



Implementation of Concurrent Planning Practice in California: Supports for Fost-adopt Parents and Social Workers

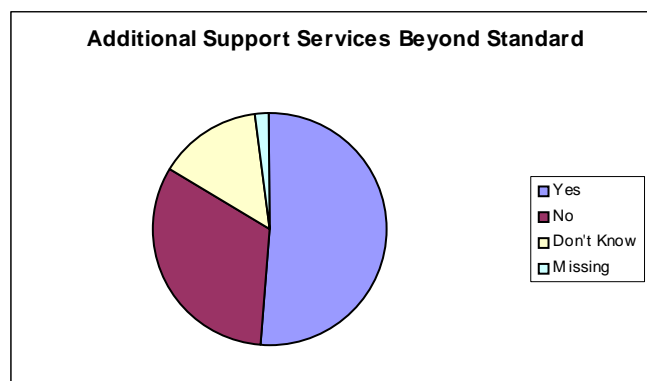
3 of 3

Concurrent planning is the practice of simultaneously offering reunification services to a child's family while searching for adoptive or guardianship homes — if the child's family fails to reunify, a permanent home is already available for the child. Concurrent planning has been heralded as a valuable tool for improving permanency outcomes within federally mandated timelines. However, concurrent planning models were developed in small, private agencies; how and with what success public agencies have been able to implement the practice with their larger caseloads and fewer resources is unclear. This document highlights the results of a survey of implementation of concurrent planning in California — the first study to systematically address how concurrent planning is being implemented in public child welfare

The experiences and impressions of practitioners suggests that certain supports may be necessary for effective concurrent planning practice. Some of these supports are: adequate training and support for foster parents¹, reducing social workers' caseloads² and frequent substantive case reviews³. This brief details the implementation of critical concurrent planning supports in California. This implementation study involved a survey of child welfare directors in 49 counties during 2003.

Supports for Fost-Adopt Parents

- Counties are split in terms of whether or not they provide additional supports for fost-adopt parents beyond what is provided to other foster parents. About half of counties report providing additional supportive services beyond what is already provided to foster parents.



Of those counties that do offer extra support to fost-adopt parents⁴:

- 60% offer specialized support groups.
- 52% offer a special liaison.
- 96% provide post-adoptive services.

1. Edelstein, S.B., Burge, D., & Waterman, J. (2002). Older children in preadoptive homes: Issues before termination of parental rights. *Child Welfare*, 81(2), 101-121.

2. Katz, L. (1999). Concurrent planning: Benefits and pitfalls. *Child Welfare*, 78(1), 71-87.

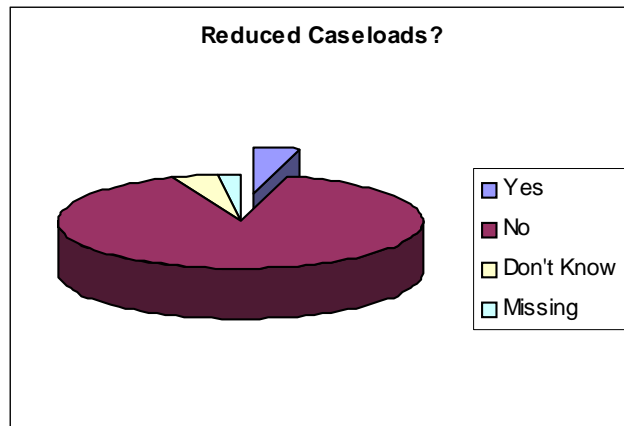
3. Lutz, L.L. (2000). *Concurrent planning: Tool for permanency – Survey of selected sites*. National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning, Hunter College School of Social Work of the City University of New York.

4. Respondents can indicate more than one.

- About 1/4 of counties use a different recruitment strategy to locate foster-adopt parents.

Supports for Social

- While almost all training for social planning, the major-fer any caseload concurrent plan-



Workers

agencies offer formal workers on concurrent ity of agencies do not of-reductions to facilitate ning.

- Just over 1/3 of agencies either co-locate adoption and reunification staff to facilitate concurrent planning with the passage of the law, or had already had this arrangement, while 60% did not take this action.
- Lastly, an additional review hearing has been suggested as a valuable support of concurrent planning, as it can encourage early consideration of parents' progress toward reunification and efforts toward alternative permanency. Ten counties, about 20% of the sample, have added an additional review hearing.

Analysis

Although virtually every evaluation, description, and summary of concurrent planning has emphasized the importance of supporting foster-adopting parents, half of the counties offer no additional supportive services to this group. While certainly such supports will be expensive, available practice wisdom on concurrent planning implies it is critical.

It is not surprising that social worker time constraints are considered problematic by so many counties (see Brief #2) since most rely on a single worker to pursue two goals simultaneously, yet virtually all fail to make any accommodations to support this increased effort by reducing caseloads. For counties using single worker models, reductions in caseloads for workers with active concurrent planning cases would maximize their effectiveness.

1. Williams, L. (1998). *Concurrent planning implementation guide*. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Social Services.; Katz, L. (1999). Concurrent planning: Benefits and pitfalls. *Child Welfare*, 78(1), 71-87.
 2. Malm, K., Bess, R. Leos-Urbel, J., Geen, R. & Markowitz, T. (2001). *Running to keep in place: The continuing evolution of our nation's child welfare system*. (Occasional Paper Number 54; Assessing the New Federalism). Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute.

For two worker models, co-location of adoption and reunification services would facilitate communication between the two workers.

Although an additional court hearing has been described as a valuable structural support for concurrent planning in that it prompts parties to consider pursuing concurrent planning in appropriate cases, relatively few agencies have chosen to introduce this change. Agencies may have decided that the risk of possible additional court delays and continuances involved with the introduction of new hearings may outweigh the potential benefit arising from heightened supervision. Agencies may wish to include additional administrative reviews early in child welfare cases to maintain a sense of urgency regarding permanency.

Methods

Technical Advisory Committee

To enhance the use and relevance of this study to child welfare practice, views of representatives from child welfare stakeholder groups were solicited. County child welfare agencies, the state Department of Social Services, juvenile court personnel, and other child welfare researchers were invited to participate in a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). TAC members assisted in developing research strategies and refining measures based upon their expertise and knowledge of the child welfare field. Feedback from the Technical Advisory Committee was solicited via meetings, letters, or occasional direct email queries.

Study sample, design and analyses

This was a cross-sectional descriptive exploratory study. A survey was mailed to child welfare directors in each of the 58 counties in California. Each child welfare director was asked to forward the survey to the employee most knowledgeable about concurrent planning implementation and practice in the county, if that person was other than him or herself. A series of mailings of letters, surveys and postcard reminders to increase response rates was done. A total of 49 of 58 surveys were returned for a response rate of 85%.

For more information, please contact:

Center for Social Services Research
School of Social Welfare
16 Haviland Hall #7400,
Berkeley CA 94720-7400

tel: 510.642.1899
fax: 510.642.1895

web: <http://cssr.berkeley.edu>