**Peer Support Groups for Child Welfare-Involved Families**
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**Study Purpose**
- Examine forms, sources, and specific examples of support which parents were able to utilize to augment their involvement with the child welfare system
- Identify perceptions of impact of these supports
- Identify benefits of CWOP Support Groups
- Identify barriers to engagement for parents

**Study Site**
The Child Welfare Organizing Project (CWOP) is a community-based non-profit organization in New York City that aims to organize and empower a parent involved with the child welfare system.

**Method**
**Qualitative in-depth face-to-face interviews**
- Parent participants (N = 29)

**Participants**

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<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>93.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>6.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>100</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
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<td>72.4%</td>
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<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
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<td>3.5%</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>N</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Married</td>
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<td>Divorced</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
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<td>17.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>100</td>
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</table>

**Exploratory Study**
- Professional
  - Mental Health
  - Legal
  - Medical
- Family & Friends
  - Willing to listen
  - Provide advice & encouragement
- Individuals with prior experience who have received formal training
- Religious & Spiritual
  - "I got my son into all the services he needed...coming here and going to all the resources that they were sending me to...all the community stuff..."
- Provided encouragement and reassurance
- Found new allies

**Parent Satisfaction with Support Groups**
- Sense of Involvement
- Sense of Safety
- Comfortable with raising individual point of views
- Sense of understanding
- There's no limit to what you can express, or what you need help in. If they [peers] can do it, they're here for you, they will do it.

**Sources of Support, identified by Parents**
- Professional
- Family & Friends
- Religious & Spiritual
- Other Groups

**Types of Supports Offered in Support Groups**
- **Informational and Educational Support**
  - "There is a wealth of information being shared in this group. I never know when I come in here what resources and what organizations I will learn about."
- **Emotional and Affective Support**
  - "I gained knowledge...knowing what really happens, what ACS [Administration for Children’s Services] is about, and what they do."
- **Instructional / Skill Development Support**
  - "Wherever I need to talk to them about an issue or anything that’s going on with my children or the foster care agency...they're there to...be my encouragement and be there to...help me...give me good advice and things like that."
  - "I gained knowledge...knowing what really happens, what ACS [Administration for Children’s Services] is about, and what they do."
- **Advocacy Support**
  - "I took the tools I had with the knowledge that I got from CWOP and I combined that to fight my battle."
  - "Whenever I need to talk to them about an issue or anything that’s going on with my children...""
  - "Last year I lost my 19 year old son. I was able to come right here and be comforted...everybody was involved and came to my son’s funeral."

**Unique Environment of CWOP Support Group**
- Shared Experiences
- Group Environment
- Judgment-free Environment
- Developing Interest in Child Welfare Organizing
- Personal Growth/Giving Support
- Expand Participant’s Social Network

**Suggestions for Improvements**
- Greater frequency of meetings
- Replication in other boroughs
- Groups for Spanish-speakers
- Inclusion of children

**Implications**
- Social support is a vital factor in engaging and empowering parents in Child Welfare.
- The peer-led CWOP group presents a unique model for supporting parents.
- Individuals develop confidence and resiliency skills through peer support.
- Parents gain exposure, skills, and interest in advocacy which yields an impact on micro and macro levels.

**Conclusion**
- Parents involved in the child welfare system encounter stigma, stress and isolation.
- Peer-to-peer mentorship and group support provides opportunity for parents to learn new skills, connect to resources, and build a social network.
- As parents develop their own capacities, they are motivated to advocate for themselves and others.
- The CWOP Parent Support Group provides a model for peer-to-peer programs with positive outcomes for participants.
- Engaging parents in this way is critical to creating a child welfare system that is more respectful and inclusive of parents.

**References**