



Promising Practices in Concurrent Planning:

Integration of Child Welfare and Adoption Units and Agencies

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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: *The goals of child welfare and adoption units and agencies are integrated to promote concurrent planning, and the functions of each are carefully coordinated to meet these goals. This includes a formalized process of identification and “referral” of cases appropriate for concurrent placement, and training in the process conducted with workers and supervisors in all units of an agency. Whether an internal unit or an external agency is used for adoption services, cooperative working relationships are nurtured.*

The existing structure of child welfare and adoption services reflects a pre-concurrent planning separation of service provision. Study participants from several counties indicated that differences in organizational culture, training and philosophy exist between adoption and other child welfare workers. These differences may exist whether an internal adoption unit is used within a child welfare agency, or an external adoption agency provides those services. Under concurrent planning, a highly cooperative working arrangement between adoption and child welfare workers is required.

As an example of an external adoption agency, 28 California counties partner with the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to provide adoption services for their child welfare clients. Prior to concurrent planning, counties typically referred cases to CDSS for permanency assessments subsequent to the failure of family reunification. However, the implementation of concurrent planning services necessitates that child welfare and adoption agencies work together earlier to determine alternative plans for children, should they be unable to return home.

Mechanisms that appear to enhance the abilities of child welfare and adoption agencies to work together and provide timely concurrent planning and adoption services to their clients can be categorized as (1) Communication, (2) Service Provision, and (3) Compromise.

Communication

- Child welfare agencies have regularly scheduled review meetings during which both concurrent planning and adoption cases are staffed with representatives from the adoption agency. Generally this meeting is held at the child welfare agency and workers from any unit (emergency response through long term foster care) are invited to discuss any case in which permanency issues have been raised. All cases are staffed 60 days before the child welfare agency recommends termination of reunification services. During the review meeting joint decisions are made regarding the direction of the case and whether or not to make a formal referral to the adoption agency.
- Informal telephone and email contact between child welfare and adoption staff is encouraged to facilitate information-sharing and to educate each other about the details and trajectories of cases.
- Cross training between adoption and child welfare workers about roles and relevant policies is provided.
- Adoption and child welfare workers have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities in child welfare cases as outlined during periodic reviews of the existing Memorandum of Agreement between agencies. Such an understanding reduces duplication while promoting shared goals related to concurrent planning, and prevents conflict around case management duties.

Service Provision

- If requested by the child welfare worker, adoption workers are involved in the initial assessment of relatives for long-term placement.
- The adoption agency home-studies county-licensed foster homes with an expressed interest in adoption, to reduce the need for placement changes, assist county agencies with the cost of placement, and speed adoption finalization.
- Subsequent to the termination of parental rights and placement of the child into a potential adoptive home, the adoption agency provides the child welfare agency with written updates of progress toward finalization. This encourages timely finalization.

Compromise

- If there is a disagreement between child welfare and adoption staff, a meeting is held with supervisors from both agencies or units to determine the best plan for the child.

Child welfare workers interviewed reported an appreciation of the involvement of adoption workers as it provides “another pair of eyes and ears” on each case. Regular efforts to facilitate communication between agencies ensure that child welfare and adoption agency staff are sensitive to the challenges in integrating their service goals (family reunification and adoption) and that they work together toward an overall vision of permanence for the child.