

**Effectively Implementing Effective Practices for Sustainable Permanency:  
A Synthesis of Research and Practice**

**Submitted by the National Implementation Research Network  
March 2018**

**Background**

**Purpose of the Project.** The Colorado Department of Human Services' (CDHS) Division of Child Welfare is engaging in work to create a Sustainable Permanency Practice Model that meets the needs of children, youth and families; reduces the likelihood of reentry into foster care; and embeds the use of permanency best practices throughout the state for children and families. Driven by the goal of reducing the current rate of reentry into out of home care from 19.2% to 8.2%, CDHS is committed to using a predictive analytics and coaching service delivery strategy to ensure caseworkers and supervisors are able to engage children and families in services and programs matched to their specific needs.

**Partners in the Project.** CDHS is partnering with Casey Family Programs, the National Implementation Resource Network (NIRN), and Eckerd Connects to develop and implement a Sustainable Permanency Practice Model. In partnership with CDHS, NIRN will support initial development and long-term capacity to use and scale the practice model across the state. Also engaged in this collaborative endeavor is Eckerd Connects, who will be engineering the predictive analytics model and building the capacity of supervisors and case managers to use data to inform practice decisions. The practice model will include: 1) case management practices specifically for children identified as high risk for re-entry; and 2) permanency practices for all children and families in out of home placement. The predictive analytics model will inform the practice approach and alignment of resources based on risk of reentry prior to case closure. Coaching will be provided to support the use of predictive analytics and other available data to identify high-risk children and potential areas of need for these children and their families, and to use permanency practices with fidelity to address these identified needs. Across this project, Casey Family Programs serves as the funder and provides oversight and strategic consultation to all partners.

**Effective Practices for Sustainable Permanency: Necessary but Insufficient**

To realize our goal of reducing reentry into foster care for children and families requires a systemic approach to scale, sustain, and continuously improve permanency practices in child welfare. This approach is particularly important for vulnerable children and families impacted by maltreatment as we know that failed intervention often leads to reentry into out of home care. The formula below describes the critical pieces needed to scale and build sustainable capacity to use evidence-informed and evidence-based practices that will reduce child and youth's reentry into foster care.

## Effectively Implementing Effective Practices for Sustainable Permanency: A Synthesis of Research and Practice



In order to obtain positive outcomes for children and families, child welfare systems need to select and use effective practices, implement the practices in a deliberate and adaptive manner, and create an enabling context that sustains and continuously improves these practices (Metz & Easterling, 2016). These three conditions refer to **what** is implemented (effective practices), **how** it is implemented (effective implementation) and **where and with whom** (enabling context) it is implemented. The formula is multiplicative because weakness in any of these three areas will compromise the possibility of achieving the intended outcomes.

- **Effective Practices:** Strategies or practices that are supported by evidence, feasible to implement, fit the needs of the children, families, and community, and are well defined
- **Effective Implementation:** Intentional and visible infrastructure to build staff competency and create organizational and systems structures to support effective practices
- **Enabling Context:** Stakeholder collaboration, communication and feedback loops, and ongoing use of data to continuously improve effective practices in local contexts

The purpose of this research brief is to synthesize: 1) effective practices related to sustaining permanency for children who have previously been in an out of home placement thus reducing their likelihood of reentry into foster care; 2) effective implementation supports for ensuring that permanency practices are implemented with integrity; and 3) an enabling context that supports authentic stakeholder engagement and data use in service to continuous improvement of permanency practices. This brief provides a summary of findings for each area of the formula. To meet this need, we conducted a targeted research review to understand and align relevant research with formula components. Initially, literature was collated from a 2017 Casey Family Programs brief, *Supporting Lifelong Families: Ensuring Long-Lasting Permanency and Well-Being*, and other originating documents, which yielded approximately 29 documents for review. Next, a targeted literature search was conducted using the University of North Carolina article search database with the following search terms: permanency, re-entry/reentry, out-of-home care, foster care, reunification, and child welfare. Finally, relevant child welfare literature was drawn from the Child Welfare Information Gateway and California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse.

In order to select effective practices, it is essential to comprehensively assess the needs of the target population. This includes securing and analyzing data on the scope of the at-risk population within the community or jurisdiction, demographic characteristics, and relevant risk factors and child outcomes—often through state administrative data, local child welfare data, and agency case data. Ideally, data will be examined longitudinally and consider nuances such as geographical differences and disproportionate representation. But the selecting entity should also consider broader, more systemic factors, or “root causes” of the problem. For example, Akin et al. (2012) argue that assessing target population needs in child welfare also encompasses understanding barriers faced by parents—such as poverty and social supports, parental clinical needs, parenting, and home and environmental stressors, as well as systems barriers—such as staffing capacity and turnover, siloed child and parent service systems, or barriers with the legal system—that may impede permanency (Metz, Bartley, & Maltry, 2017).

## Effectively Implementing Effective Practices for Sustainable Permanency: A Synthesis of Research and Practice

Thus, we begin by summarizing possible predictors of re-entry into foster care consistently cited across research. Though predictive analytics modeling will provide CDHS with a firsthand understanding of the characteristics common to families experiencing reentry into foster care within its child welfare system, this summary also provides helpful context as we illustrate how these factors have informed policy and practice.

Higher rates of re-entry into out of home care have been linked to 1) child, 2) parent and family, and 3) case or service-level characteristics as follows (Bronson, Saunders, Holt, & Beck, 2008; Carnochan, Rizik-Baer, & Austin, 2013; Kimberlin, Anthony, & Austin, 2009):

- Child Characteristics
  - Race and ethnicity
  - Infant age and pre-teen/teenaged
  - Medical, mental, or behavioral health needs
  
- Parent/Family Characteristics
  - Parental ambivalence about parenting role
  - Lack of parenting skills and social support
  - High number of parent problems
  - Parental substance abuse
  - High number of children living the home and/or returning home
  - Low income/poverty status
  
- Case/Service-Level Characteristics
  - Short length of stay in foster care
  - Neglect as maltreatment type
  - High number of placements
  - Placement in group home or residential setting (vs. kinship care, which has been associated with lower rates of re-entry)
  - Lack of parent involvement in case planning
  - Lack of parent visitation and contact
  - Unmet need/continuing need for services at the time of reunification.

## Effectively Implementing Effective Practices for Sustainable Permanency: A Synthesis of Research and Practice

| Effective Practices   |  |  |   |
|---|--|--|---|
| <i>Strategies or practices that are supported by evidence; feasible to implement; fit the needs of the children, families, and community; and are well defined.</i> |  |  |   |
| Practices to Sustain Permanency/Reduce Reentry  | Definition or Core Components Identified   | Main Findings of Research  | Citations   |
| <p><b>Therapeutic supports</b> to enhance parent-child interactions</p>   | <p>Core components include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extensive training and ongoing consultation/coaching and support for caregivers;</li> <li>• Therapeutic supports for children;</li> <li>• Emphasis on concrete encouragement and praise for positive child behavior; and</li> <li>• Use of a developmental framework.</li> </ul> <p>Examples of EBPs that use these core components include Treatment Foster Care Oregon (TFCO-P) and Parent Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In a study of 54 children randomly assigned to a foster treatment model or regular foster care, permanent placements failed for 36% of the children in regular foster care vs. only 10% of the children in EIFC.</li> <li>• Studies have shown that PCIT is effective in reducing child behavior problems, improving parenting outcomes, and reducing maltreatment recurrence among physically abusive parents.</li> </ul>  | <p>Fisher, Burraston, &amp; Pears, 2005</p> <p>Carnocahn, Rizik-Baer, &amp; Austin, 2013</p>  |
| <p><b>Intensive in-home services</b> during and after foster care</p>   | <p>Core components include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intervention at the crisis point (therapists see families when they are in crisis, within 24 hours of referral);</li> <li>• Treatment in natural settings;</li> <li>• Accessibility and responsiveness (therapists are on call 24/7; families are given as much time as they need);</li> <li>• Intensity (services are time limited and typically 4 weeks - each family receives 40-50 hours of direct service);</li> </ul>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In an evaluation of an intensive in-home family reunification program, families in the program experienced fewer re-referrals to authorities than comparison families 24 months after program intake (25.2% vs. 32.5%).</li> <li>• It is important to note that research on effectiveness of similar service models in reducing subsequent maltreatment and re-entry into foster care has been mixed, with some studies noting an increased rate of re-entry and others finding no significant difference between program participants</li> </ul> | <p>Kimberlin, Anthony, &amp; Austin, 2009</p> <p>Pine, Spath, Werrbach, Jenson, &amp; Kerman, 2009</p> <p>Fraser, Walton, Lewis, Pecora, &amp; Walton, 1996</p> |

## Effectively Implementing Effective Practices for Sustainable Permanency: A Synthesis of Research and Practice

| <b>Effective Practices</b><br><i>Strategies or practices that are supported by evidence; feasible to implement; fit the needs of the children, families, and community; and are well defined.</i> |  |  |   |
|---|--|--|---|
| Practices to Sustain Permanency/Reduce Reentry  | Definition or Core Components Identified   | Main Findings of Research  | Citations   |
|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low caseloads (2-3 families at a time);</li> <li>Use of research-based interventions; and</li> <li>Flexibility (services are provided when and where the client wishes).</li> </ul>   | and control/comparison group participants.   | <p>Carnocahn, Rizik-Baer, &amp; Austin, 2013</p> <p>Lee, Jonson-Reid, Drake, 2012</p>   |
| <b>Increased contact</b> between workers and caregivers   | <p>Core components include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishing open, honest communication with caregivers;</li> <li>Requesting family participation and feedback in planning processes; and</li> <li>Instruction and reinforcement in the performance and completion of mutually agreed-upon activities.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A review of both literature and previous CFSR Final Reports have highlighted the importance of family engagement in promoting reunification.</li> <li>Some research has suggested that increased contact and time spent between caseworkers and families improves engagement and facilitates successful reunification.</li> <li>In another study, the only significant predictors of timely reunification were age (each year younger a child was, there was a 5% increase in reunification odds) and case worker inclusion of caregiver in case activities and decisions.</li> <li>Children had a higher chance of reunification within 12 months after placement in out-of-home care when the case worker involved the caregiver in decisions and activities impacting the children compared to cases where no</li> </ul> | <p>Bronson, Saunders, Holt, &amp; Beck, 2008</p> <p>Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011</p> <p>Yampolskaya, Armstrong, Strozier, &amp; Swanke, 2017</p> |

## Effectively Implementing Effective Practices for Sustainable Permanency: A Synthesis of Research and Practice

| Effective Practices   |  |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|
| <i>Strategies or practices that are supported by evidence; feasible to implement; fit the needs of the children, families, and community; and are well defined.</i> |  |  |  |
| Practices to Sustain Permanency/Reduce Reentry  | Definition or Core Components Identified   | Main Findings of Research  | Citations  |
|   |  | efforts were made to encourage caregivers' participation.  |  |
| <b>Comprehensive Assessments</b>  | Accurate assessment to understand underlying causes of maltreatment is defined as a process that “involves developing an individualized, family-centered understanding of a child and family’s circumstances, environment, and potential in order to identify each family’s unique needs, determine the extent of the risk to the child, and to construct an appropriate intervention plan.” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State experiences as captured in CFSR reports indicate that initial family assessments play a vital role in informing case plans, which can either facilitate or hinder reunification.</li> <li>• As noted above, unmet family needs at the time of reunification have been linked to higher rates of re-entry into foster care, and similarly, one study on failed reunifications highlighted “poor assessment or decision-making by the caseworker or service provider” as a factor in nearly two-thirds of the cases.</li> <li>• Comprehensive and timely family assessment can be used to assess a family’s strengths and needs adequately to match them appropriately to services to meet those needs.</li> </ul> <p>Promising assessments identified in literature include the <i>North Carolina Family Assessment Scales for Reunification</i><sup>1</sup> and the <i>Structured Decision Making Reunification Reassessment</i><sup>2</sup>.</p> | <p>Bronson, Saunders, Holt, &amp; Beck, 2008</p> <p>Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2017</p> <p>Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011</p> |

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nfpn.org/assessment-tools>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nccdglobal.org/assessment/structured-decision-making-sdm-model>

## Effectively Implementing Effective Practices for Sustainable Permanency: A Synthesis of Research and Practice

| Effective Practices  |  |   |   |
|--|--|---|---|
| Strategies or practices that are supported by evidence; feasible to implement; fit the needs of the children, families, and community; and are well defined. |  |   |   |
| Practices to Sustain Permanency/Reduce Reentry   | Definition or Core Components Identified   | Main Findings of Research   | Citations   |
| <b>Caregiver skill development</b>   | Defined as “services to increase parents’ skill levels in a number of areas” including but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behavioral management techniques;</li> <li>• Coping skills; and</li> <li>• Problem-solving skills.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviews of experimental/quasi-experimental studies and conceptual literature related to reunification and re-entry identified parent skill training as a common feature across programs and as a service often associated with improved reunification and reduced re-entry into foster care outcomes.</li> <li>• An annual report from the <i>California Department of Social Services</i> reported maltreatment recurrence rates for children whose parents completed the Incredible Years program (a child, parent, and teacher training program) as 2 to 6 percentage points lower than children of parents who did not.</li> </ul> | Bronson, Saunders, Holt, & Beck, 2008<br><br>Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2017<br><br>Carnocahn, Rizik-Baer, & Austin, 2013 |
| <b>Mental health and substance abuse services</b>  | Three promising types of service delivery include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intensive case management including “recovery coaches” to facilitate assessments, conduct service planning, and eliminate barriers to accessing treatment;</li> <li>• Tailored programs for child-welfare involved mothers and their children; and</li> <li>• Strong use of social support.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In a study of more than 6,000 children who re-entered foster care in California, children whose case plan included drug or alcohol services were more than twice as likely to re-enter care.</li> <li>• Several studies report the likelihood of reunification increases when mothers in substance abuse treatment programs also receive matched services to address co-occurring problems.</li> </ul>   | Shaw, 2006<br><br>Bronson, Saunders, Holt, & Beck, 2008<br><br>Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011                            |



## Effectively Implementing Effective Practices for Sustainable Permanency: A Synthesis of Research and Practice

| <b>Effective Practices</b><br><i>Strategies or practices that are supported by evidence; feasible to implement; fit the needs of the children, families, and community; and are well defined.</i> |   |   |  |
|---|---|---|--|
| Practices to Sustain Permanency/Reduce Reentry  | Definition or Core Components Identified  | Main Findings of Research   | Citations  |
| <b>Anti-poverty and concrete services for families</b>  | Material supports were defined as “any reception of financially-related assistance, including housing, rent, utilities, food or clothing, appliances, furniture or home repair and other financial help. Traditional services include reception of the following “medical or dental care, disability care, cooking or cleaning help, mental health services, alcohol or drug treatment, parenting classes, marital family counseling, child counseling, legal services, daycare, respite care, discussion groups, education classes, and employment assistance” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Families who need concrete services and receive them are more likely to reunify than those with unmet needs.</li> <li>• Anti-poverty services that included material supports resulted in a reduction in later reports and placements of children.</li> <li>• Effective programs or practices provide services to meet a family’s concrete needs <i>and</i> coach families on how to access community resources to meet their needs independently in the future</li> </ul> | <p>Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011</p> <p>Bronson, Saunders, Holt, &amp; Beck, 2008</p> <p>Simon &amp; Brooks, 2016</p> <p>Lowman &amp; Siegel, 2012</p> |
| <b>Social support</b>   | “Helping parents strengthen their support networks and building community partnerships for child protection provide informal and formal opportunities for families to deal with stresses”   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social support has been identified as a critical component of post-reunification support, and lack of social support or a social network has been linked to increased risk of re-entry for children.</li> </ul>  | <p>Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2017</p> <p>Bronson, Saunders, Holt, &amp; Beck, 2008</p> <p>Kimberlin, Anthony, &amp; Austin, 2009</p>                    |
| <b>Respite care</b>   | Defined as short term care services provided in the temporary absence of the regular caregiver to children who a) are in  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respite care has been found to lower stress among families. An ARCH study from 2007 noted that although families with prior CPS</li> </ul>   | Carnocahn, Rizik-Baer, & Austin, 2013  |



## Effectively Implementing Effective Practices for Sustainable Permanency: A Synthesis of Research and Practice

| <b>Effective Practices</b><br><i>Strategies or practices that are supported by evidence; feasible to implement; fit the needs of the children, families, and community; and are well defined.</i> |   |   |  |
|---|---|---|--|
| Practices to Sustain Permanency/Reduce Reentry  | Definition or Core Components Identified  | Main Findings of Research   | Citations  |
|   | danger of abuse or neglect; b) have experienced abuse or neglect; or c) have disabilities, chronic, or terminal illnesses in order to enable the family to stay together and keep the child living in his or her home and community.  | history were referred more often, their substantiation rate was lower.  |  |
| <b>Family group decision making</b>   | Defined as processes (e.g., family team meetings, team decision-making) during which families are aligned with agency personnel and others as active participants in identifying underlying issues and making decisions and planning for care of their children                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parental involvement in six-month progress meetings is associated with lower rates of re-entry among younger children.</li> <li>• Overall, family group decision-making processes are linked to greater family engagement, increased reunification, and reduced rates of re-entry.</li> </ul>  | <p>Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2017</p> <p>Kimberlin, Anthony, &amp; Austin, 2009</p> |
| <b>Assessment of parental ambivalence/ readiness</b>  | An assessment of readiness for reunification, such as the North Carolina Family Assessment Scale for Reunification (NCFAS-R), can be useful in helping case workers determine when and whether to reunify a family and identify and plan for supports that may be needed during the transition period | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A study examining the impact of various factors upon re-entry into foster care for a sample of 512 children found that children whose parents were viewed as motivated to improve parenting were 60% less likely to re-enter care.</li> <li>• Conversely, parental ambivalence about the parenting role has been linked to increased rates of re-entry.</li> </ul> | <p>Wells &amp; Correia, 2012</p> <p>Bronson, Saunders, Holt, &amp; Beck, 2008</p>            |
| <b>Mental and behavioral services</b> for children  | Programs should address child trauma both relating to the reason for removal and the removal itself as well as stressors associated with returning home.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child mental and behavioral health needs are commonly cited as predictors of re-entry into foster care.</li> </ul>   | Jedwab & Shaw, 2017  |

## Effectively Implementing Effective Practices for Sustainable Permanency: A Synthesis of Research and Practice

| Effective Practices   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| <i>Strategies or practices that are supported by evidence; feasible to implement; fit the needs of the children, families, and community; and are well defined.</i> |   |   |   |
| Practices to Sustain Permanency/Reduce Reentry  | Definition or Core Components Identified  | Main Findings of Research   | Citations   |
|   | <p>For youth with more complex needs, services can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Care coordination</li> <li>• Team meetings</li> <li>• Youth mentoring</li> <li>• Afterschool care</li> <li>• Tutoring</li> <li>• Parent coaching</li> <li>• Respite care</li> <li>• Psychiatric services</li> <li>• Outpatient therapy</li> <li>• 24/7 crisis intervention for caregivers</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In a study of 4,642 children exiting from care to reunification over a three-year period, the authors found that when child behavioral challenges were indicated as a reason for removal they were 1.5 times more likely to re-enter care than children without this indicator.</li> </ul>   | <p>Madden, McRoy, Maher, &amp; Ward, 2009</p> <p>Roberts, O'Brien, &amp; Pecora, 2017</p>       |
| <b>Post-reunification services</b>  | <p>“Post-reunification practices occur after a child is returned home and help to support a family in maintaining successful reunification.”</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In a review of states’ Final CFSR Reports, post-reunification services are cited as a crucial practice in reducing maltreatment recurrence and re-entry to foster care.</li> <li>• Research highlights that services that enhance parenting skills, provide social support, connect families to basic resources, and address children’s behavioral and emotional needs are critical and can help to prevent re-entry into care.</li> </ul> | <p>Carnocahn, Rizik-Baer, &amp; Austin, 2013</p> <p>Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011</p> |

## Effectively Implementing Effective Practices for Sustainable Permanency: A Synthesis of Research and Practice

| <b>Effective Implementation Methods</b><br><i>Intentional and visible infrastructure to build staff competency and create organizational and systems structures to support the use of effective practices for sustainable permanency<sup>3</sup></i> |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|
| Infrastructure supports that build staff competency to deliver permanency practices and create administrative, data, and systems supports for effective implementation   | Definition or Context  | Main Findings of Research  | Citations  |
| <b>Case worker training to support use of permanency practices</b>   | Training that includes both workers and supervisors at the same time and addresses definitions, relationships, and practice was the type of training most related to transfer to skills and knowledge.   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training plus reinforcement was the most successful way to transfer training knowledge and skills in one study of child welfare workforce training. The reinforcement involved a half-day of face-to-face case consultation.</li> </ul>   | Antle, Barbee, Sullivan, & Christensen, (2008)                                       |
| <b>Access to ongoing coaching, supervision and support to ensure fidelity to permanency practices</b>  | Effective supervision was defined as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Successful application of knowledge to practice, connecting caseworkers to the agency mission, building supportive organizational structures, being an effective leader, and promotion success among employees.”</li> <li>• Coaching and supervision that reinforces skills, includes observations, reinforces relationships, and provides feedback and ongoing support to staff.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective supervision increases worker retention and staff satisfaction, and likelihood of effective practice.</li> <li>• Supervisor educational, social, and administrative support can contribute to a worker’s effectiveness in quality service delivery, improving worker capacity to define “next steps”, improve client engagement, and improve goal attainment among clients.</li> <li>• “Delivery of quality supervisions, supervisors being skilled in mentoring and providing feedback, and supportive practice standards have been related to successful child welfare case completion,</li> </ul> | Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015<br><br>Saldana, Chamberlain, & Chapman, 2016 |

<sup>3</sup> Effective implementation includes methods demonstrated to support the use of effective practices in public child welfare. While not all methods have been empirically tested with the use of effective sustainable permanency practices specifically, these methods have been identified through rigorous research to support the use of evidence-based practices and programs to improve outcomes for children and families including permanency.

## Effectively Implementing Effective Practices for Sustainable Permanency: A Synthesis of Research and Practice

| <b>Effective Implementation Methods</b><br><i>Intentional and visible infrastructure to build staff competency and create organizational and systems structures to support the use of effective practices for sustainable permanency<sup>3</sup></i> |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|
| Infrastructure supports that build staff competency to deliver permanency practices and create administrative, data, and systems supports for effective implementation   | Definition or Context   | Main Findings of Research   | Citations   |
|  |   | lower re-entry into the system, as well as CWS staff retention”   |   |
| <b>Assessments of permanency practice</b> (Fidelity)   | Fidelity data are data that measure the extent to which the evidence-based or evidence-informed program or practice have been implemented as intended.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fidelity monitoring demonstrated a protective effect on staff turnover, therefore decreasing the number of child welfare staff on a case, in one state-wide randomized trial in child welfare.</li> </ul>  | Aarons, Sommerfeld, Hecht, Silovsky & Chaffin, 2009   |
| Dedication of <b>funding to support post-reunification services</b>  | Funding is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Designated specifically for post-reunification services with clear eligibility requirements;</li> <li>Flexible; and</li> <li>Braided to leverage all existing and available streams (Title IV-B, SSBG, Medicaid, TANF, etc.).</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>States are unable to draw down federal Title IV-E funding for case management and supports once a child is reunified with his or her caretaker. Other federal funding such as Title IV-B can be used to support post-reunification services, but there are challenging time limits (e.g., use limited to a 15-month time period beginning when the child is officially placed into foster care).<sup>4</sup></li> <li>Unmet service needs at the time of reunification have been shown to increase the risk of re-entry. Reunification can be a time of adjustment for families and that stress can make it difficult to maintain</li> </ul> | Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011<br><br>Sciamanna, 2013<br><br>Roberts, O’Brien, & Pecora, 2017<br><br>Bronson, Saunders, Holt, & Beck, 2008 |

<sup>4</sup> Analysis of how the Families First Act will impact permanency services is needed.

## Effectively Implementing Effective Practices for Sustainable Permanency: A Synthesis of Research and Practice

| Effective Implementation Methods  |                       |  |           |
|---|-----------------------|--|-----------|
| <i>Intentional and visible infrastructure to build staff competency and create organizational and systems structures to support the use of effective practices for sustainable permanency<sup>3</sup></i> |                       |  |           |
| Infrastructure supports that build staff competency to deliver permanency practices and create administrative, data, and systems supports for effective implementation                                    | Definition or Context | Main Findings of Research  | Citations |
|   |                       | stability, especially when there are a number of complex and co-occurring needs. |           |

| Enabling Context   |   |   |                    |
|--|---|---|--------------------|
| <i>Stakeholder collaboration, communication and feedback loops, and ongoing use of data to continuously improve effective practices in local contexts (e.g., coordination with courts or Juvenile Justice)<sup>5</sup></i> |   |   |                    |
| Systems alignment efforts including stakeholder engagement strategies and data use for improvement   | Definition or Context   | Main Findings of Research   | Citations          |
| <b>Effective collaboration</b> among stakeholders to support coordination and implementation of permanency practices   | Key findings related to effective collaboration included shared vision, building on existing relationships, academic support, problem solving and resource sharing, and maintaining collaborations over time. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In a study of 11 child welfare systems implementing SafeCare to reduce child neglect recidivism rates, sites that were able to fully sustain the model reported significantly greater levels of effective collaboration as measured by a collaboration scale.</li> </ul> | Green et al., 2016 |

<sup>5</sup> Promoting an enabling context includes strategies demonstrated to support systems alignment in public child welfare. While not all strategies have been demonstrated to support alignment for sustainable permanency practices specifically, these strategies have been identified as best practices to support systems alignment in service to improved outcomes for children and families.

## Effectively Implementing Effective Practices for Sustainable Permanency: A Synthesis of Research and Practice

|  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|
| <p><b>Coordination with courts to support permanency practices</b></p>                           | <p>Research findings demonstrated the importance of collaboration between public agency staff and family court in supporting sustainable reunification efforts.</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Younger children whose exits from care were initiated by the child welfare agency as opposed to a court system were less likely to re-enter care.</li> <li>• Similarly, a study analyzing 3 years' worth of data from a state's administrative child welfare system found that children whose reunification was court-ordered against the agency's recommendation were twice as likely to re-enter care.</li> </ul>   | <p>Kimberlin, Anthony, &amp; Austin, 2009</p> <p>Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011</p> <p>Jedwab &amp; Shaw, 2017.</p>   |
| <p><b>Effective data systems</b> for quality improvement of permanency practices<sup>6</sup></p> | <p>Careful analysis of data in child welfare is required to understand how well services are being delivered, whether services are meeting the needs of children and families, and if services result in desired outcomes for children and families. Fidelity, monitoring, and feedback have been identified as essential components of successful and sustained implementation of evidence-based programs or practices.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research has indicated a number of benefits resulting from effective CQI processes including increased staff retention, increased involvement of staff in using data for improvement, improved referral processes, and improved outcomes for children and families.</li> <li>• Improved outcomes for children and families include reductions in the number of children placed in out-of-home care, increased percentages of children in family homes, decreased number of children in group homes, increased adoptions, improved placement stability, and increased number of investigations that are open less than 60 days.</li> </ul> | <p>Chovil, 2009</p> <p>Aarons, Sommerfeld, Hecht, Silovsky &amp; Chaffin, 2009</p> <p>Sedler, Bruns, Walker, Kerns &amp; Negrete, 2015</p> <p>Packard, McCrae, Phillips, &amp; Scannapieco, 2015</p> <p>Ahn, Carter, Reiman, &amp; Hartzel, 2017</p> |
| <p><b>Policies</b> that support permanency practice</p>  | <p>Agency policies and practices refer to practices agencies can put into place to</p>   | <p>Agency-level promising practices that reduce the likelihood of reentry include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-Planning</li> </ul>  | <p>Hatton &amp; Brooks, 2008</p>   |

<sup>6</sup> Please note that predictive analytics would be included in data use activities designed to support effective implementation of effective practices.

## Effectively Implementing Effective Practices for Sustainable Permanency: A Synthesis of Research and Practice

|   |  |   |  |
|---|--|---|--|
|   | <p>support permanency and reduce the likelihood of reentry.</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post placement services</li> <li>• Setting up formal and informal services</li> <li>• Participatory case planning practices</li> <li>• Assessing family readiness for reunifying children</li> <li>• Effective parent-child visitation</li> </ul>  |  |
| <p><b>Public-private partnerships</b> in service to the use of sustainable permanency practices</p> | <p>Child welfare presents unique challenges in ensuring effective public-private partnerships since services are often coordinated or provided through community-based organizations, and public child welfare agencies frequently rely on a network of service providers. Additionally, many treatments for families are provided through behavioral and mental health systems.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective public-private partnerships are strengthened through effective teaming structures that can support information sharing, problem solving, and feedback and coordination among the public agency and nonprofit service providers who support permanency for families.</li> </ul> | <p>Metz, Bartley, &amp; Maltry, 2017</p> |



# Effectively Implementing Effective Practices for Sustainable Permanency: A Synthesis of Research and Practice

## Summary and Next Steps

In partnership with the NIRN, Casey Family Projects, and Eckerd Connects, CDHS is creating a Sustainable Permanency Practice Model that meets the needs of children, youth and families. A critical piece of this work involves aligning caseworkers and supervisors' use of permanency best practices, strengthened by coaching and data from predictive analytics that identify children, youth, and families' needs. In order to develop capacity to adopt and implement a permanency practice model, effective practices must be selected, operationalized, and embedded within a system that supports their on-going use and continuous improvement (Metz & Easterling, 2016). This brief shared a variety of best practices to support sustainable permanency and reduce reentry into foster care (e.g., what is implemented) while also identifying critical factors in effective implementation (e.g., how practices are implemented) and development an enabling context (e.g., where and with whom) that supports this work.

With the knowledge from this brief in hand, next steps toward reaching the goal of reducing reentry into foster care include using data drawn from predictive analytics to identify the most frequent barriers to sustained permanency and addressing these challenges with best practices in the form of case management and targeted services for children and families. As these best practices are identified, they should be examined and operationalized (what is it that caseworkers and supervisors will "say and do" to support sustainable permanency?). Once best practices are identified and operationalized, systems for training and coaching can be developed and employed to foster the abilities and skills of frontline child welfare staff. At the same time, attention must be given to the systems within which these practices will reside, so conditions to support on-going improvement and problem solving are available. As noted earlier, identifying and using effective practices is a necessary but insufficient step to reduce reentry rates. Attention must also be directed at creating systems to support their use and continuous improvement in order to achieve positive outcomes for children, youth, and families.

## References

- Aarons, G., Sommerfeld, D.H., Hecht, D.B., Silovsky, J.F., & Chaffin, M.J. (2009). The impact of evidence-based practice implementation and fidelity monitoring on staff turnover: Evidence of a protective effect. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 77*, 270-280.
- Ahn, H., Carter, L.M., Reiman, S., & Hartzel, S. (2017). Development of a quality assurance and continuous quality improvement (CQI) model in public child welfare systems. *Journal of Public Child Welfare, 11*, 166-189.
- Akin, B. A., Bryson, S.A., McDonald, T., & Walker, S. (2012). Defining a target population at high risk of long-term foster care: barriers to permanency for families of children with serious emotional disturbances. *Child Welfare, 91*, 79-101.
- Antle, B.F., Barbee, A.P., Sullivan, D.J., & Christensen, D.N. (2009). The effects of training reinforcement on training transfer in child welfare. *Child Welfare, 88*, 5-26.
- Bronson, D.E., Saunders, S., Holt, M.B., & Beck, E. (2008). *A Systematic Review of Strategies to Promote Successful Reunification and to Reduce Re-entry to Care for Abused, Neglected, and Unruly*

## Effectively Implementing Effective Practices for Sustainable Permanency: A Synthesis of Research and Practice

Children. The Ohio State University: College of Social Work. Retrieved from: <http://www.ocwtp.net/pdfs/reun-reentry%20final%20report.pdf>

Carnochan, S., Rizik-Baer, D., & Austin, M.J. (2013). Preventing reentry to foster care. *Journal of Evidence-based Social Work, 10*, 196-209.

Child Welfare Information Gateway (2017, October). *Supporting Successful Reunifications*. Retrieved from: [https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/supporting\\_reunification.pdf](https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/supporting_reunification.pdf)

Child Welfare Information Gateway (2015, April). *Supervising for quality child welfare practice*. Retrieved from: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/effective-supervision/>.

Child Welfare Information Gateway (2011, June). *Family Reunification: What the Evidence Shows*. Retrieved from: [https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/family\\_reunification.Pdf](https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/family_reunification.Pdf).

Chovil, N. (2009). One small step at a time: Implementing continuous quality improvement in child and youth mental health services. *Child and Youth Services, 31*, 21-34.

Fisher, P. A., Burraston, B., & Pears, K. (2005). The Early Intervention Foster Care Program: Permanent placement outcomes from a randomized trial. *Child Maltreatment, 10*, 61-71.

Fraser, M. W., Walton, E., Lewis, R. E., Pecora, P. J., & Walton, W. K. (1996). An experiment in family reunification: Correlates of outcomes at one-year follow-up. *Children and Youth Services Review, 18*(4/5), 335-361.

Green, A.E., Trott, E., Willging, C.E., Finn, N.E., Ehrhart, M.G., & Aarons, G.A. (2016). The role of collaborations in sustaining an evidence-based intervention to reduce child neglect. *Child Abuse and Neglect, 53*, 4-16.

Hatton, H. & Brooks, S. (2008). *Preventing Re-entry into the Child Welfare System: A Literature Review of Promising Practices*. Northern California Training Academy: The Center for Human Services. Retrieved from: <http://www.childsworld.ca.gov/res/pdf/PreventingRe-entry.pdf>

Jedway, M. & Shaw, T.V. (2017). Predictors of reentry into the foster care system: Comparison of children with and without previous removal experience. *Children and Youth Service Review, 82*, 177-184.

Kimberlin, S. E., Anthony, E. K., & Austin, M. J. (2009). Re-entering foster care: Trends, evidence, and implications. *Children and Youth Services Review, 31*, 471-481.

Lee, S., Jonson-Reid, M., & Drake, B. (2012). Foster care re-entry. Exploring the role of foster care characteristics, in-home child welfare services, and cross-section services. *Child and Youth Services Review, 34*, 1825 - 1833.

Loman, L.A., & Siegel, G.L. (2012). Effects of anti-poverty services under the differential response approach to child welfare. *Children and Youth Services Review, 34*, 1659-1666.

Madden, E. E., McRoy, R. G., Maher, E., & Ward, K. (2009, April). *Travis County, Texas, Child Protective Services Reintegration Pilot Project*. Seattle: WA: Casey Family Programs.

## Effectively Implementing Effective Practices for Sustainable Permanency: A Synthesis of Research and Practice

- Metz, A., Bartley, L., & Maltry, M. (2017). *An implementation science and service-provider informed blueprint for integration of evidence-based and evidence-informed practices into New Jersey's Child Welfare System*. The University of North Carolina: National Implementation Research Network. Retrieved from: [http://www.state.nj.us/dcf/about/divisions/strategicdev/Blueprints\\_Sept2017.pdf](http://www.state.nj.us/dcf/about/divisions/strategicdev/Blueprints_Sept2017.pdf)
- Easterling, D., & Metz, A. (2016). Getting real with strategy: Insights from implementation science. *The Foundation Review*, 8(2), Article 11.
- Packard, T., McCrae, J., Phillips, J., & Scannapieco, M. (2015). Measuring organizational change tactics to improve child welfare programs: Experience in 13 counties. *Human service organizations: Management, Leadership, & Governance*, 39, 444-458.
- Pine, B.A., Spath, R., Werrbach, G.B., Jenson, C.E., & Kerman, B. (2009). A better path to permanency for children in out-of-home care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 31, 1135-1143.
- Roberts, Y.H, O'Brien, K., & Pecora, P.J. (2017). *Supporting Lifelong Families: Ensuring Long-Lasting Permanency and Well-Being*. Casey Family Programs. Retrieved from: <https://cdn.casey.org/media/supporting-lifelong-families-full.pdf>
- Saldana, L., & Chamberlain, P, & Chapman, J. (2016). A supervisor-targeted implementation approach to promote system change: The R<sup>3</sup> Model. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health*, 43(6), 879-892.
- Sciamanna, J. (2013). *Reunification of foster children with their families: The first permanency outcome*. State Policy Advocacy and Reform Center. Retrieved from: [http://www.nrcpfc.org/is/downloads/Reunification\\_FChildren\\_w.Fam.pdf](http://www.nrcpfc.org/is/downloads/Reunification_FChildren_w.Fam.pdf).
- Sedler, G., Bruns, E.J., Walker, S.C., Kerns, W.E., & Negrete, A. (2015). Developing a quality assurance system for multiple evidence-based practices in a statewide service improvement initiative. *Administration, Policy, and Mental Health*, 44, 29-41.
- Shaw, T. V. (2006). Reentry into the foster care system after reunification. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 28, 1375-1390.
- Simon, J.D. & Brooks, D. (2016). Post-investigation service need and utilization among families at risk of maltreatment. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 69, 223-232.
- Wells, M. & Correia, M. (2012). Reentry into Out-of-Home Care: Implications of Child Welfare Workers' Assessments of Risk and Safety. *Social Work Research*, 36(3), 181-195.
- Yampolskaya, S., Armstrong, M.I., Strozier, A., & Swanke, J. (2017). Can the actions of child welfare case managers predict case outcomes? *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 64, 61-70.