agencies dropped to less than 700 for the 10 states.

We expanded the sample since the survey would now be a mailing to licensed basic child care facilities, adding Mississippi, Illinois, and Kansas to increase representation from their regions and increase the total number of agencies.

A draft of the new survey was forwarded to selected team members and consultants for review and comments. The new instrument was pre-tested by two consultants, based on their agencies. The instrument was revised again and forwarded to one other consultant for final review. The final survey instrument is in Appendix 2.

The sample was revised once again. Kansas was dropped and Oklahoma was added to the list of states. Kansas law restricts the release of lists of agencies, except to Federal and other Kansas state departments. After completing the cleaning of the lists, the final sample included 1,025 agencies in 13 states. (List of the Federal Region, State, and Agency Count is attached as Appendix 1.)

The survey was mailed to all private child and family service agencies in the sampled states in January 2005. Two additional postcards and an additional survey mailing was conducted in the late spring. Many surveys were also returned electronically.

We received surveys through July 2005. We were surprised that surveys continued to be received for so long after the mailings.

FINDINGS

The data is still being analyzed. Initial findings are provided below.

THE SAMPLE

Of the 1025 surveys mailed, 74 were returned by the post office unopened, for a final number of possible surveys of 951; we received 204 surveys for a return rate of 22%. We considered this a good return rate for a mailed survey of this complexity, indicating the interest of those surveyed in the research project. Appendix 1 provides a count of the agencies who received surveys by state. They were designated as religiously-affiliated or not when they returned their surveys, based on their self-identifying answer to the question, “Is your agency affiliated with any religious denomination, faith group, or congregation?” (question 4, Appendix 2). Of the 204 agencies, 30% (n=61) are religiously-affiliated, by this definition (Appendix 3). We also did an assessment of agency mission statements to see if there was any content related to faith or denominational relationship. Of the 61 self-identified religiously-affiliated agencies, 54 (89%) referred to faith or religious affiliation in their mission statement. So, while important, mission statements are not the best way to determine whether an agency has a religious affiliation; the mission statement may or may not be indicative.

AGE OF THE AGENCIES

Almost half (n=93) of all the agencies are more than 30 years old (Appendix 3).

SIZE OF THE AGENCIES

Because of the wide diversity in the number of staff members and budget reported, we used the median rather than the mean to compare religiously-affiliated and non-religiously-affiliated agencies. With regard to staff, there appear to be few significant differences, although religiously-affiliated agencies seem to have more social workers (4.5 to 4). They report many more support staff and fewer other employees than do non-religiously-affiliated agencies. Across every category of employees, agencies more than 30 years old have larger staffs and administrations. They also have much larger budgets. Religiously-affiliated organizations report having budgets \$400,000 larger than non-religiously-affiliated organizations, representing 28% more than the median \$1,450,000 budget of non-religiously-affiliated organizations.

SOURCES OF INCOME

Most striking is the differences in where revenues are generated. Non-religiously-affiliated organizations rely on fees for services for more than 60% of their budgets, whereas religiously-affiliated organizations rely on fees for only 30% of their budgets and older organizations receive only 12% of their budgets from fees. The ability of religiously-affiliated organizations to generate income from sources other than clients enables them to offer services to clients who are unable to pay fees and to offer services that may not be reimbursable from government or insurance sources. They receive 21% of their budgets from gifts, compared to only 5% of the budgets of non-religiously-affiliated services. They are less reliant on government funding as well, receiving only 6% of their budgets from federal funds, compared to 26% for non-religiously-affiliated agencies, and 41% from state funds, compared to 50% for non-religiously-affiliated agencies. In summary, religiously-affiliated agencies receive less than half (47%) of their funding from the government, compared to more than three quarters (76%) of the budgets of non-religiously-affiliated organizations. Religiously-affiliated organizations receive little from grants (5%) and endowment (5%) compared to only slightly more from these sources for non-religiously-affiliated organizations (7% from both sources). Even organizations more than 30 years old report receiving only 8% of their budgets from endowment, putting to rest the assumption that these organizations have large endowments and thus do not have to be responsive to the changing needs of their communities, the effectiveness of their services, or relationships with their constituencies.

SOURCES OF REFERRALS

As the table in Appendix 3 indicates, there appear to be very few differences in the social service sources of referrals for religiously-affiliated and non-religiously-affiliated agencies. Both receive the bulk of their referrals from child protective services and other foster programs and state programs. The slightly higher numbers of referrals to religiously-affiliated agencies may be due to the slightly larger size of these agencies. Informally, religiously-affiliated organizations appear to have much stronger networks of referral sources. Counselors refer twice

as many, pastors four times as many, and individuals almost three times as many clients to religiously-affiliated agencies as to non-religiously-affiliated agencies.

AFFILIATIONS

Data in Appendix 3 also indicate that religiously-affiliated organizations are actually somewhat more likely to be affiliated with a professional organization (79%) than are non-religiously-affiliated organizations (62%). There seems to be little difference in their affiliation with Child Welfare League of America (11% and 10% respectively). But more religiously-affiliated organizations are accredited (25%) than are non-religiously-affiliated organizations (18%). Moreover, religiously-affiliated organizations are more likely to be affiliated with state organizations (67%) than are non-religiously-affiliated organizations (47%).

SERVING CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Most of the agencies serve children with special needs, although 10% more of the non-religiously-affiliated agencies (80%) than religiously-affiliated agencies do.

THE MISSION AND FAITH IDENTITY OF RELIGIOUSLY-AFFILIATED ORGANIZATIONS

As the data in Appendix 4 indicate, although most (89%) of the mission statements of the religiously-affiliated organizations contain words relating to faith, not all of them do (n=11). The organizations hail from 11 different religious/denominational groups; the most common were nondenominational (27%, also the largest religious group in the country), Church of Christ (24%), Baptist (14%, second after Catholics among American denominations), Presbyterian (9%), Methodist (9%), and Catholic (7%).

WHAT RELIGIOUSLY-AFFILIATED MEANS

In addition to their mission deriving from their religious group, respondents were asked to write in the nature of their affiliation. Writing in responses takes more initiative and often results in somewhat lower response rates than simply ticking off a checklist, so it is significant that 56% responded that the denomination supports them financially, 46% that they govern the agency in some way, and 40% that they are historically identified with the religious group. It should be noted that although 56% seems to be a low percentage for denominational financial support, we cannot determine how much of the gift support for these organizations actually comes from individuals and groups affiliated with denominational congregations and organizations, in addition to formal budget allocations from denominational organizations.

TYPES OF SERVICES AND NUMBERS OF CHILDREN SERVED

As Appendix 5 demonstrates, religiously-affiliated organizations serve fewer children through adoption (n=29) and foster care (n=46) than do non-religiously-affiliated organizations (n=43 and 63). They serve only slightly more children through residential care (n=67) than do non-religiously-affiliated programs (n=65). They serve quite a few more children in community based programs (n=162) than do non-religiously-affiliated organizations (n=150). This refutes

the stereotype of the large church-affiliated children's homes providing long-term care for dependent children; these religiously-affiliated organizations are as likely, and even to a greater extent to have embraced a community-based services model as non-religiously-affiliated agencies.

RACIAL AND ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF CHILDREN SERVED

There appears to be no significant difference in the racial and ethnic composition of the clients served through residential, adoptive, and foster care services provided by faith- and non-religiously-affiliated organizations. When it comes to community-based services, however, the differences are striking between the populations served by religiously-affiliated and non-religiously-affiliated programs. Although religiously-affiliated programs serve slightly more Anglo children than do non-religiously-affiliated programs (48 and 41 respectively), they serve many more African-American (35 to 15), Latino (22 to 8), and Asian/Pacific Islander (53 to 3) children. Religiously-affiliated organizations serve a median of 110 ethnic minority children (more than twice the 48 Anglo children served in community-based programs), in contrast to only 32 by non-religiously-affiliated organizations, who serve more Anglo than minority children.

FINDINGS BASED ON THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

We began with five hypotheses to test. Although the project had to be downsized when the expected funding for the large project was not available, the findings of this pilot study do address these hypotheses, as follows.

Research Question 1: Traditional religiously-affiliated child welfare agencies that are more closely tied to congregations or to their denomination for financial and referral resources will be more likely to develop community-based intervention services for vulnerable children and families.

This hypothesis supported. Religiously-affiliated organizations do receive more financial support from gifts and from their religious groups, more informal referrals from the community, and they offer more community-based services to children and families.

Research Questions 2: Religiously-affiliated child welfare agencies that more broadly define their mission will be more likely to develop community-based prevention and intervention services for vulnerable children and families.

Although we have not tested this hypothesis yet, we have the mission statements for the organizations and will begin this analysis in the next phase of the project.

Research Question 3: Religiously-affiliated child welfare agencies that provide community-based child welfare services to vulnerable children and families will define religion, faith, and spirituality as having a significant and defining role in their identity, services, and processes.

In the next phase of analysis, we will explore whether the answers to the “nature of your affiliation” question are correlated with whether or not the agency offers community based services, and the nature of those services.

Research Question 4: Agencies that have closer or stronger relationships with local communities and external professional services will be more likely to develop community-based intervention services for vulnerable children and families.

It appears that, indeed, religiously-affiliated organizations are more tied to their constituencies (and less to government funding) and are more likely to offer community-based services. We will examine this further to determine if there is any relationship between funding sources and types of services offered.

Research Question 5: There are significant and differing models for providing services to children and families that are identifiable and measurable.

We were not able to answer this question from the project; originally, this was to be studied in the larger project that included a in-depth qualitative interviews.

IMPLICATIONS

The most significant findings from the study refute stereotypes about religiously-affiliated child welfare services. The caricature of the religiously-affiliated child welfare agency is that of a residential children’s home serving predominantly ethnic minority children in long-term dependent care, with Anglo children more likely to receive prevention services. The caricature includes lower professional standards than the rest of the field, yet the ability to maintain the status quo because of a large endowment.

Our findings are quite different from these stereotypes. The religiously-affiliated organizations in this study are far more likely to serve ethnic and minority children through community-based services than they are through residential, foster, and adoptive services, and they are more likely to do so than are non-religiously-affiliated agencies. They appear to have more flexibility to develop programs due to their greater budgetary resources from gifts and denominational support. They are not characterized by large endowments that could contribute to insensitivity to professional innovations and community needs. They depend on government funding, but much less than do non-religiously-affiliated agencies. They are not as invested in the historic child

welfare services of residential care, foster care, and adoption, and appear to be much more engaged in prevention services.

Religiously-affiliated organizations are slightly larger in budget and staff than non-religiously-affiliated organizations. They receive referrals at about the same level as non-religiously-affiliated agencies from social service sources (e.g., CPS, other agencies) but have much stronger webs of informal referral sources—pastors, counselors, individuals. They are just as “professional” as non-religiously-affiliated agencies, as measured by professional affiliations, and are more likely to be accredited and part of a state professional organization.

This project suggests that further research would be fruitful in determining what community-based services these agencies are providing to vulnerable children and families. At least in this study of 204 child welfare agencies, 61 of them religiously-affiliated, it appears that religiously-affiliated agencies are providing a diversity of services with slightly more resources of funding and staff than other agencies, and they seem to be more likely to be the agencies where community-based services are being created, launched, and sustained. If we want to find and study community-based intervention services for vulnerable children and families, religiously-affiliated agencies are an important place to begin. We were not able to study these programs in the depth that a larger study could provide.

Similarly, it is clear from this study that the connection to religious communities that provides mission and support is vital and distinctive for most of these agencies. They are not providing community-based prevention service in spite of but rather because of their religious identity and networks of community support. Learning how they nurture those connections and develop services that are reaching population groups underserved by other programs will be important ground for future research.

LIMITATIONS

There are obvious limitations to the research. Although a 22% return rate is beyond what is normally expected for a mailed survey, we do not know what biases may have contributed to the non-responses of the other 78% that may in turn have skewed our findings. We did not have the resources to enlist the help of partner organizations, or to conduct phone follow-up. We would have liked to be able to call some of these agencies and learn more about their programs and conduct more intensive study of those that appear to be developing innovative services, particularly those that are community-based.

NEXT STEPS

We still have further analysis of this data to do. Some of the questions we will be exploring follow. Subsequent materials will be provided on this website as we address these questions:

1. Does the difference in size of staffs and budgets between religiously-affiliated and non-religiously-affiliated agencies hold when agency age is controlled?
2. Is there any significant difference in the age of religiously-affiliated and non-religiously-affiliated agencies?
3. Controlling for size (based on budget), are religiously-affiliated organizations still more likely to be professionally affiliated than non-religiously-affiliated organizations?
4. Is there a difference in the types of services provided to children with special needs?
5. Are the differences between religiously-affiliated and non-religiously-affiliated agencies in numbers children served through the different types of services statistically significant?
6. Although religiously-affiliated programs serve slightly more Anglo children than do non-religiously-affiliated programs (48 and 41 respectively, they serve many more African-American (35 to 15), Latino (22 to 8), and Asian/Pacific Islander (53 to 3) children. Religiously-affiliated organizations serve a median of 110 ethnic minority children (more than twice the 48 Anglo children served in their community-based programs), in contrast to only 32 by non-religiously-affiliated organizations, who serve more Anglo than minority children. We need to run tests of significance for these findings.
7. Is there any relationship between types of funding received and the types of services provided? For example, are programs that receive government funding more likely to provide residential services, or foster care? Is gift income more tied to agencies with community-based programs?
8. Hypothesis 3 was to be tested in the qualitative analysis and had to be dropped. Can we determine whether the answers to the “nature of your affiliation” question are correlated with whether or not the agency offers community based services?
9. What are categories of community-based services that respondents listed? What can we learn about the kinds of services being provided from answers to these questions?

As anticipated, this research has been an exciting pilot study in an area where little work has been done. The findings provoke the desire for further exploration. It appears that this is a rich vein of research to be mined, identifying what these organizations are doing in community-based, community-connected programs of services to vulnerable children and families.

RELATED MATERIALS

In addition to the appendices to this report that contain more detail about the sample and the findings, there is also a PowerPoint presentation, which was originally presented as follows:

Gusukuma, Isaac, Garland, Diana R., Bretzlaff, Cini, and Havens,
Rebecca (2005). The changing role of religiously-affiliated child

and family serving agencies. Presentation at the Religious Research Association, Rochester, NY, November 5

Other analyses and documents will be provided at this site as they become available.

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