

Fostering Service for Children with Disabilities: Current Situation and New Directions for Development

Anat Gilad Anna Gerasimenko Yoa Sorek

The study was commissioned by JDC-Ashalim in cooperation with the Service for Family, Community and Foster Care in the Division of Community Services and Care, Administration of Disabilities at the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Social Services

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Abstract

Background

In recent years, the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Social Services (MOLSA) has undergone a restructuring process, in the course of which a Disability Administration was established. The process has also brought about a system-wide organizational change in the area of foster care services for children and adults with disabilities, raising the need for the development of foster care services for these populations and for the adjustment and improvement of existing services. JDC-Ashalim and the Service for Family, Community and Foster Care, Division of Community Services and Care, Administration of Disabilities at MOLSA are heading efforts to improve foster care services for children with disabilities, which included commissioning the Myers-Joint-Brookdale Institute (MJB) to conduct a study to provide up-to-date information and help identify new directions for development.

Study Goals

The study aims to describe the roles and work practices in the foster care services for children with disabilities and to help identify new directions for their development.

Study Methods

The study included three key components:

- A quantitative survey to examine the characteristics of children and adults in foster care in Israel, the characteristics of the foster families and those of the birth families, various aspects relating to the foster care that the children and adults are in, and the relationship between the sides
- Semi-structured in-depth interviews with professionals in the foster care system for children with disabilities and with families fostering children with disabilities
- Information from discussion groups that were brought together by JDC-Ashalim in a study day on the subject of support for children with disabilities in foster care.

Findings

The study provided an up-to-date picture of the foster care services for children and adults with disabilities, the characteristics of children and adults with disabilities who are in foster care, and the characteristics of the foster families and birth families, as well as information about the relationship between those in foster care and their birth families. Among our findings: units have been set up specifically for fostering children and adults with disabilities in all the implementing agencies and these are headed by social workers designated exclusively for the task; most of the people in the foster care services for people with disabilities are children and young adults aged up to 21; about a fifth of those in foster care are over 22; the people in foster care have various types of disability and different levels of functioning; the role of the foster families is complex and requires availability, dedication and investment; the proportion of very religious and Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) families among the foster families is higher than the general population; the birth families are more disadvantaged than the foster families.

Conclusions

The study identified two subgroups that deserve special attention and about which there is a need to develop expertise: 1. Adults with disabilities in foster care; 2. Children and adults in foster care with relatives.

The study also identified seven areas in the foster care services for children and adults with disabilities that should be given particular attention: 1. Developing and making accessible a body of knowledge on disabilities, rights, and services; 2. Strengthening the support and supervision given to foster families of children with disabilities; 3. Enhancing methods of recruiting foster families for children with disabilities; 4. Developing the use of alternative support communication methods with children with disabilities in foster care; 5. Improving the relationship between children in foster care and their birth families; 6. Ensuring a smooth transition for children with disabilities from foster care to an optimum arrangement in adulthood; 7. Structuring a framework of specifically defined roles in the foster care service for children with disabilities and strengthening the training for foster care coordinators and social workers. These areas are interconnected and have a reciprocal effect on one other. It is therefore recommended that they be developed concurrently.