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Family Connections Oregon: Timing of Family Finding

Research Capsule #1

The following information was summarized from the Child Trends Research Brief #2011-27 “Family finding: Does implementation differ when serving different child welfare populations?” (Malm & Allen, 2011). This **FCO Research Capsule** highlights differences in Family Finding practice and outcomes when conducted on the front end vs. the back end of a child welfare case.



Family Finding at front end vs. back end of case:

- Slightly more family meetings at the front-end (avg 2.1 vs. 1.6).
- Twice as many contacts with new family and kin connections (avg 45 vs. 21).
- Larger proportion of family members invited to a family meeting actually attended (92% vs. 57%).

At the front-end, there is more focus on birth parents:

- Case is more likely to have a reunification goal; children are more likely to already be placed with relatives compared to youth lingering in care.
- Focus on increasing supports for the child by engaging relatives and expanding network, and improving relationships and developing supports for the parents (support reunification, create back-up plans).
- Rely on parents for information about relatives (back-end cases rely on administrative records).
- More potential for tension between birth parents and relatives.
- Front-end cases are sensitive to parent readiness for relative involvement.

Challenges to front-end caseworkers:

- More pressure to act quickly, may have less time to collaborate with additional, specialized family finding workers.
- May feel it intrudes on reunification efforts or caseworker rapport-building with the birth parents, especially if parents are not ready to cooperate with family members.
- May be accustomed to doing relative searches primarily for placement, less likely to focus on ongoing involvement if relative is not a potential placement.
- May not feel they have time to coordinate with relatives or arrange visitation.
- Can be confusion where relatives want to be placement resources, but reunification is the primary case goal (this could account for increased contact with new connections in front-end cases, to explain the various purposes of family finding and ongoing relative involvement)

Implications for agency administrators:

- Family Finding at back end more comprehensive than the relative searches at the front end.
- By actively engaging relatives who are not placement options, agencies balance a child’s need for both legal and emotional permanency. Efforts to strengthen family networks to provide long-term support to children may need to be prioritized as an ongoing agency goal.