

## SOCIAL WORKERS' EVALUATION OF THE RESIDENTIAL CARE SYSTEM PROJECT-GO IN GAUTENG PROVINCE

*Ms Poppy K Mashego is a MA student, and Professor Antionette Lombard is a professor at the Department of Social Work, University of Pretoria*

### ABSTRACT

The transformation of the child and youth care system in conjunction with *Project-Go*, the unblocking of the residential care system, has laid a cornerstone for the development of a family-based and child-friendly approach to service delivery. The motivation behind protecting children's rights includes a re-emphasis of the need to move away from the traditional pathology-based and deficits-based models toward the developmental and strengths-based approach. This article reports on a study conducted in the Gauteng province among probation officers and social workers that are working with children and youths in residential care facilities. The study assumed that if social workers have a clear knowledge and understanding of, and a positive attitude toward, the *Project-Go* concept and process, implementation would then be successful in improving the lives of children, youths and families. The research findings indicated that social workers have a clear knowledge and understanding of the concept and process of *Project-Go*, that they support the principles and philosophy of this concept, and share the same values and beliefs about family preservation and family reunification. However, some social workers have very specific perceptions and concerns with regard to the planning, design and implementation of *Project-Go*. The article concludes with specific recommendations in this regard.

### INTRODUCTION

*Project-Go*, the unblocking of the residential care system, was launched in November 1997 by the National Ministry for Welfare and the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Young People at Risk (IMC), consisting of the Departments of Welfare, Justice, Correctional Service, South African Police Service, Education and Public Works.

The project was designed and implemented to address the following:

1. The 1996 Cabinet Investigation Recommendations relating to residential care and probation services;
2. Minimising the number of children awaiting trial in prisons by May 1998; and
3. Facilitating the ongoing transformation of the Child and Youth Care System.

The key strategies involved the assessment and/or monitoring of children (1) entering the child and youth care system; (2) moving within the system; (3) remaining in the system; and (4) moving out of the system.

Essentially, *Project-Go* is in line with the social welfare departmental vision and mission. According to the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997:7), the vision of the Department of Social Services is "a welfare system that facilitates the development of human capacity and self-reliance within a caring and enabling socio-economic environment". The mission is "to serve and build a self-reliant nation in partnership with all stakeholders through an integrated social welfare system which maximises its existing potential, and which is equitable, sustainable, accessible, people-centred and developmental".



*Project-Go* is embedded in the theoretical frameworks of the ecological systems perspective, the contextual perspective, the developmental perspective and the strengths perspective.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR *PROJECT-GO***

### **The ecological systems perspective**

The ecological systems perspective holds that the environment in which children and families live shapes their view of the world. Furthermore, their lives are inextricably linked to their neighbourhoods. The child is part of the family system, whilst the family is part of a larger community system. If one part of the system is affected, the entire system will be subjected to the same effects. To effect change in any part of the system, one needs to consider the other related parts of the whole (Kaplan & Girard, 1994:51-54). According to the ecological systems approach, in working with children and families, the worker's role is to advocate, negotiate and facilitate comprehensive services (Kaplan & Girard, 1994:51-54).

In a research study by Maluccio, Abramczyk and Thomlison (1996:289) children were reported to make greater gains in treatment when their families were also involved. In another study by Sloutsky (1997:132) it was found that institutionalisation has profound detrimental effects on the physical, cognitive and emotional development of children and youths. These negative effects were ascribed to the institutional environment.

Therefore social welfare practitioners are challenged to expand their notions of intervention and treatment. Secondly, they are called upon to consider incorporating some of the personal, familial, school and community factors that influence the development of undesirable behaviours. It is important to recognise that the environment can either militate against or encourage undesirable behaviour.

### **The contextual perspective**

Similarly, the contextual perspective holds that developmental processes are primarily affected by the contexts in which they take place. Based on the contextual perspective, it is believed that either the presence or absence of an immediate setting, such as the family, can be a factor that profoundly changes the process of development (Sloutsky, 1997:133).

In support of this view, McWhirter *et al.* (1993:36) regard the social context and social conditions of a community to which the child and family belong as a predictor of behaviour. *Project-Go* as a programme is also embedded in the belief that the environment/context does affect development.

### **The developmental perspective**

The developmental perspective holds that children and families are unique and develop in different stages, and have the strengths and the capacity to change (IMC Report, 1996:9).

The developmental approach argues that antisocial behaviour is a developmental phenomenon that begins early in life and continues through childhood and adolescence into adulthood (McWhirter *et al.*, 1993:14).

An important aspect of the developmental perspective is the belief that development cannot be forced. This notion is in line with the view that workers need to view clients as partners, as colleagues who need to be involved in treatment planning and whose opinions and choices need to be respected.



## **The strengths perspective**

Proponents of the strengths perspective believe that all human beings have strengths. The other distinguishing feature of the strengths perspective is the shift away from labelling and categorising clients. Reframing and re-labelling are encouraged as ways and means of offering children and families a different view of themselves, and this helps them to recognise that what they consider as deficits may actually be strengths (Kaplan & Girard, 1994; Leung, Cheung & Stevenson, 1994).

It is crucial for child and family welfare workers to develop positive attitudes toward clients and to encourage clients to identify and use their own resources, to engage in positive and effective behaviour, and to appreciate their own ethnic and cultural backgrounds and competencies; it is also most important for the worker to be culturally and ethnically sensitive.

According to the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997:7), the social welfare strategy is aimed at facilitating the provision of appropriate developmental social welfare services to all the people of this country, especially those living in poverty; the vulnerable, like women and children, and those with special needs. Such services should be rehabilitative, preventative, protective, developmental and empowering. Social workers can play an important role in achieving the goals and objectives of the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997), in particular through *Project-Go*.

## **RESEARCH STUDY**

### **Research questions**

Research questions for the study included the following:

- Why is the implementation process of *Project-Go* so slow?
- What are the different attitudes and perceptions about the *Project-Go* process which may in turn affect its implementation, either positively or negatively?
- What role could such attitudes and perceptions play in retarding the progress of transforming the social welfare system, especially with regard to child and youth care?

### **Research methodology**

Although the research study included a component of quantitative research, the focus was primarily on qualitative research. Qualitative research is a systematic and empirical strategy for trying to understand what people have to say and report as their experience. In qualitative research the focus of attention is on the perceptions and experiences of the participants, what they say their beliefs are, the feelings they express and explanations they give (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 1993:99).

Similarly, Schurink (1998:243) defines qualitative research as that research that elicits participant accounts of meaning, experience or perceptions. It involves identifying the participant's beliefs and values about phenomena or situations.

Since the research topic is directly linked to social work practice, applied research was the most appropriate type of research for this study. According to Borg & Gall (1989:13-32), applied research is perceived to be more concerned with the improvement of practice, whereas basic research is concerned with theory building.

For the purposes of this research study, the evaluation design was utilised to study the *Project-Go* process. Evaluation research design implies the methods of social science that can be used to assess the design, implementation and usefulness of social interventions (Bless & Higson-Smith,



1995:47). The implementation of *Project-Go* was evaluated on the basis of what social workers had to say about their experience, understanding and perceptions regarding the whole process since it was initiated.

In this study the focus was on diagnostic evaluation, which, according to Bless & Higson-Smith (1995:248), aims at informing researchers and project managers about the current situation within communities, highlighting problems, trends, forces and/or lack of resources, as well as possible consequences of social interventions.

For the purposes of this research study the population was social workers employed by the Gauteng Department of Social Services and Population Development and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs), specifically those who are involved in probation services, those in residential care settings or in child and youth care, who are directly involved with the *Project-Go* process.

It was not feasible to study the entire population, therefore a sample was selected. Rubin & Babbie (1993:219) define sampling as a process of selecting observations. It allows the researcher to select a few observations and make generalisations to a much wider population. For the purposes of this study the researcher used purposive sampling. In this type of sampling technique the judgement of the researcher is important.

In Gauteng there is personnel corps of 2025 people who render social services. However, there are also approximately 750 people in the NGO sector who support the Department in social service delivery. Based on this, the 1999 ratio for social workers to the Gauteng population was 1:6939 (Annual Statistical Report, 1999:58).

The researcher selected a sample of 30 social workers in the Far East Rand, Pretoria and Johannesburg who are directly involved in working with children and youths or who are employed as probation officers and/or work in residential care facilities.

For the purposes of this study the researcher utilised the self-administered questionnaire to collect data. Through the self-administered questionnaires respondents were in a position to share their experiences about the planning, developing, training and implementation of the *Project-Go* process. For some respondents this was sensitive information. However, remaining anonymous protected them. The questionnaire was available in English, since all the respondents indicated that they could speak English. There was a hundred percent (100%) response rate for the questionnaires.

## Research findings

The research findings will be presented in three parts, namely (1) a profile of the respondents, (2) their personal opinion on the implementation and training and (3) the evaluation of *Project-Go*.

### *Part 1: Profile of respondent*

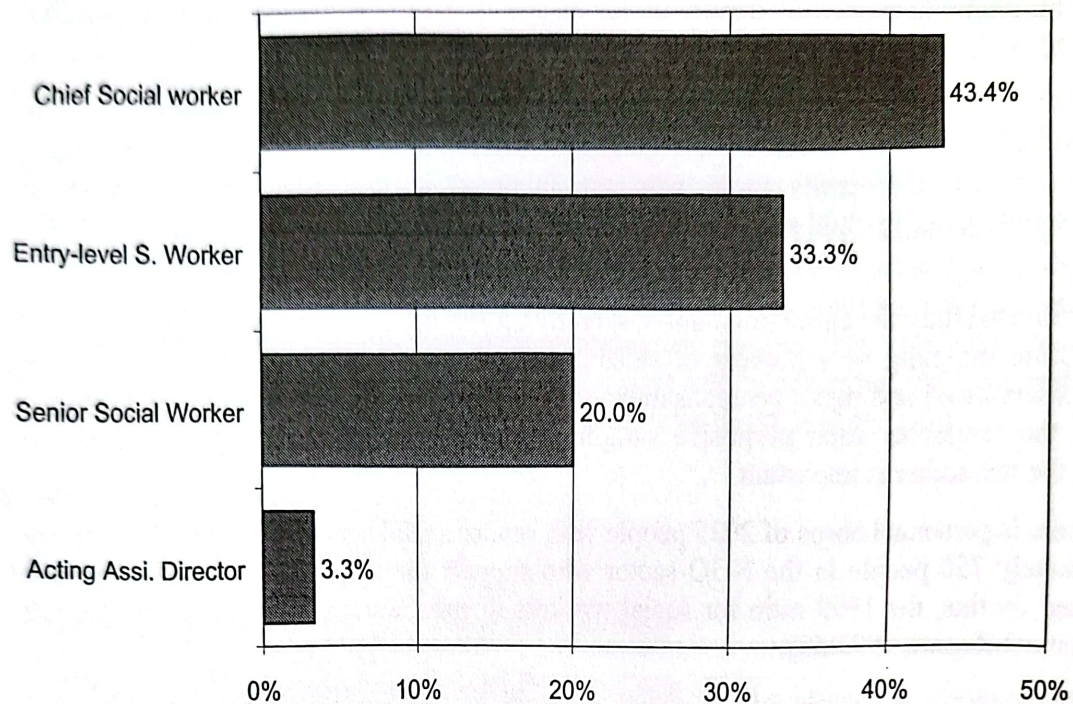
The profile of the respondent includes their occupational status, experience as social worker and experience in child and youth care work and probation work.

From Figure 1, it is evident that 43.4% of the respondents are chief social workers; 33.3% are entry-level social workers; 20% are senior social workers. Only 3.3% of the respondents hold the position of Acting Assistant Director. These findings allude to the importance of ensuring that service providers are highly trained and experienced to ensure a high level of competence, thereby ensuring effective and efficient programme implementation. One of the recommendations made by IMC stipulated that programmes serving emotionally and/or behaviourally troubled children and

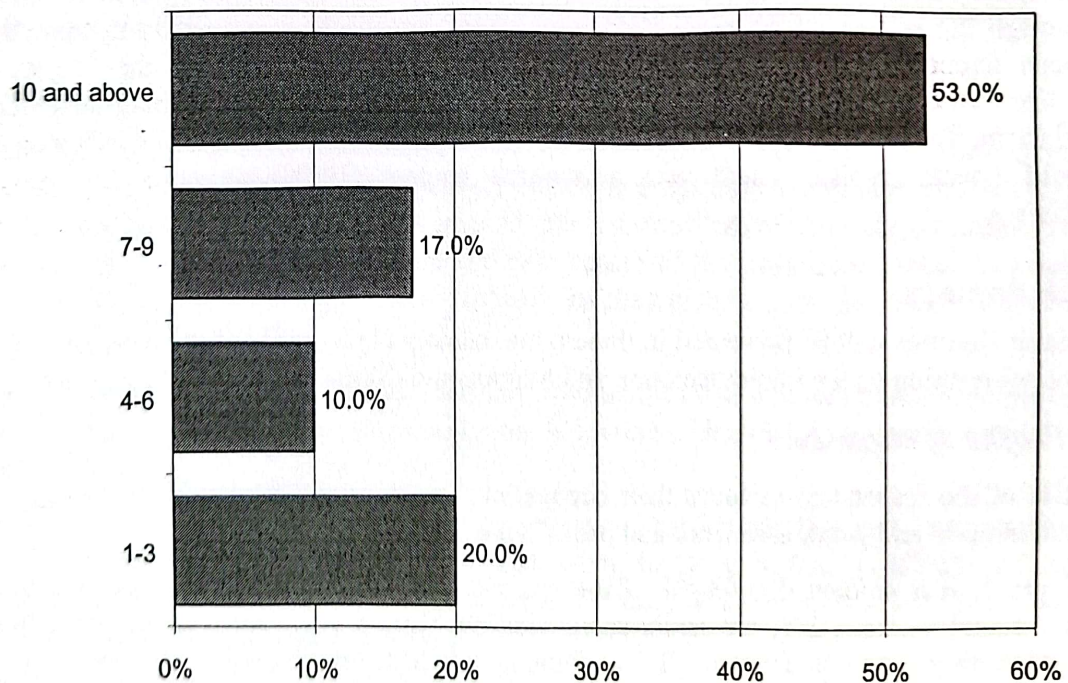


youths require professional practitioners at on-line, senior, middle management and management levels (IMC, 1996:64).

**FIGURE 1**  
**CURRENT OCCUPATIONAL STATUS**



**FIGURE 2**  
**YEARS OF EXPERIENCE AS A SOCIAL WORKER**





The above findings indicate that the majority (53%) of the respondents have more than 10 years of experience as social workers; 17% have between 7 to 9 years of experience; 10% have between 4 to 6 years of experience as social workers; and the remaining 20% have between 1 to 3 years of experience as social workers.

The level of experience can be linked to the level of competence and efficiency. The successful implementation of *Project-Go* is highly dependent, amongst other things, on the level of experience. The authors are of the opinion that the more experienced the practitioner; the better the position he/she is in to successfully implement a programme.

**FIGURE 3**  
**YEARS OF EXPERIENCE IN CHILD AND YOUTH CARE WORK**

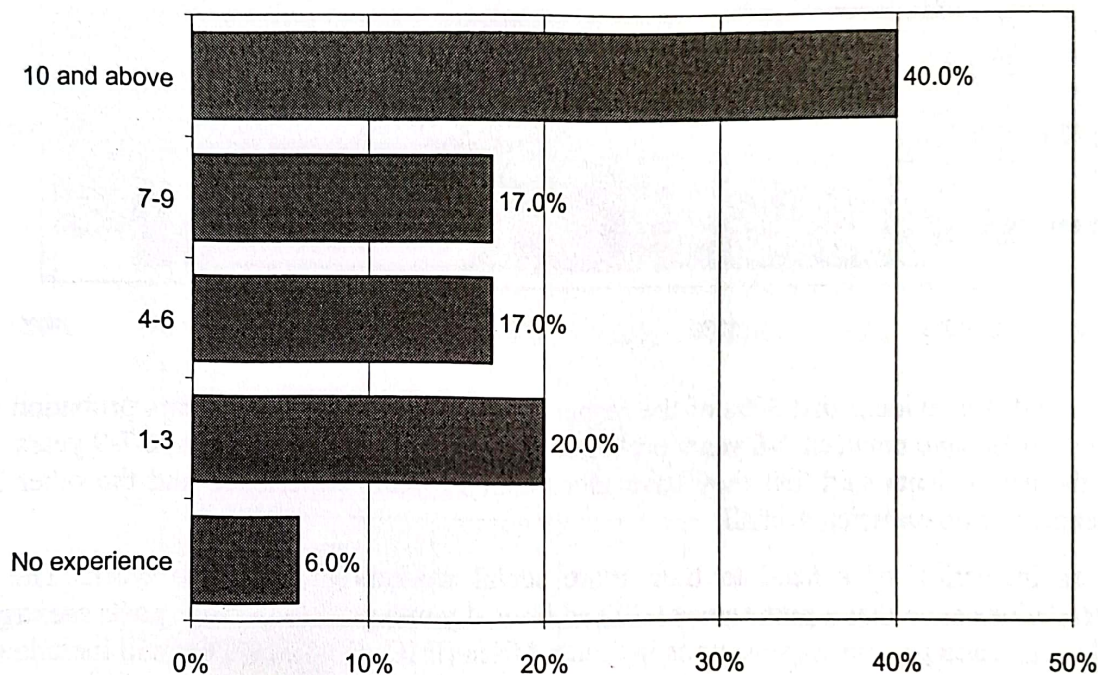
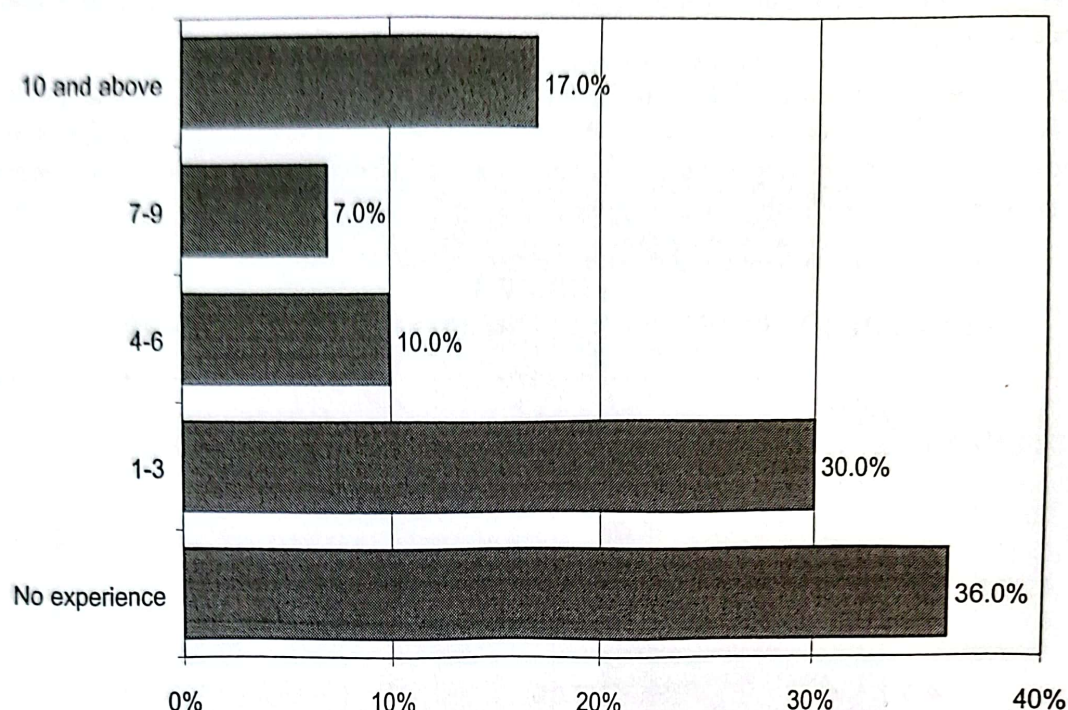


Figure 3 shows that the highest percentage (40%) of the respondents have more than 10 years of experience working in the child and youth care field; 17% have between 7 and 9 years and another 17% have between 4 and 6 years of experience; 20% have 3 and below years of experience in this field. Only 6% have no experience in child and youth care work.

The IMC recommended the urgent establishment of a three-year Bachelor's degree and eventually an Honours Degree in Child and Youth Care Work to ensure the delivery of quality and competent services to young people at risk (IMC, 1996:66). Various tertiary education institutions have already embarked on training in this regard.



**FIGURE 4**  
**YEARS OF EXPERIENCE IN PROBATION WORK**



From Figure 4 it is evident that 30% of the respondents have only three (3) years probation work experience; 10% have between 4-6 years probation work experience; and 7% have 7-9 years. Only 17% of the respondents said that they have more than 10 years experience and the other 36 % respondents have no experience at all.

This is an indication of a need to train more social workers in probation work. The IMC recommendations state that a minimum of 300 additional youth probation work posts are urgently required in state and private organisations in South Africa (IMC, 1996:61). This will include social workers for these positions, which will have a huge impact on social work jobs.

### ***Part 2: Respondents' opinions***

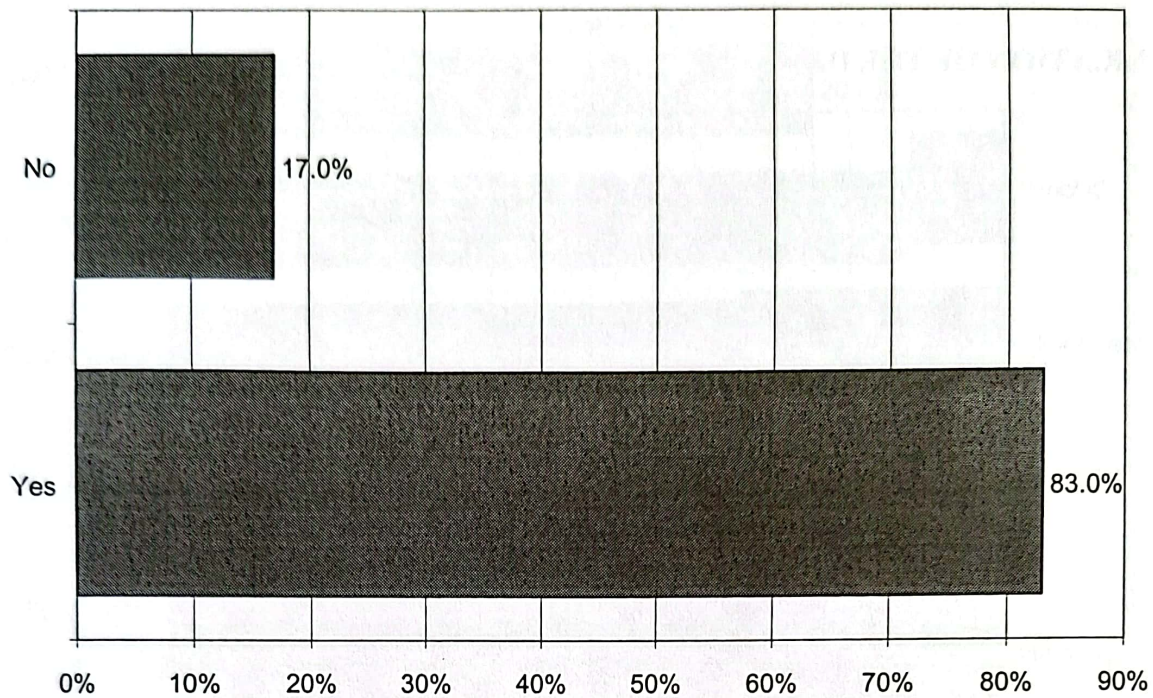
In Part 2 the respondents indicated their opinions with regard to training and the implementation of developmental social welfare as opposed to the remedial model, training in the transformation of the child and youth care system, and the best placement options for children in need of care.

The findings in Figure 5 indicate that 83% of the respondents have had training in developmental social welfare. Only 17% reported that they have not been trained. From the findings the authors concluded that *Project-Go* is more likely to be successfully implemented since it is embedded in a developmental paradigm.

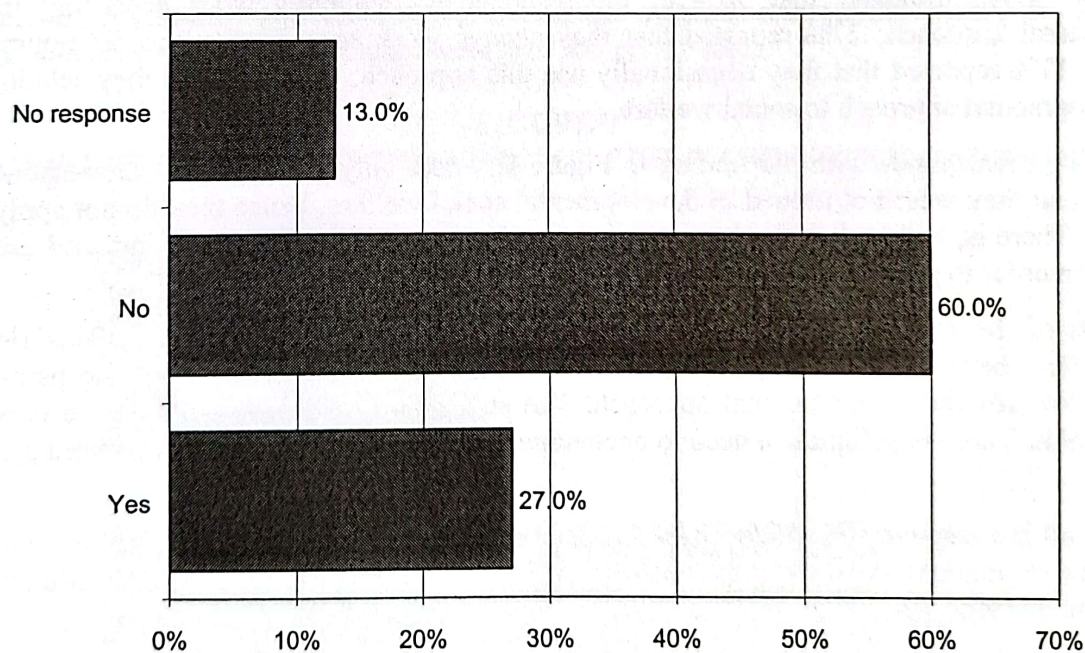
Some of the respondents did not have a positive experience of the training in developmental social work and responded by saying that they felt that this is nothing new but the implementation of basic social work principles. However, most of the respondents felt the training was a positive experience. The authors are in agreement that perceptions determine attitude. There is a likelihood that if practitioners had a positive training experience they will more likely implement what they have learned.



**FIGURE 5**  
**TRAINING IN DEVELOPMENTAL SOCIAL WELFARE**



**FIGURE 6**  
**NEED FOR TRAINING**

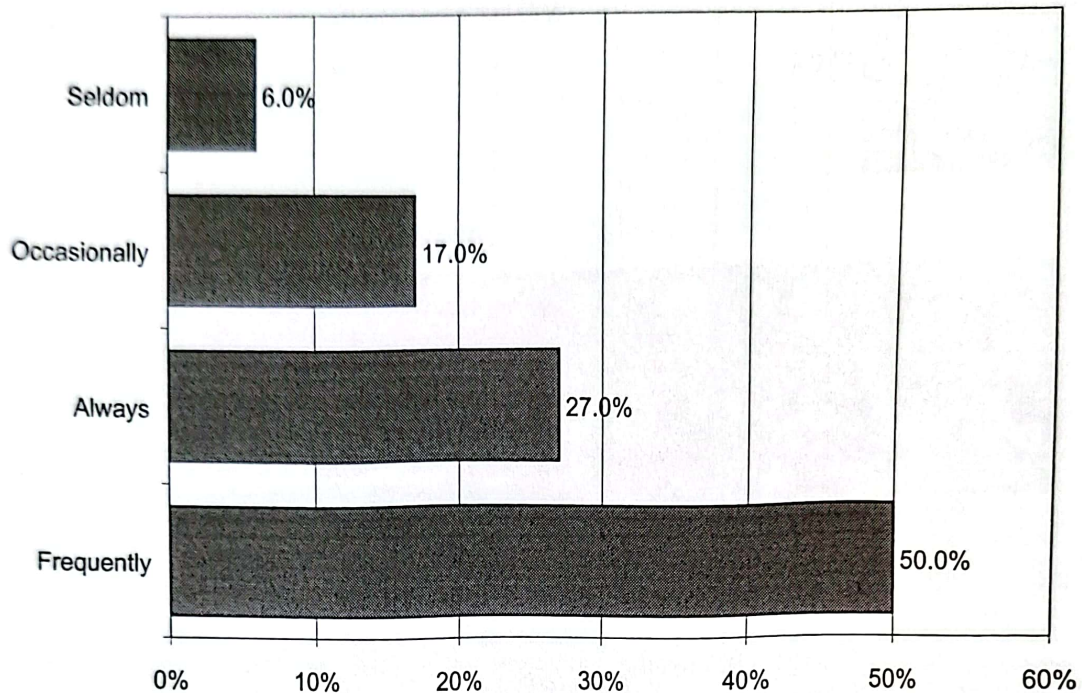


The findings show that only 27% (8) of the respondents said that they need training as opposed to the 60% who felt that they do not need training; 13% (4) of the respondents did not respond to this question. Some said that training is needed for newly employed social workers. With the “no



response" group the authors detected an ambivalence or uncertainty as to whether they need training or not.

**FIGURE 7**  
**APPLICATION OF THE DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACH TO SOCIAL WELFARE**



The graph above indicates that 50% of the respondents frequently work according to the developmental approach; 27% reported that they always work according to the developmental approach; 17% reported that they occasionally use this approach; only 6% said they seldom use this developmental approach to social welfare.

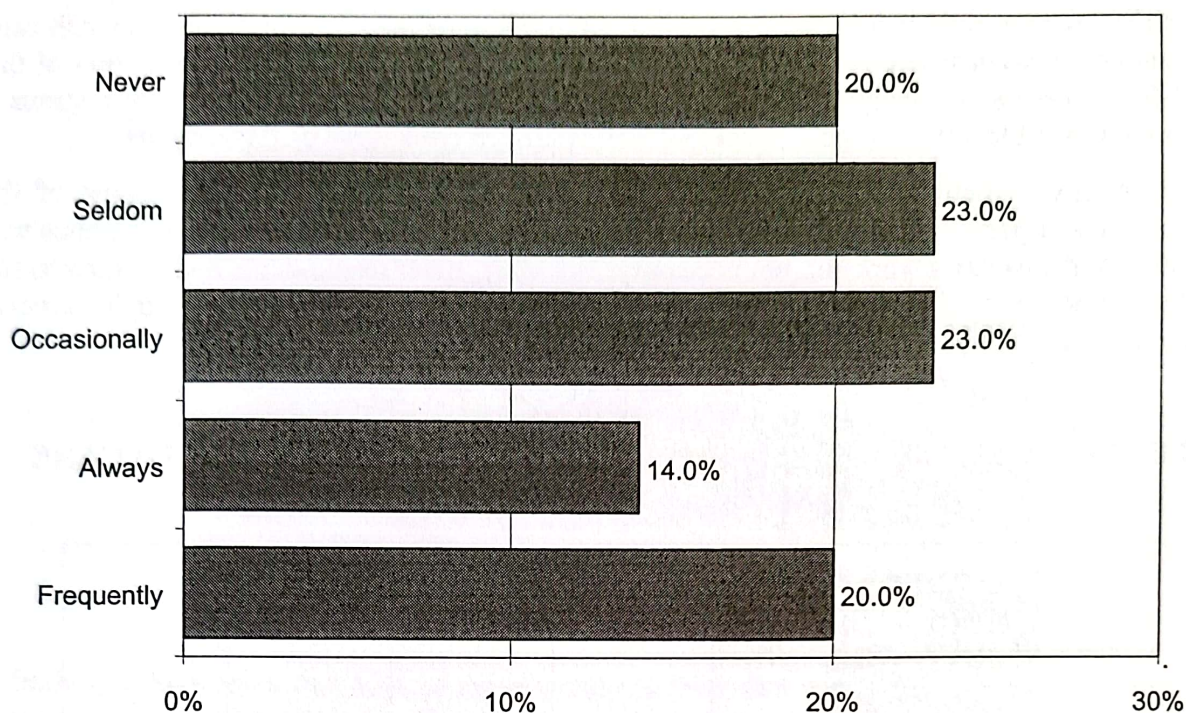
This finding corresponds with the finding in Figure 5, where only a minority of the respondents indicated that they were not trained in developmental social welfare, hence they do not apply this approach. There is, however, a need to encourage and motivate all workers to adopt and use this approach in order to provide effective services to clients.

Only 20% of the respondents reported that they never use the remedial model. This finding indicates that there is no major paradigm shift in terms of moving away from the pathology approach towards the developmental approach. The suggestion made above about the need for training holds. There is definitely a need to encourage a move away from pathology-based practice models.

Since not all the respondents were trained in the developmental model, it might be possible that some of the respondents cannot make a distinction between the developmental and remedial model or do not understand what the respective models entail.



**FIGURE 8**  
**APPLICATION OF THE REMEDIAL MODEL TO SOCIAL WELFARE**



In the *Project-Go* context the remedial model focuses on weaknesses, categorising, labelling, helping and curing, whilst the developmental perspective focuses on reframing problems into strengths, understanding and recognising ecological systems around the client, competency building, and environments which empower (IMC Report, 1996:5).

**FIGURE 9**  
**TRAINING IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF CHILD AND YOUTH CARE SYSTEM**

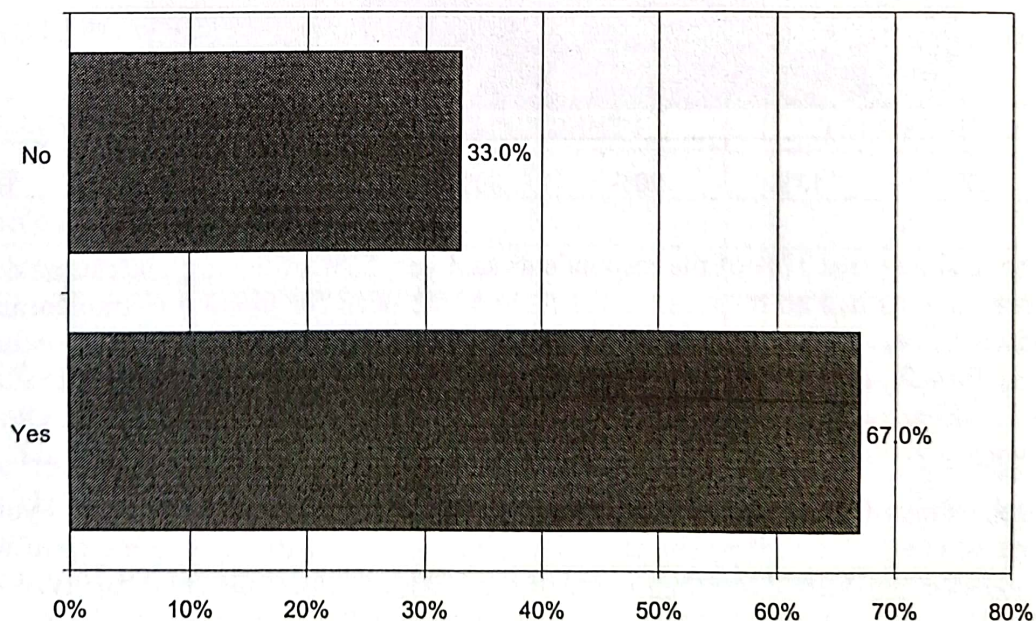


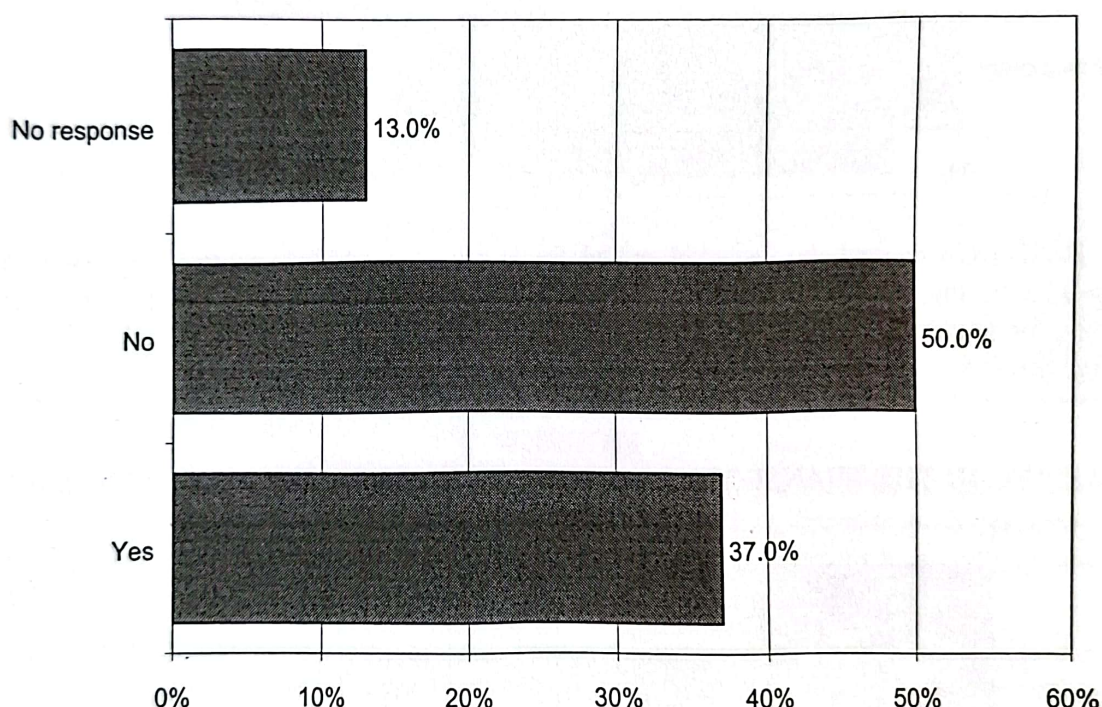


Figure 9 indicates that 67% of the respondents were trained in the transformation of the child and youth care system as opposed to 33% who were not trained. Such findings point to a definite need to have all social workers trained in order to be informed of new developments and latest trends.

The fact that some social workers are not yet trained in the transformation of child and youth care is of great concern because of the negative impact this could have on the implementation of the *Project-Go* process and principles. Transformation of the child and youth care system requires a total paradigm shift towards the new developmental approach (IMC Report, 1996:5).

There were mixed feelings about the respondents' experience of their training. Some of the respondents had a positive and fulfilling experience, whilst others reported that the experience was not good, that it was extra work and not necessary. However, other respondents had nothing to say about their experience of the training. The authors are convinced that the way that people perceive a situation has a great impact on their attitude and therefore on implementation.

**FIGURE 10**  
**NEED FOR TRAINING IN TRANSFORMATION OF CHILD AND YOUTH CARE SYSTEM**

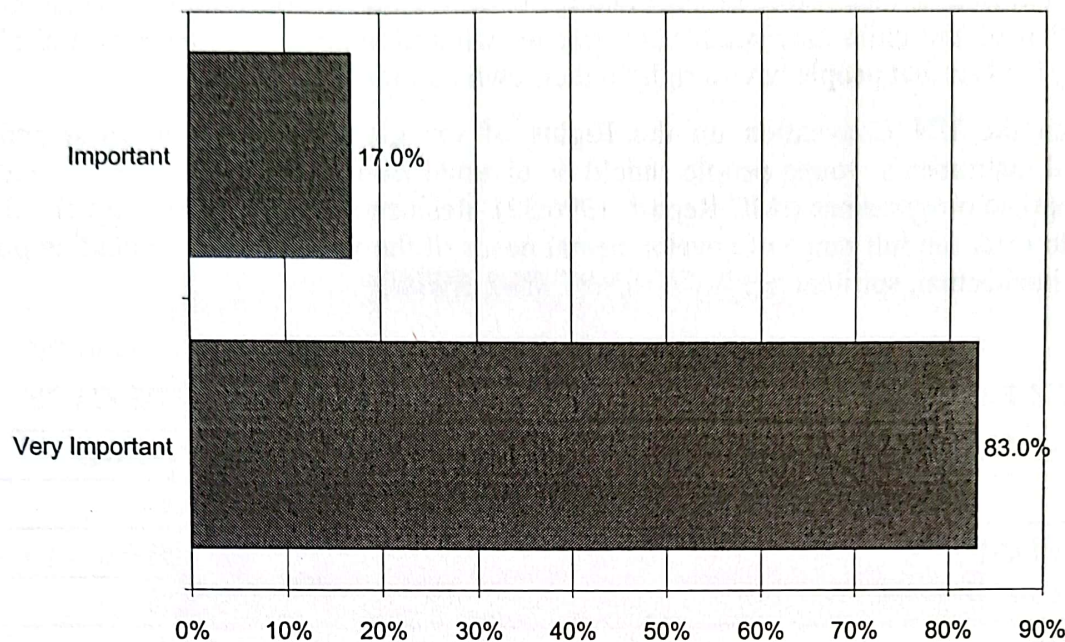


The figure above shows that 37% of the respondents said yes; 50% of the respondents said no; and 13% of the respondents had no response to the issue of the need for training in transformation of the child and youth care system. Comments from those who said they need training included the need for more formal and specialised training that they can use to increase their confidence in working with children and youths, and the need to develop preventative programmes. Others said training is always essential, but then the outcomes of such training had to be implemented.

In support of the above findings, the IMC report on the transformation of the child and youth care system also recommended that all personnel in the child and youth care field should have access to appropriate and effective formal training, in-service training and developmental supervision (IMC Report, 1996:46).



**FIGURE 11**  
**IMPORTANCE OF KEEPING CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITHIN FAMILIES**



The findings above show that 83% of the respondents think that it is very important to ensure that children are kept within their families. The remaining 17% reported that it is important to keep children in their families. This finding is in line with family preservation principles and the philosophy that maintains that the best place for children to live is with their families in the home (Bates, English & Kouldou-Giles, 1997; Cole, 1995; Roditti, 1995).

The one mandate of *Project-Go* was to place a moratorium on the movement of children deeper into the system and, where possible, move children back with their families and communities or even to a less restrictive placement (IMC Report, 1996: 7).

**TABLE 1**  
**THE BEST PLACEMENT OPTION FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTHS IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW**

PLACEMENT OPTION	RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Family	11	37%
Correctional Supervisor	5	17%
Secure Care Facility	11	37%
Prison	1	3%
Depends on the case	2	6%

The above Table indicates that 37% of the respondents believe the family is the best placement option for children, while another 37% believe the secure care facility is the best. Another 17% believe correctional supervision is the best option, and 6% reported that it depends on the circumstances of the youth offender: his/her age; the severity of the offence; the existence of previous convictions – in short, the need to deal with each and every case on its own merits.



Only 3% felt that the best option is prison; the reason given was that some youths commit serious offences such as murder and the state has a responsibility to protect law-abiding citizens. Such comments indicate a need for more training with regard to restorative justice and the transformation of the child and youth care system, without sounding judgmental and also not overlooking the fact that people have a right to their own opinion.

In line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Beijing rules and other international instruments, young people should be diverted from the criminal justice system into more appropriate programmes (IMC Report, 1996:32). Residential care programmes should be in a position to meet the full range of developmental needs of the young person, including physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual and social needs (Bates *et al.*, 1997: 9).

**TABLE 2**  
**THE BEST PLACEMENT OPTION FOR CHILDREN IN NEED OF CARE**

PLACEMENT OPTION	RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Family	18	60.0%
Place of Safety	4	13.3%
Foster Care	4	13.3%
Adoption	1	3.4%
Other	3	10.0%

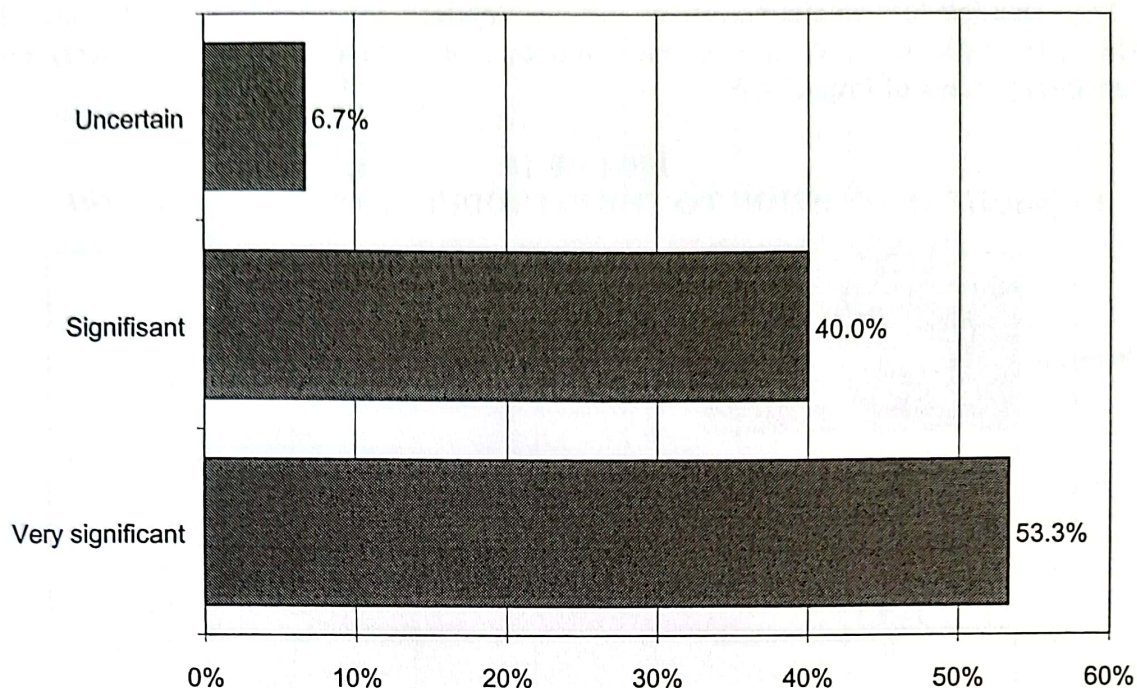
Table 2 indicates that 60% of the respondents think the family is the best option for children in need of care. Another 13.3% felt that the best place for children is in a place of safety, whilst the other 13.3% felt foster care is the best. The remaining 10% said it all depends on the circumstances of the child or children concerned and available resources. They also said each case must be handled on its own merits and that each child must be assessed and dealt with individually. Only 3.4% recommended subsidised adoption to help economically deprived families to cope with the demands of raising children.

### ***Part 3: Evaluation of Project-Go***

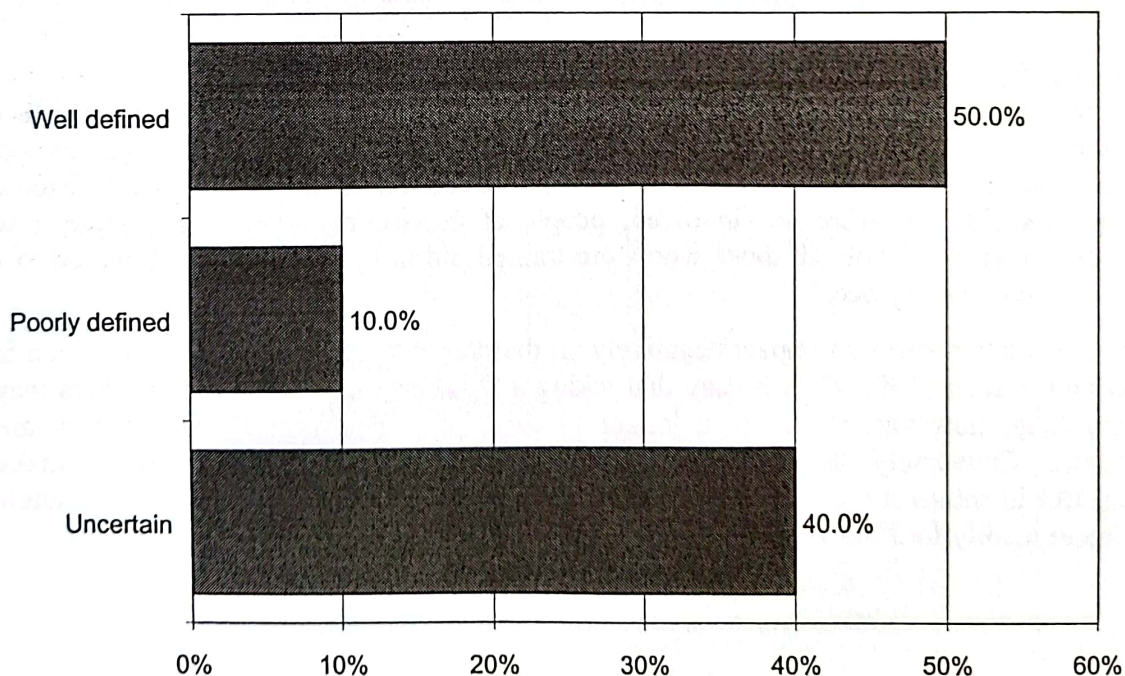
From the graph above it can be seen that a majority (53.3%) of the respondents rated the *Project-Go* process as very significant, 40% rated it as significant and 6.7% were not certain. This last category could be newly employed social workers who entered the social work field only long after the process had been initiated. Those who gave it a significant rating said that they have not seen any significant changes, as there is no major movement of children and youth out of the welfare system. They said that restrictions had been placed on the movement of children, but no new options were given. They also said that the process is protracted before a final placement is effected.



**FIGURE 12**  
**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF *PROJECT-GO***



**FIGURE 13**  
**THE DEFINITION OF GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF *PROJECT-GO***

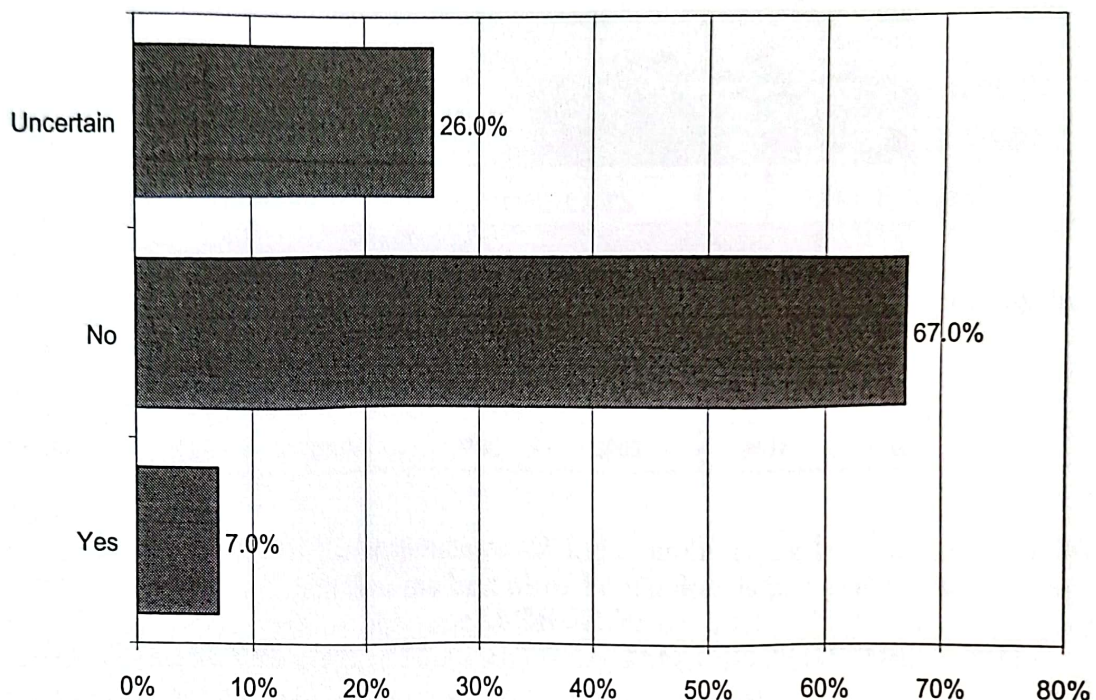


The findings reflected in this graph indicate that half (50%) of the respondents rated the goals and objectives as well defined; another 40% were uncertain and only 10% said they were poorly



defined. Those who said the goals and objectives were poorly defined reported that the concept and process were not clear, the process was frustrating and no guidance was given. Others said that there was no consistency with regard to requirements prior to placement of children and youths. They also felt that no alternatives or sufficient options are given and that it is unrealistic and difficult to implement. Perceptions and attitudes like these can impact negatively on the implementation process of *Project-Go*.

**FIGURE 14**  
**CONSULTATION PRIOR TO THE INTRODUCTION OF *PROJECT-GO***

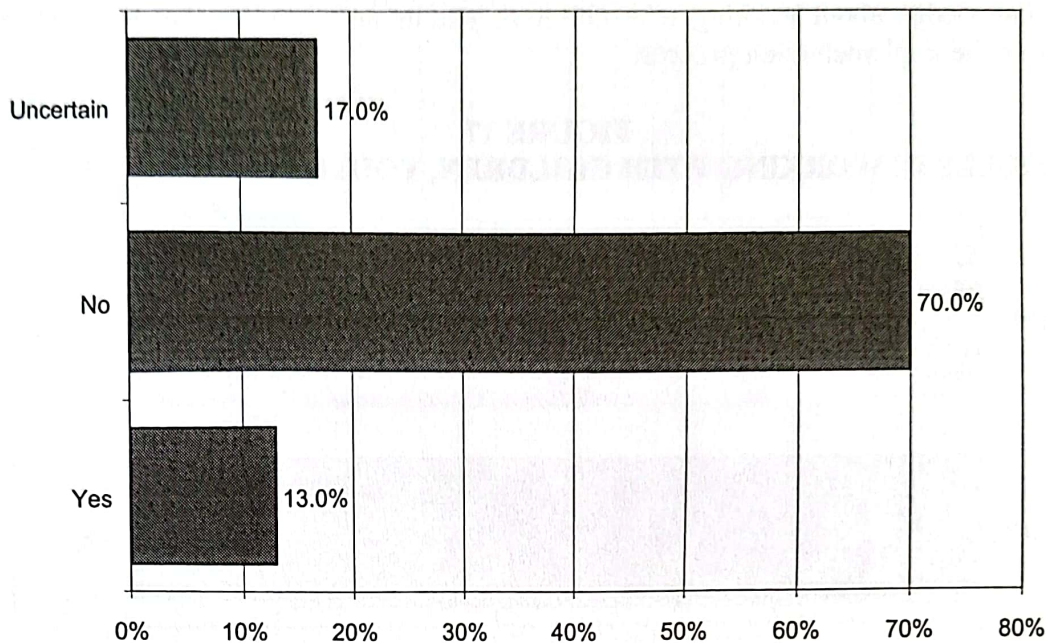


The findings show that 67% of the respondents said no consultation took place and only 7% said consultation did take place. The other 26% were uncertain and this can be ascribed to the fact that some were not in the social work field when the process was introduced, whilst others did not get feedback from their colleagues about the project. Comments made included: "The decision came from top down; NGOs were not involved; people at grassroots did not participate; relevant stakeholders were not involved; those who were trained did not give feedback; I started to work after the process was in place."

Lack of consultation can also impact negatively on the implementation process. This is confirmed by Stott and Walker (1992:22) who say that taking a decision without involving others may not take very long; however, it will take longer to explain, gain employee commitment and be implemented. Conversely, the more people are involved, the longer it will take to make the decision. But in return it will be quicker and easier to implement the decision and commitment will be more readily forthcoming.

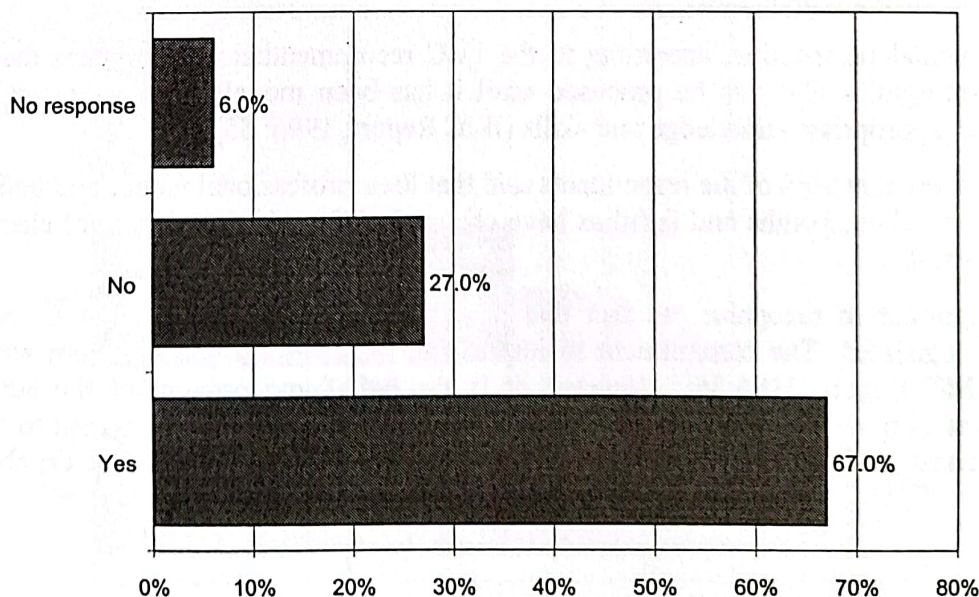


**FIGURE 15**  
**TRAINING ON PROJECT- GO**



The findings indicated that 70% of the respondents said that not sufficient training was offered, as opposed to 13% that said it had been. The remaining 17% were uncertain as they form part of the newly employed social workers who needed to be trained. The vision of the Department of Social Services and Population Development in the Gauteng province is to ensure that all personnel are appropriately trained so that they can provide an integrated, innovative, effective, ethical and child-friendly service (IMC Report, 1996:46).

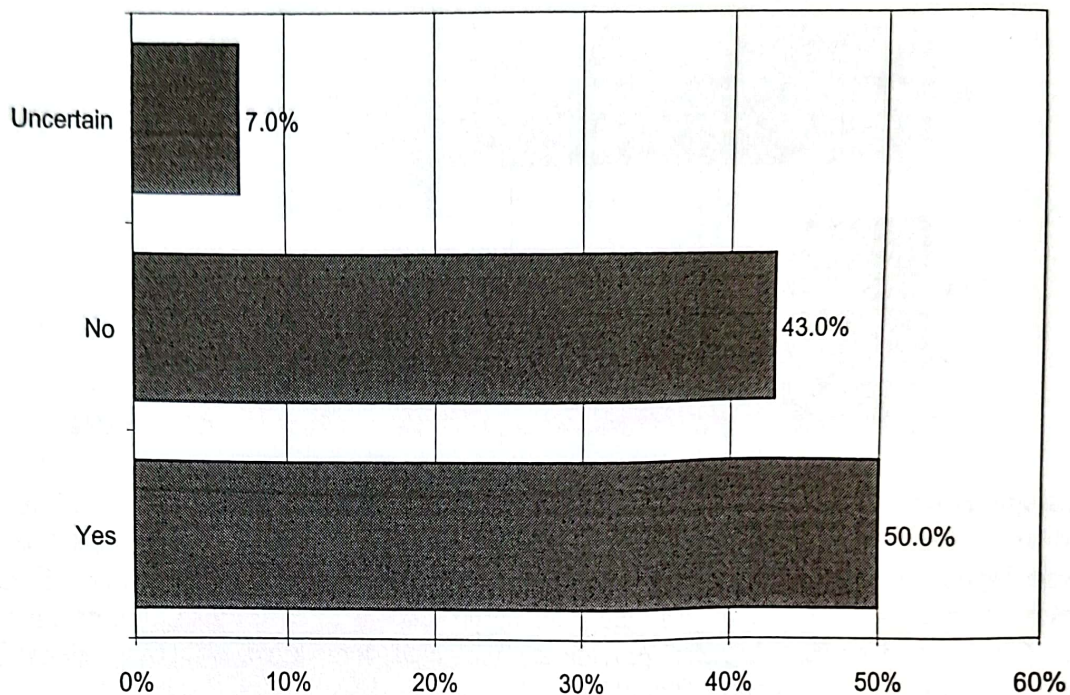
**FIGURE 16**  
**KNOWLEDGE IN WORKING WITH CHILDREN, YOUTHS AND FAMILIES**





Findings indicate that 67% of the respondents affirm that their knowledge improved after the introduction of *Project-Go*, whilst 27% said it did not. The remaining 6% did not respond. It is an interesting observation that there is a positive outcome from the *Project-Go* process in terms of increasing knowledge about working with children, youths and families that will trickle down positively into the implementation process.

**FIGURE 17**  
**SKILLS IN WORKING WITH CHILDREN, YOUTHS AND FAMILIES**



This study shows that 50% of the respondents said that their skills have improved and 43% said their skills remained the same. The remaining 7% were not certain, because they were not trained and have not learned anything new.

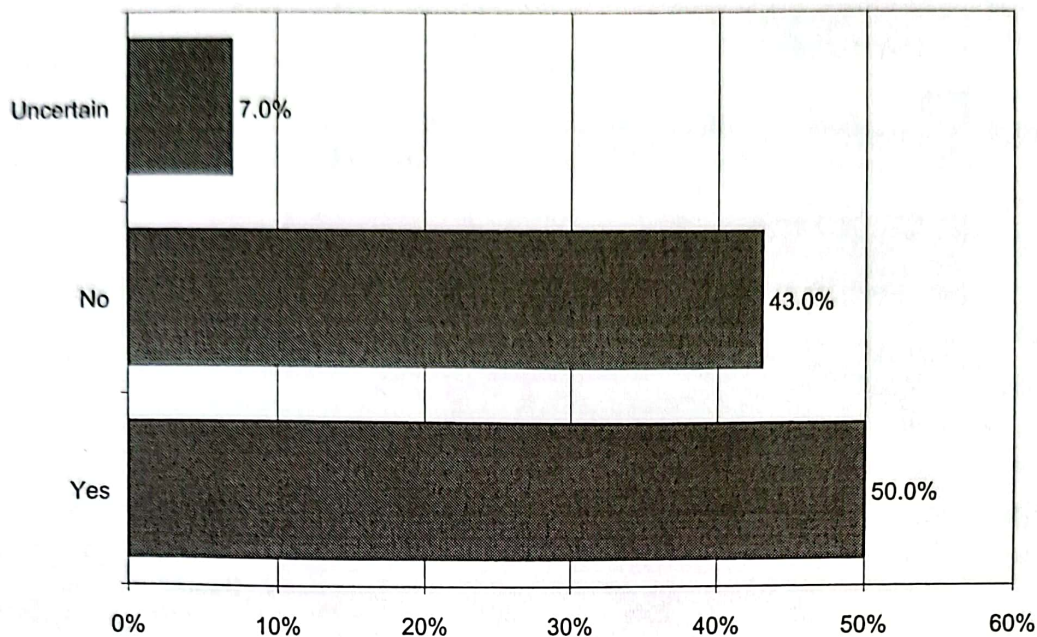
The developmental perspective, according to the IMC recommendations, proposes that no new system or paradigm is likely to be practised until it has been modelled, experienced and then supported with appropriate knowledge and skills (IMC Report, 1996: 55).

The findings show that 50% of the respondents said that their professional values and beliefs about working with children, youths and families have changed; 43% said they have not changed; and 7% were uncertain.

It is also important to recognise the fact that change and development cannot be controlled, mandated or legislated. The commitment to improve and change must come from within each individual (IMC Report, 1996:56). However, it is the belief and opinion of the authors that practitioners need to develop positive attitudes toward their clients, encourage them to engage in positive and constructive behaviours, and to identify and use their own resources or capabilities.

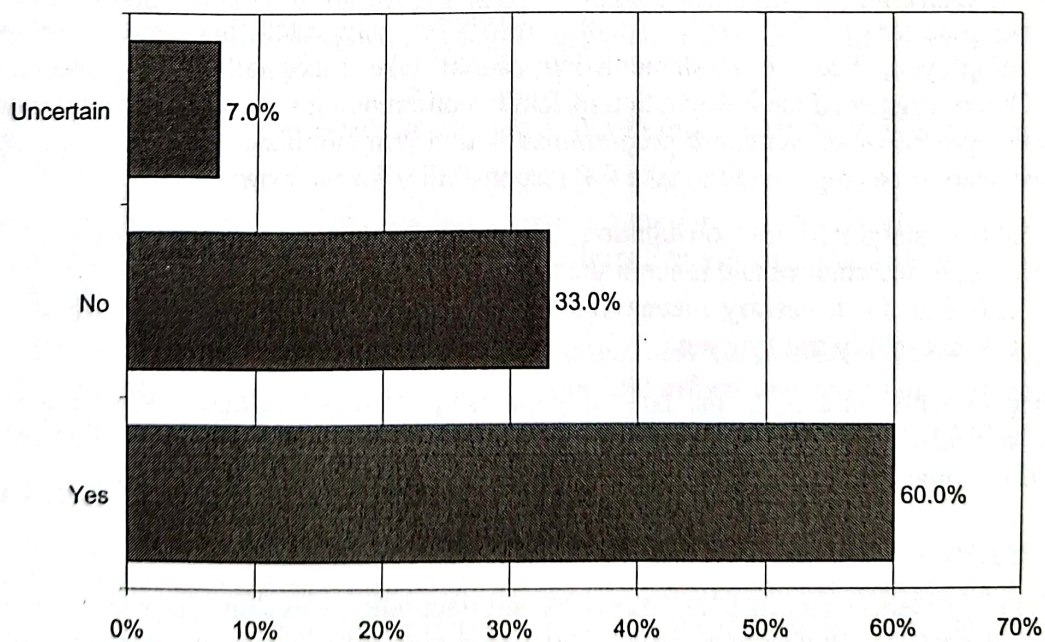


**FIGURE 18**  
**CHANGES IN PROFESSIONAL VALUES AND BELIEFS ABOUT CHILDREN,  
 YOUTHS AND FAMILIES**



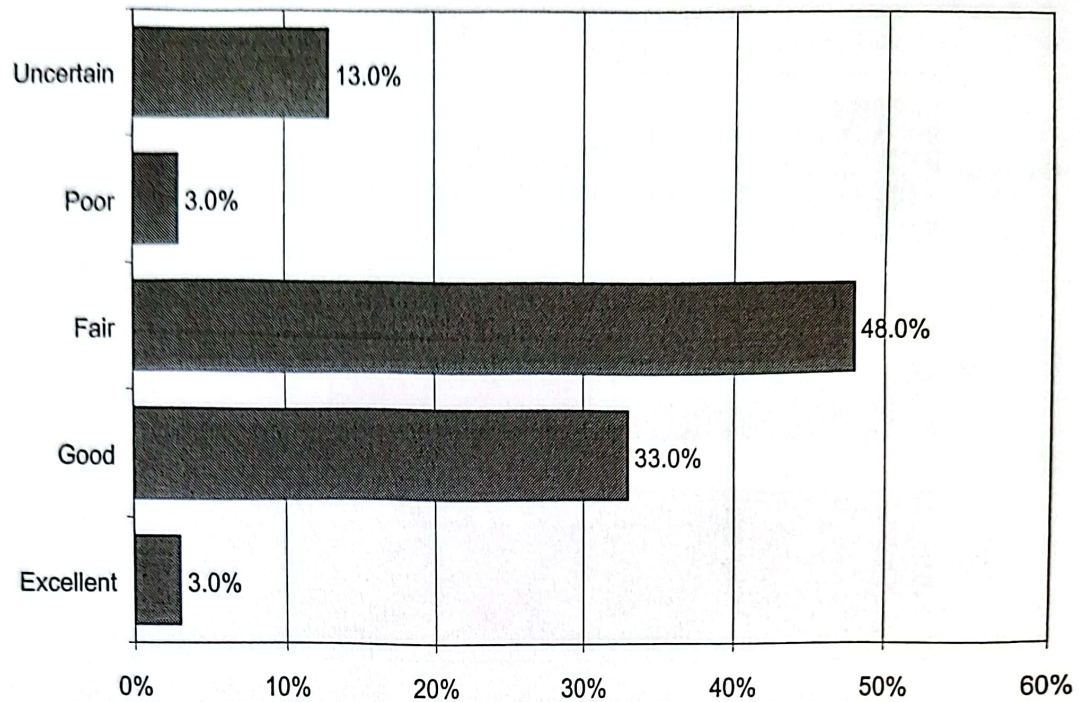
Findings indicate that 60% of the respondents believe there have been some changes in child and youth care since the introduction of *Project-Go*; 33% do not believe this to be the case; and the remaining 7% are uncertain. It seems as if there has been some positive change but that there is still scope for more improvements and positive changes in service delivery that will contribute toward creating a better life for all.

**FIGURE 19**  
**CHANGES IN SERVICE DELIVERY**





**FIGURE 20**  
**OVERALL RATING OF *PROJECT-GO***



From the findings indicated above 48% of the respondents rated the entire *Project-Go* process as fairly successful; 33% gave it a good rating; 13% were uncertain; 3% said excellent and 3% gave it a poor rating.

According to the findings, most of the respondents agree with the *Project-Go* concept and its principles, goals and objectives. However, the problems highlighted revolve around the issues pertaining to training, consultation, implementation, follow-up and monitoring, as well as a lack of alternative placements.

As indicated above, most respondents suggested that all the stakeholders need training in the concepts and processes of *Project-Go*. Another respondent suggested that more social workers should be employed, because implementation cannot take place effectively due to heavy caseloads. Others suggested the introduction of family conferencing with all involved stakeholders and the development of preventative programmes within communities. Another suggestion was that families need to be empowered to take full responsibility for their own children.

Some respondents suggested that consultation should take place at all levels to enable all the role players to buy into this concept and make it their own. They also suggested that follow-up training is required and that the necessary means and resources need to be put in place to ensure that *Project-Go* is successfully implemented.

Additional comments referred to the lack of partnership with NGOs and CBOs; a shortage of manpower to render an effective service, and a lack of accessibility to needed resources. Others said there is too much state control and too many policy changes and inconsistencies.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Gauteng Department of Social Services and Population Development should at all times and at all costs endeavour to consult at all levels with all role players and stakeholders to



ensure joint participation, co-operation, commitment and successful achievement of whatever goals they aspire to.

- The Gauteng Department of Social Services and Population Development needs to look into the training of all role players and stakeholders, including the families and communities that it serves. Vigorous awareness and educational campaigns need to be launched at community level to market the *Project-Go* concept and process.
- Training on the *Project-Go* concept and process should be made compulsory for all stakeholders working with children and youths. These include social workers, probation officers, probation assistants, teachers, health professionals, justice and correctional services personnel, police service personnel, psychologists, and child and youth care workers.
- A user-friendly training manual that can be up-dated periodically should be developed so that it can be used for self-study and referral purposes. This can be done with the help of training institutions of higher learning to ensure that it reflects a higher standard and quality.
- A section on alternative placement options, designing preventative programmes, restorative justice, family assessment and conferencing should be included in the training manual.
- Other diversion programmes such as the ones offered by NICRO need to be developed and implemented in all communities. The existing ones such as YES and the Journey programme need to be scientifically evaluated and, if found to be successful and effective, they could be replicated.
- More social workers and fully trained probation officers need to be employed by the Department and other NGOs with government subsidies to facilitate the implementation process.
- Co-operation between external and institutional social workers needs to be strengthened to ensure that children and youths do not remain too long in institutions.
- Monitoring and evaluation of the implementation process need to be outsourced to specialists who can ensure that positive, efficient and cost-effective outcomes are achieved.
- The *Project-Go* concept and process need to be streamlined as there seem to be some inconsistencies and confusion with regard to the procedures and requirements for approval from the *Project-Go* teams.
- Awards need to be introduced to reward and reinforce best and effective programme implementation.
- It is essential that social workers and other service providers adopt a positive and constructive attitude toward new developments and change efforts that are aimed at improving the lives of children, youths and families.
- It is also essential that social workers and other service providers offer objective and constructive criticism and appraisal of all departmental efforts and contribute toward effective and efficient service delivery that would improve the lives of children, youths and families.

## CONCLUSIONS

The objectives of the study were achieved in that the research findings have shown that: (i) most social workers do understand the concept of *Project-Go*, (ii) most social workers have extensive knowledge and understanding of the rationale behind the *Project-Go* process, (iii) most social workers have negative perceptions and attitudes about how the process was introduced, and finally



(iv) most social workers made some recommendations toward the successful implementation of the process based on their experience of the introduction of the concept and process.

Overall the majority of respondents were in agreement with the principles, philosophy, values and beliefs of the concept and process of *Project-Go*. This concept is in line with the need to reframe and redesign child welfare services to emphasise family support and empowerment, strengths and capabilities, self-sufficiency, and sustainability. It is also in line with the need to protect the rights of children and youths, whilst at the same time increasing and encouraging parents' responsibilities for the care of their children.

Finally, *Project-Go* as an approach or model recognises children, youths and families as having the strengths and capabilities to change. The other role players referred to are regarded as partners in the problem-solving and goal-setting process; they recognise and respect their opinions and decisions, and endeavour to provide services and support toward the achievement of their goals.

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