

# A study on the Practical Group work to Enhance the Resilience of "Quasi-Family" Children's Welfare Institutions

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**Abstract:** *Orphans and disabled children are a special group of children, and the welfare of orphans and disabled children is an important part of the social security system. At present, there are mainly institutional care, foster family care, "quasi-family" care, and adoption. Among them, "quasi-family" is an innovative model that recruits loving and responsible parents from the society to form a simulated family to raise orphans and disabled children, which supplements the family support that children lack and allows them to grow up in a warm and loving life and interaction. However, in practice, it is also found that the "quasi-family" parenting model still has problems in family organization model, family belief system, family communication ability, etc. Therefore, using group work methods, guided by family resilience theory, and starting from the perspective of strengths, professional social work services are provided to quasi-family, promoting changes in quasi-family belief system, organization model and communication status, so as to improve the quality of raising orphans and disabled children.*

**Keywords:** Orphans and Disabled Children, Family Resilience, Group Work.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Research Background

According to the Statistical Bulletin on the Development of Civil Affairs in 2023 issued by the Ministry of Civil Affairs, by the end of 2023, the total number of orphans in China was 144,000, of which 102,000 were orphans living in the community; a total of 11.13 billion yuan was spent on child welfare throughout the year. At present, the main institutions responsible for the centralized care of orphans and disabled children in my country are child welfare and relief protection institutions at all levels and of all types. With the change of parenting concepts, economic and social development, and the continuous improvement of people's living standards, the care of orphans and disabled children has gradually shifted from centralized care to a variety of coexistence of family care, foster care, and other methods, realizing the transition from single care to diversified placement. "Quasi-family" is an innovative model for the care of orphans and disabled children. Children live in a "simulated family" in a welfare institution and can obtain formal support from the community, institutions, schools, etc., as well as informal support from family, brothers and sisters, etc., to meet their development needs. However, in practice, the "quasi-family" care model also shows many problems, especially in terms of family organization model, family belief system, and family communication ability. Therefore, guided by the family resilience theory, designing and carrying out "family-like" resilience-enhancing group services in children's welfare homes from a strengths perspective, promoting the construction and development of family-like areas, can greatly improve the quality of nurturing for orphans and disabled children.

### 1.2 Literature Review

#### 1.2.1 The practice and related research of "quasi-family"

During the two world wars, many children lost or left their parents due to the war and were sent to orphanages. The children in the institutions received physical care, but many children still showed serious psychological disorders. In the 1950s, John Bowlby submitted a report to the World Health Organization, pointing out the harm of institutional care, especially the harm of maternal deprivation. Since then, a wave of anti-institutional care has been formed. Some scholars believe that institutional care deprives children of maternal love and point out that children should leave welfare institutions and go to families, which in turn promotes new changes in orphan care (Hu Qi, 2012). Some European countries, such as Norway and the Netherlands, have begun to close or disperse children's welfare institutions into "institutional family care" and turn "centralized care" into "family-style care." Related studies have found that when orphans and disabled children need care services, the family-like model is the best choice (Hacsi Tim, 1995), can enable orphans and disabled children to live with their "parents" and "brothers and sisters", thus improving their quality of life.

Hong Kong was the first place in my country to start relevant explorations. The Hong Kong Social Welfare Department and several non-governmental organizations provide welfare services for children. In the mid-1990s, Save the Children in the United Kingdom first introduced a model of raising orphans and disabled children in a child welfare institution in a family-like environment in the Guangde County Children's Welfare Institute. Since then, the concept of "quasi-family" has attracted the attention of academia and practitioners (Zhou Zhenou, 2001). Since the success of the first "quasi-family" pilot in Zhengzhou in 2003, the "Zhengzhou Model", "Beijing Model" and "Changsha Model" explored so far have not only retained the advantages of previous in-house foster care, but also alleviated the problems of lack of rehabilitation environment, lack of psychological counseling and urgent need for special education for orphans and disabled children to a certain extent, pointing out a new direction for the rescue and upbringing of orphans and disabled children. Scholar

Wang Xiaomin (2021) emphasized the humanistic care in the "quasi-family" upbringing model, and the importance of family to the development of orphans and disabled children cannot be ignored.

### 1.2.2 Research on family resilience

The earliest research on resilience focused on exploring the "risk factors" and "protective factors" of service recipients. Later, scholars began to pay attention to the ecological system of service recipients and also paid attention to resilience at the family level, emphasizing the exploration of family strengths, potential and resources through interactions among family members.

Foreign research on family resilience started early, and has formed a number of constructive theoretical models. For example, McCubbin proposed and continuously developed a family resilience model by analyzing how families cope with stressful life events, finding the characteristics, dimensions and attributes of families, and exploring the impact of family resources and social support on family adaptability (Wang Huating, 2024). In social work practice, scholars advocate the establishment of a cooperative relationship between workers and families, emphasize the examination and cultivation of family belief systems, and point out that positive guidance should be used to help families clarify belief systems and correctly view family experiences (Collins D, Jordan C, Coleman H, 2009). They also promote changes and growth in service objects such as prisoners' families, single-parent families, disaster-stricken families, and patient families with a mindset of mutual respect and expectation of change on both sides.

Domestic research on family resilience is relatively lagging behind. Li Donghui and Tian Guoxiu (2020) embedded relational perspectives, connections, cooperation and other elements into the original family resilience framework; Yao Jinzhong (2022) analyzed the characteristics of Chinese familyization to enhance the local explanatory power of the concept of family resilience. At present, social workers improve family resilience by reducing or alleviating risk factors, focusing on improving difficulties; focusing on the analysis of internal advantages and resources of the family, focusing on capacity building; providing multi-system integrated services, and paying attention to external resources (Ren Meilin, 2023). Good service results have been achieved in the fields of de facto orphaned children, sick families, single-child families, migrant families, and families with children in difficulties.

### 1.2.3 Research Review

Relevant research and practice have proved that the "quasi-family" model is a better choice for raising orphans and disabled children. Its core is the construction and development of the family and providing family-style care for orphans and disabled children. However, it is also found that "quasi-family" often has problems in family organization model, family belief system, family communication ability, etc., which seriously affect the growth and development of orphans and disabled children. The family resilience theory emphasizes the exploration of family advantages, potential

and resources through the interaction between family members, which is consistent with the inherent needs of quasi-family construction and development. Although there are very few empirical studies on the improvement of quasi-family resilience, research on de facto orphaned children and children in difficult situations can still provide direction and ideas for this article.

## 1.3 Theoretical Basis

Family resilience theory takes the family as a unit, focuses on the study and change of the family's overall beliefs, organization and communication system, emphasizes the importance of the family in individual development, and points out that the family's ability to cope with crises and challenges can be improved and family happiness can be achieved by tapping into the family's strengths, potential and resources. In this study, taking 10 "quasi-families" in X Children's Welfare Institute as an example, the group work method is used from the perspective of strengths to promote the mastery of life skills by orphans and disabled children, strengthen the communication between quasi-family members, promote the transformation of members from strangers to acquaintances and then to family members, enhance family identity and sense of belonging, and help these special children grow better and integrate into the family and society.

## 2. The Practical Process of Group Work to Enhance the Resilience of "Family-like"

### 2.1 Demand Analysis

#### 2.1.1 Children's level: the need to improve self-confidence and social adaptability

Through the needs survey, it was found that the children in the children's welfare institution had obvious sub-grouping phenomenon, and most children only established good interactive relationships with a few children; about 60% of the children had few or even no friends outside the institution. The reasons for this phenomenon include children's lack of self-confidence and self-isolation, and their inability to adapt to life outside the institution. It can be seen that children have a strong need to improve their self-confidence and social adaptability.

#### 2.1.2 Family level: the need to enhance family resilience

Before officially entering the quasi-family, the loving parents had only one week of contact with the children, which led to a lack of understanding between the parents and the children and a lack of family emotional foundation. After hastily entering the quasi-family, about 75% of the families had contradictions and conflicts, including children not adapting to the parenting style of their parents, different schedules and living habits among family members, poor communication among family members, quarrels and physical conflicts, etc., and even 2 quasi-family experiences were resolved. It can be seen that at the quasi-family level, family members have the needs of reconciling communication conditions, changing belief systems, and adjusting organizational models in order to better cope with and solve family problems.

## 2.2 Service Target

1) Encourage children to master necessary life and self-care skills such as housekeeping, cooking, and riding the bus alone, so as to enhance their self-confidence in life and their ability to adapt to society.

2) Learn family life etiquette, promote parents and children in similar families to understand and be familiar with each other's personality, lifestyle and habits, promote communication among family members and adjust the family organization model.

3) Lead family members to experience a better life together, guide members to form common family memories, promote the transformation of family members from strangers to acquaintances and then to family members, change the belief system, and realize that they are part of the family.

## 2.3 Service Plan

### 2.3.1 Service Target

X Children's Welfare Institute has 10 "quasi-families". The "quasi-families" of X Children's Welfare Institute are simulated families consisting of healthy loving couples (loving mothers sign employment contracts with the Children's Welfare Institute) and 4-6 orphans and disabled children in the institute, who live together in well-decorated apartment-style houses with complete facilities.

### 2.3.2 Service Plan

**Table 1: Overview of service plan**

Group Theme	Service Objectives	Service Plan
"Smart Home" Etiquette Group	Learn the etiquette in family life to promote mutual adjustment and reduce possible contradictions and conflicts in the future.	Family members learn polite language and communication skills together, discuss and clarify the distribution of housework, establish family rules, make family recipes, etc.
"Love in the Palms" Life Education Group	Promote the emotional bond between children and parents, appreciate the beauty and preciousness of life, and learn to cherish the present.	Caring parents and children start by raising a blade of grass together and then raise an animal together.
"Skilled Craftsmen" Family Handicraft Group	Promote the formation of common family memories among members and enhance family members' sense of identity and belonging to "home".	Family members dress up as "family" together and make family albums with photos of the activities.
"Guo Se Tian Xiang" Family Cooking Group	Comprehensively improve children's self-care, social adaptation and other abilities.	Lead the children of these families to experience the steps of buying vegetables, washing vegetables, cutting vegetables, putting vegetables into the pot, plating, sharing and tasting, and vote for the "God of Food" in the food festival.
"Happy House" Family Day Group	Increase the sense of ritual and satisfaction in family life and promote emotional connections between family members.	Taking traditional festivals as an opportunity, we make lanterns and guess riddles during the Lantern Festival and make moon cakes during the Mid-Autumn Festival.

## 2.4 Implementation Process

"Smart Family" Etiquette Group: When children first enter a family, caring parents are organized to learn etiquette in family life with their children, including polite language, communication skills, housework distribution, family rule-making, family recipe making, etc., to improve the "wisdom" of getting along with each other, so as to promote the running-in of both parties, reduce possible contradictions and conflicts in the future, and enable both parties to enter into family roles more quickly.

"Love in the Palm" Life Education Group: After loving parents and children have initially entered their roles, the life education group enables group members to think about and understand "I and life". In the process of raising a blade of grass or a small animal together, loving parents and children can further understand each other's personality, habits, etc., and gradually promote the relationship between children and parents.

"Skillful Craftsmen" Family Handicraft Group: After the first two series of group activities, caring parents and children have developed a certain emotional connection and tacit understanding. Based on this, family members are organized to dress up the "home" together and record beautiful moments, which promotes the formation of common family memories among members and enhances the family members' sense of identity and belonging to the "home".

"Guo Se Tian Xiang" Family Cooking Group: Children in welfare institutions will be discharged from the institution and live independently after they become adults, so it is essential for them to learn certain life skills. Taking cooking as the starting point, through caring parent guidance, social worker explanations, and children's hands-on practice, let the children experience the steps of buying vegetables, washing vegetables, cutting vegetables, putting them into the pot, plating them, sharing and tasting them, and vote for the "God of Cookery" during the food festival. While practicing and improving kitchen skills, children learn to tidy up the kitchen, practice communication skills such as bargaining, share dishes, etc., so as to comprehensively improve children's self-care and social adaptation abilities.

"Happy House" Family Festival Group: Chinese traditional festivals are important moments for family reunion, and this is also true for the family. Make lanterns and guess lantern riddles during the Lantern Festival, make moon cakes and share them during the Mid-Autumn Festival, etc., to promote emotional connections between family members, increase the sense of ritual and satisfaction in family life, guide family members to be grateful for each member's contribution to the family, and build a good family emotional support system.

## 2.5 Service Evaluation

### 2.5.1 Service Development

In the series of group activities, the attendance rate of each activity reached 95%, and the degree of interaction was high. Children and parents actively participated in all aspects of the activities and took the initiative to share their feelings and gains from the activities. Through feedback from activities, social workers further understood the needs of the service

recipients and also saw the changes and growth of children and similar families.

### 2.5.2 Service effectiveness

Children's self-confidence is improved and social adaptability is enhanced. Through multiple professional services, the children have mastered certain life skills, communication skills and social interaction skills. About 95% of the children have made new friends on campus.

Family relationships are close and family resilience is significantly improved. In the series of group processes, children and parents cooperate and interact. Although there are occasional conflicts, they continue to understand each other and realize that they are part of the family. 86% of the service recipients believe that "the family atmosphere is very good" and 91% of the service recipients express that they "like my home". Words such as "our family, mother, and Yao'er" appear frequently when describing service experience and harvest. Emotions for the family are naturally revealed in life, and the communication status, organizational model, belief system, etc. of the family have been optimized.

### 3. Summary of Improving the Resilience of "Quasi-family" Through Group Work Intervention

Focus on life-oriented group activities to enhance the resilience of "family-like" children. In this series of group activities, various service themes are close to life and carried out in the context of family life. First, it does not disrupt the regular institutional arrangements of the children's welfare home, ensuring that all work can proceed smoothly, thereby establishing a friendly cooperative relationship with the home; second, in family life and interaction, it not only promotes the coordination of family communication, but also promotes orphans and disabled children to learn and master a number of life skills, etc., and enhances their self-confidence; fourth, it takes the formulation of family rules, joint care of animals and plants, making family albums, learning cooking, etc. as entry points, gradually forming their own family memories, realizing that they are part of the family, thereby transforming the family belief system and adjusting the family organization model.

Create a warm and caring community atmosphere in the welfare home through participatory observation and interaction. In this series of group activities, social workers are not only service providers, but also integrated into the family-like life by living together. In this way, children and parents no longer think of social workers as experts and therapists, but as neighbors and partners who grow up with them, successfully solving the problem that is difficult to get into the hearts of children. In addition, the neighbor role of social workers also makes up for the shortcomings of the simplistic environment of the welfare home to a certain extent. With the development of various life service activities, a warm and caring atmosphere is created in the functional community environment of the welfare home.

Multiple forces work together to promote the healthy growth and self-development of children. In addition to a series of

group activities, we also use the social work service station of the Children's Welfare Institute as a base point to link the forces of surrounding schools and communities. Through thematic activities, community publicity and other activities, we have established a new model of children's welfare work centered on family services and supported by the community (school). The joint efforts of multiple forces lead children to feel love, improve their abilities, and promote their growth and self-development.

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