

family

A D V O C A C Y

PO Box 502
Epping NSW 1710

305/16-18 Cambridge St
Epping NSW 2121

Phone: (02) 9869 0866
Facsimile: (02) 9869 0722

Record

340

File Number

10305

Author: Brandon, David

Title: Do we really want parents to be less protective?

Original source: Community Living Volume 7 Number 2

Resource type: Written

Publication Date: 01/10/93

Publisher info: Hexagon Publishing

Abstract

Written by a professional to other professionals from a professional's point of view, this is nevertheless a very illuminating article in that it deals with a common attitude that professionals have towards parents of children with disabilities. Brandon argues that instead of seeing parents as nuisances who interfere with their work, professionals should recognise parents as an important asset since they know their child best. **Keyword: Professionals**

Do we really want parents to be less protective?

David Brandon

If parents are 'difficult' have you considered how we seem to them and to their children? In our struggle, we even crowd out the voices of their children, says David Brandon.

What about all these stupid parents? Sometimes you get the impression that many professionals in our field wish that people with learning difficulties were all orphans. As a staff member recently remarked in an adult training centre, with a note of bitterness, "What do we do with these parents, especially when they are older?" Well, we can put poison in their mugs of Philosan. Get in to an urgent tug of war for the souls of the children. Or, as a very last resort when all else has failed, we can see them as people who have legitimate positions on life and not as objects to do something with. We can listen carefully to what they have to say because they have a detailed knowledge, even a love, for their own children.

You get the impression that many professionals wish that people with learning difficulties were all orphans.

They are deeply concerned about the serious issues of exploitation and rejection.

True, some parents can be an enormous pain in the neck. They are very difficult people, unlike you or I who are always extremely reasonable. They have had a child with learning difficulties and learned to be over protective. Do you recall that stigmatising word for a thousand social work or nursing files. 'The parents are over protective.' What does that really mean? What does it mean to be just protective enough? What's the bench mark and who decides what it is?

After all, we are describing people who have had to cope with immensely difficult situations. I talked to a woman who told me the classic story. The hospital consultant told her 45 years ago, "You've got two options, either dump him in the institution and forget all about him or take him home and teach him all you can." Get in touch with how that would feel, being told that about your baby. The long struggle of pregnancy and then birth and a professional male tells you that. How would you respond? How would you cope over the next 50 years?

Of course, that is only just the beginning. That devastating remark is followed by tedious visits relieved by very few jokes from a long line of often earnest, depressed and depressing professionals. I know a woman who keeps 500 of our visiting cards in a large Nescafe jar. Historically, we have focused mainly on what the baby and the child couldn't or wouldn't do. "He won't be able to do this or that." Then the growing child has entered a series of special services, that

This article is made available by the Institute for Family Advocacy & Leadership Development and cannot be used except for the sole purpose of research and study

weren't really 'special' in the Sainsbury's meaning of the term. The special schools, the various hospital clinics, the adult training centres - all important and despairing repositories of lost causes, dedicated either intentionally or unintentionally to segregation. When was the last time your heart lifted up on entering these services? Last year? Last decade? Never ever?

Knock hearts out

Such experiences are bound to create generations of parents who feel empowered and dynamically optimistic about the world and, in particular, their offspring. Like hell they are. They are designed to knock the hearts out of all but extraordinary people. They are designed to corrode their realistic dreams and frighten them rigid. They encourage people to become passive or bitter, to feel at the mercy of professionals who don't know what they are doing.

And now we've got a new generation of fancy evangelists - preaching the cause of integration, whatever that means. They are equally fervent about a completely new gospel. "You know a few years ago, we encouraged you to send your children to special school, to the adult training centre - well, that was all wrong. They should be mixing with real people in the real world. We've grown out of our Blue Peter stage." Signed Zebedee. I and others have to shoulder some of the heavy blame for that new wave which is variously misunderstood.

We have created images of each other based on mutual antagonism amid ten thousand misunderstandings.

If parents are 'difficult', have you considered how we seem to them and to their children? In our struggle the voices of their children may even be crowded out. We have created images of each other - professionals and parents - often based on mutual antagonism amid ten thousand misunderstandings. We have jointly created a harsh world where no one seems responsible for anything, just like Dickens' *Little Dorrit*.. Everything just happens. No one is ever to blame. Eventually and sadly, we all feel and behave just like orphans.