

Collaborative and Thoughtful Practice in Early Intervention

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Introduction: Occupational therapy is the collaboration process or partnership between the client and the therapist who work together to achieve the client's goals. Family-centred practice (FCP) provides a philosophy and a method of service delivery that underpins early intervention service for children under 6 years and is considered best practice in fields concerned with optimal child development (King et al. 2002; Dunn, 2000). When working in partnership with children and their families it is often necessary to work across professional boundaries and in the context of a social model of practice. This model of working relies on thoughtfulness and insight with those with whom we work: children, their parents and families.

Objectives: The aim of this study was to gain a critical understanding of parental experiences of an early intervention service which professionals believed was based on the principles of family centred practice; and how the service might be improved to meet the needs of families.

Method: Using qualitative inquiry, in-depth interviews were carried out with parents of seven children with primary physical disabilities who attended a preschool programme.

Results: Overall findings revealed that parents were relatively satisfied with the nature of the services they received, but identified specific process elements including lack of support at critical times; lack of information and continuity of care not being adequately developed and that warranted further attention.

Conclusions: Parent expertise, knowledge and support were identified as valuable resources for other parents, professionals and the organisation as a whole, but were not effectively utilised within the service.

Contributions to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy: Understanding parental experiences and perceptions as well as their beliefs and expectations of service delivery will help service providers and policy makers in planning, developing and implementing services that are timely and effective for parents and more likely to meet their needs. This may promote a shift in practice from parents as recipients of services to parents as drivers of services, moving towards a model that is truly family centred in its approach.

References: King et al. 2002

Dunn, 2000