Evidence Based and Promising Practices with Latino Children and Families

**Cultural Mediator Programs**

Cultural Mediator Programs typically involve the use of lay community members, although they may also involve staff of community-based organizations. These individuals are specially trained to provide education and outreach to Latino families within their communities. Cultural mediators serve as mentors and coaches to Latino families involved in child welfare services to bridge the cultural gap by communicating differences and similarities between cultures. Cultural mediators may be assigned to specific cases and work in tandem with the designated caseworker throughout the life of the case, or they may serve as a mediator to specific populations (e.g., non-resident fathers) or at a specific point of service delivery (e.g., to help families understand the court process).

**Cultural Brokers**

The concept of cultural brokering originated in the health care field where it has been well documented as a valuable approach in delivering health care services to culturally diverse populations. The concept of cultural brokering is based on principles of cultural and linguistic competence, particularly as they concern collaboration with natural, informal support systems among diverse populations. Within child welfare, the use of cultural brokering emerged from the Family to Family initiative in Fresno County, where the model was used as a method to address the overrepresentation of African American children. In this model, cultural brokers receive initial and ongoing training by independent consultants and trainers. Cultural brokers are typically assigned at intake and accompany social workers at the point of initial contact. An evidence-based curriculum for the use of cultural brokers with African American families was developed by CaISWEC. Although initially applied to practice with African American families, it has since been expanded within Fresno County to practice with Latino families, and is currently being pilot tested in Orange County with Latino families.

**Outcomes:** When implemented with African American families in Fresno County, positive outcomes were reported in parents’ perceptions of the program. However, there was no difference in recurrence of maltreatment, length of time to case closure, type of placement, number of placement moves, and social worker visitations between cases with cultural brokers and those without.

**Promotoras Programs**

The concept of promotoras originates from the use of community health workers in medical settings to provide community education to rural populations, and has been practiced with Latino populations since the mid-1960s. Historically, promotoras are lay Latino community...
members who receive specialized training to provide basic health education in the community, although they are not professional health care workers. Promotoras also provide guidance in accessing community resources. Thus, promotoras serve as liaisons between their community, health professionals, and social service organizations. Although promotoras are typically volunteers, they may also be paid staff. Within child welfare settings, promotoras play a similar role as cultural brokers, acting as a coach and mentor to Latino families throughout the life of a case. In California, promotoras play a large role in the provision of services in Placer County, where the promotora program is run through the Latino Leadership Council. Promotoras provide services to youth and families across social service systems, including child welfare, health, juvenile justice, and education.

Outcomes: An evaluation of the promotora program in Placer County is in process, but preliminary findings show that families are more engaged in their service planning, demonstrate better follow through, and report greater satisfaction with services. Staff have reported a workload reduction in that the promotoras are providing additional support and linkages to services that allow them to focus on other aspects of service delivery.

Birth Parent Mentors
Programs involving birth parents mentors function similarly to cultural brokers and promotoras. Birth parents mentors are used across child welfare systems in a number of ways, and although the concept was not developed specifically to respond to the needs of Latino families, the concept can be viewed as culturally congruent in the same way that the use of cultural brokers or promotoras facilitates communication and bridges cultural gaps that may exist between child welfare agencies and Latino families. For example, as part of a larger father engagement program in Orange County, two bilingual and bicultural birth fathers have been hired to serve as mentors to fathers with current cases in the dependency system. In Contra Costa County, Parent Partners are assigned to families at the time of their initial dependency hearing to help parents understand their rights and responsibilities and to assist parents toward reunification.

Outcomes: In Contra Costa County, children whose parents were involved in the Parent Partner program were more likely to reunify within 12 months than children whose parents were not involved in the Parent Partner program. Specifically, 58.9% of children whose parents were involved in the Parent Partner program reunified, compared to 25.5% of children whose parents were not involved in the program.

Evidence-Based Parent Training Programs

The evidence-based parent training programs included here are those programs that are empirically supported and have been developed or adapted to respond to the unique needs of Latino children and families. A number of these programs have been tested with specific child
welfare outcomes, while others have demonstrated success in related outcomes, but have not been specifically tested within child welfare settings.

**Parent Training Programs Tested with Child Welfare Outcomes**

**Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT)**
PCIT has demonstrated efficacy in reducing behavior problems in young children and reducing negative parent-child interactions. PCIT involves 12-14 sessions where parents are taught skills to establish a nurturing and secure relationship with their child while increasing their child’s pro-social behavior and decreasing negative behavior. PCIT is the most tested among parent training programs in terms of cultural adaptations for use with Latino families.

*Outcomes:* Culturally tailored versions have demonstrated comparable outcomes to standard PCIT and improved outcomes over standard conditions in reducing children’s behavior problems and parenting stress. Culturally tailored versions have also reported positive outcomes in satisfaction and retention. Within child welfare settings, PCIT has demonstrated significant reductions in repeat maltreatment.

**Safe Care**
Safe Care is an evidence-based, behavioral-parent training program that targets risk factors for child physical abuse and neglect. The program involves an 18-20 week in-home intervention designed to improve parent communication and problem solving, improve parent-child and parent-infant bonding, and enhance home safety and health care skills, with the ultimate goal of preventing child abuse and neglect.

*Outcomes:* Safe Care has demonstrated efficacy in preventing first incidence of maltreatment and in reducing repeat maltreatment. A culturally adapted version is currently being implemented in San Diego County. Preliminary research has examined client perceptions of adherence, working alliance, and satisfaction and findings show that perceptions of service delivery were consistent for Latino and non-Latino clients, suggesting that adaptations made to engage Latino and Spanish-speaking clients can be done without compromising adherence to the model. Provider-client ethnic match and service receipt in Spanish were associated with more positive perceptions of adherence and satisfaction among Latino clients.

**Triple P – Positive Parenting Program**
Triple P is a preventively oriented parenting and family support strategy that has multiple levels of intervention of varying degrees of intensity. All levels aim to prevent behavioral, developmental and emotional problems in children. The program promotes (1) enhancement of skills, knowledge, confidence, and resourcefulness of parents; (2) more nurturing, safe, engaging, and nonviolent environments for children; and (3) children’s social, emotional, linguistic, intellectual, and behavioral competencies.

*Outcomes:* Results have demonstrated positive changes in parenting skills, child problem
behavior, and parental well-being in the small to moderate range. Within child welfare settings, Triple P has demonstrated positive outcomes in reducing substantiated maltreatment, out of home placements, and child maltreatment injuries. There have been no published or tested models including cultural adaptations, but some literature provides recommendations on how to adapt the model to meet the needs of diverse populations without compromising fidelity.

**Parent Training Programs NOT Tested with Child Welfare Outcomes**

**Familias Unidas**
Familias Unidas is a Latino-specific, parent-centered preventive intervention designed to foster parental investment, reduce adolescent behavior problems, and promote adolescent school bonding/academic achievement and protective factors against drug abuse and delinquency.

*Outcomes:* Familias Unidas has demonstrated effectiveness in increasing parental investment (encouragement, validation, support, involvement) and decreasing adolescent behavior problems. No impact on school bonding/academic achievement has been reported.

**Parent Management Training (PMT)**
PMT involves didactic instruction, modeling, role-playing, and home practice to teach parenting skills in encouragement, monitoring, discipline, and problem solving.

*Outcomes:* PMT is considered one of the most efficacious outpatient treatments for childhood behavior problems. An adaptation for Latino families (Nuestras Familias) has demonstrated benefits in both parenting outcomes (general parenting, skill encouragement, overall effective parenting) and youth outcomes (aggression, externalizing, likelihood of smoking and use of alcohol, marijuana, and other drugs).

**Los Niños Bien Educados (LNBE)**
LNBE is a culturally-adapted, parenting skill-building program designed expressly for Latino American parents. It is designed as a 12-session program to be used with small groups of parents and as a one-day seminar for larger groups. LNBE was developed from research with Latino American parents to determine which parenting issues are most important and most specific to this cultural group. Coverage of child abuse and proper parenting is included.

*Outcomes:* LNBE has demonstrated effectiveness in improving parents’ knowledge and awareness of parenting skills and parent self-reports have indicated satisfaction with training content. However, it has not been tested on children’s behavioral outcomes.
Evidence-based child welfare practice models included here are models that are based on empirically supported practices and ideally have shown promise in improving outcomes for Latino children and families.

**Family Group Decision Making (FGDM)**

FGDM recognizes the importance of involving family groups in decision-making. Typically, a trained coordinator brings together the family group and agency personnel to create and carry out a plan to safeguard children. Core elements of the FGDM model include:

1. An independent (i.e., non-case-carrying) coordinator is responsible for convening the family group meeting with agency personnel.
2. Agency personnel recognize the family group as their key decision-making partner.
3. Family groups have the opportunity to meet on their own.
4. When agency concerns are adequately addressed, preference is given to a family group’s plan over any other plan.
5. Referring agencies support family groups by providing the services and resources necessary to implement the agreed-on plans.

**Outcomes:** Findings regarding the use of FGDM are mixed, but studies have shown that the use of FGDM is associated with higher rates of reunification with parents, increases in relative placements, and lower re-entry rates. A federally funded evaluation of FGDM including randomized control trials is currently occurring through 2014 in Colorado, South Dakota, and Texas which is expected to yield the most robust information on outcomes of FGDM to date. Although data concerning the use of FGDM with Latino families is limited, one evaluation of an FGDM program in Texas found that 40% of Latino families who participated in FGDM were reunified, compared to only 13% of Latino families who did not participate in FGDM.

**Family to Family**

Family to Family is a family-centered, neighborhood-based initiative emphasizing family preservation and early intervention. Core elements of the Family to Family model include:

1. Building Community Partnerships – developing partnerships with community organizations in neighborhoods where referral rates are high.
2. Team Decision Making (a variation of FGDM).
3. Resource Family Recruitment, Development, and Support – finding and maintaining foster and kinship homes who can support children and families in their neighborhoods.
4. Self-Evaluation – teams of agency staff and community partners analyze data about key outcomes.

**Outcomes:** An evaluation of 11 sites (including 5 California counties) participating in Family to
Family from 2005 to 2008 found inconsistent, though generally positive results. The most consistent positive findings were in keeping siblings together, placing children with kinship caregivers, and placing children in their own neighborhoods. Outcomes for Latino families have shown that Latino children with high exposure to Family to Family were 29% more likely to exit foster care within 12 months than children with no exposure to the model.

**Differential Response**

Differential Response programs are designed to provide voluntary services to families with low-risk allegations by offering an alternative pathway to child welfare services from the traditional maltreatment investigation. Services provided to families are considered preventative in order to prevent future intervention. The process of tailoring services to diverse communities, including predominantly Latino communities, is described in the CalSWEC curriculum on Differential Response. Core elements of Differential Response programs include:

1. Two or more discreet responses to screened-in reports.
2. Assignment protocols are based on assessment of risk or other requirements.
3. There is capacity to reassign families to another pathway.
4. Families may refuse services in the non-investigation pathway.
5. There is no formal determination of whether maltreatment has occurred in the non-investigation pathway.
6. Caregivers are not indicated as perpetrators and are not listed in a Central Registry.

**Outcomes:** Differential Response programs have undergone multiple evaluations in many states, including California. The most consistent finding across studies is that participation in the non-investigation pathway has been demonstrated to reduce the numbers of post-program reports of alleged maltreatment (though differences were often modest and findings were associated with level of risk). Another finding across studies is that services are provided to families in the non-investigation pathway earlier than to those in the investigation pathway. Process evaluations indicate that families and program staff are more satisfied with the non-investigation pathway than with the investigation pathway. Most studies do not report specific outcomes for Latino families. However, one study that examined data from NCANDS across 5 states found that Latino children were slightly less likely than White children to be re-reported following participation in a Differential Response program.

**Family Finding**

Family Finding was initially designed to support the transition to adulthood for youth who have been in the foster care system for long periods of time, many of whom have lost ties to their birth families, as well as support from the child welfare system. The program sought to promote positive relationships and secure commitments from adults who will remain involved in a child’s life after they age out of foster care. However, in recent years, the model has also been implemented with children and youth new to out of home care, with the hope that by engaging relatives and securing permanent connections earlier in the case process, the
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frequency and timeliness of reunification could be improved, and the population of youth with limited connections would decrease over time. Core elements of Family Finding include:

1. Discovering at least 40 family members and important people in the child’s life.
2. Engaging as many family members and supportive adults as possible to participate in a planning meeting on how to keep the child safely connected to family members.
3. Planning for the successful future of the child with the participation of family members in family meetings.
4. Making decisions during the family meeting that support the legal and emotional permanency of the child.
5. Evaluating the permanency plans developed for the child.
6. Providing follow-up supports to ensure that the child and family can access and receive informal and formal supports to maintain permanency.

Outcomes: Family Finding programs have undergone numerous evaluations across diverse sites. While findings have been inconsistent, many programs have reported higher percentages of reunification with birth parents for children in Family Finding programs compared to control groups. Children receiving Family Finding also have had a shorter average length of time to permanent placement than control group children, and were more likely to experience placement stability. No specific outcomes for Latino children have been reported.

Safety Organized Practice/Signs of Safety
Safety Organized Practice involves a combination of child welfare practices based upon Signs of Safety that emphasize the safety of children within their homes. It unifies a number of evidence-based approaches in addition to Signs of Safety, including group supervision, motivational interviewing, and solution-focused treatment. Although not designed specifically to meet the needs of Latino families, Safety Organized Practice is built around the cultural humility framework to ensure that families know their culture is valued. Safety Organized Practice is being implemented extensively in Northern California in areas with large Latino populations.

Outcomes: Although the Safety Organized Practice approach has not yet been extensively evaluated, it is based on empirically-supported practices. However, additional research is needed to demonstrate the effectiveness of this model in achieving safety for children and youth involved in child welfare cases.

Practice Innovations with Latino Families
These practices include those that have not been specifically tested for their outcomes but have shown promise in facilitating engagement with Latino children and families and in addressing their unique needs.
Specialized Positions and/or Units
Practices that employ specialized positions and/or units involve the use of dedicated staff that have specialized knowledge of the Latino culture or specialized knowledge of unique issues that may affect Latino children and families, such as issues related to immigration or international collaboration. Specialized staff are typically bilingual and bicultural. Staff in these positions receive specialized training on culturally responsive practices and/or special issues that may arise during a case in order to ensure culturally responsive service provision. These staff may serve as primary caseworkers or as liaisons to assist in specific areas, such as complex immigration issues or to facilitate international collaboration. Examples include the following:

Special Skills Workers
Special Skills Workers are used in Sacramento County and are defined as staff that demonstrate specialized knowledge of the Latino culture, in addition to language. Special Skills Workers are typically assigned at intake; however, if the need is not identified at intake, caseworkers inform family members that they may request a Special Skills Worker. These workers also hold quarterly meetings to identify emerging issues impacting Latino families and make policy and practice recommendations. Special Skills Workers also meet quarterly with staff from the Mexican Consulate to review cases and address issues of collaboration across agencies.

International/Immigration Liaisons
International or Immigration Liaisons are used in a number of counties and serve as the point of contact with foreign agencies and representatives to ensure compliance with international treaties, policies, and law. Liaisons are typically assigned to any case involving a child who needs to connect with a foreign consulate and collaborate with child welfare staff to facilitate repatriation of minors in a foreign country and manage requests from foreign consulates. Liaisons also assist staff with coordination and notification when staff must travel to and from another country, and serve as a resource person to staff regarding all international issues that affect services to Latino families, as well as identify training needs among staff. Liaisons also assist caseworkers in identifying children who may be eligible for forms of immigration relief such as Special Immigrant Juvenile Status and assist staff in processing these applications.

Specialized Units
Specialized units typically house a staff of specialists that are uniquely trained to address the needs of Latino and/or immigrat families. Examples include units that are located within predominantly Latino communities and are specially trained to address the unique needs of Latino families, or staff that are specially trained in international and immigration issues. An example of this practice is the Special Immigration Status (SIS) Unit in Los Angeles County. This specialized unit was established to provide immigration services to all children eligible for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status. The SIS Unit handles the entire legalization process for referred cases until the child is approved or denied legal status and issued a “green card.” Cases eligible for these services are referred by regional offices to the SIS unit. The referring caseworker remains primary on the case and the SIS Eligibility Worker is assigned as secondary.
Workforce Development Strategies
Workforce development strategies are designed to facilitate the provision of linguistically and culturally responsive services to Latino children and families. These strategies range from recruitment programs for bilingual/bicultural staff, as well as specialized training for existing staff on cultural responsiveness, community engagement, and unique issues affecting Latino children and families. These strategies may also involve ongoing coaching and mentoring to staff to facilitate cultural responsiveness in case planning and service delivery.

Recruitment for bilingual/bicultural staff
Recruitment strategies vary by needs and resources of each agency, but typically include efforts to reach out to the Latino community and provide education on career opportunities. Recruitment activities may also take place at local or national conferences to recruit social workers entering the workforce. Long-term strategies may also be used that begin recruitment activities within community high schools or neighborhood mentoring programs.

Pay Differentials for Bilingual/Bicultural Staff
Pay differentials may be used to facilitate recruitment and retention of bilingual and bicultural staff by acknowledging their specialized skills. Pay differentials also acknowledge the increased workload that may result both from the complexity of cases involving Latino and/or immigrant families, as well as the need to translate documents and materials.

Staff training and education
In addition to general training in cultural responsiveness, specific training may be provided that addresses Latino culture, as well as unique issues that may impact Latino families, including those resulting from immigration-related concerns. Among California counties, a number of different avenues for providing training are used, including collaborations with community-based organizations, training by consular staff, training by Immigration and/or International Liaisons, and specially designed training programs based on the unique needs of the particular county. For example, in Orange County, staff developed a “Toolkit for Working with Immigrant Families” that illustrates how and when immigration issues may arise during a dependency case. Training curricula used in California and other states that address culturally responsive child welfare practice with Latino and/or immigrant families are available at the LPAC website.

Partnerships with Community Organizations
Partnerships with community organizations are designed to facilitate the provision of culturally responsive services to Latino children and families, as well as to ensure that services are provided by linguistically and culturally responsive providers. Collaborations with community organizations can also assist in workforce development strategies by providing opportunities for staff training and education on cultural issues, community resources, and the needs of specific populations. For example, in San Francisco County, the child welfare agency collaborates extensively with the Family Resource Center to provide preventive/early intervention services for Latino families in the community. Agency staff work collaboratively with FRC leadership to identify effective service models for use with Latino families that are
both evidence-based and culturally responsive. Agency staff also collaborate with FRC staff to recommend adaptations to existing programs in order to ensure cultural responsiveness.

**Community and/or Staff Advisory Groups**
Advisory groups are designed to provide a feedback mechanism between child welfare agencies and individuals with awareness of the unique issues affecting Latino children and families in their communities. Advisory groups typically consist of community members, although they may also consist of staff and/or service providers who regularly provide services to the Latino community. Advisory groups operate with different structures, but serve to examine issues affecting Latino families and recommend or develop strategies to improve policy and practice. Examples include:

- Spanish Speaking Workers Forum (Orange County)
- Cultural and Linguistic Competence Committee (Placer County)
- Specialized Skills Workers Meetings (Sacramento County)
- Spanish Speaking Foster Parents (San Diego County)
- Spanish Language Advisory Committee (Alameda County)

**Linguistically Responsive Services**
Linguistically responsive services ensure that families are provided information and services in their preferred language to facilitate engagement, build rapport, and establish trust. Written materials are provided in families’ preferred language to ensure families understand all activities, expectations, and timelines. The use of Language Determination Forms may facilitate the provision of linguistically responsive services by ensuring that families understand their options for receiving services in their preferred language. Examples of Language Determination Forms used in California counties are available at the LPAC website.

**Adoptive/Foster Parent Recruitment Programs**
Adoptive and foster parent recruitment programs typically provide targeted education and outreach to Latino communities to promote adoption and/or foster parenting. Activities typically include community engagement, such as hosting or participating in community events, targeted advertising on adoption and foster parenting opportunities within Latino communities, and ensuring that all materials and information concerning adoption and foster parenting are provided in both English and Spanish. For example, Nuestros Niños Adoptions is an adoption program used in San Diego County. The program serves as the point of entry for the Spanish-speaking population in order to recruit and approve Latino families to provide adoption services.

**Data Collection**
Data collection facilitates the ability to track outcomes to measure the effectiveness of services and interventions with Latino children and families. In addition to Latino ethnicity, these efforts may involve the collection of data on parental and/or child country of origin, as well as family members’ citizenship status. These additional elements acknowledge the diversity within the Latino population and facilitate a better understanding of the effectiveness of services among a
diverse population. Data collection efforts also typically involve a training component to ensure that accurate data regarding ethnicity, nativity, and citizenship are collected.