

# CHAPTER 1 CALIFORNIA'S TITLE IV-E CHILD WELFARE WAIVER DEMONSTRATION PROJECT, FINAL REPORT

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

### *1.1 The California Title IV-E Child Welfare Waiver Demonstration*

This report summarizes the evaluation findings of the California Title IV-E Child Welfare Waiver Demonstration Project evaluation of Intensive Services Components. The Waiver is a collaborative effort involving the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), California Department of Social Services (CDSS), county child welfare services agencies and the contracted evaluators at the University of California at Berkeley's Center for Social Services Research (UCB). The Waiver permitted the State and selected counties to waive federal and State restrictions on the use of Title IV-E funds in order to use funds flexibly to implement child welfare service innovations. Participating counties used funds to provide intensive, individualized services, thereby permitting children to remain at home, return home sooner or to be placed in permanent family settings. As with other Title IV-E Waiver projects the intent was to provide cost-neutral services.

### *1.2 California's Demonstration Projects*

California's Title IV-E Waiver Demonstration Project was approved by DHHS on August 19, 1997. During the first two years of the project, a number of challenges and unanticipated circumstances led to the redesign of California's original plan. Originally, California proposed to implement and evaluate three new approaches to child welfare services: the Kinship Permanence Component (KPC); the Extended Voluntary Component (EVC), and the Intensive Services Component (ISC). Counties submitted responses to a Request for Proposals covering a variety of proposals under these categories. The KPC was designed to provide subsidized guardianship to kin caregivers, thereby increasing support to families, encouraging more stable permanency plans, and preventing further reentries into the system. After approval of the Waiver projects, California concurrently implemented the statewide KinGap Program, which precluded the KPC program since an experimental design with random assignment was no longer viable. The EVC was designed to allow participating counties to extend the time period of voluntary placements from six to twelve months without a court dependency hearing or loss of federal foster care payment eligibility. Seven counties were selected to participate. However, in the 21-month enrollment period following the start of the project, three counties withdrew due to implementation difficulties, and no more than 10 children were enrolled from all participating counties. The lack of enrollment and county withdrawals led to a decision to phase the program down on August 31, 2000. A Final Report on EVP was submitted in May, 2002.

The Intensive Services Component originally consisted of the following innovative services and sub-studies: a) Family Group Decision Making/Family Conferencing (FGDM)<sup>1</sup>; b) Wraparound Services; c) Community Mentoring (ISCM); and d) Shared Family Care. FGDM and Wraparound will be described in more detail below. The Community Mentoring component was

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the remainder of the report, we use "FGDM" to refer to the program, and "conferences" to refer to the specific family decision-making meetings.

to provide family mentoring, emergency support, and other services to maintain and/or reunify families. By June 2002 the one participating county decided to close its ISCM program, before adequate data on the program's impact could be collected. The primary factor in deciding to close the program was the cost. The results of a final focus group revealed, for example, that implementation costs, which relied on in-kind contributions from community collaborators, did not materialize.

The Shared Family Care Component, originally conceived to be evaluated under the experimental randomized control design, yielded too few participants in the two counties to implement the study design. As a result, a pre-experimental evaluation design was incorporated into the ongoing evaluation by the National Abandoned Infants Resource Center (NAIRC) located at UCB, with additional private foundation funding.

This Final Report will summarize findings on the remaining Intensive Services components, FGDM and Wraparound. Five counties (Alameda, Humboldt, Los Angeles, Sacramento, and San Luis Obispo) implemented Wraparound programs. Two counties (Fresno and Riverside) implemented FGDM. While both types of programs are needs-driven, strength-based, family-centered approaches, there are marked differences between them.

Wraparound has been defined as a philosophy of care characterized by a planning process that results in a set of services and supports (S.K. Goldman, 1999). Wraparound involves professionals, family and others in an ongoing planning process to provide the services necessary to assist the child and family in changing and/or managing the child's behavior and increasing the family's self-sufficiency. While grounded in specific values and elements, the process of Wraparound is responsive to contextual characteristics, resulting in some degree of model variation. Initially developed in the field of mental health for children with severe emotional disorders and their families, Wraparound was implemented in this Demonstration Project with children and their families involved with the child welfare system. The two populations of children being served under the Wraparound portion of the Waiver were children residing in the most restrictive levels of group care in California, and children at-risk of being placed in the most restrictive levels of group care. Each county developed specific criteria for eligibility within the two target populations. In addition to the five counties participating in the Demonstration Project, Wraparound is currently being implemented throughout most of the State under Senate Bill 163, California's legislation enabling flexible use of State and county funds for child welfare placements, primarily for non-Title IV-E eligible children. As a result, each of the counties in the Demonstration Project concurrently provided Wraparound to federally-eligible children and state-eligible children. However, only Title IV-E federally eligible children are included in this evaluation.

FGDM is defined as a planned process in which parents/caregivers are joined by family, friends, and providers of community resources to decide what is best for the children and families involved with the child welfare system (Harper & Coburn, 1998). The values, philosophies, and recommended procedures are well documented. Because of FGDM's roots in both restorative justice and child welfare fields (Hassall, 1996), its targeted populations are highly varied among children, youth and families throughout many activities of the criminal justice and child welfare systems (see, for example, Buford & Hudson (2000)). FGDM in the context of child welfare denotes a family-centered approach to making decisions, in contrast to the traditional approach characterized by professionals maintaining complete control over the assessment and planning phases. More specifically, in the U.S. FGDM has been used to capitalize on family strengths to

develop service plans. Although the available literature does not specify the “dose” or the number of family conference meetings required to achieve specific outcomes, the intervention is meant to support the development of plans to assure child safety and/or placement decisions in the early phases of involvement. FGDM was also implemented for various purposes in many of the State’s county agencies. Two counties, Fresno and Riverside, participated in the Waiver study testing the efficacy of FGDM in different contexts. Fresno opted to implement FGDM in its Voluntary Family Maintenance Unit as a means of preventing out-of-home placements for children at-risk. Riverside used its Waiver FDGM program to facilitate placement stability and permanence for a population of children already in placement.

### ***1.3 The Waiver Evaluation***

The overarching hypothesis for the Waiver evaluation is that the flexible use of Title IV-E funds permitted implementation of service models that are at least as effective and cost-effective as standard services. In order to test these assertions and related questions, the Intensive Services study includes (a) an Impact Study involving random assignment to treatment and comparison groups that measures outcomes related to the treatment intervention; (b) a Process Study that examines the changes required to implement the interventions and the context in which county programs operate; (c) Model Fidelity assessment measures that explore the extent to which program implementation remained consistent with the defining philosophies and implementation objectives of each intervention; (d) a Cost Study that enumerates the costs of the Fresno County FGDM program, and (e) a Cost-Neutrality Study that addresses the Federal requirements for cost-neutrality in the use of waived Title IV-E dollars.

### ***1.4 Purposes of Final Report***

This report was produced as a requirement of the federal Waiver Demonstration contract between CDSS and the Children’s Bureau. The purpose of the report is to summarize and/or update findings from the following:

- 1) The Process Studies
- 2) Model Fidelity Studies
- 3) The Impact Studies in the areas of Child Safety, Permanence, Placement Stability, Child and Family Well Being, and Youth and Family Satisfaction
- 4) The Cost Study (FGDM in Fresno County)
- 5) The Cost-Neutrality Results

The Center for Social Services Research at the University of California, Berkeley, conducted all studies except the Cost-Neutrality Study, which was conducted by CDSS. This report will include a discussion of the findings, recommendations for further study, and a summary of “lessons learned” for future child welfare service delivery innovations. Note: many of the study documents referenced, such as interview protocols and instruments or annual process study reports, have been submitted previously and will not be included as appendices in this Final Report. Some of these documents can be found in previous reports at the study’s web site (<http://cssr.berkeley.edu/childwelfare/projectdetails.asp?name=waiver>). Inquiries can be made to the Principal Investigator ([ecohen@berkeley.edu](mailto:ecohen@berkeley.edu)).

In addition, summaries of the Extended Voluntary Placement results and the Community Mentoring Study are included in this report.

A few general notes about this report:

- 1) Regarding terminology, in the FGDM and Wraparound studies we have tried to use child- and family-friendly research language throughout when characterizing our research participants. For example, at the suggestion of stakeholders in the early planning, we refer to the “experimental” and “control” groups as “treatment” and “comparison” groups, despite the latter terms’ more typical use in quasi-experimental research designs.
- 2) In the absence of specific focus groups with State agency staff and managers, the UCB evaluation team provided CDSS staff an opportunity to review the UCB sections of the draft Final Report. The FGDM Process Study section contains some comments from their review as footnotes.
- 3) The FGDM and Wraparound study chapters can be read as “stand alone” studies. We separately discussed each study’s general methodology and those methodologies specific to their respective chapters. (The two Fidelity Studies, for example, were both highly unique and used different methodologies.) The Summary and Conclusions addresses both studies together.
- 4) The  $p$  value threshold for statistical significance testing was set at  $p \leq .05$ . Due to the small sample nature of some of the analyses, when an observed  $p$  value was higher (i.e.  $p < .10$ ) some of the analyses were flagged as “trends” worthy of note, albeit “not statistically significant”.

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