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CHILD WELFARE PERMANENCY REFORMS

FUNDED BY THE DAVID AND LUCILE PACKARD FOUNDATION,
THE CALIFORNIA ENDOWMENT, AND THE STUART
FOUNDATIONS.

Concurrent Planning: Core Principles and Promising Practices

The following summary of Core Principles and Promising Practices in Concurrent Planning is based upon preliminary analyses of data from the study: **Child Welfare Permanency Reforms**. This research examines the implementation of concurrent planning in 6 California counties, through conducting 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). The list below is a summary of concepts and practices that appear to reflect and support efforts to implement concurrent planning. These are based upon identified needs, observations about existing practice, and recommendations made by stakeholders in study counties as well as other California counties with strong records of well-developed concurrent planning practices. Future documents will describe in greater detail several of the promising practices.

Core Principles

- Child welfare agencies embrace concurrent planning on many levels in order for the system to operate effectively. A commitment of resources accompanies philosophical commitments. Concurrent planning is supported through a combination of policies, procedures, training efforts and communication between professionals, and thus the full responsibility for concurrent planning does not rest with individual social workers.
- The service approach is built on the concurrent planning philosophy that adults, rather than children, should assume the emotional risk in foster care; it assumes that adults are better able to manage the ambiguity of relationships and the uncertainty of an unknown future than are children, so the emotional burden is shifted.
- Relative placements are included in agencies' overall approach to concurrent planning.
- Birth parents, concurrent placement families, and relative caregivers are fully informed about role expectations, the nature of concurrent planning, and their case status throughout the life of the case.
- Families providing concurrent placements are able to actively embrace reunification efforts of birth parents and receive proactive professional support necessary to do so.
- Social workers and agencies implementing concurrent planning actively support the efforts of families providing concurrent placements.
- Birth parents are provided with adequate services to support reunification in a timely fashion, including sufficiently frequent visitation.
- Children are placed in permanent homes as early as possible.
- Children experience placement moves as infrequently as possible.

Promising Practices

- Concurrent planning practice is institutionalized through communication of the principles listed above by agency directors and managers, and translation into policies and practices at a variety of levels. This includes training on concurrent planning for child welfare workers and supervisors in all units of the agency. (Training communicates institutional support for acting in “dual” roles and clarification of roles for child welfare workers in various parts of the agency with respect to concurrent planning). Practical tools for implementing concurrent planning (e.g., guidelines, checklists, referral forms) are actively developed and disseminated. Policies and procedures incorporate concurrent planning as a valued mode of child welfare practice (e.g., inclusion of concurrent planning as a standard in employee evaluations).
- A formal search for relatives and absent parents, including resolution of paternity issues and compliance with Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) requirements, takes place early in every case.
- Specific recruitment, screening, training and support is provided to concurrent placement families (kin and non-kin) to assist in preparing for the emotional and practical challenges of concurrent planning.
- Regular collaborative case reviews encourage thoughtful discussion of concurrent planning alternatives, and provide collegial and supervisory support for workers making difficult decisions within limited time frames. Reviews begin early in case involvement to identify children needing a permanent plan, and ensure participants retain a sense of urgency regarding the need to consider concurrent plans (e.g., prior to the Jurisdictional/Dispositional Hearing; every 3 months for children under 3 years and every 6 months for children over 3; and reviews every 6 months for all children past termination of reunification services).
- 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.
- Clear definitions and procedures are in place regarding the process and content of “full disclosure” regarding concurrent planning (e.g., who will know what, when, and how).
- 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 adoption workers).
- Intensive support services to birth parents are available early in the reunification process (e.g., at Detention and Disposition) to help manage emotional reactions, facilitate parents’ taking of responsibility, educate about the child welfare intervention process, and support engagement in services.
- Interagency committees and partnerships are developed in support of concurrent planning practice. Examples include a focus on early questions related to permanency (e.g., Behavioral Health screenings of all children and adults prior to Jurisdictional/Dispositional hearings, to consider service needs and their impact on case status), as well as later permanency issues (e.g., interagency review committees involving Child Welfare, Probation and Behavioral Health for older youth transitioning to emancipation, including an emphasis on identifying and forging relationships with individuals who can make a lasting emotional commitment to the youth).