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Review of *Creating Positive Systems of Child and Family Welfare: Congruence with the Everyday Lives of Children and Parents*. Gary Cameron, Marshall Fine, Sarah Maiter, Karen Frensch, and Nancy Freymond (Eds.). Reviewed by David Tobis.

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Nichols illustrates how agency documentation and accountability requirements create barriers for both the homeless young people and the social service workers who are involved in their care. In Nichols' words, her work is an attempt to "draw attention to the processes whereby people's actual experiences are subsumed in discourse, objectified as abstract data, or transformed into the terms through which they become institutionally recognizable or actionable" (p. 25). This movement from experience to actionable data is what she argues produces the "gaps" through which young people find themselves falling. Governance and funding sources create accountability structures that drive agencies to serve bureaucratic needs instead of the needs of young homeless people.

As an example of institutional ethnography, this text would be great in the classroom. It is brief and is written for an academic audience. It shows clearly how the needs of clients and the needs of bureaucracy can have very little to do with one another. Finally, the author brings praxis into her final chapter, an important step in feminist scholarship. She examines ways to start to change the system, by making connections between those in need and those in positions of power to influence how need is provided.

For social workers in the field, this book will be an affirmation of what they have been struggling with for the past decade—an agency focus on accountability, paperwork, and bureaucratic requirements that take up much of the workers' time, leaving insufficient time to foster relationships with the people they want to help.

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Gary Cameron, Marshall Fine, Sarah Maiter, Karen Frensch, and Nancy Freymond (Eds.), *Creating Positive Systems of Child and Family Welfare: Congruence with the Everyday Lives of Children and Parents*. University of Toronto Press, (2013), 352 pages, \$56 cloth, \$27.96 paperback.

This is an unusual book, to its great credit. *Creating Positive Systems of Child and Family Welfare* provides an opportunity

for parents in the child welfare system to describe and assess their own lives and to reflect on their experiences in the child welfare system. It focuses on the critical, though often analytically neglected, interaction between clients and caseworkers. The book listens to and presents the voices of both parents and caseworkers to make the child welfare system “more welcoming and helpful for both families and service providers.”

The chapters of the book are primarily based on research from the Partnership for Children and Families Project carried out in Ontario, Canada between 2000 and 2010, focusing on families with children who have been removed for fewer than four months. The chapters cover clients’ and parents’ perspectives on their interactions—18 life stories of fathers involved with the Children’s Aid Society in southern Ontario, 16 mothers whose child welfare cases had been closed, parents’ and service providers’ perceptions of those 34 life stories, the experiences of 31 mothers whose children had been placed into foster care, an exploration of six “good worker-client relationships,” a matched comparison of parents’ and service providers’ perceptions of their interactions, and so on. The book provides a unique body of information on the critical boundary where parents interact with caseworkers. The chapters report, again and again, that “service participants and service provider perceptions of what was important and what was helpful did not necessarily correspond to each other.” The conclusions, again and again, are that child welfare practice would improve dramatically if the perceptions and needs of parents were a larger part of the child welfare decision-making process, and if supports for both families and caseworkers were more available.

Few studies focus on the perceptions and experiences of parents and caseworkers. This book begins to fill that gap, not only for social work students, who often have had little experience with the people and communities with whom they will be working in child welfare, but also for practicing professionals and administrators who will be enriched by learning more about the needs and life experiences of their clients. The book, however, fails to acknowledge other work that explores similar territory, such as the ground-breaking publication, *Rise Magazine* that presents the life stories and recommendations of parents whose children have been in the child welfare

system in the United States, primarily in New York City. Nora McCarthy, editor of *Rise*, who read the book at my request, found it to be “an important way to start a rich discussion. It focuses on parents without taking the workers out of focus.”

The chapters are all based on qualitative research called a “broken mirror design,” with “each fragment of the broken mirror...reflect[ing] something different...” At times samples are described as being randomly selected with no description of how random selection was carried out. Another oddity is calling impoverished, desperately struggling individuals, people with “lives of lesser privilege.” At times the chapters read like case notes rather than aggregated findings. But that is both the limitation of qualitative research as well as its power to illustrate through specific detail the generalizable experience of individuals.

The most important issue the book does not address is, how can the insights of the book be implemented? As noted in the conclusion by Gary Cameron,

The forces of inertia in a system as large and well-established as child welfare in Ontario are very powerful. Attempts at major reforms of Ontario’s child welfare system over the past couple of decades, while they have had notable impacts, have left the core ideology, service delivery structures, and relationships with clientele largely unchanged.

The book concludes with useful recommendations including less paper work, fewer cases brought to court, local and team decision-making, service agreements with clients, and more quality daycare and other services. But the book is silent on what force will bring about a change in the core ideology, service delivery structures and relationships. The conclusion of one of the authors is to “recognize the power imbalance in the worker–client relationship and work at minimizing this by providing clear information...” But information alone will not change the balance of power in child welfare. There needs to be a countervailing force, as was used by child welfare parents who confronted similar problems in New York City. They organized and successfully pressured government and private

agencies to make the types of reforms this book seeks. Without an organized countervailing force for reform—parents, families, youth, or a class action lawsuit—the seminal findings of this book will remain marginalized.

David Tobis, Maestral International

Lauren Heidbrink, *Migrant Youth, Transnational Families, and the State*. University of Pennsylvania Press (2014), 208 pages \$49.95, cloth.

Visions of the Southwest border in the 1980s were revisited the summer of 2014 when thousands of youth fleeing organized crime and endemic poverty in Central America's northern triangle—Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras—crossed into the U.S. seeking safety and economic stability. Customs and Border Protection officials apprehended more than 68,000 youth, about 23% of them from Mexico and the remainder from Central America, in FY 2014. After processing them at "holding facilities," they were transported without explanation to poorly equipped military bases in Oklahoma, Texas and California, and a FEMA-managed warehouse in Nogales, Arizona. Once transferred to the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), the youth were locked up for indefinite periods in privately contracted Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) youth detention shelters from California to Delaware. With minimal access to attorneys, family members, or even use of telephones, immigrant youth, far from feeling welcomed, found themselves in an incomprehensible maze of structures supposedly in place to protect them.

Though the United Nations recognized the majority of those fleeing northern triangle countries as refugees according to the 1951 UN Convention, the reasons for their desperate leave-taking were barely addressed by mainstream media. The youths' own voices and motives were utterly suppressed. By mid-November, a majority of U.S. voters endorsed the Congressional stalemate on immigration reform. Central American and Mexican children, despite U.S. and international laws in their favor, were on their own to defend their rights