

Family Connections Oregon: Research Capsule 6

April 2014

Results from a Family Finding Experiment

Landsman, Boel-Studt, & Malone, *Children & Youth Services Review* January 2014

Study Location: Ames & Cedar Rapids regions, Iowa (mix of urban and rural communities)

Population Served: children 0-17 referred to a provider agency for foster placement by Iowa DHS (the agency manages placement matching for all children coming into care in the state) – all participants received as-usual child welfare services, and family search and engagement was an added component/enhancement for the intervention group

Research Design: Randomized experimental design, although siblings of children in the study were randomized into the same group

Family Finding

Model: the Families for Iowa's Children (FIC) model is based on the Catholic Community Services of Western Washington (CCSWW) model. The FCI model has five main components:

<i>Component</i>	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Intervention activities</i>
Referral	<i>Expedite family finding and seamless randomization process</i>	Referral to FIC, randomization, and S&E person assigned within one day of placement request
Information Gathering, Documentation and Search and Identification	<i>Identify and search for all potential relatives/kin and create team and process for facilitating permanency</i>	S&E meet with caseworker for background and file mining; meet with child and family to identify supports; internet searches and other online records; develop team of professionals and family/kin; Family Team Meeting held within 20 days of FIC enrollment to review placement reasons, family strengths/needs, and then begin case planning. FTMs held quarterly to review changes and progress toward goals
Contact, Assessment and Engagement	<i>Engage family and supports and prepare child and family for successful visits</i>	S&E contacted relatives/supports with 2 days of DHS approval
Family Ties: Transition to Family	<i>Transfer decision-making to family, strengthen relationships and sustain connections</i>	S&E ensures home study completed for family placement, licensing, financial support, etc.; S&E supports family in assuming decision-making responsibilities and in trial visits; team anticipates needs and provides supports to sustain relational and physical permanency outcomes
Documentation	<i>Provide ongoing feedback to staff and assessment of process and outcomes</i>	S&E recorded initial family connections and goals for family finding; S&E recorded files and databases examined to locate relatives; S&E recorded family/supports contacted and engaged, child outcomes and changes

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Staffing/Training: full-time Search & Engagement (S&E) staff working for a provider agency contracted by DHS; staff were trained by CCSWW and received consultation during the course of the study; worked collaboratively with DHS caseworkers

Family Meetings: No model discussed – goal was to hold “family team meetings” at least quarterly to engage family in the case planning process, review changes, and discuss progress towards goals

Key Research Findings

- Three times as many family meetings for the FIC group (3.95) compared to control (1.21), with 28% of the variance in number of family meetings was explained by group assignment
- Children in FIC had twice as many family members and/or informal supports involved in service planning (11.70) compared to the control group (4.22), with 41% of the variance in number of supports explained by group assignment
- Children in FIC were more than twice as likely to achieve relational permanency compared to the control group (81% to 65% of sample achieved relational permanency)
- Children in FIC were more than 8 times as likely to be adopted by a relative (13% to 2%)
- Children in the FIC group were 65% less likely to age out of care during the study period without achieving permanency (5% to 12%)
- There were no statistically significant differences between FIC and control in terms of other types of placement outcomes (e.g., relative placement or not), the number of placement disruptions, or the likelihood of a substantiated maltreatment report after randomization
- Survival analysis of time to permanency (from randomization date to permanent placement, case closure without permanency, or end of study period) showed no significant differences between groups in days to permanency

Discussion

- Overall, family finding contributed to relational permanency in terms of the number of family and informal supports for the child, family involvement in case planning, and at least one adult providing ongoing contact and informal support
- In retrospect, the authors say it may have been overly idealistic to expect FIC to influence physical permanency outcomes (type of placement) across the board; the S&E had little authority over placement decisions. The S&E did have influence over finding and engaging supportive connections for the child, which may explain the relational permanency findings
- The authors suggest that the reason there were no differences in subsequent maltreatment reports may have been because there were more people and meetings involved, which may have resulted in more opportunities for mandatory reports about safety (surveillance effect).
- *Limitations:* perfect randomization was not possible, given the necessary exceptions for sibling groups; data records for the two groups came from different sources; very heterogeneous sample; the study period was 2.5 years, which prevented observation of outcomes for all children in the study