A Vision for a Better Child Welfare System

Birth Parent Advisory Committee (BPAC) Recommendations Report

June 30, 2014
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Recommendations Report I

June 30, 2014

Recommendations, parent perspectives and research findings in child welfare system policies and practices in four areas of focus:

I. Mandated Child Abuse Reporting
II. Child Protective Services (CPS) Investigations
III. Decision Making Processes
IV. Realign Child Welfare Funding to Strengthen and Support Families and Promote Safety
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Executive Summary

In mid-2013, the members of the Birth Parent Advisory Committee (BPAC) met for two days with staff from Casey Family Programs and the National Alliance of Children’s Trust and Prevention Funds. The BPAC discussed multiple components of the child welfare system. In thinking about how to recommend areas for improvement, they selected four topical areas:

I. Mandated Child Abuse Reporting
II. Child Protective Services (CPS) Investigations
III. Decision-Making Processes
IV. Realign Child Welfare Funding to Strengthen and Support Families and Promote Safety

This report presents the BPAC’s findings and recommendations and represents a vision for a better child welfare system. It is the first in a series of reports to be produced by this group of select parents from across the country that have a range of expertise and personal experiences within the child welfare system. They serve as strategic partners with Casey Family Programs (CFP) and through this report reveal family needs and service gaps in the four areas of focus identified above. The BPAC members serve in a variety of leadership roles such as parent mentors, veteran parents representatives, policy advocates and as organization administrators. The BPAC members use their advocacy skills to insure that the voices of child welfare consumers and the community are heard in the development of policies and practices that affect families. The BPAC worked with staff at CFP and the National Alliance of Children’s Trust and Prevention Funds to create these recommendations for the improvement of child welfare policy and practice.

The recommendations are based on the experiences and critical thinking of BPAC members and were supported by literature reviews, research findings and feedback from parents, child welfare professionals, community-based providers and other stakeholders. There are many definitions of “evidence” regarding quality practices. One definition refers to a decision-making process that integrates the best available researched evidence with family and professional wisdom (National Alliance of Children’s Trust and Prevention Funds, 2009). All of these elements are present in this paper while maintaining the parent perspective as primary. What follows are the four areas of focus and the recommendations for each of them. They are ranked in the order of importance.

The long term goal of the recommendations is to achieve Casey Family Program’s 2020 goals of improving outcomes for families, reducing the need for out-of-home placement of children and safely reducing the number of children in foster care by 50 percent by the year 2020 (from more than 500,000 children down to 250,000 children).
I. Mandated Child Abuse Reporting

1. Where appropriate, encourage mandated reporters to engage parents in the reporting process for reports made about their families.

2. Incorporate key elements, into mandated child abuse reporting systems to include but not be limited to:

   • Structure for ensuring that the mandated reporting system is implemented in a consistent manner and in accordance to state laws
   • Determination regarding who is mandated to report. Most often mandated reporters include any individual in a paid or volunteer position who works with and/or has frequent contact with children and/or families.
   • Providing initial and ongoing training for mandated reporters and child welfare staff (i.e., determination of mandated and other reporters to be trained, criteria for trainers including criteria for parent mentors or veteran parents to assist in developing and providing the training, and required training content that includes disproportionality issues and how to differentiate between child maltreatment and value driven concerns that relate to differing parenting practices and when it is appropriate to report, etc.)
   • Resources to increase awareness about mandated child abuse reporting for the public, such as the annual resource guide published by the federal Children’s Bureau, media tool kit, tip sheets to prevent child abuse and related tools.
   • A regular evaluation of the reporting system and continual quality improvement processes such as publishing evaluation findings on their jurisdictions’ child welfare system’s website.
   • Child protective services and law enforcement should have a protocol in place to maintain regular communications and cross report to provide continuity and consistency in services to keep families safe.

3. Members of the community-at-large who are not mandated reporters should be informed how to recognize and act on their responsibilities to provide a supportive role in helping children at risk of harm and families who are vulnerable to maltreatment, including making a report to child protective services when needed.

“When I acted angry and uncooperative at the beginning of my case, I was really experiencing fear of the unknown and of losing my child forever. It would have been more helpful if the caseworker had shown empathy and understanding and given me words of encouragement, instead of taking it personally and responding to me in anger, power and control.”

Kimberly M., Parent
II. Child Protective Services (CPS) Investigations

1. Child welfare workers should actively engage parents as partners in the investigation, service planning and service delivery.

2. Use alternative response approaches that focus on the parents' capacity to safely care for their children. This system would include:

   - Strengths-based, solution-focused safety assessment
   - Identification of family functioning and help in building on existing protective factors
   - Identification, understanding and respect for families’ values and cultural traditions
   - Safety-focused, respectful, meaningful, collaborative engagement with families
   - Service plans and case plans developed in partnership and in agreement with the family (families assist with creating an alternative safety plan in all judicial cases. Depending on the scale of maltreatment, child welfare staff will follow a scale of least to more intrusive) and written in language that the family understands
   - Services are tailored to fit families' individual strengths, needs and resources
   - Group and team decision-making meetings structured to encourage full parent participation
   - Community service provider partnerships and peer mentor support

   If it is determined that a child is not in danger of maltreatment caseworkers should engage and offer services to safely maintain the family structure.

3. Co-train with parent mentors and veteran parents utilizing training curriculum and tools that include the unique perspectives of parents affected by issues such as substance abuse, interpersonal violence, mental health (depression) and trauma. This would assist child welfare caseworkers in engaging families, from initial contact until the case is closed, in a positive strengths-based approach that supports families in addressing their issues.

“In my dealings with Child Protection Services I wished that someone would want to listen to me and to hear my story instead of judging me and thinking that I don’t love or care about my kids.”

Toni M., Parent
III. Decision-Making Processes

1. It is recommended that all mandated and non-mandated stakeholders, including but not limited to child protective services workers, attorneys, law enforcement, and community representatives, collaborate with and build partnerships with families in the child welfare system, based on trust, equality and mutual understanding to achieve specific goals.

2. Promote the participation of trained and reunified birth parent advocates at key decision-making points throughout the life of the case as a best practice family engagement strategy in child welfare systems and all related systems such as courts, substance abuse treatment programs, etc.

3. Ensure parents are informed and meaningfully involved in the decision-making processes about their families conducted by child protective services workers, courts and law enforcement personnel.

4. Ensure that parents receive effective legal representation at every court hearing. Court-ordered documents and reports should be clearly explained and communicated to the parents prior to the court hearings.

“From my personal experience at a Team Decision-Making Meeting (TDM), parents have no clue of what’s about to happen. Parents need to be told the truth and the child welfare worker needs to be upfront. Parents should always be advised to bring supporters and to have a ‘Plan B’ just in case. I did not have a Parent Advocate or anyone to support me in my TDM and it was my first and only time in the system. I felt if I had known these things upfront my son could have avoided the stay in foster care.”

Brejea C., Parent
IV. **Realign Child Welfare Funding to Strengthen and Support Families and Promote Safety**

1. Develop and use appropriate communication tools (i.e., fact sheets, social media, editorials, etc.) to educate parents, communities, policymakers and funders about the need to align child welfare funding with desired outcomes of supporting families and keeping children safely at home. For example, the desired outcomes would be state and federal incentives to safely maintain children at home with their family.

2. Use successful public will-building strategies to educate the public about creative ways to fund prevention and intervention services. Examples of such strategies include action kits with practical tips, technical assistance projects, a national summit, targeted research, periodic surveys, audio conferences, websites and learning communities.

3. Communicate the societal and financial benefits and value of prevention, in-home services and reunification services for children, parents and the family and identify parents who can talk about how these benefits support improved safety, permanence and well-being outcomes for children. For example, create strategies where parents can share their stories through the use of trainings, workshops, public presentations, written articles, support groups, etc.

“As a parent affected by child welfare, I was surprised that I was unable to get everything that I needed to help me and my son due to the way funding is distributed. If funding was aligned to support ‘child welfare’ I would not have been limited to the type of services that were available to me and my family. I could have received services in my home, perhaps preventing my son from going into foster care. Funds should be available to support the needs of the family before and after contact with the child welfare system.”

Sandra K., Parent
Focus Area Recommendations

These recommendations provide a birth parent perspective on how to improve safety and well-being outcomes for children and families who come to the attention of the child welfare system. BPAC members identified the following four areas as needing significant policy and practice improvements.

The recommendations are arranged by focus area. Each focus area has a description, issue statement, a set of recommendations and each recommendation is supported by parent perspectives and some elements of “what the research says.”

I. Focus Area: MANDATED CHILD ABUSE REPORTING

“I often wonder if proper training for mandated reporters could have provided the intervention my son desperately needed during a custody battle. It is disheartening when a mother finds she can protect herself, but not her child. I will be forever thankful to the one mandated reporter who did report and was able to get my son the help he needed.”

Sherry T., Parent

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<tr>
<th>Parent Perspectives on Mandated Child Abuse Reporting</th>
<th>What the Research Says</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Many mandated reporters lack knowledge about the child abuse reporting law.</td>
<td>• Forty percent of professionals who are mandated reporters have failed to report child abuse or neglect at some time. They note barriers such as 1) lack of knowledge about its signs and symptoms and the ability to identify them correctly; 2) lack of knowledge of reporting procedures; 3) concern about negative consequences to the child or family; 4) fear of retaliation, or 5) a belief that child protective service will be unable to help. (Ref #1)</td>
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<td>• Many mandated reporters do not have a clear understanding of what is appropriate to report.</td>
<td>• Research studies are needed on the efficacy of training programs for mandated reporters, including how different training models have more or less impact with different audiences. (Ref #2)</td>
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<td>• Many times reports are made on parents who are displaying poor parenting skills but there is no indication of abuse toward their children.</td>
<td>• Concerns about racial and socioeconomic bias in the making of child abuse and neglect reports have been consistently seen over the past 15 years. (Ref #3 and Ref #4)</td>
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<td>• Many schools create their own reporting protocols which are inconsistent with the law and provide limited training to their staff.</td>
<td>• Making a report provides an opportunity to promote the parent’s role, responsibilities, and power in managing his or her interaction with the child. The child’s safety is always the primary concern, but parents are encouraged to participate in the report, including making a self-report when appropriate. (Ref #5)</td>
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<td>• There is inadequate and inconsistent training provided to mandated reporters.</td>
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<td>• Child welfare workers’ attitudes and biases frequently tend to negatively impact the child abuse reporting process.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Where appropriate, encourage mandated reporters to engage parents in the reporting process for reports made about their families.</td>
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Mandatory reporting is the legal requirement that professionals notify appropriate authorities about cases in which children and certain other groups of vulnerable individuals are being abused. State laws addressing the abuse and neglect of children were passed in all 50 states following the 1962 amendments to the Social Security Act that required all states to include child protection in their child welfare systems. While some states require all people to report their concerns, many states identify specific professionals as mandated reporters. Specific procedures are usually established for mandated reporters to make referrals to child protective services. Individuals designated as mandated reporters typically have frequent contact with children. Such individuals may include:

1. Social workers
2. Teachers, principals, and other school personnel
3. Physicians, nurses, and other health-care workers
4. Counselors, therapists, and other mental health professionals
5. Child care providers
6. Medical examiners or coroners
7. Law enforcement officers

Issue Statement

In federal fiscal year 2012, about 3.4 million reports were made to child protective services concerning the safety and well-being of approximately 6.3 million children. As a result of these reports, a nationally estimated 686,000 children were found to be victims of child abuse or neglect (The 2014 Prevention Resource Guide: Making Meaningful Connections, https://www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/preventionmonth/resource-guide/.)

Using child abuse reports as the primary avenue into the child welfare system perpetuates fear about the system and mandated reporting. Inconsistent child abuse reporting can create confusion, suspicion and negative perceptions among families. By implementing consistent mandated child abuse reporting practices across all child welfare systems, communities are poised to better inform families of positive parenting and offer effective services that promote adult functionality through identifying children who are at risk. There is a need for:

- All potential allegations to follow uniform decision-making criteria
- All mandated reporters to be offered training in child welfare investigation/assessment practices
- States to adopt consistent allegation narrative forms
- Tougher penalties to be imposed on frivolous calls. (this impacts investigators' workload)
- Families to be informed of how maltreatment is defined.
Some states are addressing these issues. For example, in Minnesota, the Department of Human Services created *Child Maltreatment Screening Guidelines* based on the Minnesota Statute (M.S.) 626.556, Reporting of Maltreatment of Minors Act. This promotes statewide consistency in definition and practice direction to county social service agencies and also informs the general public about types of child safety concerns that should be reported. The guidelines emphasize that families and communities are best served when child maltreatment act screening guidelines are clearly understood and readily available. (*Minnesota Child Maltreatment Screening Guidelines*, Minnesota Department of Human Services, www.dhs.state.mn.us, DHS-5144-ENG 9-12.)

**Recommendations**

1. Where appropriate, encourage mandated reporters to engage parents in the reporting process for reports made about their families.

2. Incorporate key elements into mandated child abuse reporting systems to include but not limited to:
   - Structures for ensuring that the mandated reporting system is implemented in a consistent manner and in accordance to state laws.
   - Determination regarding who is mandated to report. Most often mandated reporters include any individual in a paid or volunteer position who works with and/or has frequent contact with children and/or families.
   - Providing initial and ongoing training for mandated reporters and child welfare staff (i.e., determination of mandated and other reporters to be trained, criteria for trainers including criteria for parent mentors or veteran parents to assist in developing and providing the training, and required training content that includes disproportionality issues and how to differentiate between child maltreatment and value driven concerns that relate to differing parenting practices and when it is appropriate to report, etc.)
   - Resources to increase awareness about mandated child abuse reporting for the public, such as the annual resource guide published by the federal Children’s Bureau, media tool kit, tip sheets to prevent child abuse and related tools.
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   - Child protective services and law enforcement should have a protocol in place to maintain regular communications and cross report to provide continuity and consistency in services to keep families safe.

3. Members of the community-at-large who are not mandated reporters should be informed how to recognize and act on their responsibilities to provide a supportive role in helping children at risk of harm and families who are vulnerable to maltreatment, including making a report to child protective services when needed.
II. **Focus Area: CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES (CPS) INVESTIGATIONS**

“The investigation process should be a tool that assists workers to truly identify and evaluate the needs of families without the threat of having your child removed unless the child is in imminent danger and there are no other resources to assist the family. During my personal investigation, I felt that the social worker was not truthful about the concerns that the Department had with my family and I was blindsided when the removal happened.”

Nancy V., Parent

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<tr>
<th>Parent Perspectives on Child Protective Services (CPS) Investigations</th>
<th>What the Research Says</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Investigations are judgmental and create fear and resistance among families.</td>
<td>• Family engagement represents a significant change for many child protective service agencies (CPS). Families will be more receptive to services when they feel less CPS surveillance and stigma. They can engage more positively in change when they are recognized for having both strengths and needs rather than being labeled as perpetrators. (Ref #7)</td>
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<td>• Child welfare workers frequently promote a “cookie-cutter” case plan and tell the family what tasks must be completed and do not work at building a trusting relationship with the family.</td>
<td>• Family engagement strategies include openly sharing information and professional knowledge; exploring family strengths; services driven by family-and agency-identified needs; and maximum family input into case planning. (Ref #6)</td>
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<td>• Differential response uses a strength-based approach and appears to be a growing trend across the nation.</td>
<td>• Research identifies the following strategies for alternative response or family assessment response cases (Ref #7):</td>
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<td>• Alternative responses to investigations can support much-needed changes in how the system interacts with families.</td>
<td>1. Family engagement versus an adversarial approach</td>
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<td>2. Services versus surveillance</td>
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<td>3. Labeling as “in need of services/support” versus “perpetrator”</td>
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<td>4. Being encouraging with families versus threatening</td>
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<td>5. Identification of needs versus punishment</td>
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<td>6. A continuum of response versus “one size fits all”</td>
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<td>• High-quality, well-designed ongoing cross-training for all workers in the CPS system – including mandated high-quality, well-designed ongoing cross-training for all workers in the CPS system – including mandated reporters, community-based service providers, court and law enforcement personnel – is recommended. (Ref #8)</td>
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Description

Over the past 18 years, many child welfare administrators, parents, service providers and other stakeholders interested in the delivery of child welfare services have become increasingly concerned that an investigative response to child maltreatment reports has been inflexible and adversarial and did not provide sufficient services to meet family needs. The inability of families to access appropriate services or to accept offered services has also been linked to additional occurrences of maltreatment (Waldfogel, 1998). Some stakeholders have also been concerned that investigation is usually an intrusive intervention, and one that is not responsive to families’ circumstances. Many state and local CPS systems have been redesigned to include an alternative response (differential response) approach. A central tenet of differential response is that many children and families brought to the attention of child protective services (CPS) can be better served using a supportive and collaborative approach that is free of the constraints and stigma of an investigation (Huebner, Durbin, & Brock, 2009). For example, Minnesota developed a 20-county differential response demonstration project beginning in 2001, which was implemented statewide by 2004. Evaluation findings reported that families, child protective service workers, and community-based service providers found the approach to contribute to more positive working relationships; that families in the non-investigation pathway received more needed services than those in the investigation pathway; and that families in the non-investigation pathway were less likely to have new maltreatment reports (Institute of Applied Research, 2006; Johnson, Loman, & Siegel, 2005; Loman & Siegel, 2004b; Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2005; Siegel & Loman, 2002; Siegel & Loman, 2003).

Issue Statement

Many child welfare systems conduct investigations in ways that are disrespectful, demeaning and punishing of parents/families rather than working to build a partnership with families that is based on mutual agreement and understanding of working together to achieve specific goals.

Recommendations

1. Child welfare workers should actively engage parents as partners in the investigations, service planning and service delivery.

2. Use alternative response approaches that focus on the parents' capacity to safely care for their children. This system would include:
   - Strengths-based, solution focused safety assessment
   - Identification of family functioning and helping build on existing protective factors
   - Identification, understanding and respect for families' values and cultural traditions
   - Safety-focused, respectful, meaningful and collaborative engagement with families
• Service plans and case plans developed in partnership and in agreement with the family (families assist with creating an alternative safety plan in all judicial cases. Depending on the scale of maltreatment, child welfare staff will follow a scale of least to more intrusive) and written in language that the family understands
• Services are tailored to fit families' individual strengths, needs, and resources
• Group and team decision-making meetings structured to encourage full parent participation
• Community service provider partnerships
• Peer mentor support

If it is determined that a child is not in danger of maltreatment, case workers should engage and offer services to safely maintain the family structure.

3. Co-train with parent mentors and veteran parents utilizing training curriculum and tools that include the unique perspectives of parents affected by issues such as substance abuse, interpersonal violence, mental health (depression) and trauma. This would assist child welfare caseworkers in engaging families, from initial contact until the case is closed, in a positive strengths-based approach that supports families in addressing their issues.
### III. Focus Area: DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

"My personal experiences with the Office of Social Services investigative and case management practices were non-productive for everyone involved. The case plan was created solely by the case manager and I was never given an opportunity to express my desires for my child or the need for much needed treatment to rectify an abnormal past. Today, I honestly believe that building healthy relationships are essential in assisting families to reach their full potential. By having the chance to co-author and co-create your future with child welfare staff is more than empowering, it’s a right that all families have and once that is recognized, we will accomplish much more together that will reduce negative outcomes and keep children with their families."

*Corey B., Parent*

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<tr>
<th>Parent Perspectives on Decision-Making Processes</th>
<th>What the Research Says</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Members of the Birth Parent Advisory Committee (BPAC) strongly endorsed these practices as critical ones for caseworkers to implement:(Ref #9)</td>
<td>• Research shows there are four main factors related to case worker and parent engagement:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Understand how hard it is for parents to have their children removed from their care</td>
<td>1. Caseworker actions – Communications Skills (listening; explaining process; open/equal communication; establishing trust by showing concern for family and best interest of child/family; honesty).</td>
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<td>• Admit to a mistake when one is made and tries to correct the situation.</td>
<td>2. Caseworker competency – Being organized, flexible, efficient, experienced; being passionate about the work.</td>
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<td>• Tells parent what she/he plans to say in court about the family and parent – both negative and positive.</td>
<td>3. Caseworker attitudes – Polite, friendly, fair, non-judgmental, easy to talk to, respectful, calm, down-to-earth.</td>
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<td>• Tells parent who he/she can contact for help when caseworker is gone for more than a day or two.</td>
<td>4. Use of power – Shared power with caregiver; working with caregiver by involving them in making decisions about their case. (Ref #10)</td>
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<td>• Informs parent about the help that is available to complete the case plan</td>
<td>• Parents are more likely to become involved in decision-making when the caseworker:</td>
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<td>• Obtains needed services for parents in a timely manner.</td>
<td>1. Is honest and clearly communicates about reasons for agency involvement</td>
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<td>• Cares about the parent’s children.</td>
<td>2. Communicates in a respectful manner</td>
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<td>• Recognizes parent’s right to make decisions about his/her children during the time they are in care.</td>
<td>3. Is willing to listen to client’s story</td>
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<td>4. Follows through on commitments /tasks</td>
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<td>5. Reduces the power imbalance</td>
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<td>6. Reduces the parents’ fears</td>
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<td>7. Maintains a reasonable size of caseload to have sufficient time to work with family</td>
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<td>8. Avoids communicating confrontationally</td>
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Description

It is vitally important that child protective services workers, attorneys, law enforcement personnel and community service providers build partnerships with families in the child welfare system and engage them in decision-making processes. When families are encouraged to actively participate in decision-making processes such as opening a case, removing a child, reunifying with their family or obtaining services, they feel heard and understood, are less defensive and resistant and solutions can be sought. Parents learn they are not alone to find a solution and there are numerous avenues of support. A team decision-making approach provides the opportunity for families to involve other key stakeholders in these critical decisions, such as extended family members, foster parents, a birth parent advocate, teacher and pastor to help build a support network for the family. There are promising practices throughout the country showing that trained and successfully reunified birth parent advocates can promote family engagement at key decision-making points throughout the life of the case in child welfare systems and all related systems such as courts, substance abuse treatment programs, etc.

Issue Statement

In many cases parents do not feel that the caseworker is willing to listen to them, explain the process or involve them in making decisions about their case. They fear the worker has pre-judged them and may not understand the ethnic and cultural traditions of their families and the challenges they face. When parents have the chance to speak for themselves during a case conference, they are often overwhelmed, fearful, embarrassed, angry or confused.

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that all mandated and non-mandated stakeholders, including but not limited to child protective services workers, attorneys, law enforcement, and community representatives, collaborate with and build partnerships with families in the child welfare system, based on trust, equality and mutual understanding to achieve specific goals.

2. Promote the participation of trained and reunified birth parent advocates at key decision-making points throughout the life of the case as a best practice family engagement strategy in child welfare systems and all related systems such as courts, substance abuse treatment programs, etc.

3. Ensure parents are informed and meaningfully involved in the decision-making processes about their families conducted by child protective services workers, courts and law enforcement personnel.

4. Ensure that parents receive effective legal representation at every court hearing. Court-ordered documents and reports should be clearly explained and communicated to the parents prior to the court hearings.
IV. Focus Area: REALIGN CHILD WELFARE FUNDING TO STRENGTHEN AND SUPPORT FAMILIES AND PROMOTE SAFETY

“As a parent affected by child welfare, I was surprised that I was unable to get everything that I needed to help me and my son due to the way funding is distributed. If funding was aligned to support ‘child welfare’ I would not have been limited to the type of services that were available to me and my family. I could have received services in my home, perhaps preventing my son from going into foster care. Funds should be available to support the needs of the family before and after contact with the child welfare system.”

Sandra K., Parent

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<tr>
<th>Parent Perspectives on the Importance of Realigning Child Welfare Funding</th>
<th>What the Research Says</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Educate the public about creative ways to fund prevention and intervention services to support and keep children safely at home with their families (i.e., Title IV-E Waiver Demonstration Projects).</td>
<td>• Title IV-E funds are used to pay for costs of a child in foster care. They are not to be used for services to prevent removal or for reunification services for a parent. In 2011, the federal Child and Family Services Improvement and Innovation Act (P.L. 112-34) reauthorized the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to approve new child welfare Title IV-E Waiver Demonstration Projects. These Projects can enable states to creatively use Title IV-E funds outside of the foster care costs restriction. Waivers allow state and tribal child welfare agencies to design and demonstrate a wide range of approaches for improving safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for children. (Ref #11)</td>
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Description

Currently, funds often are not provided to families early enough to prevent the need for more intense services. There are few tools available that translate complicated child welfare financing information into simple messages for parents, policymakers, funders and the public that would help them understand the importance of finance reform. If developed, such tools can increase understanding about the possibilities of using child welfare funding to support and help build family strengths and to keep children safely at home limiting the need for out-of-home services.
Issue Statement

Child welfare funding does not adequately support an array of services to strengthen families and keep children safely at home with their families and few understand the possibilities for making changes in child welfare financing that may lead to better outcomes for children and families. Thus, there is little public will for making these important improvements to the child welfare system.

Recommendations

1. Develop and use appropriate communication tools (i.e., fact sheets, social media, editorials, etc.) to educate parents, communities, policymakers and funders about the need to align child welfare funding with desired outcomes of supporting families and keeping children safely at home. For example, the desired outcomes would be state and federal incentives to safely maintain children at home with their family.

2. Use successful public will-building strategies to educate the public about creative ways to fund prevention and intervention services. Examples of such strategies include action kits with practical tips, technical assistance projects, a national summit, targeted research, periodic surveys, audio conferences, websites and learning communities.

3. Communicate the societal and financial benefits and value of prevention, in-home services and reunification services for children, parents and the family and identify parents who can talk about how these benefits support improved safety, permanence and well-being outcomes for children. For example, create strategies where parents can share their stories through the use of trainings, workshops, public presentations, written articles, support groups, etc.
The diagram below depicts the importance of building partnerships with families in the child welfare system as a way to create trust, understanding, collaborations and responsive policies and practices to help families achieve their goals. An increasing number of child welfare administrators and caseworkers are working in partnership with families to make critical improvements in the highlighted focus areas. This report is a valuable resource for BPAC members to use to talk with policymakers, child welfare leaders and other key stakeholders about the need to transform the child welfare system policies and practices nationwide and ultimately achieve Casey Family Programs’ 2020 goals of safely reducing the number of children and youth in foster care and improving outcomes for families.
Conclusion

The child welfare system is an important part of our nation's infrastructure for ensuring that children are safe and families are strong. It is time to make improvements in the way the system interacts with families and many strong leaders in the field are working to make those changes. The experience of parents who have received services through the child welfare system is a critical resource for understanding how these improvements might be made. This document drawing on the expertise of the Casey Family Programs Birth Parent Advisory Committee will be used by them to offer insights and guidance to policymakers, child welfare leaders, advocates and others interested in transforming the system. Their personal and collective insights are linked with resources from the professional literature from the child welfare field.

While working in collaboration with staff from Casey Family Programs and the National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds, the BPAC members invested many hours of discussion and reviewing the literature to create the recommendations contained in this document. It is intended to assist BPAC members in communicating recommendations to help families obtain needed services and supports as early as possible so they can provide safe and nurturing homes for their children and prevent the need for out-of-home placement.
2014 Birth Parent Advisory Committee (BPAC)

Corey Best (Daytona Beach, FL) – Mr. Best currently works as a Family Engagement Specialist for the Healthy Start Coalition in Volusia & Flagler Counties in Florida. He has been an active Parent Leader for the PYRAMID (Parents and Youth Reaching Amazing Milestones with Initiative and Dedication) Community Café since 2010. He is also a Technical Assistance Consultant for Georgetown University’s Adaptive Leadership Team with a focus on social equality, organizational change and family engagement. Mr. Best is a motivational speaker and has trained over 400 public service staff, early child care providers and families in the state of Florida.

Brejia Colthirst (Oakland, CA) – In August 2010 Ms. Colthirst was hired as Parent Advocate by A Better Way, Inc. to work with families involved with the child welfare system in Alameda County. Ms. Colthirst feels that it is important to have procedures in place to help new parents entering the system to understand what is going to happen and what will be expected of them. In her local child welfare system, she teaches a three-week orientation for parents just entering the system.

Sandra Killett (New York, NY) – Ms. Killett is a graduate of the Child Welfare Organizing Project (CWOP) Parent Leadership Academy and was employed as a Parent Advocate for five years. She established the Undoing Racism Committee to examine racial disproportionality in the child welfare system. She serves on the Advisory Board to the Commissioner of New York City Administration for Children’s Services, and is the Executive Director of CWOP. She also serves on the Disproportionate Minority Representation Committee at the Bronx and Manhattan Family Courts.

Eric Luciano (San Diego, CA) – Mr. Luciano has done extensive public speaking to child welfare system staff and he has also been an advocate for fathers in Team Decision-Making meetings. He served on the Casey Family Program’s Birth Parent Transition Implementation Committee and participated in Strategic Sharing training. He earned his Master’s Degree in Social Work and was recently hired as a social worker with the San Diego County Child Welfare system. He is the recipient of the Casey Family Program Excellence for Children Award for 2013.

Kimberly Mays (Tacoma, WA) – Ms. Mays is currently managing a Parent-to-Parent Program in King County Superior Court, which is now the statewide model for this type of program. While working and raising her daughter, she successfully earned her Associate, Bachelor and Master Degrees. Today Ms. Mays is sober 9 years and she is a highly effective parent advocate who serves on the King County Parent Advocacy Committee, Washington State Parent Advocacy Network, and Washington State Racial Disproportionality in the Child Welfare Legislative Advisory Committee.
Toni Miner (Jefferson County, CO) – Ms. Minor is a former parent partner with Jefferson County Colorado Child Welfare Services and was in this role for five years. In addition to mentoring families, she provided training to caseworkers, Court Appointed Special Advocate volunteers and kinship care providers. Ms. Miner is active in Child Welfare System Team Decision-Making meetings and serves on the Children’s Justice Task Force, and Domestic Violence/Child Protection Services Coordinating Council and the State Title IV-E Waiver Committee.

Timothy Phipps (Portland, OR) – Mr. Phipps is a founding member of the Fathers Advisory Board in Multnomah County, a member of the Family Connections Oregon subcommittee working to develop a Statewide Parent Leadership Team for the state child welfare system, and he provides core training for new child welfare caseworkers. He has extensive experience doing public speaking engagements.

Ray Sanchez (Casa Grande, AZ) – Mr. Sanchez is a volunteer sponsor of two fathers going through the same drug court from which he successfully graduated. He is the recipient of the Casey Family Programs Excellence for Children Award for 2012.

Sherry Tomlinson (Columbus, KS) – Ms. Tomlinson is the chair for her county Family Advisory Council which is a local group of concerned parents and family partners that develop strategies to help families with resources, transportation, information and support. She also volunteers as a facilitator of a weekly women’s addiction support group at the local jail to help mothers who have lost custody of their children due to drug addiction. She was a founding member along with a dedicated group of other family and community partners who worked on the development of the Kansas State Family Advisory Network. She later served as the President of this advisory network. She currently serves as a consultant for the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections.

Nancy Vivoda (Detroit, MI) – Ms. Vivoda was recruited to the Detroit Center for Family Advocacy where she currently works assisting parents in obtaining free legal services to help prevent children from going into the foster care system. She participates in her local child welfare department’s Team Decision-Making meetings and serves on a special committee focusing on changing the way the system provides services to families in Michigan. Ms. Vivoda is an experienced trainer for Casey Family Programs (CFP) and has worked with the CFP birth parent activities for the past six years. She is also a consultant for the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections and has done extensive public speaking. She is the recipient of the Casey Family Program Excellence for Children Award for 2013.
References

Mandated Child Abuse Reporting


Child Protective Services (CPS) Investigations


Decision-Making Processes


Realign Child Welfare Funding to Strengthen and Support Families and Promote Safety

Additional Source Documents


Frameworks Institute, [http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/mission.html](http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/mission.html)


[https://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/manda.pdf#Page=1&view=Fit](https://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/manda.pdf#Page=1&view=Fit)


