



## Introduction: Building Resilience and Enhancing Quality of Life for Children and Families

In growing up, a child should know some joy in each day and look forward to some joyous event for the morrow. —Nicholas Hobbs

Our day-to-day lives are enriched by the moments that bring us joy and a sense of meaning. The sources of such moments are varied, but what they share is a capacity to provide us with the feeling that, for now, for us, things are good and right. Unfortunately, there is also a further, common set of associations with the idea of “enrichment”—that enrichments are extras, frills, luxuries. Or that enrichment is something like dessert, that you may only be allowed to have if you behave yourself and meet expectations. If the spending of public money is any indication, there is a strong cultural endorsement of this view (at least as it applies to other people and other people’s children). Activities that are generally thought of as enriching are those that are paid for only with the greatest reluctance, and they are also the first to have their funds cut when budgets get tight.

This issue of *Focal Point* begins from the idea that enrichments, far from being frivolous, are instead essential. The joy and meaningfulness which enrichments provide make a direct, positive contribution to quality of life. What is more, enriching experiences add to our reserves of strength and purpose, and these reserves in turn enable us to adapt, cope, recover and even thrive in the face of challenges and stresses. Specifically, this issue of *Focal Point* looks at research related to sources of enrichment, and at innovative programs that promote enrichment and achieve positive outcomes for children with emotional and behavioral challenges, and for their families.

Research results notwithstanding, the most compelling evidence for the value of enrichment is found by looking to personal experience. What parents and other caring adults want most to see in their children is evidence of an enriched life. They want to see their children laughing, being with good friends, losing themselves in creative or intellectual activities, finding

“the zone” in sports, locating their own moral centers, being joyful. Parents also know that without enrichments in their own lives, challenges and stressors eat away at their capacity to care for their children.

Caregivers and other concerned people are often frustrated in efforts to provide ongoing access to enrichments for children and youth with emotional and behavioral disorders, as well as for other members of their families. Previous experience may lead to a feeling that enriching activities are simply unavailable, or out of reach. Where do you look for adventure for a teenager who’s been kicked out of clubs, teams, or scouting troops? How do you help a child find friendships when his disorder is characterized by difficulties in social relationships? How can a youth who has attentional difficulties find the patience required to produce art, poetry, or music? How can a parent find the time to spend with friends or to sing in a choir? Sometimes it may be that the barriers are partly failures of imagination. For example, it may take an imaginative leap to consider that a young person with challenging behavior may find value—and provide value—through community service. It may also take some creative thinking to imagine a way to arrange supports or to tailor an experience so that participation in a desired activity will be feasible.

The barriers may be even greater when the funds or supports for enrichments are sought through the formal service sector. Often, in treatment planning, the idea of using funds in such a way does not even come up at all. When non-traditional or unusual expenditures, services or supports are requested, difficulties often arise around justifying the cost, even when such costs are small relative to the costs of traditional services. It is not just the policies and rules that are to blame. Often the people who participate in planning and providing services seem to be thoroughly conditioned by the traditional views of services as remedial *work*, and this gives rise to a reluctance to expend public money to provide activities that look like *fun*. This reluctance may be further compounded by the well-documented tendency for providers to blame parents for causing their child’s

emotional or behavioral disorder, or even to blame the child herself for the difficulties she experiences. For providers who hold this view—whether consciously or unconsciously—funding enrichments will be particularly unpalatable if doing so seems like rewarding “bad” behavior.

Despite barriers, children and youth with emotional and behavioral disorders are finding enrichments through a variety of creative channels, and the evidence of the positive effects of these enrichments is growing. Service providers who use a strengths-based approach are likely to understand the value of enrichments, and as experience with strengths-based approaches grows, so too will the capacity to creatively integrate enrichments into planning for treatment and family support. We hope that this issue of *Focal Point* will contribute to the momentum behind this creative movement.

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