Community or Colony: System Rationality, Lifeworld Rationality and the SONI-Approach for Social Work

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Abstract
In borrowing Jurgen Habermas' (1987) concept of the 'lifeworld', this paper unpacks some of the practice tensions inherent in child protection work. Premised on the argument that legal solutions are not always just solutions, the paper proposes an alternative framework called the SONI perspective which is inclusive and flexible enough to integrate the 'life-worlds' of people into the everyday thinking and practice of helping professionals. The authors argue that the construction of such an inclusive helping framework creates pathways for collaborative advocacy and cooperation between a range of diverse community stakeholders, and enables social work to play its part in identifying and minimising the unintended ill-effects caused by legal logic. .

Keywords: Empowerment, Strengths, Habermas, Lifeworld system, Collaborative advocacy, SONI, Social justice

"Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave my heart into my mouth; I love your majesty according to my bond; nor more nor less" (Shakespeare 1623, Act 1.sc.1, p 13). Upon hearing this statement of duty from his daughter Cordelia, King Lear disowned her and wondered how was it that she was *"So young and so untender?"* Was Lear responding to his daughter as a King or a father? One wonders how Lear failed to have a father's intuition which would have acknowledged what was NOT said in an objective way. Lear was retiring and he divided the land he ruled with an evidence based practice: "Which of you doth love us most?" While Goneril and Reagan gave Lear's empirical research question the 'right' answer "I love you more than … eyesight, space, and liberty … and all other joys" (*Act 1.sc.1, 11)* Cordelia did not understand the logic of her father's controlling system, "Mend your speech a little, lest you may mar your fortunes". Hence, while Lear's daughters were part of his plan, it was firstly a plan for the land he ruled. Lear's use of scientific logic for family matters led then to one of the most tragic tragedies that drama has come up with: Lear and his daughters began a deadly war against each other where none of them survives.

Shakespeare showed us two different ways of 'knowing'. Firstly, knowledge derived from an objective process or scientific facts which became brute facts because their context was

eliminated. Nonetheless, these are the facts that could be presented in a court room. Secondly, intuitive knowledge that lacks evidence and is derived from a sense of familiarity or closeness with a social context.   Scientific facts and social facts may contradict from time to time. Sometimes, like in King Lear's case, it can even be disastrous to base a decision only on objective facts. Lear's thinking was shaped by the logic of the system he was administering and this impacted his relationship with his favourite daughter rather negatively. Social work is part of the system and it runs the risk of negatively impacting the people it professes to serve with the logic of the system. Jürgen Habermas has developed a theory explaining why this happens even though it is not the intention of social work professionals (Habermas 1987). Habermas states that we have two options observing how society is operating. We can observe the logic of the system or that of the lifeworld.

The lifeworld views society as a community; a network of relationships among people be they family, friends, colleagues, school mates, lovers, club members and so forth. Members of such networks support each other because of the affection they experience in their relationships. They look out for each other and in times of need they help each other simply because they care for each other. The affection in their relationships is expressed in the way they address each other. 'My bosom friend', 'Abla' the Turkish for big sister, 'Mei Mei' the Chinese for little sister. Also, the Tamil 'Amma' and the Malay 'Ibu' for mother are all terms of endearment that embody the natural closeness within lifeworld relationships.

The type of support offered is usually concrete, tangible and part and parcel of everyday life: *"I will pick up your kids from childcare and they can eat with us while you do the extra shifts your boss is demanding of you".* Hence, those who receive get more or less what they expect from their relationships. They know what can be expected and the supporter knows what is expected and how support can be done in a way not compromising the helped person's image or position. We relate to older and younger people differently, people without children will refrain from giving parents advice and a bosom friend is allowed to take liberties a colleague is not. Lifeworld support has either an inbuilt mechanism of mutuality ("I help you and you'll help me") or an unconditional obligation (like a mother's "duties") and its logic is transparent for the people involved. Interestingly, there is not a legal entitlement for support and no legal contract to enforce it. The support is value-based and although there is an expectation for the favour to be returned, it is not this expectation which motivates us but the belief or conviction that it is the right thing to do regardless of what is in for me. By doing so the values inherent in people and/or relationships are nurtured and strengthened. This can be described as a self-energizing cycle. It is important to note that the fabric of the lifeworld is woven together by the type of *communication* where people try to understand the other person's situation and viewpoint and act on the resultant understanding to affect each other. The more engaged people are with their lifeworld, the more they experience a sense of belonging; the more they receive and give support in their lifeworld, the more they integrate as members of a community. The self energizing cycle of lifeworld facilitates the important social work goal of integration but social work is not part of this cycle. Social work belongs to what Habermas calls the "system".

The system is society with its administration and laws; politics and economy; organisations and professionals and in general its experts who have a logic that is significantly different from the

logic of the lifeworld. The logic of the system is described by Max Weber as 'instrumental rationality' (1964, p 18) meaning decisions and action are taken when there is a perceived benefit. The market economy is driven by this logic. People work because they are promised a salary; a mother provides food because she wants to nurture her children, a restaurant does the same thing because there is a profit to be made. We are likely to be quite disappointed if our spouse told us: "I married you only because you are earning lots of money and provide me with excellent living conditions." However our boss would be pleased to hear that the excellent salary and working conditions he provides motivates us. People act on instrumental rationality when they expect advantages from their actions or when they want to avoid disadvantages. Jeremy Bentham was the first to scientifically analyze the reinforcement principle of avoiding pain and gaining pleasure (1781). He even came up with interesting practical ideas to utilize this principle by conceptualising and designing Panopticon (1787), residential "services" where residents could be watched all the time and therefore positively or negatively reinforced for their behaviour in order to reengineer them through a learning experience engineered by experts (Foucault 1994, p 268). Compared with the dungeons where people in the old days were cast away, this was quite a radical modern step towards 'behaviour modification' according to a predefined aim we would usually refer to as the "common good".

When a client visits a family service centre the professionals there are paid a salary for their expertise according to a work contract that is aligned to the contract their employer would have with the organisation or people providing the funds for maintaining a helping system that fulfils its responsibility of administering to people who have a legal entitlement for support. The professionals may empathise with the plight of the client seeking help but they can only offer help if they assess that the client's problem is within the criteria of his/her entitlement. The type of help provided has to fall within the policies of the organisation and the realm of interventions recognised as a standard in professional practice. Thus, it is the expert assessment or diagnosis that triggers the help. Assessment and support are meant to be an objective scientific process repeatable at any time by any professional. The helping relationship is generalized; it does not need any natural ties. The communication involved has to fulfil a strategic purpose and even "empathy" from the viewpoint of the system is a tool of instrumental rationality used to achieve a certain purpose. Whether the professional agrees with it or not, the invisible hand of the system (determined by the aw and funding) uses communicative action as a tool.

One of Pablo Picasso's early paintings Science and Charity (1897, Museo Picasso, Barcelona), painted at a time when science started to become a vast helping business, depicted this impersonal logic of the helping system: *A sick mother in a comfortably made-up bed serenely occupies the centre of the canvas's diagonal composition. She lies between a seated doctor focused on his hand-held watch while he takes her pulse, and a nun who holds the woman's child and extends her a drink.* The doctor represents the system and he is engrossed in his task which requires his professional expertise. His service has to bring him an income which will partly go towards an ongoing development of this expertise. What he is doing is not defined by the doctor-patient relationship but by medical science. He has no eye contact with his patient or the nun who is for him, just another part of a support system that runs on a division of labour. The mother and the nun can only trust that he will improve the situation because his medical logic is not transparent to a lay person even if one's own life is involved. On the other hand, the

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nun represents the lifeworld and she is deeply affected by the situation. She looks intently at the mother like a "sister" and does what a sister would do: holistically caring in simple practical ways for her child, her body and her soul with affection. She has to be a "sister" to do what a professional is too specialized and to detached to do because the professional support is science-based; therefore standardized and specialised.

The medical profession has taught us that whenever specialists work, there are risks of side effects. Habermas has described such side effects as the *colonization of the lifeworld*: "The imperatives of the system invade the lifeworld like colonial masters a tribal society and enforce assimilation." (Habermas 1987, Vol 2, p 522, translated by author). The "imperatives" Habermas refers to are the "media" which the fuel the system (formal law and money), producing a "functional integration" of the employees in a company or the students in a classroom. They are not a natural community but they are "integrated" through a contract of employment or simply because compulsory education is required of the law. Invasion happens when economical or legal media begin to shape (re-form) the relationship and the functioning of the lifeworld. In traditional Maori society, children were not considered the wards or the "property" of their parents but were regarded as members of the tribe. Responsibility for their care was shared. It was usual for children to be also raised by care-givers who were not their biological family. This is called "Whangai" and means that children have a place in several family systems. The Whangai institution is in conflict with the administrative adoption system and adoption laws which do not recognise grandparents and other tribe members as having the rights to make decisions on behalf of children in their care unless formal adoption or guardianship has been arranged which again does not allow the child to be part of two or more families (Love 2005, p 18). If it is not clear whose children they are, the legal system is not able to classify the group as a family with the accompanying rights and therefore re-forms the Maori family according to a model of *individual* responsibility and "ownership".

If a parent does not provide sufficient pocket money, a youth may file a complaint with the child welfare department and the case can even end up in court. If the legal entitlement of children for pocket money as well as for care and protection is enforced solemnly with the means of the legal or economical system, the following two side effects are usually observable:
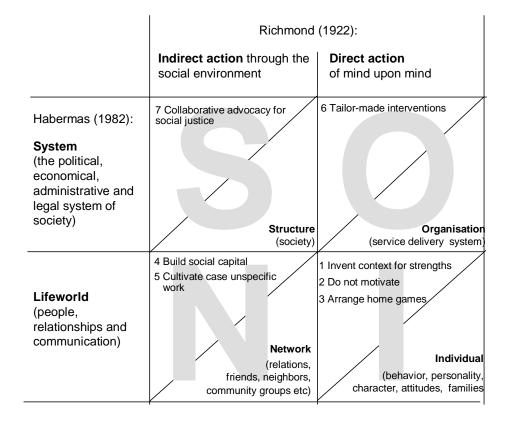
1. Exclusion:
Professional support or supervision which is usually to a certain extent the outcome of a legal decision has an inbuilt mechanism of exclusion. Citizens become clients and they learn quickly that they can rely on the help of social workers and this help is even more reliable than what they get from their relatives, friends or neighbours. Clients then nurture ties with the professionals and this result in weakened ties with their natural support networks. (McKnight 1995) The same sort of weakening happens when people loose their resources and abilities to wash themselves, to advocate for themselves or to organize themselves because professionals are washing them, advocating for them and doing community development for their estates. When disadvantaged or disabled people get special treatment in specialized schools, homes or sheltered workshops, this support is meant to shelter and to nurture them but on the flip side, it cuts the fabric of the lifeworld by excluding these people from their families, friends, neighbours, in general: from the mainstream.

2. Devaluation:

When social workers impress their little clients in a children's home with their polite and democratic way of dealing with them, the children will start to appreciate the child-rearing practices of the social workers over that of their kin. Hence, the failures of their own parents are highlighted and shame results. The efforts and authority of the parents are further devalued. Before these children were admitted the operating procedures of the state's child protection teams demanded that professionals systematically distrusted the lifeworld as they got a message that something may be adrift with the family. These professionals needed to ensure the safety of the children and the professional way of doing this was placing the family under the supervision of the state. By doing so, the authority and responsibility of parents and kin are significantly reduced and one wonders how this devaluation can strengthen the family. If therapeutic (mandatory) counselling was an option to *educate* parents, the main lesson they learned was that their values and ways of upbringing are a failure and only the "colonial masters" were able to teach the "tribal society" *their* professional concept of child rearing which was not necessarily based on the values, traditions and resources of the family. Moreover, the family did not have access to such values in the first place. When a legal decision regarding the safety of the children was necessary it was highly influenced by the budget and staffing of the administration (medium: money) and by the need of the administration to unambiguously define the so called *best interest of the child* from the viewpoint of the legal system. Such definitive decisions need to put the professionals in a legally safe position and may not be able to support the ambiguity and complexity that comes with everyday living or lifeworld logic. Often things are right as well as wrong and grey is the more relevant colour. However the legal system does not understand this lifeworld code. Normally the risks will be minimised at the expenses of lifeworld devaluation through the provision of services guaranteed by professional standards.

Influenced by the work of Habermas, the social work profession developed a theory to guide practice which was called the Lifeworld Approach. (Thiersch 1986 & 1992). This Social Work approach tried to break up common paradoxes in social work intervention. For example when the basic needs of food, shelter and education of children are not attended to, how can social work have an impact on parents and yet leave them in the driver's seat? In the same vein, how can Social Work protect children without putting the family under the "remote control" of the state? Social work is part of the system and as such can it ever support the lifeworld without colonizing it? This is a Gordian knot which needs to be untied, albeit difficult. To do so, social workers must do more than to only link "clients" to the interventions that are provided by the experts in the system. While these expert services may be appropriate and necessary, social workers should also work towards de-linking "citizens" from expert "supervision" and activate the problem-solving wisdom within the lifeworld. Lifeworld solutions will never be as neat as those provided by the system but they are genuine attempts of people helping themselves. As we know, helping clients to help themselves is a fundamental social work tenet. Hence, expert services if necessary should be organized around lifeworld solutions and remain permeable to lifeworld wisdom. This implies that interventions which try to minimize their own colonizing effects need to intervene also in the system to adapt it to the lifeworld. Mary Richmond's famous definition of "case work" as "back to the individual by way of his social environment"(Richmond 1922, p. 98) requires social workers not only to have "insight into individual and personal

characteristics" but also "insight into the resources, dangers, and influences of the social environment" to be able to intervene through "direct action of mind upon mind" as well as through "indirect action through the social environment" (p. 27). Cross tabulated against Habermas' distinction between lifeworld and system we get a 4-field table resembling the Chinese character 田 which means field. The fields in the top half of the table describes social work interventions that are needed for engaging the system, the fields in the lower half highlight lifeworld-interventions. These fields aptly depict a profession at the intersection of (1) people engineering through care, education, rehabilitation and (2) community engineering through mobilizing network support, (3) organizational development through adapting procedures and policies to lifeworld solutions and (4) enforcing ideas of what ought to be in society (Staub-Bernasconi 2007). Usually, developing organizations and policy is not seen as part of case work. This is done by management and external consultants or by lobby groups and politicians. A truly "holistic" social case worker however intervenes in all four fields and provides in one case four different answers to the question "what is the case?" *Individuals*, but also natural *networks* that they draw support from; the *organizations* that serve them and the *structures* in society that affect them. These four dimensions form the acronym SONI which can be used as a tool for analyzing and guiding practical social work according to the lifeworld-system-theory. In the framework, the lower half of each quadrant indicates a dimension of the SONI-model and in its upper half, key intervention techniques are described.

SONI framework of the lifeworld approach

| | Richmond (1922): | |
	Indirect action through the social environment	**Direct action** of mind upon mind
Habermas (1982): **System** (the political, economical, administrative and legal system of society)	7 Collaborative advocacy for social justice **Structure** (society)	6 Tailor-made interventions **Organisation** (service delivery system)
Lifeworld (people, relationships and communication)	4 Build social capital 5 Cultivate case unspecific work **Network** (relations, friends, neighbors, community groups etc)	1 Invent context for strengths 2 Do not motivate 3 Arrange home games **Individual** (behavior, personality, character, attitudes, families

Yaser arrived excitedly at the hospital with a baby basket in hand, all ready to bring his wife Yee Ling and their 3 day old baby home. His joyful day turned into one filled with anxiety, anger and humiliation when he was told by child protection service that Yee Ling and he had to leave for

home without their baby. This was Yee Ling's fourth child but the first with Yaser whom she has been married with for more than a year. Her other children were born out of wedlock and were all in foster care. Yee Ling is 33 years old but since she was 18 years old, she has spent about 10 years of her life in and out of prison for various offences. The child protection service has known Yee Ling for 10 years and has a psychological report that describes her as having a "borderline intellect conduct disorder" and "poor impulse control". Yaser did not take the news well and started kicking up a storm at the hospital. He argued that even if his wife was deemed to be an unfit care-giver, the baby could count on him. He refused to leave the hospital, spoke in an aggressive tone and challenged the hospital to call the police as he believed that the hospital was kidnapping his baby.

The Individual as the "case":

Yee Ling named her second child "master tortoise" and her third child Xing Xing Ya, who was born at home as Yee Ling had refused to be admitted into a hospital. The evidence presents the mother as one who exposes her children to ridicule and one who rejects medical attention suggesting that she does not have the best interest of her children at heart. The first principle "**invent context for strengths**" expects professional case work to discover the context of Yee Ling's problematic and non-cooperative actions to create more options for seeing "what is the case?". The tortoise stood for longevity and although it was a cartoon character, Master Tortoise, embodied wisdom, strength and generosity which were qualities she had wished for her second child. Xing Xing in Chinese means stars and she had hoped that this child would be as beautiful as the stars. She also added Ya into the name as she had already been acquainted with Yaser,and together, they wanted to be the family for Xing Xing. By including Ya in her child's name, she created a form of contract to ensure that her 'fatherless' child would now have Yaser as a father. Yee Ling had also refused to deliver Xing Xing in a hospital as she was afraid that child protection services would remove the baby upon her delivery. Yee Ling refusing to go to a hospital while in labour; was trying to be a mother to her baby but put herself and her baby at risk. Even though Yaser did not have savings and a stable income he was an expert in nurturing living creatures. He had spent most of his adult life working on farms, loved nature and held various jobs breeding prawns, fish and poultry. He had also worked on fruit plantations. A social worker who is able to acknowledge the diligence and discipline required of farm and plantation workers even if they come across as uncouth, may be able to the hear the distinctions within Yaser's aggressive tone at the hospital. Yaser was highly anxious that his child was not in an ideal situation at the hospital and he was determined to care for his baby well. Human behaviour is always an attempt at problem solving. If social work is smart enough to discover or invent the right context for behaviours the picture of thoughtful and motivated parents can emerge which is a good starting point for the second principle of the SONI-Model of working in accordance with the will of clients. "**Do not motivate**" means to interpret Yaser's aggression not as non-cooperative but as a signal to reconsider the professional intervention. Social Work often talks about what clients 'need' and seldom about what clients 'want'. In fact, frequently as social workers, we want clients to want what we want. Yee Ling and Yaser were viewed as needy and incompetent and not as parents who are determined to do their best for their child. Social work that attempts to minimize the ill-effects of colonization avoids motivating clients but tries to find their motivation. The distrust, unhappiness and non-cooperation

displayed by Yee Ling and Yaser towards the child protection service and social workers in general, cast a doubt over their moral commitment to care for their baby. Yee Ling's record with child protection was also evidence that did not augur well for her competency as a mother. The SONI-Model would expect from a professional to find in such a care and protection case a common goal with the parents (maybe the babies well being) and to develop together with them a strategy for achieving this goal without jeopardizing either their commitment nor the safety of the child. The third principle "***arrange home games***" is a way of *how* this can this be done. Clients loose confidence and strength when they are interacting with social workers and other helping professionals. Perhaps, this is because like the incredibly strong giant Antaeus (Antaios) in Greek mythology, people become weak as a mouse when they are transformed into clients who are not standing on familiar ground. The language of the professionals is an alien jargon and the logic of problem solving or treatment can be intimidating or at best uncomfortable for parents in an anyway difficult situation. Yee Ling's disorderly conduct and poor impulse control could be understood as reactions to feeling intimidated, humiliated and weak. In sports, statistical analyses have shown that 'playing at home' can be translated into a distinct advantage for the team or the individual. Basically, more games are won at 'home' rather than 'away'. Thus, if we really want to help the people we serve to succeed; it makes sense having them play more 'home' games. People in an "away game" come across needy. People in a "home game" context appear strong. The invention of the Family Group Conference (FGC) in the late 80s was an effective legal regulation to ensure that care and protection needs are met but the plan to ensure this is designed by the lifeworld. The administrative procedure of the FGC maximizes the influence of the lifeworld as a way of minimizing the side effects of the system (CYP&F Act, s20 - s38). However, it must be stressed that it was not designed as a Social Work method for better client participation. "The Department of Social Welfare … is not capable of meeting its goal without major changes in its policy, planning and service delivery" (Ministerial Advisory Committee 1988, p. 7). This will "require concerted action from all agencies involved - central and local government, the business community, Maoridom and the community at large" to combine "strengths, diversity and ingenuity" of the lifeworld "with the Department [system] in mutual goodwill to herald a new dawn." (p. 8) Therefore we need to look into the other dimensions of SONI.

The Network as the "case":
Yee Ling and Yaser left the hospital that day without their baby. They only did so after the police officer promised them that he would continue to look into the case. For Yaser the police was the only constant he could trust. However, Yee Ling and Yaser were furious with the community social worker as she was unable to convince child protection service to release the baby. Over the next few days, the community social worker visited their home with the aim of getting their co-operation to improve their "care plan". The door and windows were always shut and it looked as the couple did not have any inclination to cooperate with the professionals who had betrayed them. The social worker ended up meeting several neighbours instead of the couple. The neighbours nonchalantly told the social worker that the couple was probably home but wanted to be left alone. The neighbours were used to the stream of strangers or what they described as "government people" knocking on the door. As one neighbour put it, "Girl, you're government right?" By simply coming by and exchanging some friendly banter, this social worker became a familiar face with the neighbours thus nurturing a community presence. The social worker

needed to get in touch with the couple badly and so she approached an elderly woman a few doors away for help. She had noticed that this elderly lady was always home every time she came by. She explained to the lady that she was really trying to get the couple's baby home but since she failed at the hospital, they do not want to talk to her. The elderly lady felt that the social worker was sincere and offered her useful advice, "It will be Hari Raya tomorrow, leave a note with the time that you are going to visit. Bring a present and they cannot refuse to let you in as it is a joyous day, a day for forgiveness and reconciliation. I will have a talk with them tonight." This social worker was a Filipino Catholic but she has been renting a room from a Malay Muslim family and living in their household for about six months. She has taken an interest in the Malay Muslim culture and has observed how members of her landlord's family greeted each other. On a couple of occasions, she helped the land lord's wife bake some cookies and cakes and she learnt that Kueh Lapis, a layered cake was quite a favourite among most people. Next day, when she arrived at the couple's flat with a box of the finest Kueh Lapis (baked by her landlord's wife) in hand; Yee Ling and Yaser were there to greet her. She took their hands and before letting go and bringing hers to her chest, she said "I am sorry. I will work harder." The couple quickly invited her to have a seat and offered her a drink. "I hope you like Kueh Lapis" the social worker began and soon Yee Ling and Yaser warmed up to her as she related how she learnt baking from her Malay Muslim landlord. This social worker was able to reconnect with her clients because of the *"case unspecific work"* (Principle 5) she did at the household where she resided. In this example, "*case unspecific work*" refers to the effort a social worker puts into understanding the lifeworld of the clients (Malay Muslim culture) and mobilizing resources (landlord's wife) even though there is no specific case in mind. This social worker took an interest in the Malay Muslim culture when the opportunity presented and not because she needed the understanding to work on a particular case. SONI requires the social worker to cultivate lifeworld knowledge as part of his professional development. *Case unspecific work* also refers to networking efforts that cultivate social capital. Relationships, acquaintances and other connections to the community become "**social capital***"* that a social worker can draw on to assist his work (Principle 4). The elderly lady that showed the community social worker, the 'key' into the couple's home was an acquaintance from the couple's natural network. Successful social workers are a walking treasure chest of community resources and connections to all sorts of people gained through case unspecific work. "By the way, if you can find someone you trust to help look after your baby, I think we can get her out of the hospital." The social worker mentioned casually as she sipped on her drink. Yaser looked up thoughtfully and after a moment said that he had an aunt residing in the same block of flats he could approach. The woman Yaser introduced to the social worker the following day was not really his aunt but she was assessed to be reliable enough to release the couple's baby under her care. As part of the fostering arrangements, Yaser and Yee Ling could visit their baby daily. This was an important small step that provided Yaser and Yee Ling the opportunity to present evidence that they were competent enough care-givers for their baby. Yaser and Yee Ling did not have family but when it came to the crunch they could identify a supportive neighbour. This was their social capital that they drew on to bring their baby closer to them. With a proposition that was in line with what Yaser and Yee Ling wanted, the social worker activated support from her clients' natural network.

The Organisation as the "case"

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The community-based social worker got a call from child protection services informing that Yaser and Yee Ling have breached the fostering arrangements. They had taken their baby away from their aunt. Yaser and Yee Ling shared with the social worker that they were not happy with how the aunt was looking after their baby and started relating various incidents that they felt were not in their baby's best interest. The social worker listened respectfully and observed that while the couple was talking to her, they took turns to care for their baby. Yaser was quite adept at changing the baby's nappy while Yee Ling hummed a soothing tune while having the baby in her arms. "During the past 30 minutes, you have shown me that you are both very caring and responsible parents. I must let child protection services know this and see how you can be allowed to continue to care for your baby." This statement turned the couple's defensiveness into enthusiastic co-operation. The social worker then got them to put together a list of questions regarding baby care which they wanted answers to. These questions touched on the 'best' type of infant formula, milk preparation, feeding times, bathing frequency and so forth. Immediately, the social worker called a colleague who is a mother and put the phone on speaker mode. An instant infant care workshop was conducted for Yaser and Yee Ling in their living room who participated attentively. From an earlier conversation, Yee Ling had expressed to the social worker that she found a suggestion for her to practice her infant care skills with a doll rather insulting as she had already given birth to three other children. Hence, she could not see any reason how she would benefit from such a standardized parenting workshop which neither acknowledges her expertise or her specific needs. The customised infant-care lessons conducted at the client's home however provided the parents with a setting tailor-made for their learning needs as well as some evidence that went some way in assuring child protection services that the baby was well cared for. ***Organisations need to tailor their service and approaches*** if they want to be supportive to their clients (Principle 6). Despite the meaningful encounters with the social worker, the couple was still distrustful of social service services in general. Dropping by regularly to monitor how they were doing would only reinforce the sense of distrust. Hence, the social worker arranged for the police to be the point of contact for any information between the couple and social services. The police appreciated that Yaser held them in high regard and that they could play a meaningful role in supporting this family, ensuring the safety of an infant and pre-empting unhelpful confrontations that disturbed the peace. Each day on their rounds, their officers spent a few minutes saying hello to the baby and this was an important aspect of the care plan for child protection. By doing this, the social worker like a tailor, 'altered' the routine of home visits required to fulfil the service delivery standard of her organisation, as well as that of the police and this resulted in 'a new customized service' (Principle 6) which was also in line with what the parents wanted (Principle 2).

The Structure as the "case"

Yaser and Yee Ling felt that they were being discriminated against by the child protection system and by social workers in general. It was never the system's intention to discriminate but in its pursuit of child safety it ran the risk of devaluing, weakening the lifeworld and excluding a baby from its natural ties in order to protect him. If we take a longer term view, the legal "safe" solution may be unjust not only for the parents but the child too. "Social workers have a responsibility to promote social justice, in relation to society generally, and in relation to the people with whom they work." (IFSW 2005, s 4.2). The lifeworld approach of SONI addresses the issue of child protection from the viewpoint of a child's best interest in the longer term while

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the administration responds from an immediate legal point of view. This often leads to disagreements and it is as though the lifeworld and the system approaches are diametrically opposed. It need not be so if we can view the concerns of both approaches as different points on a continuum of interventions that are moving towards the same long term goal. This continuum can be divided in the work phases of crisis management, remedial, developmental and preventive with its respective emphasis of safety, treatment, family strengthening and community integration. When abuse or neglect of a child is discovered, the optimal option is a collaborative approach where parents and the experts work together to ensure safety. However there are situations when there is not enough time to put in place the prerequisites for such a cooperative endeavour. When the system has to respond immediately to neutralise danger and ensure safety, an out of home placement may be the only option. However, by doing this the system must acknowledge that the safety guaranteed is mainly physical. For the emotional, social and cultural needs of the child this immediate solution of the system must be improved from the very point it is implemented. Parents or care-givers must in principle believe that they are trusted by a system that acknowledges their genuine desire in wanting to care for their children. They must feel reassured that it is also the system's ultimate goal for their children to be under their care. Hence, right from the start they must be supported to improve the inappropriate living conditions or lifestyles which are deemed to be detrimental for their children's well-being. This may need behavioural changes on the part of the parents (field "Individual") as well as the mobilizing of additional material resources and options for the family on the part of the system (field "Structure"). Interventions that neutralise risks, remedy problems and strengthen families would enable children to return to the care of their parents or care-givers. For sustainability, appropriate monitoring needs to be put in place. This should be provided from the natural networks within the community which need to be mobilized and nurtured by community based social work. The long-term phase would ensure that the family is supported to the extent that their children's well being would not be put at risk again. In this framework, all phases on the continuum are valid and important for the well-being of the child but how safety is ensured and how treatment is carried out will have a significant impact on family strengthening and community integration. For example, when children live away from their family for an extended period of time, bonds are weakened and care-givers are disempowered.

Ensuring the rights of children to care and protection is an enormous moral and legal accomplishment for a society and an accomplishment which needs to be upheld. However, if the realisation (enforcement) of these rights is done with the power and the means of a legal force, society is weakened. Social work is the part of the system which enables it to perceive perspectives of the lifeworld by amplifying the vibrations of the lifeworld. In the dimension "Structure", social work is the warning subsystem of the system with sensors that are sensitive for not only detecting … problems but also convincingly and influentially thematise them in such a way that they are taken up and dealt with by the system (Habermas, 1996, p. 359). Those who only administer and execute laws would lose this important function which keeps the system and lifeworld aligned. The construction of such helping frameworks creates pathways for cooperation and this is ***collaborative advocacy*** that enables social work to play a part in identifying and ***minimising the unintended injustices*** caused by the legal logic of the child protection system (Principle 7). Collaborative advocacy also has a view towards nurturing a

more sensitised and humble system that will seek and put in place structures that facilitate and validate the problem solving wisdom from the lifeworld. The child-centric framework of the law needs to meet the family-centric values of the lifeworld to ensure not only safety but integration. As such social work creates a "microcosm 'will formation' that produces a communicative power to influence the enactment of statutory processes within formal child protection. It is within this context that the law acts as a medium to link 'lifeworld and 'system' and to channel the expression of families' interests and needs." (Hayes / Houston 2007, p. 996)

Yaser and Yee Ling have been proud, caring and competent parents for some two years now.

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