

Child welfare experts share ideas

■ Researchers from the U.S. and Israel trade information at a local conference.

BY GINNIE GRAHAM
World Staff Writer

Child welfare experts and social workers from the U.S. and Israel came together Tuesday at the University of Oklahoma-Tulsa campus to trade information.

The daylong training and development conference on child maltreatment included discussions and lectures by officials from the Haruv Institute based in Jerusalem, leading practitioners in Tulsa and researchers from several national universities.

The event attracted about 85 participants and Israeli media.

"There are a lot of pockets of good work happening in child abuse and neglect, but there is never a chance to get national and international experts together to talk about best practices," said OU-Tulsa President Dr. Gerry Clancy said.

The Charles and Lynn Schusterman Foundation co-sponsored the event with OU-Tulsa and the Haruv Institute, which was founded by the Schusterman Foundation in 2007 to develop knowledge and training programs for the prevention and treatment of child abuse and

neglect within families.

The institute approaches the issue from research, education and public policy perspectives.

Clancy said the Schusterman Foundation had the idea for the conference based on some key successes in Israel, particularly in the reduction of the maltreatment rates.

"We've had a shift in the conversation from intervention to prevention, which I find exciting," he said.

Hillel Schmid, professor of social work at Hebrew University of Jerusalem, outlined the differences and similarities in the U.S. and Israel regarding child abuse and neglect.

Two major differences are in the high use of residential facilities for foster care and in the type of maltreatment.

About 80 percent of Israeli foster children are in institutions, and maltreatment breakdown includes 36 percent physical abuse and 37 percent neglect.

In the U.S., institutional foster care is being phased out and considered a placement of last resort.

Neglect accounts for the vast majority of reports, at about 78 percent nationally and 88 percent in Oklahoma, according to the U.S. Children's Bureau report in 2010.

Oklahoma ranks 35th in the rate of child abuse and neglect nationally.

Schmid said that among Israel's challenges are com-

munication about cases among agencies and confidentiality and privacy laws preventing the release of information.

Stacey Leakey, an infant mental health consultant with the Parent Child Center of Tulsa, noted that U.S. practitioners would list some of the same challenges.

"It's sobering that we are facing similar problems," she said. "In another way, it's discouraging to realize we are all dealing with the same problems."

Leakey said the move toward a trauma-informed system in Oklahoma means that the conversation will have to change among families, service providers, court officials and child welfare workers.

This will take a family's situation into context and how it affects a child's development.

Leakey said research into this area relies on field workers, who also rely on the researchers for data for designing best-practice models.

"I hope all of us are moving toward a much more integrated system," she said.

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TEAMING UP

OU-Tulsa President Dr. Gerry Clancy: "There are a lot of pockets of good work happening in child abuse and neglect, but there is never a chance to get national and international experts together to talk about best practices," he said.

