



Promising Practices in Concurrent Planning:

Formal and Informal Communication Opportunities Between Workers

5 of 6

This series of brief publications, *Promising Practices in Concurrent Planning*, provides descriptions of select practices identified through preliminary analysis of data from the study: **Child Welfare Permanency Reforms**. This study examines the implementation of concurrent planning in 6 California counties through focus groups and interviews with a variety of stakeholders in concurrent planning cases (i.e., social workers, supervisors, and child welfare managers; attorneys and judges; and foster parents and birth parents). Promising Practices from several non-study counties and agencies with well-developed concurrent planning approaches have also been examined. The practice approach described below represents work conducted in one or more of the following county child welfare agencies: Contra Costa, Mendocino, Monterey, Placer, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Mateo, and Yolo counties, as well as the Foster Family Agency, Sierra Adoptions. Although none of these Promising Practices have been empirically examined in terms of their impact on child and family outcomes, each of those highlighted appears to reflect and support efforts to implement concurrent planning.

Promising Practice: *Formal and informal opportunities for communication are available between workers with different responsibilities on concurrent planning cases (e.g., court workers, continuing services workers, and placement or adoptions workers)*

In some county agencies, a high degree of communication appears to occur between social workers regarding concurrent planning issues. Examples of factors facilitating this communication can be divided into three contributing influences: Structural (the organization of the Department), Formal (mandatory communication between workers), and Informal (non-mandatory communication between workers). The following is a description of one county's system and how it encourages communication between workers.

Structural

- Staff are organized into integrated teams. Each team includes at least one adoption worker and one licensing worker. In addition, there are several on-going (family reunification) social workers on the team.
- The integrated teams sit in close proximity to each other in the same building.
- Because it is a small county, the supervisor of the Court Unit is also the supervisor for the Adoptions Unit.

Formal

- The integrated teams have a weekly meeting during which they staff cases within their unit.
- Some Integrated Team supervisors require the social workers to prepare structured case presentations during the weekly meetings. This ensures that workers in various roles have an understanding of the range of case needs.
- An automated system tracks the length of time a child is in care, and flags cases for presentation to a concurrent planning review meeting to assure that the child is placed in a potentially permanent home (if appropriate). For children younger than three years old, the computer flags the cases after three months in care. For children older than three years old, the computer flags the cases after nine months in care. After the staffing, the case may be formally assigned to an adoption worker (within the case-carrying social worker's team) for follow-up.

Informal

- Because the agency is small, all of the social workers are familiar with one another and an open dialogue exists regarding cases and case plans.
- Adoption workers on each team act as consultants to the ongoing reunification social workers (and vice-versa) as an outgrowth of their integrated team function and personal familiarity.

Although the formal and informal opportunities for intra-agency communication may be most readily facilitated in smaller county agencies, larger agencies may benefit from efforts to similarly co-locate workers and integrate functions. Workers in one county using such an approach report ease of communication and access to a range of expertise that positively impacts casework, saying that "our entire staff is working together from the beginning to look at permanence issues."

