

Project Fundamental das Crianças Project: Family Integration

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Two year therapeutic programme working with children and their families towards systemic change. (Familial Integration-The foundation for success)

Short History

Casa do Caminho, is an orphanage in Xerém, Brazil which was established to work towards keeping the children away from the risk factors associated with living amongst urban strain. The children at Casa do Caminho are orphans or come from destructed families and arrive at Casa do Caminho through the Juvenile Court (Conselho Tutelar), Child and Youth Protection Court of Duque de Caxias, as well as the surrounding judicial district. When the children arrive at the Casa, they are often traumatized by both experiences they have witnessed within their families of origin (e.g., poverty, violence, sexual abuse, poor parenting practices) and by the transition to the orphanage. Many of the children are in dire need of mental health treatment as they are grieving the loss of their families and systems of origins. Although the orphanage has previously implemented a system of structural behavioral support (e.g., rules, consequences, positive reinforcement), the children have not previously had an outlet to be able to cope with the intergenerational trauma that they have incurred within their families of origin.

Why work with the families?

Change is possible when the system supporting the difficult behaviour is addressed (Sells, 1998). At the Casa do Caminho, a new system of family and individual therapy will be implemented which will improve communication, hold children to higher standards of behavior, and address change on a multi-systemic level. Many social projects involve the creation of a Utopian environment, which removes children from the risks and dangers of society. Unfortunately removing the children from society at large is not the answer as it separates them from the realities of living within a community, thus making family reintegration, fostering and adoption very difficult. It is essential that the Casa do Caminho attempts to move away from the model of institutionalization and works towards community and familial integration.

As shown in figure 1, a significant amount of children are held in care longer than is legally recommended. 42% of children stay in care for a period of 2 -5 years. This period well surpasses the period recommended, as these institutions are only considered temporary solutions. Many studies have shown the damaging psychological effects caused by long-term care in institutions.

At the present time educators working with the children are often frustrated, as many of the children visit their families of origin during the weekends, and return to the orphanage displaying defiant behaviors (e.g., non-compliance, aggressive behaviors, and negative interactions). The children's non-compliant behaviour appears to have direct detrimental effects on the overall dynamics of the Casa do Caminho, ultimately leading to psychological adjustment of the child, and impaired family management. The orphanage does not presently have a system to work within the ecology of family unit, therefore the children return to an unhealthy environment which has not changed.

As figure 2 points out, 77% of all children living in shelters or children's home in Rio de Janeiro have links to a family member. Additionally, only 4% of the children are orphans. It is a tragedy that many families give up their children due to impoverishment and a lack of social structures that should prevent this from occurring. The present program would allow the Casa do Caminho to find the familial link and work towards strengthening of the family unit.

Although the children have gained skills within the Casa do Caminho, they do not have the tools to navigate life outside of the orphanage. Without family involvement and training success is infinitely limited. Targeting early defiant behaviour within the children's systems of origin is important because of its repeated association in research with a variety of later maladjustments during young adult years. Researchers state that defiant behaviour that is not targeted is a precursor to the development of other, more serious forms of antisocial behaviour, criminal activity and substance abuse (Barkley, 1990).

Objectives of Fundamental das Crianças Project

The individual and family therapy model is being proposed as a two year project which will continue to provide individual therapy to the children and adolescents on a weekly basis. The family training program will form a structural base to open communication between the Casa do Caminho and the children's systems of origin. Further, the family

training program will assist with the following goals:

- Understanding the basis for childhood mis-behavior,
- Building positive relationships with their child
- Increasing compliance and decreasing defiant behaviour
- Implementing time out and other disciplinary methods
- Improving individual and family problem solving
- To establish appropriate roles and healthy boundaries.

The proposed system at the Casa will allow work on a systemic level to induce change, thus allowing the children to feel empowered, enhance their self-concept, and guide them in choosing appropriate behaviours. Change is possible when the system supporting the difficult behaviour is addressed (Sells, 1998). The individual and family therapy model will address change on a multi-systemic level ultimately assisting the children in building a structure which will assist them with a healthy transition into society.

Funds Needed

£20,000 to be used for staff salaries, transportation, educational materials and office supplies for 2 years

Funds Raised

£4,500.00 Click here to donate <http://www.justgiving.com/melissavargo/>

Project Team

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