

Team Based Parent Representation (TBPR) Analysis

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Team Based Parent Representation (TBPR) Analysis

Introduction

A novel interdisciplinary approach that has begun to gain traction in the child welfare sphere centers parent representation in their dependency case to ensure that parents have the necessary support and services to navigate their case. This approach is being implemented in various states, from New York via interdisciplinary law offices to Washington state's Parent Representation Program to Arizona's Team Based Parent Representation (TBPR). Although the specific components of these programs vary, their purpose is to support parents in all aspects of their child welfare case by utilizing various individuals, such as attorneys, social workers, case managers, parent advocates, and peer parents, who bring their own expertise to each case. The purpose of this evaluation is to consider how the peer parent, or Peer Parent Navigator, in TBPR participates in the process. Furthermore, this evaluation aims to assess preliminary case outcomes associated with TBPR participation.

The interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary approach is not new to child welfare, as historically, agencies have utilized these approaches, such as Team Decision Making and Family Group Decision Making, to promote positive case outcomes (Crea et al., 2012; Lalayants & Epstein, 2005; Marcynyszyn, 2012; Rushovich et al., 2021). A critical component of these approaches is parental involvement; however, many barriers exist that hinder parental engagement in their child welfare cases. One such barrier is that the standard service model for child welfare agencies tasks child welfare caseworkers

with managing all aspects of parent engagement. This model can be problematic as birth parents and guardians may find it difficult to trust their child welfare caseworkers due to the caseworker's position within the child welfare agency and their role in the removal of the child (Berrick et al., 2011). Further complicating the situation is that caseworkers frequently have large caseloads, disrupting the ability for the caseworker to invest adequate time to developing the relationship and establishing trust with the parent (Gallagher et al., 2011; Hollinshead et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2013; Turney, 2012). Child welfare caseworkers may only be required to meet with parents one time per month (Sankaran et al., 2015); therefore, the minimal contact with parents hinders the ability of caseworkers to provide a sustained, high level of support that cultivates parents' trust in the child welfare system and the caseworker's role.

The multidisciplinary team model in child welfare allows for parent representation to be fulfilled through various service providers collaborating with parents through all levels of case involvement. Three general categories, case-level, peer-level, and systems-level, have been identified that represent the various realms of family involvement with the child welfare system (National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care, 2008). Case-level family involvement deals with solution-focused engagement between parents and the child welfare agency, as "families and agency practitioners work as partners to develop a shared understanding of the family's problems and formulate solutions" (National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care, 2008, p. 3). Peer-level family involvement includes utilizing parents with first-hand experience as mentors for parents currently involved with the child welfare system. These mentors help parents understand their role in their case, as well as create a safe space to build trust with a peer. System-level family involvement includes integrating the lived experiences and knowledge of families who have been involved with child welfare agencies within the child welfare system to progress toward the betterment of the system (National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care, 2008). This person-centered approach aims to set parents up for success by supporting them in all capacities, from working the case plan with the assistance of their case manager (case-level), to relating to another on a personal level (peer-level), to advocating for policy changes that will benefit child welfare involved families (system-level).

Emerging programs around the US have found ways to circumvent the disconnect between child welfare involved parents and the child welfare system by utilizing a multidisciplinary team service model. This model incorporates the aforementioned realms of involvement by offering services at all levels of care: case, peer, and system. The multidisciplinary team model provides comprehensive child

welfare case management for the parent by providing them with a team consisting of an attorney, child welfare caseworker, social worker, and a peer mentor (Sankaran et al., 2015). The attorney is able to provide the parent with legal representation as well as attend collaborative team meetings to ensure that all team members have equal understanding of court proceedings. The caseworker is able to help the team understand the child welfare case and facilitate services that aid in the reunification of the family. The social worker is able to provide the parent with resources outside of the child welfare case that may be directly impacting their ability to care for themselves or their child (Sankaran et al., 2015). Perhaps the most important aspect of the multidisciplinary model is the inclusion of the peer mentor role as “peer mentors’ perspectives on child welfare services stand apart from that of the social worker, the judge, the lawyer or any of the other allied professions who may be involved in the case” (Berrick et al., 2011, p. 180). Peer mentors may help to mitigate some of the parent’s negative feelings that arise with involvement in the child welfare system as parental distrust of child welfare caseworkers often lead to a reluctance to engage in services (Anthony & Turnlund-Carver, 2017; Lee et al., 2013). The peer mentor is also able to offer the parent a positive, supportive relationship built on shared experience (Berrick et al., 2011), while helping them navigate through a system they once navigated themselves.

Maricopa County TBPR

The TBPR program in Maricopa County, Arizona began in October 2019 and provides an umbrella of support to parents navigating the child welfare system. The TBPR team is comprised of an attorney, social worker, and Peer Parent Navigator. Each team member brings their own unique area of expertise and experience to the table when assisting child welfare involved parents. Arizona law requires that each parent is entitled to an attorney to represent them and if they cannot afford an attorney, one is appointed to them. Usually, the parents receive their attorney as an appointment from Maricopa County Superior Court. The attorney works in the Office of the Public Advocate (OPA), the Office of the Legal Defender (OLD) or is an independent contract attorney through the Office of the Public Defense Services and represents the parent at all dependency case hearings and provides advice and guidance on all legal matters pertaining to the case. Part of the representation requires the attorney to advocate for the parent in the court room, requesting visitation and services on their client’s behalf. The social worker on the team assist a parent with resources and obtaining necessary services. TBPR social workers are contracted through the Maricopa County’s Office of Public Defense Services (OPDS) as experts and many of them have prior experience working as Department of Child Safety case specialists. The prior experience that many of the social workers have is advantageous as they

are familiar with the Department’s policies, know what DCS case specialists look for in terms of parent behavior change and child safety, and can act as a bridge in communication between parent and DCS as they can speak the Department’s language. Finally, the Peer Parent Navigator provides support to the parent on a level that the other team members cannot. Having the lived experience of navigating the child welfare system, Peer Parent Navigators can relate to what the parent is going through on a personal level. Peer Parent Navigators provide hope to a parent by sharing their own child welfare stories while also providing tangible resources, such as housing resources, and clothing and furniture as the parent prepares for reunification. Additionally, Peer Parent Navigators can enhance parenting skills as they are trained in various parenting skills programs and they also facilitate classes and support groups aimed at increasing knowledge of and trust in the child welfare system. Furthermore, they provide information about what the experience of participation in services will entail and how to engage in non-adversarial advocacy for their children and themselves. Peer Parent Navigators truly understand what it is like to be in the parents’ shoes and can oftentimes get parents to engage where others may have been unable to in the past. The TBPR members help prepare parents for meetings, such as case plan staffings, court hearings, and Child and Family Team or Team Decision Making meetings, by assisting parents in organizing their thoughts on what they want to communicate in the meetings where decisions regarding their families may be made. Moreover, the attorney, social worker, and Peer Parent Navigator work together to ensure that the parent has access to the resources and services needed to be successful in their case.

Participation in TBPR is voluntary and any parent that has an open dependency with DCS, whether it is an in-home or out-of-home dependency, is eligible to participate in TBPR. Each parent has their own team of attorney, social worker and Peer Parent Navigator. In rare exceptions, do both parents have the same social worker and Peer Parent Navigator. For ethical purposes, the parents have separate attorneys. A parent is typically referred to TBPR by their attorney although Peer Parent Navigators can also make referrals. If a parent has heard about the program and would like to participate, they will discuss the program with their attorney who will then refer them to the program. Attorneys refer their clients to TBPR for various reasons, whether it is to facilitate communication between DCS and parents to assist parents in obtaining housing or other resources, or, to help parents living outside the state in securing services. Although a referral to TBPR is at the attorney and Peer Parent Navigator’s discretion, a parent is more likely to be referred to TBPR if they express an interest in the program and are otherwise engaged in their child welfare case (i.e., maintain communication

with the attorney, participate in services and visitation, etc.). Once a parent agrees to participate in TBPR, their attorney will submit a request to the attorney's supervisor to have a social worker and Peer Parent Navigator assigned to the team. When approval for the program is secured, the attorney will directly reach out to a social worker contracted through OPDS that provides TBPR services. Before a social worker can accept the case, they first must conduct a conflict of interest check. After that is completed and they are assigned to the team, they are required to contact the parent within 48 hours. Similarly, a request for a Peer Parent Navigator will be submitted to the Family Involvement Center (FIC). The Peer Parent Navigator will also contact and engage with the parent as soon as they are assigned to the team which can take up to a week depending on the ability of the Peer Parent Navigators to take on a new parent. In an ideal situation, the social worker and Peer Parent Navigator will contact the parent together to introduce themselves and explain their respective roles on the team; however, due to the contractual time constraints of the social worker, participating parents may be contacted by the social worker and Peer Parent Navigator on different dates. The Peer Parent Navigator and social worker maintain communication with each other to ensure that parents are supported in all capacities while maintaining constant communication with the attorney, which ensures that the attorney has up to date and accurate information and time to focus on the legal aspects of the parent's case. This multi-pronged approach holistically assists child welfare involved parents.

Method

In order to understand the role of the Peer Parent Navigator in the Maricopa County TBPR process, as well as preliminary case outcomes associated with this model, stakeholders who had participated in the TBPR process were interviewed. A total of 14 participants (N = 14) were individually interviewed, including attorneys (n = 6), social workers (n = 6), and peer parent navigators (n = 2). The interviews were conducted virtually over Zoom and audio recorded for transcription purposes. Participation was voluntary and all participants were provided with a consent form to read prior to their interview. Participants were not directly compensated for their participation; however, all interviews were held during working hours. Participants were recruited from lists that were provided by the Family Involvement Center (FIC), the Office of the Public Advocate (OPA), and the Office of the Legal Defender (OLD).

The interview questions were designed to better understand the role of the Peer Parent Navigator in the TBPR process as well as case outcomes that TBPR members have observed using the process. FIC was invited to review the questions and offer suggestions prior to the final questions being submitted for

approval to the ASU Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Additionally, OPA provided data regarding child welfare dependency cases that were part of the TBPR process. The data included dates associated with the case (preliminary protective conference [the first court date/appearance], date a TBPR social worker was assigned, date of dependency or case dismissal), the number of children involved in each dependency case, and the case outcome for closed cases.

Analysis

Transcripts of the individual interviews were entered into NVivo, a software program used for qualitative data analysis, to assist in organizing and coding the data. The data coding and theme identification was an iterative process. The initial codes were derived from the questions that were asked during the interviews. The first round of coding consisted of each individual interview being coded by a coding team composed of two researchers. Following initial coding, the teams met to discuss the coded data and resolve any differences that may have occurred regarding code selection. All coding teams were able to reach consensus regarding the data that were coded. For the second round of coding, a team of two reviewed the codes and looked for commonalities between the interviews. The third round of coding consisted of the coding team looking across codes for commonalities and grouping codes according to similar themes. The final round of coding consisted of the coding team identifying an overarching theme for each group of codes as well as sub-themes. Specific statements made by participants that exemplified an additional theme or sub-theme were also identified by the coding team. After the themes and pertinent quotes were identified, they were sent to FIC, OPA, and all interview participants for member checking and to give participants an opportunity to provide feedback to the research team. The feedback provided was positive and no suggestions were made to change the themes. A secondary data analysis was conducted on the data provided by OPA.

Results

The analysis identified three general themes regarding the role of TBPR and the Peer Parent Navigators in child welfare. The first theme addresses how TBPR defines success of their parents and cases. The second theme centers around the function of TBPR in child welfare. The final theme focuses on the importance of the foundational work of the TBPR program. There were additional sub-themes associated with each overarching theme. The sub-themes are identified in Table 1 and discussed in the next section.

Table 1. Team Based Parent Representation Themes and Sub-themes

Theme	Sub-Themes
Team Based Parent Representation takes a holistic approach to success	TBPR strives for reunification but is open to alternate case outcomes
Team Based Parent Representation serves as a bridge between DCS and parents	TBPR provides umbrella of support and services to child welfare involved parents Peer Parent Navigators forge a unique connection with child welfare involved parents through lived experiences Parents do not feel alone in the child welfare process
Foundational work is vital for the future growth of TBPR	Internal and external challenges impede program's growth Team members hope to expand program to all child welfare involved parents

TBPR takes a holistic approach to success

The first theme, *TBPR takes a holistic approach to success*, was echoed throughout the participant interviews. Team members recognize that a successful case outcome is subjective and can come in many forms. As the following participant states, a case is successful when a parent has a positive outlook on their experience with TBPR and is equipped to address their needs in the future.

“...even the outcomes that are not positive... kids who end up having parental rights terminated or guardianship, parents still walk away with a positive perception of our program that... we’ve really helped them know that... they are able to have a better sense of their struggles and... resources to help them get sober.” (TBPR Social Worker)

Similarly, success can look like a parent having the support they need to accept their limitations and place their child’s needs and well-being before their own wishes, as demonstrated by the following quote,

“I think having that support... so that he [the parent] got to the place that by the time we were at the trial, he was like “I can’t do this right now. I know that I’m not in the place to parent my child and... he needs to stay where he is at and not put them through the trauma of that severance trial.” I think was really positive for him. Not that it was the ending he wanted, not that it was the ending any of us wanted either. But I think that saved him a lot of extra trauma and going through a severance trial, where we would have sat there for... three, four days and DCS would have berated everything he ever did wrong in his entire life. And he didn’t need that and I think he came to a really good place at the end, where he was like I can’t do this right

now, and my best bet is to make amends, with the relative because they had had a really bad relationship throughout the case.” (TBPR Social Worker)

Keeping success subjective enables parents who participate in TBPR to define success on their own terms and acknowledges the diverse experiences of child welfare-involved parents.

TBPR strives for reunification but is open to alternate case outcomes

A sub-theme of *TBPR takes a holistic approach to success* is that *TBPR strives for reunification but is open to alternate case outcomes*. The attorney, social worker, and Peer Parent Navigator provide support and resources to parents so they can reunify with their child(ren). Although the process is not easy or quick, reunification is achieved by many parents who participate in TBPR, as indicated in the following statements.

“I started in January [2021], and since January I have eight clients who have successfully had their children returned to them and had their DCS cases closed... I’m not saying that like super quick, we got the child returned to them, but I’m talking about we came up with an in-home safety plan where DCS was comfortable having the child in the home with them with... a responsible adult or something... and then very quickly thereafter they showed like, “oh everything’s great here” and then they returned the child to their custody as well.” (TBPR Social Worker)

“I’ve had several cases... where the children have been able to reunify because of the efforts we’ve made and ultimately, it’s the parent, that is, you know doing all the hard work and working their services and their case plan, but... with the additional support that we provided and the communication that we’ve maintained with the parents and attorneys just helps that process go a lot smoother or quicker.” (TBPR Attorney)

Although termination of parental rights and guardianship may not be the case outcomes that parents desire, they can still have positive experiences with these case outcomes. For example, parents may be able to advocate for their case plans to be changed from termination of parental rights to guardianship. Furthermore, they may be able to maintain relationships with their child(ren) after the severance or guardianship, as demonstrated by the following,

“I’ve had a couple of cases where it’s ended up in guardianship to where a family member is able to really foster that parent child relationship beyond what we can offer, because unfortunately DCS does have a timeline they can’t keep these cases open indefinitely.” (TBPR Attorney)

Furthermore, even in the event where parental rights are terminated, TBPR provides a means for parents' voices to be heard and they walk away from the process feeling as though someone was on their side and advocating for them, as captured by the following quote,

"I think there are successes, even clients that in the end do have their rights terminated, which you know, is obviously not the outcome they typically are looking for. They at least feel heard in the process and even if they're not able to make the changes, they at least have someone there that they feel is on their side, as opposed to DCS, where we see a lot of headbutting, they feel that even though... they couldn't make the changes, they felt at least heard going through the process. And I think that adds a lot, even if the outcome wasn't... reunification, there are a lot of other benefits that the program has for our clients." (TBPR Social Worker)

Although family reunification is often the ultimate case plan goal in child welfare, there are circumstances where it cannot be achieved. TBPR strives to ensure that parents have the most positive experience possible with the alternate case outcomes of termination of parental rights and guardianship.

TBPR serves as a bridge between DCS and parents

The second theme is TBPR serves as a bridge between DCS and parents. DCS case specialists often carry large caseloads and are responsible for the management of the entire child welfare case, leaving them little time to devote to individual parents. Conversely, TBPR is parent focused and as the team members' sole purpose is meeting parents' needs and assisting parents in reaching their goals. This may be as simple as explaining the child welfare process to parents and helping them navigate the system, as captured by the following quotes,

"We are there to advocate and support the parents and to be a sounding board for them... helping them navigate the system...helping them understand child safety, and... what services and support they need to do to get the children home. And you know, helping them navigate community resources that are going to be helpful for them after their children are returned and DCS is no longer in the picture to prevent DCS coming back in the picture, so I think that's a big part of it, too." (TBPR Social Worker)

"It [TBPR] really empowers the parents, because oftentimes the parents feel so alone in the process...they have this huge loss of control where nothing that they say, they feel matters. When we get involved [we] really help them feel more empowered and like they have a little bit more control back." (TBPR Social Worker)

TBPR bridges the communication between parents and their DCS case specialists. Attorneys are constrained by the ethical issue that they cannot directly communicate with DCS (a represented party); thus, they rely on the social workers and Peer Parent Navigators to communicate directly with DCS on behalf of parents, especially when there may be tension between the parent and DCS case specialist. Communication between all parties is key to ensuring "little things not becoming big things" as described in the following quotes.

"There's a lot of things the social worker can do that I cannot do as an attorney. One of those things is communicating directly with DCS. I cannot talk to a caseworker, I have to go through the AG (Assistant Attorney General that represents DCS) and this [TBPR] breaks down that barrier because the social worker can talk directly to DCS, they can... attend visits and they have much more flexibility, whereas I'm constrained to the legal issues." [TBPR Attorney]

"I can see little things not becoming big things. So usually like I have cases where maybe visits get disrupted or service stops or something like that and typically a parent, you know may not be able to navigate the system either emotionally they might be too upset to be able to communicate effectively with the Department or may not have the follow through to follow through with the Department, be consistent. Oftentimes, parents have trouble with DCS reaching back to them being timely in their communication and so that social workers there to kind of be that grease on the wheel that allows things to go more smoothly..." (TBPR Attorney)

TBPR provides "umbrella of support" and services to child welfare involved parents

The first sub-theme of *TBPR serves as a bridge between DCS and parents* is *TBPR provides an "umbrella of support" and services to child welfare involved parents*. The TBPR members lean on their own area of expertise of the child welfare system to support parents in all capacities. TBPR provides tangible support, such as food boxes, and intangible support, such as knowledge regarding how to navigate the child welfare system. If a team member cannot meet a parent's specific need, they will refer them to the appropriate person as there are "different roles supporting parents and families in different ways" in TBPR. This is demonstrated in the following quotes.

"The role of the entire team is to offer parents, offer families, an umbrella of support...We can assist them with housing resources, we can assist them with you know food boxes, parenting classes, how to navigate the system... if there's complaints or if there's issues with services... who to go to first,

you go to your attorney, your case manager and if things, whatever the issue is, isn't getting resolved supervisors, APMs [Assistant Program Managers]." (TBPR Social Worker)

"Everyone working as a team will increase the likelihood or increase the... rate of reunification for parents.... different roles supporting parents and families in different ways... should lead to a more positive outcomes, a greater proportion of the time." (TBPR Social Worker)

Peer Parent Navigators forge a unique connection with child welfare involved parents through lived experiences

The second sub-theme of *TBPR serves as a bridge between DCS and parents* is *Peer Parent Navigators forge a unique connection with child welfare involved parents through lived experiences*. Peer Parent Navigators are trained to appropriately and effectively share their personal experiences with the child welfare system to offer hope to parents and validate their feelings and experiences, as captured by the following quote from a Peer Parent Navigator.

"Our role, in like a large part... is that life experience, to help them feel not alone, to validate what's going on, to listen to their concerns and basically identify their needs. If it's a need that I can't fulfill then I'm going to have that conversation with them like, okay, then what's our next step, how do we get this and it could be just about anything." (TBPR Peer Parent Navigator)

Peer Parent Navigators are beneficial to the TBPR process as they offer a level of expertise in their lived experience that no other team member can provide. They not only understand what it feels like to navigate the system, they are "able to ask some of the questions and get the ball rolling", as indicated by the following quotes from social workers and an attorney.

"They [Peer Parent Navigators] truly understand what it's like feeling... completely overwhelmed in and just bombarded by DCS and they're able to, really just, give them that... comfort in knowing they're not alone- they've been there they've had to... jump through the hoops for the department... I do think they're beneficial." (TBPR Social Worker)

"The peer parent navigators have that real life, lived experience. All parent navigators have been through the system, have had their children removed. Some of them have been through the process of like a severance trial, maybe rights terminated and getting kids back after that process and so they have a full you know, different experience than us as social workers and they can kind of relate to the

parents better and honestly." (TBPR Social Worker)

"One of the biggest successes that I've seen is that the Peer Parent Navigators are able to ask some of the questions and get the ball rolling, will get the services started, and to continue in going in a way that that parents sometimes cannot do." (TBPR Attorney)

Peer Parent Navigators also provide child welfare involved parents with a sense of hope, as they lift parents up during the arduous process of navigating the child welfare system. Peer Parent Navigators are like "cheerleaders with experience, as indicated by the following quote from an attorney.

"So, the Peer Parent Navigator...that's someone who has been involved in this system, someone who has gotten their kids back and knows what it's like to be in parents' shoes. So really good sounding boards. A good motivator for these parents, because I mean it's a very intense process, it can very easily have a parent get down on themselves, so someone to kind of lift them up, I like to refer to them as like cheerleaders with experience." (TBPR Attorney)

Parents do not feel alone in the child welfare process

The final sub-theme of *TBPR serves as a bridge between DCS and parents* is *parents do not feel alone in the child welfare process*. The interdisciplinary approach to TBPR ensures that parents do not feel alone as they are buffered by the one-on-one support they receive from their attorney, social worker, and Peer Parent Navigator. TBPR ensures that parents' voices are heard and many parents 'take comfort in the fact that they're part of a special program with a team of people committed to ensuring their success, as demonstrated by the following quotes.

"...[parents] do take a lot of comfort in the fact that they're part of a special program, that they have a person on their team who is an ex DCS case manager, so between having a parent who has been through it and an ex DCS case manager, both people are on your side being supportive, understanding, helping explain to you... this is what this looks like to the attorneys, this is what this looks like to DCS when they're looking at your situation, instead of being on the defensive those people can be like a little bit little more like, "oh okay"." (TBPR Peer Parent Navigator)

"They [DCS] can't give that attention to our clients and our clients really need that attention and I really see- getting that one-on-one support-if you get a social worker that works well with the attorney, with the client and really have that team our clients feel heard. And I just, I can't stress enough how

important it is for [the] client's... to feel heard and not feel talk[ed] down to by DCS- because in their mind, a lot of times DCS is the ones that took their children and even if the case manager is fully in this to help reunify the parents, sometimes... they don't care what the case manager says, but ultimately, they have this team that works with them and they feel that they really have support. And I think there's also opportunities for additional services and, you know, additional just help through the process. And I think that's just invaluable." (TBPR Social Worker)

Foundational work is vital for the future growth of TBPR

The final theme is *foundational work is vital for future growth of TBPR*. As TBPR is a relatively new program to the Maricopa County Court system, there are still DCS case specialists who are unfamiliar with the work of TBPR. Therefore, it is imperative that TBPR members build a strong foundation of the program by obtaining stakeholder investment in the program. This can be achieved by communicating the purpose of TBPR in the dependency process with child welfare stakeholders, including the roles of the various team members, as reported by the following social workers.

"Not every DCS worker, [or] supervisor really knows about our program and so, sometimes we can have some difficulty in communicating so we just have to really educate them on what our role is..." (TBPR Social Worker)

"Some of the challenges are with it just being so new, I think. Not everybody is familiar with it... there were DCS workers that were like, 'we need you to sign a release of information', and I was like, no, you don't need that to talk to me like that's not needed or 'you just work for the Attorney so we can't trust what you're saying'..." (TBPR Social Worker)

Internal and external challenges impede program's growth and success

The first sub-theme of *foundational work is vital for future growth of TBPR* is that *internal and external challenges impede the program's growth and success*. Attorneys, social workers, and Peer Parent Navigators noted internal policy and procedural challenges to the TBPR process. Team members acknowledge the need for policies and procedures to ensure that everyone involved in a case is on the same page, as indicated by the following quotes.

"I think, because we're so new as well and we're still trying to find what works and what doesn't work... having maybe more policies or procedures in place just to make sure that everyone on the

team is on the same page." (TBPR Social Worker)

"More policies or procedures in place just to make sure that everyone on the team is on the same page right as to what we should be doing, and then maybe just having some ongoing like training or meetings or discussions as well, for that same reason, just to make sure that we're all on the same page make sure." (TBPR Attorney)

One participant discussed a recent policy change wherein TBPR social workers are not automatically considered mandated reporters. Per the Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, each state is required to have policies and procedures pertaining to which individuals or professionals are required to report suspected child abuse and neglect. These individuals typically include doctors, counselors, teachers, child welfare workers, and social workers. In Arizona, social workers are required to report if they believe a minor is a victim of child abuse or neglect (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019); however, since the TBPR social worker is not providing a direct service or treatment to parents (i.e., case management) and are utilized as more of a referral source, they are not bound by the same mandatory reporting requirements (Arizona Supreme Court, 2020). This differentiation may pose a precarious ethical dilemma to some social workers as well as the DCS regarding the role of TBPR social workers, as noted by the following social worker's quote.

"Then they changed it and said no, as part of the legal team you aren't a mandated reporter... I think that discredits us a lot... in DCS's eyes because they feel like 'well... they're not gonna protect these kids, they're going to know kids are in harm's way and they're not going to notify us', and I think that puts a bad taste in DCS's mouth." (TBPR Social Worker)

Finally, funding of the TBPR program is a challenge. Currently, the social workers in the TBPR are funded through Title IV-E funds. There were not any participants who indicated a parent being turned away from the program due to lack of funding. However, the Peer Parent Navigators are funded through other grant programs. In order for the program to expand and become sustainable, different funding streams need to be secured. It was expressed that future funding streams should allow for the TBPR members to operate independently so there are no constraints placed on the team members, as indicated by the following attorney's quote.

"Our social workers have a lot of autonomy to make decisions and to do things they feel are necessary... that factor is important and cannot be inhibited... You start putting too many restraints and

rules and regulations and policies and it's going to lose its potency.” (TBPR Attorney)

Attorneys, social workers, and Peer Parent Navigators also noted various external challenges. One external challenge that was identified by attorneys more often than social workers or Peer Parent Navigators was how quickly the decision to remove a child from a parent's care could be made compared to the months it may take to consider returning a child to a parent, as noted in the following quote.

“One of the most hurtful things that can be done to a family [is] breaking [up] that family... Then a decision [to remove a child] takes place in an hour or two... but it takes months to put those kids back or to decide to even talk about it.” (TBPR Social Worker)

“There's too much bureaucracy. ... I looked at this social work program as a kind of a way to put a little Band-Aid on where we can.” (TBPR Attorney)

Another external challenge expressed by various team members was the reluctance of child welfare stakeholders, such as the Assistant Attorney Generals and DCS case specialists, to engage with TBPR members and work with them to support parents. It was expressed that this reluctance may stem from not knowing the role of TBPR members, as in the following quote.

“The Assistant Attorney Generals are very hesitant to work with us due to confidentiality and they think that we work for the attorney's office and I think there's still confusion with that. We do not work for any specific attorney office, we're contracted through the County so... I don't work for OPA, I don't work for OLD, I'm contracted to work with their case with one of them.” (TBPR Social Worker)

As many social workers are former DCS case specialists, there could be a speculated feeling of unwillingness to engage with them as the following quote from an attorney suggests.

“I think they [DCS] need to kind of step back a little and try to look at it as a group effort... our [TBPR] social workers really are there to support the parents and really help them feel heard, be heard, and get services necessary. They're not there to undermine DCS.” (TBPR Attorney)

The final external challenge identified by attorneys, social workers, and Peer Parent Navigators was parents not being in a place where they can meaningfully participate in the TBPR program. Substance use was identified as a significant barrier by multiple team members and is expressed by the following quote from a social worker.

“Their [parents] continued use is a huge barrier... because they are not in a place in their lives yet to benefit from the support from the team-based program and even have the support the services have been given to them through DCS so substance abuse is the biggest barrier. There have been a few cases I could say you know, possibly mental health, like unaddressed mental health but, you know that, with, you know, persistence and consistency, that mental health piece, they usually come around, compared to like substance use, is really hard, a really hard one right now.” (TBPR Social Worker)

Additionally, parents involved in a dependency case often have multiple people involved in their lives and are required to participate in various services per their case plan. Although TBPR is intended to support parents in what is typically a very stressful situation, some parents may be too overwhelmed to participate in TBPR, as indicated by the following quote from a Peer Parent Navigator.

“Some parents are overwhelmed with what they have to do anyway, and they feel like it's going to be extra work or that there's just so many people involved already... They just can't deal with it, you know they don't want anything else... Unfortunately, there are parents out there that don't trust anything that is offered to them.” (TBPR Peer Parent Navigator)

Team members hope to expand the program to all child welfare involved parents

The second sub-theme of *foundational work is vital for future growth of TBPR* is team members' hope to expand the program to all child welfare involved parents. Attorneys, social workers, and Peer Parent Navigators overwhelmingly support the inclusion of TBPR for every child welfare case. The TBPR members have seen first hand what can be achieved when parents participate in TBPR from the beginning of a dependency case and believe all parents should be given the option to participate in the program from the onset of their case, as indicated by the following quotes.

“Every single client who is having their child removed at the onset of their case should be asked if they want to be involved in this program and given the opportunity, so that they can have that support from the gate...” (TBPR Social Worker)

“I think from the beginning, if we have that support, they have someone to reach out to, we can get services in place faster, we can get reunification faster if the parent wants it at all. Of course, it's on the premise that the parent wants to engage in the services and understands the concerns and really wants to get better. I think it's just so important. Every time I had a case, I tried to get a team... surrounding a client if they wanted that. And I just think that having that support is so beneficial. I just hope it thrives

and moves forward and this is the future for our clients.” (TBPR Attorney)

“I would like to see them [TBPR] get ordered on every case because I think... it would just change the entire system. We need somebody to hold their [parents] hands. You can’t just say, go get clean and expect people to just go do it... I would like to see the programming statewide.” (TBPR Social Worker)

“I hope they evolve both in scope and in size, I mean, relatively speaking a low percentage of our overall cases have them assigned at this point because it’s a relatively new program. I think that it would be great to have one automatically assigned to every single case because I think every parent that comes in could benefit from someone else in their corner someone else who’s knowledgeable about the system.” (TBPR Attorney)

Additionally, hope was voiced that the number of social workers and Peer Parent Navigators will increase in the future. There is a limited number of Peer Parent Navigators and social workers, and as demand for TBPR increases, these members will become strained and not be able to provide the level of service that they are currently providing to parents. Furthermore, social workers are currently contracted as experts with OPDS and it may be better for them to be embedded within the individual Indigent Defense Offices, OPA and OLD, as indicated by the following quote.

“Right now, at least for the social workers, we’re just contracted through the Office of Public Defense. My hope would be that there is a program developed through... a parent social worker program within in the office of public defense services, where there are full time social workers who oversee the contract social worker in, you know, kind of we have someone to go to, you know, like a supervisor or boss... so my biggest hope would be serving more parents, having a bigger team of peer [parent] navigators and social workers, and it being the norm, that every parent be represented by a team based approach.” (TBPR Social Worker)

Currently, funding for the Parent Peer Navigators is dependent on grants; therefore, the future of their involvement is contingent on continued funding opportunities. It is hoped that with the demonstrated successes of the program sustainable funding streams will be identified.

Secondary Data Analysis

The quantitative data from the OPA included data on 178 parent cases, only four of which were not independent, i.e., two cases were related, for example, an additional child was born to an already involved parent and the new child then became subject to a dependency petition. The number of

children per case varied from 1 (42.7%), 2 (17.4%), 3 (11.2%) 4 (4.5%), 5 (3.4%) up to a maximum of 9 children. Thirty-five cases did not have information to indicate whether or not the number of children was greater than one. The data included parents who were assigned a TBPR social worker as early as October 2019, when the program first began, through to October 2021. Of the 178 cases, the majority of parents (n = 147 or 82.6%) engaged in the TBPR program, whereas the parents in 28 cases did not engage (15.7%). The parents in three cases were not reported as engaged or refused to engage (1.7%).

The number of days from the preliminary protective hearing until the assignment of a social worker ranged from 1 to over 1,000 days, with a median of 134 and average of 177 days, indicating that the program accepts parents at all stages of their case. Of the 73 cases for which a permanency outcome had been determined, 53 cases resulted in reunification (72.6%). Severance was indicated for 15 (20.5%) of the 73 cases, and guardianship in 3 cases (4.1%). There were 105 cases undetermined as of October 2021. Table 2 presents some descriptive characteristics of the 178 cases, however, this is based on available information and should be considered a lower bound estimate or likely underreported. These characteristics are not to be confused with reasons for removal.

Table 2. Select Characteristics of the TBPR Cases

Characteristics Listed in the Case	N = 178	%
Substance Use		
Yes	29	16.3%
No	149	83.7%
Other Justice System Involvement		
Yes	11	6.2%
No	167	93.8%
Mental Health of Parent		
Yes	21	11.8%
No	157	88.2%
Domestic Violence		
Yes	21	9.0%
No	157	91.0%
Prior Severance		
Yes	13	7.3%
No	165	92.7%
Housing an Issue		
Yes	29	16.3%
No	149	83.7%

As seen by the descriptive percentages in Table 2, some of the parents experienced considerable challenges, including substance use, domestic violence, housing and prior severances from other children that presented challenges to their current child welfare dependency. However, looking at the relationship between reunification (yes or no) and the variables representing challenges to reunification, only one variable was associated with reunification at a statistically significant level ($p = .006$, parent refused service or was not engaged). The direction was as expected, those who refused or who were not engaged were associated with other types of permanency than reunification. Parent refusal or engagement ($B = -2.8$, $df = 1$, $p = .019$) accounted for 12.5% of the variance explained in reunification as an outcome. Although 73 is a relatively small sample, this indicates that challenges such as housing, prior severances, domestic violence, substance use, other justice involvement are not deterministic in whether or not a parent will be reunified with their child(ren).

Discussion

TBPR is a relatively new practice in child welfare, and began in Maricopa County as a voluntary service in October 2019. In Arizona, the multidisciplinary team consists of the parent's attorney, a social worker, and a Peer Parent Navigator. Parents can self-refer by asking their attorney to be involved with TBPR, but are more likely to be referred by their attorney or a Peer Parent Navigator. Interviews with 14 team members representing TBPR involved attorneys, social workers and peer parents were analyzed to better understand the role of the peer parent, and to gather impressions of the program. Secondary data from the Office of the Public Advocate on 178 cases referred for TBPR were also analyzed to better understand case characteristics and preliminary outcomes.

Findings of note include that the program does not define reunification as the only successful outcome. Guardianship and severance of parental rights may also be considered successful case outcomes, if the parents involved accepted services to help them with their challenges and if they felt supported and heard during the dependency process. Thus, it is important for TBPR to have the parent define success on their own terms. An important area of further inquiry in the evaluation of TBPR is whether or not the parent considers their involvement in TBPR a success, and whether or not closure in instances of severance or guardianship indicated continued parent/child relationship, on some level, and if kin was involved in the case, did case closure include improved relationships with family members than existed at the outset of, or during, the dependency.

TBPR was also considered by those interviewed as an important addition to a child welfare system

with overburdened child welfare specialists. In other words, the TBPR social workers have more time to work with the parent(s) and understand their needs and seek specific resources with the parents that would be expected of the case manager if caseloads were lower. TBPR may also have an impact on other system actors, for instance the juvenile court system if severance trials are avoided. Further evaluation of TBPR should examine cost savings compared to practice without TBPR.

Other aspects of TBPR are totally unique to the role of the team member, in particular, the Peer Parent Navigator. The Peer Parent Navigator not only provides resources, support, and coaches the parent, but also serves as a role model for a successful transition to a life post child welfare involvement. Having social workers on the team with prior child welfare agency employment experience was also considered important, especially given the turnover among child welfare specialists, as the TBPR social worker can add or correct information on child welfare processes. With very few exceptions, the same social worker and Peer Parent Navigator remained on the case from beginning of being assigned to the case until the finality of the case. Although those interviewed voiced support for expanding the program to additional child welfare involved parents, there was a concern that the team members not be overwhelmed with too many cases so that they can continue to provide the level of service they are meant to provide. Thus, increasing capacity would necessitate additional resources. Those interviewed felt strongly that the roles of the TBPR social worker and Peer Parent Navigators need to maintain independence from the child welfare agency, i.e., in both funding and oversight.

As the TBPR program is relatively new, and as attrition is a common feature in child welfare, it is important that there are ongoing efforts to educate all involved on the purpose, roles and associated policies and procedures guiding the implementation of TBPR. In particular, the issue of mandated reporting is complex as it pertains to TBPR. Social workers often consider themselves mandated reporters, as delineated in the social work code of ethics (Krase, 2013); however, as the TBPR social worker does not provide treatment to parents, mandatory reporting requirements do not apply to them in their TBPR capacity. This issue will require ongoing attention by TBPR members to ensure that the parents participating in the program are appropriately supported while also maintaining the safety and well-being of their children. Furthermore, as experience with the program model grows, there is also a desire to document what works well and what does not work, and to solidify systems such as the referral system, the end result being a fully articulated program model that is available for education/marketing and training.

Analysis of the quantitative data on 178 demonstrated that the majority of parents referred for TBPR, 82.6%, engaged with the program. TBPR has accepted cases at many stages of involvement, up to plans for severance, and of the 73 cases that have had permanency outcomes, 53 or 72.6% have resulted in reunification. One of the most encouraging findings in the quantitative analysis was that the only item significantly related to the outcome of reunification, was whether or not the parent engaged in TBPR. Common child welfare challenges related to dependency outcomes such as substance use of the parent, domestic violence, mental health of the parent, housing, and prior severances of parental rights were not significantly related to the outcome of whether or not there was reunification when controlling for parental engagement. It is reasonable, therefore, to suggest that TBPR is likely to lead to overall better rates of reunification in Maricopa County. This finding is significant as Maricopa County has the highest severance rate of the 20 most populous counties in the United States (Edwards et al., 2021). Future evaluation efforts with regard to TBPR should include race as Black children tend to be overrepresented in out of home care, and tend to have longer average lengths of stay (Putnam-Hornstein et al., 2021). Examining differences in outcome by race could provide another important dimension of the utility of the TBPR process. Furthermore, a more rigorous design involving a matched or randomized comparison group is needed to further assess this hypothesis.

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