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JANUARY 04, 2021

How do parent partner programs instill hope and support prevention and reunification? (APPENDIX)

Appendix A: Snapshot of research on parent partner programs

Here is a brief summary of the research on individual parent partner programs. For the companion issue brief on this topic, please see [How do parent partner programs instill hope and support prevention and reunification?](#)

PARENTS ANONYMOUS®

Description

Parents Anonymous® is open to any parent or caregiver in a parenting role who is seeking support, positive nurturing, and parenting strategies regardless of the age or special challenges of their children or youth, including severe emotional concerns. Services include weekly support groups, parent partner services (such as advocacy, kinship navigator services, in-home parenting, and supportive services including linkages to community resources), and helpline services.

Evaluation Summary

A 2010 evaluation assessed whether participation in Parents Anonymous® mutual support groups was associated with child maltreatment prevention. Parents new to groups were interviewed at baseline, one month, and six months; the sample represented about 20% of group newcomers. **All parents showed improvements in child maltreatment outcomes, risk factors, and protective factors.** Parents starting out with particularly serious needs showed statistically significant improvement on every scale.¹ A 2011 study utilized a longitudinal design with three data collection time points and a nonrandomized comparison group of 210 families. Results indicated that after attending Parents Anonymous® mutual support group meetings, **parents had statistically significant reductions in risk factors for child abuse and neglect.**²

In a 2020 study by National Council on Crime and Delinquency, parents who participated in Parents Anonymous® were matched to those who did not participate but had the exact same combination of values, such as race/ethnicity and prior child welfare history. The study found that participants in Parents Anonymous® were significantly less likely to have a subsequent child maltreatment referral and have a substantiated maltreatment finding at the 12-month follow-up period compared with parents who did not participate. Substantiations decreased by half for parents who participated in Parents Anonymous®.³

PARENTS IN PARTNERSHIP (PIP) (LOS ANGELES COUNTY, CA)

Description

Parent partners are a committed group of parents who have successfully navigated the system and now work in partnership with the Department of Children and Family Services to provide parents with information, support, empowerment, mentorship, and hope. They serve parents who have recently lost custody of their children as well as parents whose children are in foster care without permanency.

Evaluation Summary

A 2017 study⁴ examined (a) whether distance was a barrier to participation in orientation of a parent mentor program (PIP) for 98 parents involved with the child welfare system and (b) whether participation affected reunification outcomes for 73 parents. Findings showed:

- Parents who lived closer to the PIP orientation location were more likely to participate in the orientation.
- Parents who attended PIP orientation were **5 times more likely to reunify with their children.**

IOWA PARENT PARTNER PROGRAM (IA)

Description

Parent Partners provide one-on-one mentoring by providing advice, support, and encouragement to families whose children are currently involved with DHS in efforts to enhance their capacity to provide for and guide their children's healthy development. Parent Partners meet with families face-to-face as well as by phone.

Evaluation Summary

The University of Nebraska at Lincoln evaluated the Iowa Parent Partner Project. The outcome evaluation utilizes a matching technique, propensity-score matching (PSM), to match treated (children with Parent Partner participants) with untreated participants (children without Parent Partner participants) on the probability of being treated in order to approximate an experimental design (with random assignment). A 2019 evaluation⁵ found that:

- Children of program participants were significantly more likely to return home to their families than the children of matched non-participants (62% compared to 55%).
- Program participants were significantly less likely to have a subsequent child removal within 12 months of the child returning home than matched non-participants (13% compared to 22%).
- No significant differences were found between the children of program participants and children of matched nonparticipants in the total time in out of home care or subsequent child removal within 24 months of returning home.

PARENTS FOR PARENTS (WA)

Description

The Parents for Parents Program (P4P) connects parent allies (parents who have successfully navigated the juvenile dependency system) with parents who are new to the system. Parent allies provide support and help parents new to the system understand what they must do to successfully reunite with their children. The program consists of three main elements: Parent ally support at dependency court hearings, a two-hour educational class called Dependency 101, and an ongoing support class called Dependency 201.

Evaluation Summary

- A 2020 [evaluation](#)⁶ used a quasi-experimental design to examine if there are relationships between P4P and compliance with services and case outcomes. Overall, the findings suggest a positive relationship between P4P and parental engagement and case outcomes. A summary of statistically significant findings includes:

Parent Engagement

- A relationship between Dependency 101 attendance and increased knowledge of the roles in the child welfare system and an increased level of trust in CPS

- A positive relationship between Dependency 101 attendance and service compliance at the first review hearing and permanency planning hearing for mothers and fathers
- A positive relationship between Dependency 101 attendance and visitation compliance at review and permanency planning hearings for mothers; a positive relationship between Dependency 101 and visitation compliance at the permanency planning hearing for fathers
- A positive relationship between Dependency 101 and mother attendance at all key hearings; a positive relationship between Dependency 101 and father attendance at the permanency planning hearing and second review hearing

Case Outcomes

- 70% of parents who participated in Dependency 101 reunified with their children compared to 53% of parents who did not participate in Dependency 101
- 79% of parents who participated in Dependency 101 and received additional mentoring reunified with their children compared to 67% of parents who participated in Dependency 101 but did not receive any additional mentoring
- 26% of parents who participated in Dependency 101 had their parental rights terminated compared to 39% of parents who did not participate in Dependency 101

PARENT PARTNER PROGRAM (CONTRA COSTA COUNTY, CA)

Description

The principal goal of the Parent Partner Program is to help parent clients gain awareness of their rights and responsibilities, and to assist parents toward reunification with their children. Parent Partners are selected because of the successes they have experienced in overcoming significant obstacles, changing patterns of personal behavior that diminished their parenting skills, and by acknowledging the role of child welfare in motivating them to re-prioritize their family.

Evaluation Summary

The outcome study⁷ included data from two groups of children: 236 children whose parents were served by Contra Costa County during the time period July 2005 – March 2008, and whose parent worked with a Parent Partner following removal of their child, along with a matched comparison group of 55 children whose parents were served by Contra Costa County in 2004, before the Parent Partner Program was established. Groups were matched based on ethnicity, case intervention reason, substance use, child age, and child gender. Cases were examined 12 months following case opening to determine reunification status. Results indicate that reunification may be more likely for children whose parents were served by Parent Partners. Approximately 60% of children whose parent engaged with a Parent Partner reunified within 12 months post removal, compared to 26% of children whose parents were not served. No relationship between parent participation in Dependency 101 and length of time until permanency.

PARENT ADVOCATE (JEFFERSON COUNTY, KY)

Description

Parent advocates work with caseworkers to achieve the following goals: (1) work intensely with parents to prevent removal of children from their homes; (2) work instructively with parents to reunify children in a timely manner; (3) work collaboratively with foster parents to maintain family connections; and (4) maintain connections between parents and children while in out-of-home care. Parent advocates and caseworkers engage parents to participate in case planning, to provide information to parents about foster care and the child welfare system, and support families by providing support, resource linkage, and modeling.

Evaluation Summary

Key findings included:⁸

- Children in families receiving parent advocate services had fewer placement moves in their current episode of care, 0.8 moves vs. 1.8 moves, than those who did not receive services.
- Children in families receiving parent advocate services overall spent less time in care, 10.2 months vs. 18.2 months, than those who did not receive services.
- Children in families receiving parent advocate services had higher percentages of reunification than those not receiving services.
- Children in families receiving parent advocate services exited to adoption and emancipation less frequently than those not receiving services.

Other findings included:

- Of the 250 closed cases, 215 children did not have subsequent CPS referrals; 25 children had a substantiated finding of abuse or neglect within one year.
- Of the 202 children receiving parent advocate services who left out-of-home care before 2008, 70.3% reunified with their parents or relatives, compared to 56.7% of children who did not receive parent advocate services.

SOBRIETY TREATMENT AND RECOVERY TEAMS (START) (KY)

Description

START is an intensive program for families with co-occurring substance use and child maltreatment delivered in an integrated manner with local addiction treatment services. START pairs child protective services workers trained in family engagement with family mentors (peer support employees in long-term recovery) using a system-of-care and team decision-making approach with families, treatment providers, and the courts. Essential elements of the model include quick entry into services to safely maintain children in the home when possible and rapid access to intensive addiction or mental health assessment and treatment. Each worker-mentor pair has a capped caseload, allowing for intensive work with families, individualized wraparound services, and identification of natural supports.

Evaluation Summary

2012 evaluation outcomes included:⁹

- Women in START have nearly double the sobriety rate of non-START counterparts.
- Children in START are about half as likely to enter foster care.
- At case closure, more than 75% of START kids remained with or were reunified with parent(s).
- Parents show improved parental capacity.
- For every dollar spent on KY START, \$2.22 is saved in offset foster care costs.

2015 evaluation outcomes:¹⁰

- Children served by START were less likely to experience recurrence of child abuse or neglect within 6 months compared with a matched control group.
- Children served by START were less likely to re-enter foster care at 12 months compared with a matched control group.

1 Polinsky, M. L., Pion-Berlin, L., Williams, S., & Wolf, A. M. (2010). Preventing child abuse and neglect: A national evaluation of Parents Anonymous® groups. *Child Welfare, 89*(6), 43-62.

2 Polinsky, M. L., Pion-Berlin, L., Long, T., & Wolf, A. M. (2011). Parents Anonymous outcome evaluation: Promising findings for child maltreatment reduction. *Journal of Juvenile Justice, 1*(1), 33-47.

3 Burnson, C., Covington, S., Arvizo, B., Qiao, J., Harris, E. (2020). The impact of Parents Anonymous on Child Safety and Permanency. National Council on Crime and Delinquency. Retrieved from: <https://parentsanonymous.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Sept-20-NCCD-Study-on-Positive-Impact-of-Parents-Anonymous.pdf>

4 Enano, S., Freisthler, B., Perez-Johnson, D., & Lovato-Hermann, K. (2017). Evaluating Parents in Partnership: A Preliminary Study of a Child Welfare Intervention Designed to Increase Reunification. *Journal of Social Service Research, 43*(2), 236-245.

5 Chambers, J., Lint, S., Thompson, M., Carlson, M., Graef, M. (2019). Outcomes of the Iowa Parent Partner program

evaluation: Stability of reunification and re-entry into foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 104, 1-11. Retrieved from: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1020&context=ccffacpub>

6 Trescher, S., & Summers, A. (2020). *Outcome Evaluation Report for Washington State's Parent for Parent Program*. Washington, D.C.: Capacity Building Center for Courts. Retrieved from: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/56b0d6d4e707eb68892b71c1/t/5e1d001e44a61407bc11f187/1578958880190/P4POutcomesReport.pdf>

7 Berrick, J., Cohen, E. & Anthony, E. (2011). Partnering with Parents: Promising Approaches to Improve Reunification Outcomes for Children in Foster Care. *Journal of Family Strengths*, 11, 1-13.

8 Lianekhammy, J. & Huebner, R. (2008). *Parent Advocate Program Evaluation Outcomes for Families Served in Jefferson County, September 2005 to April 2008*.

9 Huebner, R. A., Willauer, T., & Posze, L. (2012). The impact of Sobriety Treatment and Recovery Teams (START) on family outcomes. *Families in Society Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, 93(3), 196-203.

10 Hall, M. T., Huebner, R. A., Sears, J. S., Posze, L., Willauer, T., & Oliver, J. (2015). Sobriety treatment and recovery teams in rural Appalachia: Implementation and outcomes. *Child Welfare*, 94(4), 119-138. Retrieved from <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1804471357?accountid=141789>

Editor's note: This brief, originally published June 4, 2019, was updated January 2021 to reflect more recently published research.

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