

# Family Connections Oregon: Research Capsule 7

May 2014

## Family Connections Hawaii Final Report, December 2012

Department of Human Services, State of Hawaii

**Study Location:** State of Hawaii

There were two components to this project, each serving a different child welfare population on the island of Oahu in the City and County of Honolulu. It should be noted that Hawaii has an extremely multicultural population.

1. **Early 'Ohana Intervention** served families of newly placed children and children at risk of placement at the very beginning of their case opening. Hawaii employs differential response by diverting lower risk families to voluntary community services. So the families in this project who are served by the Department of Human Services represent families with more serious problems. Cases with sexual abuse, severe Domestic Violence and imminent risk or safety issues (homicidal, suicidal or assaultive) were excluded.
2. **Enhanced 'Ohana Connections** served children aged 4-16 who had been in foster care for a year and who did not have permanent legal and/or emotional family connections.

**Research Design:**

1. **Early 'Ohana Intervention** – cases were randomized at the point that a Department of Human Services social Worker was dispatched to do an investigation to consider placement.
2. **Enhanced 'Ohana Connections** – cases were randomized at the time of transfer of data (names of children remaining in care after one year) to the service agency EPIC 'Ohana.

**Overall Project Barriers:**

- A fiscal crisis in Hawaii resulted in a 30% reduction and high turnover in the child welfare workforce including DHS leadership. This made the work of developing collaborative relationships especially challenging from 2009 to 2011.
- All of the data analyzed in this project is secondary data gleaned from the DHS Management Information System as well as EPIC 'Ohana's dataset, reports and notes. A work station for the DHS MIS was installed in the EPIC 'Ohana office and EPIC 'Ohana staff were trained in mining data from the system.
- There was no new funding for sustainability after the grant and the Early 'Ohana Intervention meeting itself has not been sustained. The following aspects of the 2 interventions have, however, been sustained:
  - The automatic referral process set up during the project (initiating a referral to EPIC at the launch of an investigation) was incorporated into other existing contracts with EPIC 'Ohana and has been implemented statewide. This has nearly tripled the number of cases receiving early Family Finding services.
  - The skills and expertise developed around seeking permanency and lasting supportive connections for children has informed practice in continued Family Connections work.

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## Family Finding

### *Model:*

1. **Early 'Ohana Intervention:** The goal was to start Family Finding and family engagement as quickly as possible after the launch of an investigation to consider placement. Comprehensive Family Lists were developed through case mining (searching DHS and EPIC 'Ohana databases for previous service), internet searches and questioning families in depth.
2. **Enhanced 'Ohana Connections:** Use of the Kevin Campbell Model. This model is available to all children and families in the Child Welfare System, so the case file is reviewed to see if the Family Finding process has already been done and to use it as a baseline if it has. Internet search is then conducted to find contact information, if needed. Then the Family Connections work begins by contacting and engaging the children and family to help them develop permanent relationships, establish a family placement, and foster team building.

### *Process Issues:*

- ***Staffing/Training:*** EPIC 'Ohana is a nonprofit service agency dedicated to family engagement practices in Hawaii. They developed and have been offering Ohana Conferencing in Hawaii Child Welfare services since 1996. In 2007 they developed and began implementing Intensive Family Finding Services, based on the Kevin Campbell model. This grant enhanced those services by adding a Dispatch Team, available 24/7 to respond to referrals triggered by an investigation, providing an immediate family meeting within 24 – 72 hours with the goal of preventing placement or finding a relative placement. Then intensive family finding begins for the 'Ohana Conference held within 30 days.
- ***Methods:*** The first step in the Family Finding process was to search the DHS Management Information System and the EPIC 'Ohana database for previous services offered. Then the EPIC 'Ohana Facilitator met the parents and family to add to and confirm the Family List. Then the Family List would be more fully developed through internet searches and calls to relatives and in depth interviewing of family members.
- ***Number of Contacts:*** No number was indicated as a goal and no numbers were provided for the Early 'Ohana Intervention service. For those who received Enhanced 'Ohana Connections, an average of 45 relatives had been identified after 6 months of initiating the service compared to an average of 25 identified relatives in the comparison group.

### *Barriers:*

- For the Early Intervention service, DHS Crisis and Emergency Response Teams had to add additional steps to an urgent and time sensitive intervention process, including a call to EPIC 'Ohana Dispatch staff to log the case into the random assignment protocol, and when the case was assigned to the intervention, they then had to incorporate the Family Finding and Connections work and the EPIC 'Ohana Facilitator into the crisis encounter with the family. An automatic referral process was eventually developed and implemented in the last year of the project.
- For the Enhanced 'Ohana Connections project, the timing of serving children after they had been in care for a year presented a challenge in that the majority of children had already been placed with family or kin. Case managers and guardians worried that the Family Connections work may de-stabilize the placement.

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- Collaborative relationship building was hampered by the reduction in DHS workforce and reorganization of regional offices. Intensive dissemination of information about the project and collaboration with section supervisors assisted in reducing this barrier.

## Family Meeting

### **Model:**

1. For the Early Intervention an “immediate family meeting” was held at the point of a family’s first encounter with DHS in which removal and placement were being considered. These occur within 24-72 hours of the launch of an investigation and may take place in the family home, at a hospital or even in the middle of the night at a police station, etc. The goal is to prevent placement or find a relative placement. Then an expedited ‘Ohana Conference was scheduled and held within 30 days. The immediate meeting and the ‘Ohana Conference are convened and facilitated by someone on a “Dispatch Team” (available 24 hrs/day, 7 days/week) from EPIC ‘Ohana. The ‘Ohana Conference is voluntary, is modeled after the New Zealand model and includes family private time. Additional conferences are held as needed by the family to check on progress and to modify the service plan and placement options.
2. In Enhanced ‘Ohana Connections, a Family Connections Specialist meets with identified family members separately to engage and assess their involvement and to enlist their participation as a member of a team focused on developing permanent connections for the child. ‘Ohana Conferencing may be used by the team if desired, but not necessarily. The Family Connections Specialist also meets with the child, if age appropriate, and the social worker and other service providers. Team activities may be formally structured or not. The Specialist works with team members to connect or reconnect with the child through various means (visit, phone calls, etc.). In some cases, if the child was already richly connected to relatives, the Specialist simply tracked and followed the maintenance of those connections.

### **Process Issues:**

- Staff/Training: Ohana Conferencing was developed as a partnership between DHS and the Family Court and EPIC ‘Ohana emerged from that partnership as a non-profit organization. EPIC ‘Ohana staff have been convening and facilitating conferences for DHS Child Welfare since 1996.
- Description: An ‘Ohana Conference is a model of FGDM based upon indigenous practices of the Maori and Native Hawaiian people. Conferences are convened and facilitated by a “neutral party.” It is designed to honor the cultural differences of each family by establishing a respectful and comfortable space and by utilizing a strengths-based and child-focused agenda. As of 2012 EPIC ‘Ohana had facilitated more than 13,500 conferences in the state of Hawaii. The conference agenda is as follows: Welcome and Introductions, Purpose of the work today, Who are the children, Needs and services, Hopes and dreams, Family Strengths, Concerns and Legal Timelines, Help & Services, Family Connections and Visits, Private Family Time, Agreement, Closure.
- Timing in Case: In Early ‘Ohana Intervention an immediate family meeting was held within 24-72 hours of the launch of an investigation for possible placement with whatever family could be quickly gathered. The First ‘Ohana Conference was held within 30 days and additional conferences were held as desired or needed. In Enhanced ‘Ohana Connections a conference may or may not be held.

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## **Key Research Findings:**

### ***Early 'Ohana Intervention:***

- When an Early 'Ohana Intervention took place, children were less likely to be removed.
- With an Early 'Ohana Intervention, children who were removed stayed in care for a shorter period of time and were more likely to be placed with relatives.
- Within twelve months of an Early 'Ohana Intervention, more children were reunified, and fewer children remained in out-of-home non-relative foster care.
- The earlier an 'Ohana Conference took place, the sooner a child was reunified.
- Participants report a high level of satisfaction in the services received.

### ***Enhanced 'Ohana Connections:***

- When Enhanced 'Ohana Connections work was done, more family connections were identified.
- When Enhanced 'Ohana Connections work was done, the quality of family connections was much stronger (e.g., more direct vs. indirect contacts with child).
- Family Finding methodologies that are blended and build seamlessly upon one another are effective in finding family (e.g., case mining, then internet search, then talking to family members).