

Some of the first recorded efforts to manage orphaned and neglected youth came in the 1700 and 1800s. Communities struggled to deal with dependent children. In the early days of America, poor and orphaned children were treated in the tradition of English poor laws. Some children were taken out to private citizens who were willing to care for them for a fee; younger children were sent to live in almshouses or poorhouses with other destitute children and adults; and older children were indentured to families to work off the cost of raising them. In the early nineteenth century, the prevalence of public and private orphanages increased after many reports were issued regarding the multitude of problems with almshouses (McGowan, 2014). Regardless of the method of care for dependent children, the strategy at that time was that separating a child from his or her family, and community was the best way to address delinquency and child maltreatment.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, such efforts were criticized due to poor living conditions in orphan asylums. A growing concern also emerged regarding whether children can be socialized and integrated into society when they are raised in institutions. In response, new theories of intervention were developed. One solution, called placing out, arranged for children to live with substitute families. Many consider placing out as the origin of what we now know as foster care (Petr, 1998). As the debate over institutional care versus in-home care intensified, social workers began to develop a practice specialization in the care of children and families. The development of this specialization occurred in conjunction with the professionalization of social work in the early 1900s.

At the same time, public policies were beginning to focus on issues relevant to children and families. In 1912, the US Children's Bureau was created. This federal office was responsible for monitoring the condition and treatment of children in the nation. In 1921, the Child Welfare League of America, a private organization concerned with ensuring the well-being of children, was established (Jimenez et al., 2014). In addition, the concept of assistance to mothers was introduced.

At this time, juvenile court systems were also developed. Prior to their creation, the judicial system treated youth like adults, with no consideration for their age. Child welfare advocates successfully lobbied for special treatment of young people in the legal system. For the first time in American history, there seemed to be recognition of the unique needs of children and families by policy makers as well as by professionals working with this population (see Box 7.3).

By the middle of the 1900s, investigation of the institutions that were designed to care for children often revealed improper and dangerous conditions. This led to a shift in philosophy away from removing children from family environments and toward supporting family environments and keeping children at home. Thus, the 1940s and 1950s saw a reduction in the use of institutional care and an increase in the use of foster care (Crosson-Tower, 2013). Theories focusing on keeping families together were being formulated, and social workers were becoming more involved in advocating for the best interests of children (Hess, McCart, McGowan, & Boisko, 2000). Child welfare was being

Box 7.3 Point of View

The decision about whether to try a youth accused of breaking the law as an adult or in juvenile court, where sentences are typically not as harsh or as long, is extremely controversial. A 15-year-old who is tried and convicted of murder in an adult court may be sentenced

to life imprisonment. In a juvenile court, this same youth would likely be sentenced to juvenile detention with the intent of providing rehabilitation and returning him or her to society on adulthood (18 years of age). Which approach seems best? Why?

further defined. Theories about the causes of and solutions to problems affecting children were formulated, and the friendly visits practiced by Charity Organization Society workers (see Chapter 1) were replaced by assessment and counseling.

As the profession moved further into the twentieth century, family preservation and home-based placements became accepted as the best practice for most child welfare needs, and a professional agenda to return removed children home when possible was formed (McGowan, 2014). Intervention with children and families expanded to include counseling methods such as individual, family, and group work. More recently, these interventions were enhanced through the concept of **wraparound services**, a **strengths-based response to child welfare** that uses community-based formal and informal services. In the wraparound process, the child and the family develop a set of goals. A team of people who are relevant to the child's well-being (e.g., family members, teachers, service providers), work collaboratively to develop and implement a care plan to meet these goals (Bernstein et al., 2015). In addition, **family group decision making** was also adopted by many states as a way of supporting the idea that families can contribute to decision making in child welfare (Mather, Lager, & Harris, 2007). Family group decision making is a broad term used to describe a number of approaches where family members are brought together to decide how best to care for their children. The specific approaches vary, but most use a trained facilitator to help the family develop and implement a plan. Advocacy on behalf of children has become increasingly important to the profession, as social workers are more involved in policy making regarding issues facing children and families. Social workers also started working in the schools.



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Broadly defined, **child welfare** includes the activities, programs, interventions, or policies that are intended to improve the overall well-being of children (Pecora, Whitaker, & Maltuccio, 1992). In this text, the term is used to describe the private and public systems put in place to serve the needs of children. One of the most significant parts of the child welfare system is the protection of children who are at risk of maltreatment. The legal definition of child **maltreatment** is:

The physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, or exploitation, negligent treatment, or maltreatment of a child by a person who is responsible for