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A Look at a Multi-Disciplinary Team of Professionals working with Parents as Partners

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ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT ON AND FOR THE HANDICAPPED

Parents - Partners in Action

One of the most important factors in determining the success of our work is the importance we give to working together-to being a team. Therefore it seems natural that parents are considered an integral part of the team.

The Project's History

One of the first steps in the development of the Action-Research Project, was a meeting with the headmaster and teachers at the Wardija School which was chosen from among other schools. The team members discussed and explored with the school staff possible ways of presenting the Project to the parents. With help from the Headmaster, teachers and the Schools' Parents Association a meeting was held at the school which had a turnout of 70% of the parents.

The Project was presented from its varying aspects by the different team-members. Afterwards there was ample time for questions and informal discussion. We ate, drank and talked about the children and about the process that was planned.

As a Social Worker I felt that the team and the parents were truly "partners in action" when my request for permission to visit their home was received with a round of applause.

How Are We Working Together?

1. Parents receive a letter reminding them about the Project and that it is time for us to meet them and their son or daughter. Through this letter I inform them that I will be contacting them by telephone to arrange an appointment for my visit to their home. All correspondence is addressed to both the mother and the father.

2. Appointments are made by telephone to suit the family concerned. Here I emphasize the importance that I meet both parents. I take this opportunity to explain the aims of this home-visit, which are:

- a. To listen and talk to parents.
- b. To ask them about their son or daughter.
- c. To try to understand how they perceive things and what their feelings are.
- d. To try to understand what their hopes for the future are.
- e. To explain the aims of the Project further and to obtain parental consent to their child being assessed by the Project team.

3. The Visit

The family members are interviewed and a questionnaire is filled. Through this the main aims of the visit are fulfilled. A second questionnaire is left for completion by the parents, this is aimed at assessing the child's self-help skills. The parents are then invited to a meeting with the Doctor and Psychologist at the School.

4. First Meeting at the School

The Doctor and Psychologist fill in a Psycho-Medical questionnaire regarding the child's development, his or her health, the parents' health etc.

Here, parents have the opportunity to explain their situation further, to talk about their situation and ask about anything that is preoccupying them.

As this meeting is held in the school, parents have the occasion to see their son or daughter in the classroom and to talk to the headmaster and teachers. Through this, communication between parents and school is strengthened.

At the end of this meeting, the parents are invited to another meeting after each member of the team has examined or assessed their son or daughter.

5. Case-Conference

This is led by the Head of Paediatrics at St.Lukes Hospital. Every member of the team presents the necessary reports and recommendations within his or her speciality.

The parents' perspective is voiced and given importance. Decisions are taken with consensus of all the members.

6. Second meeting with parents at the School

Four days after the 'Case-conference', the Doctor, Psychologist and Social Worker meet the parents and give them a full report of the assessment carried out during the previous fortnight during which the team would have met them and examined their son or daughter. They are given information about the 'Case-conference', recommendations made and the reasons for them.

The parents are given a letter listing the professionals who have examined their son or daughter, and others who were present during the case-conference. Both the letter and recommendations are explained fully. Special attention is given to the style of the written report, technical terminology is excluded and simple language that is understood by parents is used. The parents are given ample time to ask whatever they wish and assure themselves that they have understood everything. They are informed that they can find a full record of all the examinations and assessments carried out in the school file.

7. The parents have the opportunity to meet with the Project nurse who is working on the Project and who is responsible for fixing the follow-up appointments with the doctors and other specialists in the health field. Contact with the nurse helps the parents to refer to her when they are faced with any difficulties in implementing the recommendations of the team.

The parents are a sine qua non in the implementation of these recommendations. Anything suggested can only be implemented through their contribution.

8. The parents are partners in the service dimension too. One of the most important and frequent individual recommendations is for parents to participate in societies of parents of handicapped children.

9. The parents join in the Research which depends on:

- What they feel, are and wish.
- Their participation.

Our work with parents is undertaken jointly and successfully.