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Family Connection Demonstration Project: Supplemental Evaluation Report

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Study Location: Central and eastern Washington

Population served: Children, families and caregivers (varied by intervention)

Research Design: Longitudinal, within-subjects analysis

Model: A combined, 3-part model including:

- 1) Intensive Family Finding (IFF)/ Family Search & Engagement (FSE)
- 2) Kinship/Tribal Navigator (KN)
- 3) Family Team Decision Making (FTDM)

Overall Project Barriers:

- Legislative changes impacted the collaboration between the Department of Children & Family Services (DCFS) and private agency staff
- Changes in DCFS leadership resulted in a lack of consistency and support of the overall project
- Staff engagement was impacted by administrative and legislative changes
- Limited involvement in the project by the Yakima Nation presented challenges to implementing the Tribal Kinship Navigator piece
- Evaluation and continuous review were negatively impacted by an IRB delay

Intensive Family Finding (IFF) / Family Search & Engagement (FSE)

Population served: Children involved in existing dependency case or new entry into foster care (age and timing not specified).

Meetings & Timeline: No family meetings. Cases closed by 6 months from date of referral.

Model: An initial meeting between the FSE Specialist and the social worker (caseworker) was held following referral. A “Discovery” meeting was held 4-6 weeks after the initial meeting to discuss outcomes of family search and engagement activities (no family present). The professional team reconvened 30 days later to address additional action items.

At six months, the cases were closed due to positive outcomes or inactivity.

Process Issues:

Staffing/Training: FSE services were provided by contracted, co-located Family Finding staff (FSE Coordinator, FSE Specialists) that were specially trained in family search techniques.

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Methods: The FSE Specialist used internet-based family finding techniques (such as Accurint), as well as traditional methods (letters, phone calls). Family members served as sources for identifying additional family members. The social worker was updated by the FSE Specialist throughout the case.

Number of Contacts: The number of connections with relatives varied from a low of 1 to a high of 42, with 7.39 the average number of relative contacts. Connections were differentiated from identifications, which averaged 61 relatives per child. Linkages with grandmothers and siblings were the most likely to result in a positive connection.

Key IFF/FSE Research Findings:

- Over ¾ of the children involved in IFF/FSE made a positive engagement with some type of relative, kin or other supportive adult
- Race did not impact rates of connection, though child's sex did (male children were 8% more likely than female children to be successfully connected to family)
- At the time of FSE project completion, 73% of children were in their home and had permanency plans finalized or in progress
- An average of 7.5 relatives were located per child, with an average of 2.6 engaged
- Maternal relatives were twice as likely as paternal relatives to be engaged, with aunts as the most likely connection (25.9%)
- The engaged connections helped to improve the permanency and stability for 75% of participating children

Family-Team Decision Making (FTDM)

Population served: Families (no additional criteria specified)

Meetings & Timeline: None identified

Model: None identified

Process Issues:

Staffing/Training: None identified

Methods: Cases were randomly assigned to FTDM facilitators for entry, transition (placement change) and exit. FTDM facilitators facilitated meetings, assisted family members in discussing strengths, concerns, assessing need for services and timeframes for completion of services, developed action plans and provided the completed documents to all meeting participants.

Number of Contacts: None identified

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Key FTDM Research Findings:

- The Family Team Decision Making meetings resulted in the preservation of the child's placement or reunification; 25% of meetings ended with a placement in a foster home

Kinship Navigator (KN)

Population served: Primary kin caregivers referred from DCFS or that directly contacted KN staff

Meetings & Timeline: No family meetings. Caregivers participated in an intake interview and a voluntary 6-month follow-up interview.

Model: No specified model. The program was designed to assist caregivers in navigating community-based resources.

Process Issues:

Staff/Training: None identified

Methods: None identified

Key KN Research Findings:

- Caregivers involved in KN services were most likely to see an increase in legal assistance, increase in access to transportation, minimization of risk of placement disruption and decreased concern about keeping the child in the home.