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## The Children's Bureau's Role in Promoting Parent Engagement and Family Support: A Brief History and Current Efforts

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## The Children's Bureau's Role in Promoting Parent Engagement and Family Support: A Brief History and Current Efforts

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Parent engagement and family support are a related set of strategies that are core features of many child and family services with demonstrated positive impacts on families (Mbwana, Terzian, & Moore, 2009). Although a variety of definitions exist, parent and family engagement is defined as “a family-centered and strengths-based approach to partnering with families in making decisions, setting goals, and achieving desired outcomes. It is founded on the principle of communicating openly and honestly with families in a way that supports disclosure of culture, family dynamics, and personal experiences in order to meet the individual needs of every family and every child” (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2010, p.1). Within child welfare services, a number of family teaming models have been developed to facilitate parent engagement and enable parents and caregivers to serve as decision makers in their children’s safety, permanency, and well-being. Several commonly used models include Family Group Decision Making, Family Team Conferencing, Team Decision Making, and the Permanency Teaming Process (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2009). Within child maltreatment prevention, parent leadership or shared leadership is a longstanding philosophical approach that recognizes a “partnership where parents and staff share responsibility, expertise, and leadership in area that affects families and communities” (Parents Anonymous, 2012, p.1).

A related but distinct concept is family support, which is defined as “empowering and strengthening adults in their roles as parents, nurturers, and providers” (Family Support America, 1996, p.2). Nine principles of family support practice<sup>1</sup> outline strategies for working with families; these principles focus on building on family strengths, creating equal and productive working relationships between staff and parents, and infusing this approach across multiple levels of the system and the community (Dunst, 2002; Family Support America, 1996). Similarly, a systems of care approach in child welfare emphasizes that families are involved as key stakeholders, whether they are helping tailor their child's individualized plan of care or helping design, build, or maintain the system of care. Families are involved in policy development, care coordination, evaluation, strategic planning, service provision, social marketing, and individual and system advocacy (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2010).

Both parent engagement and family support programs represent intentional shifts in the approach to service delivery that is grounded on the need to place parent and family needs and strengths at the forefront of planning, implementation, and policy development. It is also grounded in

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<sup>1</sup>The Nine Principles of Family Support Practice are available at [http://www.co.douglas.or.us/dccf/principles\\_of\\_family\\_support.htm](http://www.co.douglas.or.us/dccf/principles_of_family_support.htm).

mutual respect between the consumers of services, service providers, researchers, program planners, and policy makers. Others describe family support as a grassroots movement for social change that urges policy makers, researchers, and program planners to work in partnership with families to ensure that they receive the support they need to be successful (Family Support America, 1996; Kagan & Weissbourd, 1994).

One of the early definitions of parent engagement promulgated by the Children's Bureau was based on the original Title IV-B Subpart 2 Family Preservation and Family Support legislation, which called for "the active involvement of major actors across the entire service delivery system for children and families including . . . parents (especially parents who have participated in family support and/or family preservation programs) and other consumers, foster parents, adoptive parents, and families with a member with a disability" (Children's Bureau, 1994, p.9). The same legislation also provided the definition of family support services: community-based services designed to promote the well-being of children and families and increase the strength and stability of families through such services as respite care, drop-in centers, early developmental screening, and parent training.

Over the years, federal child welfare policy supports parent engagement and family support strategies through various Children's Bureau-funded state formula grant programs, research and demonstration discretionary grants, child welfare monitoring reviews, and technical assistance. This article highlights grant programs funded by two federal laws—Promoting Safe and Stable Families and the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act—and Children's Bureau's efforts to test innovations and disseminate knowledge about promising and evidence-based practices regarding parent engagement and family support. The article begins with a brief legislative history and then highlights grant programs that are supported by the legislation.<sup>2</sup> The article concludes with a discussion of the new opportunities for systems change through the Title IV-E Waiver Demonstration projects.

### **Related Legislative History**

#### **Brief History of Promoting Safe and Stable Families**

Public Law (P.L.) 96-272,<sup>3</sup> the *Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980*, established the federal foster care program under Title IV-E of the

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<sup>2</sup>This article is not intended to be an exhaustive review of all the relevant legislation on Children's Bureau programs that may include parent engagement or family support.

<sup>3</sup>For more information about child welfare legislative history, visit <http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/otherpubs/majorfedlegis.cfm>.

Social Security Act as a permanent entitlement for eligible children and also created the federal adoption assistance program. Embedded within this legislation is a philosophical approach that promoted concepts of family support and family-centered practice within child welfare services. The 1980 law intended to reduce placement in foster care and ensure that children who did enter care would eventually be placed with a permanent family and home. P.L. 96-272 required states to make “reasonable efforts” to prevent the removal of a child from his or her family into foster care and to reunite a child with the biological family if he or she had to be temporarily removed.

The term “reasonable efforts” is broadly defined by states but generally means that child welfare agencies must provide parents with resources to ensure that the child is safe, the home environment is stable, and the home meets the well-being needs of the child. The intent of services is to empower and increase the family’s capacity to safely meet the needs of their children as well as to be accessible and culturally appropriate. These services are often grouped under umbrella terms such as “family preservation,” “family support,” “preventive services,” or “family reunification” and includes parenting classes, family therapy, substance abuse treatment, respite care, home visiting, and parent support groups. Courts are empowered with the authority to determine if reasonable efforts have or have not been made. If the court finds that the necessary resources and supports have not been made available to the family, child protective services funding from federal and state sources is in danger of being reduced.

More than a decade later, child welfare legislation included greater specificity regarding the requirements and definitions of family support and family preservation. The 1993 *Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act* (P.L. 103-66) added capped entitlement funds under the newly created subpart 2 of Title IV-B. These funds enable states to provide “family support” and “family preservation” services to families with children (including foster, adoptive, and extended families). The act further states that no more than 10% of federal program funds could be spent on plan administration and requires states to direct the largest portion of funds to the family support and family preservation service categories. In order to receive funds, states are required to develop a broad plan for provision of services to children and families that must be completed every five years; this plan is to include goals and benchmarks against which to measure progress. Further, states are required to report on the services provided and

progress toward the plan goals on an annual basis in the state's annual progress and services report (APSR).<sup>4</sup>

Embedded within child welfare regulations that were developed from the legislation, the Children's Bureau bears responsibility for monitoring how effectively states provide services to children and families. One way the Children's Bureau determines how successful states are in providing family preservation, support, and engagement services, is through the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs). The CFSRs assess both state capacity to create positive outcomes for children and families and the results achieved by the provision of appropriate services. The CFSRs are periodic reviews of state child welfare systems and are intended to ensure conformity with federal child welfare requirements, determine what is actually happening to children and families as they are engaged in child welfare services, and assist states in helping children and families achieve positive outcomes.<sup>5</sup> After a CFSR is completed, states develop a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) to address areas in their child welfare services that need improvement. The CFSRs began in 2000, and since then, two rounds of CFSRs have been completed in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Several key indicators are used to determine how successful states are in providing services, and among them are several related specifically to family engagement. These key indicators address preventing the removal of a child from his or her home; identifying and addressing the needs and services of the biological parent, the child, and the foster parent; the involvement of the family and, if appropriate, the child in the case planning process; and visits by the caseworker to the child and the parents.

Included in the *Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997* (P.L. 105-89) was a reauthorized version of the new program under Title IV-B, subpart 2 of the Social Security Act. This program, the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program (PSSF), requires states to dedicate a significant portion of the funds received under that program to "time-limited family reunification" and "adoption promotion and support services" (in addition to the state's existing family support and family preservation services). The law was subsequently amended by *The Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendments of 2001* (P.L. 107-133), which was

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<sup>4</sup>For more information about the Child and Family Services Plan or the Annual Performance and Services Reports, visit [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/programs\\_fund/index.htm#CFSP](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/programs_fund/index.htm#CFSP).

<sup>5</sup>For more detailed information about the CFSR process, outcomes, indicators, and results from the first two rounds of reviews, visit <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/monitoring/child-family-services-reviews>.

enacted in January 2002. The amendments maintained the annual mandatory funding level as a capped entitlement funding level at \$305 million but authorized additional *discretionary* funds for up to \$200 million annually. The 2001 amendments also added support for infant safe haven laws (which were to be established via state law) to the definition of family preservation services and broadened the definition of “family support services” by adding two additional goals: strengthening parental relationships and promoting healthy marriages (U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Ways and Means, 2011).

In 2011, the *Child and Family Services Improvement and Innovation Act*<sup>6</sup> also amended the state plan requirements for the PSSF Program (Children’s Bureau, 2012a). The amendments require states to describe the process for identifying populations at greatest risk of maltreatment as well as how this population would be targeted for services. Additionally, the definitions of “family support services” and “time-limited family reunification services” under the program were amended. The amended definition of family support services is intended to serve as a means to enhance child development and therefore specifies mentoring as a means to achieve this. The amendments to the definition of time-limited family reunification services include a focus on activities to aid parents and siblings in visiting children in foster care and was therefore amended to include peer-to-peer mentoring and support groups for parents and primary caregivers. Other provisions of the law include establishing new grants related to improving monthly caseworker visits of children in foster care and the continuation of the Regional Partnerships grant program to address the needs of families impacted by substance abuse. More information about the PSSF formula grant program will be discussed in a later section.

### **Brief History of the *Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act***

The *Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act* (CAPTA) is one of the key pieces of legislation that guides child protection and child maltreatment prevention efforts and provides funding for both formula and discretionary grants that have incorporated parent engagement and family support. CAPTA was originally signed into law on January 31, 1974 (P.L. 93-247). At that time, the new law required states to have a system for receiving and responding to allegations of child abuse or neglect. It was reauthorized seven times from 1978 through 2010, and with each

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<sup>6</sup>A copy of the entire Title IV-B Promoting Safe and Stable Families legislation is available from [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws\\_policies/index.htm](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws_policies/index.htm).

reauthorization, amendments to CAPTA have expanded and refined the scope of the law.<sup>7</sup>

The most recent reauthorization to this law occurred through the *CAPTA Reauthorization Act of 2010* (P.L. 111-320), signed into law on December 20, 2010. The law authorizes grants to states for child abuse or neglect prevention and treatment (CAPTA state grants), grants to states for programs relating to investigation and prosecution of child abuse and neglect (Children's Justice Act), community-based grants for the prevention of child abuse and neglect (CBCAP), CAPTA discretionary research and demonstration grants, the Adoption Opportunities program, and the Abandoned Infants Assistance program.

Throughout the various iterations of CAPTA, Title II, now known as the Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention Program (CBCAP), has always maintained strong language regarding family support and parent leadership as key requirements for the program. CAPTA specifies that the lead agency must demonstrate "the capacity and commitment to ensure the meaningful involvement of parents who are consumers and who can provide leadership in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of programs and policy decisions of the applicant agency in accomplishing the desired outcomes for such efforts" (Children's Bureau, 2012b).

### **Brief History of the Indian Child Welfare Act**

Finally, the *Indian Child Welfare Act* (ICWA) (25 U.S.C. § 1901) is yet another piece of the puzzle which, in combination with CAPTA and PSSP, emphasizes the importance of family engagement efforts (Limb, Chance, & Brown, 2004). ICWA is a significant piece of legislation regarding the right of American Indian people to protect and raise their own children. With the passage of the law, Congress clearly states that the purpose of ICWA is to "protect the best interests of Indian children to promote the stability and security of American Indian tribes and families." Additionally, Congress admits that prior to ICWA, state child welfare agencies failed to recognize tribal relations of American Indian people as well as the social standards and culture that prevail in American Indian families and communities. With ICWA, necessary changes were enacted that give federally recognized Indian tribes jurisdiction over custody matters involving American Indian children. ICWA provides guidelines for placement of American Indian children when they are no longer able to remain safely in their homes, with the preference being placement with the

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<sup>7</sup>The complete legislative history and text of the entire Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act is available at [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws\\_policies/index.htm](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws_policies/index.htm).



child's extended family. If an extended family member is unable or unwilling to take the child, the child should then be placed with a family who shares the child's tribal affiliation. If a child cannot be placed with another member of a child's tribe that most approximates a family where his/her needs are met, priority would be placement in another non-member Indian family home (Strong, 2005). The final placement option available for an American Indian child is placement with a family (Indian or non-Indian), approved by the child's tribe.

### **Grants**

This section provides specific details about how parent engagement and family support are infused into several formula and discretionary grant programs. There are two key distinctions between these two types of programs: 1) formula grants have designated state lead agencies that are the only entities that can apply and administer the grant funds (e.g., state child welfare agency or another entity designated by the governor in each state); and 2) funds are allocated on a formula basis, typically based on the number of children under 18 years old in the state. Discretionary grants, on the other hand, are competitive grants awarded to a number of different types of eligible entities and based on a funding opportunity announcement that outlines the requirements for a particular grant program.

### **Formula Grant Programs**

Title IV-B of the *Social Security Act* (P.L. 112-34) includes the awards of mandatory, annual fixed grants with the purpose of supporting states, tribes, and territories in the development of effective child welfare services. The grant amounts are based on a formula and therefore vary based on the state, tribe, or territory. The Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program is a formula grant awarded annually to support states, tribes, and territories in the development of effective child welfare services and to help them operate every aspect of their child welfare systems—from prevention of child abuse and neglect to adoption—and the information systems necessary to support these programs. Specific programs include the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program (PSSF) and the Court Improvement Program (CIP). As stated previously, PSSF provides funds to states for provision of “family support” and “family preservation” services to families with children (including foster, adoptive, and extended families). PSSF is often used by child welfare agencies to fund a range of family support services for families brought to the attention of child welfare.

The *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008* (P.L. 110-351) provides an optional program for states to receive formula funding to administer a Title IV-E Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP). The *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008* also renews the federal commitments to kinship care by providing federal funding for a new permanency option for certain children in foster care to live permanently with relatives while still receiving financial and medical assistance. As of September 2012, 31 Title IV-E Agencies, including 30 states and one federally recognized tribe, are approved to operate a guardianship assistance program. The law also adds a requirement for Title IV-E agencies to exercise due diligence to identify and notify all adult relatives of a child within 30 days of the child's removal and to inform the relatives of options to become a placement resource for the child. In addition to the supporting kinship care and guardianship permanency options for youth in care, the law also adds a new requirement that Title IV-E agencies make reasonable efforts to place siblings removed from their home in the same foster care, adoption, or guardianship placement or facilitate visitation or ongoing contacts with those that cannot be placed together, unless it is contrary to the safety or well-being of any of the siblings to do so. These policies demonstrate the federal commitment to preserving families by ensuring that children continue to be placed with their siblings and relatives.

Another federal mandate intended to support family engagement and family support efforts is the *Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention and Treatment Act* (CAPTA). A portion of the CAPTA funds are awarded to states on a formula, fixed-grant basis to assist states in improving child protective services and child maltreatment prevention programs. Title II of CAPTA is known as CBCAP; this program provides funding to a lead agency designated by the governor in every state to develop, operate, expand, and enhance community-based, prevention-focused programs and activities designed to strengthen and support families to prevent child abuse and neglect. As a result of the specific legislative language regarding parent leadership, states are required to promote parent leadership and engagement in funded programs, and one of the outcomes for the national conceptual framework for CBCAP is to "increase the number of agencies developing and implementing action plans to address meaningful parent involvement." (Children's Bureau, 2012c).

Finally, the *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008* (P.L. 110-351) provides formula funding for the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program for states to administer the Education and Training Voucher program and to fund youth development policies

aimed at providing youth in foster care with necessary skills for self-sufficiency. Many states incorporate youth leadership and engagement in funded programs by creating youth advisory boards that provide consultation and expertise to the state on youth policies and practices.

### **Discretionary Grant Programs**

Over the years, the Children's Bureau has invested approximately \$200 million annually for more than 300 discretionary grants in over 50 different program areas designed to continually build the knowledge base in child welfare practice, from prevention to permanency. The discretionary funds support a variety of activities, including: research and demonstration projects on the causes, prevention, identification, assessment, and treatment of child abuse and neglect; the development and implementation of evidence-based and evidence-informed programs and other initiatives; training and technical assistance; and national cross-site evaluations through grants and contracts. Unlike the formula grants described earlier, which are targeted funds for specific state entities, discretionary grants are competitive awards that are made to a variety of entities including state and local public and private health and human services agencies, university- and hospital-affiliated programs, and community-based programs. Grants awarded under discretionary funding are demonstration projects that put into place and test new, unique, or distinctive approaches for delivering services to a specific population. In this way, demonstration projects may test a theory, idea, or method that reflects a new and different way of thinking about service delivery.

While the discretionary grants focus on a wide range of activities depending on the legislative and program priorities, parent support and parent engagement are important features of the selected grant clusters which are highlighted in this article: Improving Child Welfare Outcomes through Systems of Care; Comprehensive Family Assessments; Family Connections; Supporting Evidence-Based Home Visiting to Prevent Child Maltreatment; the Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers; Quality Improvement Center on Differential Response; and the Quality Improvement Center on Early Childhood. For the Children's Bureau, "grant clusters" represent grantees that were funded through a common funding announcement and have typically included anywhere from 2 to 53 individual grants for each cluster. Depending on funding and legislative priorities, some clusters include a corresponding national technical assistance and/or cross-site evaluation component intended to provide programmatic and evaluation support, promote peer learning and sharing, synthesize the lessons learned, and evaluate the outcomes from grantees'

activities. An important theme running across the grant clusters highlighted in this article is the attention to the engagement of parents in key aspects of service delivery and a conscientious attempt to incorporate this philosophy in policies, training, implementation, and evaluation.

The Children's Bureau recognizes the importance of parent engagement and involvement for child welfare practice. In 2005, based on early results from the CSFRs and the needs of the field in general, the Bureau developed recommendations for Comprehensive Family Assessments for Child Welfare.<sup>8</sup> The guidelines are based on foundations of quality practice which include:

- the central importance of engagement and relationship building for gathering meaningful information on family, children, and youth;
- the essential involvement of families and youth in identifying their own needs and strengths;
- the need to assess the cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and other individual factors influencing the perception of family and youth needs and the caseworker's willingness to discuss these factors;
- the recognition of the significance of the "stages of change" on the family's and youth's capacity and willingness to identify their needs and in their motivation to change; and
- the benefits of identifying and including extended family and other family support resources as well as other service providers who know the family in the process of assessing needs and strengths.

Each of these foundational practice principles are embedded, to varying degrees and with varying levels of success, into the work of the clusters described in the next section.

### **Improving child welfare outcomes through systems of care.**

From 2003-2009, the Children's Bureau funded nine demonstration grants to test the efficacy of a systems of care approach to improving outcomes for children and families involved in the child welfare system and to address policy, practice, and cross-system collaboration issues raised by the Child and Family Services Reviews. With its roots in children's mental health systems of care, this five-year initiative focused on infrastructure

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<sup>8</sup>The Comprehensive Family Assessment Guidelines are available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/resource/cfa-guidelines-for-cw>.

development to strengthen the capacity of human service agencies to support families involved in public child welfare through a set of six guiding principles.<sup>9</sup> One of these principles focused on child, youth, and family involvement in services. Through the grants, child welfare agencies tested innovative practices to engage families to play more active roles in development and execution of their case plans. As part of this, families were encouraged to bring members of their support systems (e.g., extended family members, neighbors, and pastors) to their family teaming meetings. Most grant communities enhanced family involvement at the case level by implementing or expanding their existing family teaming approaches to be more consistent with the values and principles of systems of care. To ensure family members were able to serve effectively in their roles, many grant communities developed requirements for parent partner (i.e., peer mentors) positions and supported these individuals through training, supervision, and compensation. One of the other tools developed and disseminated through these grants was a video series that showcased the perspectives of family members, caseworkers, supervisors, and administrators regarding the successes and challenges of parent engagement.<sup>10</sup>

### **Comprehensive family assessment grantees.**

In 2007, the Children's Bureau funded five research and demonstration projects that would test the feasibility of implementing the Comprehensive Family Assessment Guidelines within child welfare settings. The guidelines explore the nature of comprehensive family assessment and its relationship to other agency operations. The guidelines' intent is to serve as a guide to agencies regarding the nature and function of comprehensive family assessments. In using the guidelines, grantees were expected to develop, implement, and institutionalize assessment protocols and interagency processes that will support strengths-based, ongoing assessment of all family members, identify underlying needs of families, improve frequency and quality of caseworker contacts with families, and enhance engagement of fathers in assessment and case-planning processes. The grantees were also asked to evaluate the implementation of the comprehensive family assessments and the assessment guidelines to document potential linkages between

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<sup>9</sup>More information about the six systems of care guiding principles are available at <http://www.childwelfare.gov/management/reform/soc/history/principles.cfm>.

<sup>10</sup>The family videos developed by these grant projects are available at <http://www.childwelfare.gov/management/reform/soc/communicate/initiative/familyvideos/>.

comprehensive family assessment and improved outcomes. Some of the key lessons learned to date underscore the importance of facilitating family engagement in the case-planning process and including more intentional efforts to engage fathers in the assessments. Effective strategies of grantees to support family engagement include training staff on motivational interviewing and incorporating the use of parent partners and cultural consultants (James Bell Associates, 2012).

### **Family connection grantees.**

The *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008* (P.L. 110-351) authorized funding for the Children's Bureau to award new Family Connections Grant projects. The Children's Bureau awarded 48 discretionary grants to fund 36-month project periods. The purpose of the grant program is to help children who are in or are at risk of entering into foster care reconnect with family members. Projects initiate or expand programs in one, or any combination of, the following areas: kinship navigator programs; programs utilizing intensive family-finding efforts to locate biological family and reestablish relationships; programs utilizing family group decision-making (FGDM) meetings; and residential family treatment programs.

Service models and key activities for Family Connection grantees are tailored to the purpose of each program area. Residential family treatment grantees provide comprehensive, evidence-based, gender-specific family treatment services. Kinship navigator programs assist caregivers through information and referral systems and other means to learn about, locate, and use existing programs and services to meet caregiver needs and the needs of the children they are raising. Most family-finding programs use the Kevin Campbell or Catholic Community Services of Western Washington (CCSWW) models of family-finding, and several incorporate FGDM or similar family meeting services. FGDM grantees are implementing one of several existing family meeting models to bring together children, parents, foster parents, service providers, child welfare professionals, advocates, and community partners to make decisions that support the safety, well-being, and permanency of children. FGDM models also incorporate methods to respond to domestic violence situations (James Bell Associates, 2011).

Many of the Family Connection grantees have incorporated parental or caregiver leadership as a fundamental aspect of their program, either by having parents serve on advisory boards to the agency or by selecting or hiring only former caregivers as kinship navigators. The Family Connection demonstration projects are developing these programs

as identifiable sites that other states/locales seeking to implement family connection services for this population can look to for guidance, insight, and possible replication.

### **Supporting evidence-based home visiting to prevent child maltreatment.**

In 2008, the Children's Bureau funded 17 cooperative agreements to support the infrastructure needed for the widespread adoption, implementation, and sustaining of evidence-based home visitation (EBHV) programs to prevent child maltreatment.<sup>11</sup> At its core, home visiting programs provide opportunities to help parents and caregivers build positive parenting skills that focus on improving the parent-child relationship. Many home visiting programs focus on at-risk families with the goal of improving knowledge and skills to support their children's development and learning, prevent child maltreatment, and ultimately, improve their children's well-being (Del Grosso & Daro, 2009). Parent engagement and family support are key strategies offered by several evidence-based home visiting programs.

Through the Supporting EBHV program, grantees were charged with combining their grant funds with other funding sources to support the implementation of EBHV programs with fidelity, the scaling up of the high-fidelity home visiting models, and the sustainability of the models. Grantees are also conducting local implementation and outcome evaluations. The program's overarching goal is to generate knowledge about the use of evidence-based home visiting programs to prevent child maltreatment, including obstacles and opportunities for their wider implementation. The grantees are learning what it takes to engage and retain high-risk families impacted by substance abuse, mental health, and domestic violence problems. They have also identified several key strategies for recruiting and training the necessary workforce and quality supervision and support needed (Del Grosso & Daro, 2009).

In 2011, the EBHV grant program was formally incorporated into the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (MIECHV) State Formula Grant Program, which is administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) and authorized by the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act* (P.L. 111-148). The Children's Bureau also funded Mathematica Policy Research and Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago to conduct a cross-site evaluation of the grantees' programs. The primary purpose of the cross-site evaluation is to

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<sup>11</sup>For more information about the Supporting EBHV grantees and the national cross-site evaluation, visit <http://www.supportingebhv.org>.

identify successful strategies for adopting, implementing, and sustaining high-quality home visiting programs to prevent child maltreatment. The final evaluation reports will be available in 2013.

**National quality improvement centers on non-resident fathers, differential response, and early childhood.**

The National Quality Improvement Centers (QICs) are initiatives that represent a new way of discretionary grant making that utilizes an intermediary organization that is responsible for funding, supporting, and evaluating a set of research and demonstration projects focused on a specific topical area.<sup>12</sup> Over the years, five national QICs have been established to explore key topics including privatization in child welfare, legal representation of children in child welfare, and the three topics described here. Each of the QICs has focused on different aspects of engaging caregivers and families in child welfare services at different points along the continuum.

The Children's Bureau funded the National Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers (QIC-NRF) from 2007-2012.<sup>13</sup> In prior years, family engagement efforts focused more on the biological mother who was the primary custodian of a child and who came to the attention of the child welfare agency. Birth fathers are absent from the home of at least 65% of children who come to the attention of the child welfare system (American Humane Association, American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law, and National Fatherhood Initiative, 2007). Furthermore, even after a child has been removed and placed in out-of-home care, paternal relatives tend not to be involved in the case-planning process for the child. However, changes in practice have emerged that include searching for birth fathers and their families so that they may play an active role in the life of the child. The specific purpose of the QIC-NRF was to determine what impact increased non-resident father engagement has had on the safety, permanency, and well-being of their children who have become involved with the children welfare system. The QIC-NRF activities focused on supporting a research-based and outcome-focused approach to inform best practices related to engaging fathers and paternal

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<sup>12</sup>The Children's Bureau also funded four Regional Quality Improvement Centers on Child Protective Services and Adoption, which also focused on other key topics from 2001-2007. More information about each of the current National Quality Improvement Centers is available at

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/tta/index.htm#qips>.

<sup>13</sup>More information regarding the resources developed by the QIC-NRF is available at <http://www.americanhumane.org/children/programs/fatherhood-initiative/qic-fatherhood-toolkit/>.



family members, facilitating a national network for information-sharing and problem-solving, and supporting the research-based and outcome-focused approach to determine the impact of father involvement on child safety, permanence, and well-being outcomes.

The Quality Improvement Center on Differential Response's (QIC-DR) overall goal is to promote innovation, evidence-based practice improvements, and advancement of knowledge about child welfare outcomes that test practice models of differential response. By redesigning the ways in which child protective services (CPS) can respond to screened-in reports alleging child maltreatment, differential response approaches create more flexibility for agencies and their staff. Differential response has also been referred to as dual track, multi-track, alternative response, and multiple response systems (or MRS). Differential response-organized CPS systems typically have two pathways to serve families: 1) an investigation pathway and 2) a non-investigation pathway. The non-investigation pathway is also called alternative response, family assessment response, and similar titles by varying jurisdictions. Inherent in this approach is an implicit and explicit philosophy around the importance of engaging parents in new and non-stigmatizing ways to conduct a family assessment and provide needed services to ameliorate the presenting problems. Currently, three states have received funding through the QIC-DR: Colorado, Illinois, and Ohio.<sup>14</sup> In addition to examining outcomes related to risk and safety, one of the primary research questions that the cross-site evaluation focuses on is: "How is the non-investigation pathway different from the investigation pathway in terms of family engagement, caseworker practice, and services provided?" (National Quality Improvement Center on Differential Response, 2012). This project will provide crucial information about how states are able to engage families in this different approach to investigation and child protective services.

Parent engagement and family support are at the heart of the work of the Quality Improvement Center on Early Childhood (QIC-EC). The QIC-EC was established in response to the growing body of research pointing to the critical role of early life experiences in shaping children's developmental outcomes, the compelling data that point to the highest risk of maltreatment for infants and young children, and the need to incorporate child maltreatment prevention as a central component of early childhood initiatives. The QIC-EC emphasizes that prevention efforts must include a focus on promotion (i.e., increasing protective factors) as

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<sup>14</sup>More information about each of the QIC-DR funded research and demonstration projects is available at <http://differentialresponseqic.org/>.

well as on prevention (i.e., reducing risk factors) and be placed within the larger context of optimal child development and increased family strengths. Using the socio-ecological model as the guiding theoretical framework, the QIC-EC funded four research and demonstration projects as well as a cross-site evaluation, which focuses on generating new knowledge around preventing child maltreatment for infants and young children.<sup>15</sup> The overarching research question for the QIC-EC is: “How and to what extent do collaborations that increase protective factors and decrease risk factors in core areas of the social ecology result in optimal child development, increased family strengths, and decreased likelihood of child maltreatment, within families of young children at high risk for child maltreatment?” (National Quality Improvement Center on Early Childhood, 2012) Each of the funded programs is testing a different approach, but all share common principles and strategies squarely focused on parent engagement and family support. For example, one site uses a neighborhood-based community organizing model that focuses on engaging parents in high-risk neighborhoods to become more active and responsive to the needs and strengths of the community. Two of the grantees established advisory boards, which include parents who graduated from their programs, and all the projects are striving to engage participants in other meaningful ways to assist with program development and planning.

### **Training and Technical Assistance Around Family Engagement and Family Support**

A key responsibility at the federal level is to help build capacity at the state and local level to improve service delivery for families. The Children’s Bureau fulfills this role by providing training and technical assistance to states, tribal, and local child welfare agencies to support family engagement, family preservation, and other family support services aimed at preventing and responding to child abuse and neglect. The Children’s Bureau has a training and technical assistance network, which consists of national resource centers (NRCs), national quality improvement centers, regional implementation centers, information clearinghouses, and various technical assistance contracts.<sup>16</sup> This network of federal employees, child welfare experts, researchers, and practitioners provides training and technical assistance to states, tribal, and local agencies on federal policy

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<sup>15</sup>More information about each of the QIC-EC funded research and demonstration projects is available at <http://www.qic-ec.org>.

<sup>16</sup>A complete list of the entire Children’s Bureau Training and Technical Assistance Network is available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/tta/>.

and regulations, as well as information on evidence-informed and evidence-based practices and approaches to working with children and families at risk of child abuse and neglect. The Children's Bureau's network provides a wide variety of technical assistance in various areas including but not limited to the administration of data systems, the organizational improvement and training of child welfare staff, the role of the judiciary in child welfare, and strategies to enhance permanency for children through effective youth development approaches and through the recruitment of adoptive families. Three of the National Resource Centers providing extensive technical assistance on parent engagement and family support are the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections (NRCPFC), the FRIENDS National Resource Center for CBCAP, and the National Resource Center for Tribes which are described in the next section.

### **National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections**

The National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections (NRCPFC) provides training and technical assistance regarding policy, practice, and evidence-based approaches to supporting family engagement and family support services.<sup>17</sup> The NRCPFC at the Hunter College School of Social Work helps strengthen the capacity of state, local, tribal, and other publicly administered or supported child welfare agencies to institutionalize a safety-focused, family-centered, and community-based approach to meet the needs of children, youth, and families. The NRCPFC provides on- and off-site technical assistance, which is customized for each request and designed to build capacity in child welfare systems and to support states, territories, and tribes in achieving sustainable, systemic change resulting in greater safety, permanency, and well-being of children, youth, and families. The NRCPFC also works closely with the Family Connection discretionary grantees by providing information and supporting peer sharing through grantee meetings, teleconference calls, and a website for sharing the grantees' project information and disseminating the cross-site evaluation findings.

The NRCPFC provides expertise on a wide variety of topics, such as: strategies to engage parents and community partners in the provision of safety-focused, individualized family-centered services to children, youth, and families; working with states and discretionary grantees to implement practices that relate to the Fostering Connections legislation; strategies to develop skills in the practice of family group

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<sup>17</sup>More information about the NRCPFC and the Digital Stories are available at <http://www.nrcpfc.org/>.

conferencing and family group decision making; and practices that engage families in assessment, case planning, case review, and timely decision making about reunification, adoption, guardianship, kin placement, or appropriate use of another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement.

The NRCPFC promotes family engagement practices to reunify families and engage fathers and paternal resources in permanency planning. This includes the practice of family search and using engagement strategies to identify family members for children and youth separated from their birth families. The NRCPFC also promotes practices in relative care that utilize guardianship when appropriate. They share best practices regarding visit coaching and concurrent permanency planning. Recently, the NRCPFC embarked on an initiative to capture the stories of children, youth, and families affected by the child welfare system through digital storytelling. This technique is the practice of using computer-based tools to tell stories. As with traditional storytelling, most digital stories focus on a specific topic; in this case, the focus is on stories about children, youth, and families affected by the child welfare system, and the stories contain a particular point of view. These stories are made available to help everyone involved with the child welfare system become more attuned to the needs and strengths of families.

### **National Resource Center for Community-based Child Abuse Prevention**

The Family Resource Information, Education and Network Development Services (FRIENDS) at the Chapel Hill Outreach-Training Project is the National Resource Center for CBCAP; it provides targeted training and technical assistance to CBCAP state lead agencies to build capacity to meet the full array of CBCAP program requirements, including the implementation of family support strategies. FRIENDS' services focus on primary and secondary prevention, including a focus on assisting grantees in measuring and reporting on their outcomes in their various programming efforts.<sup>18</sup> FRIENDS offers services in collaboration with several national partner agencies focused on child welfare evidence-based and evidence-informed programs and practices addressing collaboration, systems change, and parental and youth involvement. In addition to outcome accountability, FRIENDS offers training and technical assistance in areas such as: best practices in child abuse and neglect prevention programs; program planning and design; marketing programs and initiatives; community coordination, collaboration and networking;

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<sup>18</sup>More information about the FRIENDS resources is available at <http://friendsnrc.org/>.

parent involvement and shared leadership; peer review; program self-assessment; understanding the role of prevention in the Child and Family Services Reviews; and serving culturally diverse populations. FRIENDS provides technical assistance through webinars, conference calls, and on-site visits to assist states in engaging parents and promoting family support.

Given the legislative language in CAPTA Title II, one of the key priorities for FRIENDS technical assistance is building grantee capacity to infuse meaningful parent leadership and engagement in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the work of the CBCAP lead agencies. There are multiple strategies used to ensure that the parents' perspective and expertise guides the work of FRIENDS. First, there is a Parent Advisory Council comprised of almost a dozen parent leaders from across the country; this council meets on a monthly basis, with and without FRIENDS staff, to provide input and feedback on national technical assistance activities and materials that are developed by FRIENDS. For example, parents were involved in reviewing and commenting on the development of the Evaluation Toolkit, a widely used online technical assistance tool to help states and other programs identify outcomes and measures for prevention and develop logic models for their programs.

FRIENDS also developed a Parent Leadership Ambassador Training, an intensive, in-person training event offered to grantees who are interested in strengthening the parent leadership component of their programs. States that participate must attend with a parent leader who will be their partner in implementing the plans developed during the training. Currently, 37 states have participated in this training over the last seven years. To reach other grantees, FRIENDS also developed an online training titled "Creating Effective Parent-Practitioner Partnerships: An introduction to Parent Leadership." The importance of infusing parent voices is evident in the planning committee for the annual grantees meetings, where parents often volunteer and also present as part of different sessions for the meeting. FRIENDS has also partnered with National Public Radio's Story Corps to interview and record the stories of parents sharing their journey to becoming a parent leader. These audio stories are shared at various meetings and are also available for download through the FRIENDS website. Many CBCAP lead agencies include parent leaders within their advisory groups. Several states offer local parent leadership training and other mutual support groups. In addition, more grantees are implementing the Strengthening Families Initiative developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy; this program

includes parent partners as a key component for promoting protective factors to prevent child maltreatment.

### **National Resource Center for Tribes**

One of the newest resource centers funded by the Children's Bureau is the National Resource Center for Tribes (NRC4Tribes).<sup>19</sup> Although the Indian Child Welfare Act establishes a preference for keeping Indian children with their families, deferring to tribal judgment on matters concerning the custody of tribal children and placing Indian children who must be removed from their homes within their own families or Indian tribes, state child welfare agencies often work with tribal agencies and families. Families involved with American Indian child welfare often have a complex set of needs that are exacerbated by poverty, lack of educational opportunities, overcrowded living conditions, and addiction to alcohol and other drugs (Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, 2004). In addition, tribal social service programs are challenged in developing or enhancing their own systems. It is with these needs in mind that the Children's Bureau, through the NRC4Tribes and discretionary funding targeted to tribes, seeks to assist tribes and the states that work with tribal families in building their capacity to design services and programs to serve American Indian families.

The Children's Bureau, through NRC4Tribes, is dedicated to building the capacity of state child welfare agencies to increase cultural competence and sensitivity to tribal voices in state child welfare systems and provide culturally appropriate services to Indian families. Like the other resource centers, the NRC4Tribes is part of the Children's Bureau Technical Assistance Network and is designed to improve child welfare systems and to support states and tribes in achieving sustainable, systemic change that results in greater safety, permanency, and well-being of children, youth, and families. The NRC4Tribes engages tribes to enhance the capacities of tribal agencies, courts, and organizations to support successful child welfare programs and provide effective child welfare services through facilitating peer-to-peer consultation between tribes regarding child welfare issues, improving tribal child welfare practice, and working with tribal child welfare staff to achieve greater safety, permanency, and well-being of children and families.

### **Lessons Learned in Promoting Parent and Family Involvement**

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<sup>19</sup>More information on the NRC4Tribes is available at <http://www.nrc4tribes.org>.

There are a number of important lessons learned from the Children's Bureau efforts to promote family engagement and involvement in funded programs. In the late 1990s, a national evaluation of family support programs was commissioned by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in response to the increased funding made available for these types of services through Title IV-B, subpart 2. Although the study is now more than ten years old, the findings from the meta-analysis provided a detailed description of the different types of family support programs across the country and concluded that these types of services produced small but significant effects across a range of outcomes for parents and children. However, the effects of family support were *not* evenly distributed across different program models and service strategies. Programs that used professional staff and delivered parent education and support through group meetings had stronger positive effects on parenting behavior and on outcomes for children. Programs that were more targeted and focused services on specific types of families rather than on, for example, all low-income families in a neighborhood tended to be more effective (Layzer, Goodson, Bernstein & Price, 2001).

Lessons learned from the discretionary grantees emphasize that leadership at the agency and community levels is critical for setting an organizational culture that values and respects parent and family involvement. Once leadership has buy-in and ownership, ensuring adequate resources and staffing is another key element for success. Dedicated staff and parents are needed to ensure the success of any parent engagement or leadership initiative. Parents who are invited to participate in various meetings or committees need to be engaged at a more meaningful level, not just to meet a quota for a token parent representative. In addition, parents may need concrete supports in order to participate fully in various activities. Support in the form of transportation, child care, or other stipends are necessary components that must be included in the budget. Comprehensive training for family members serving as peer mentors and advocates for system-involved families and as leaders on decision-making bodies is needed to support and retain parents in this work. In addition, agencies should develop clear standards and guidelines related to requirements and supervision of, and compensation for, parent peer mentor/advocate positions that may be established. Finally, agencies should embrace continuous quality improvement and invest in evaluating family involvement programs to demonstrate their impact on child, family, and systems outcomes, to ensure their success and long-term sustainability (James Bell Associates,

2002; National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care, 2010).

### **Future Directions and Opportunities**

The Child Welfare Demonstration Projects represent a new opportunity to redesign child welfare systems by leveraging current policies and requirements and shifting existing resources to promote the safety, permanency, and social and emotional well-being of children and families involved in the child welfare system. The Department of Health and Human Services has renewed authority to grant up to ten child welfare demonstration projects in each of federal fiscal years 2012-2014.<sup>20</sup> The Children's Bureau goal in facilitating innovation and experimentation in child welfare programs through these demonstration projects is to improve outcomes for children. Therefore, states are encouraged to consider whether the opportunity to use federal child welfare funding flexibly could support innovative strategies to promote better outcomes for children who are at risk of foster care placement or who are already placed outside the home. The Department will prioritize consideration of waiver applications in which the Title IV-E agencies propose to use the flexibility under the demonstrations as a vehicle to test or implement valid and reliable screening and assessment tools and evidence-based or evidence-informed intervention approaches that will produce positive well-being outcomes for children, youth, and their families. Particular attention is placed on addressing the trauma experienced by children who have been abused and/or neglected. Evidence-based and evidence-informed practices have been developed to address the most common mental health diagnoses, trauma symptoms, and behavioral health needs of children; these practices show measurable improvements or promising results. Parents and caregivers need support in managing the behaviors of children who have experienced maltreatment and in providing an environment in which healing can occur. In such supportive contexts, children can learn the value, purpose, and safety of relationships. Demonstration projects can be an important mechanism by which Title IV-E agencies implement and scale up effective screening and assessment tools and interventions focused on safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes.

In 2012, the Children's Bureau approved nine demonstration proposals that include initiatives to support family engagement and family

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<sup>20</sup>More information about the Child Welfare Waivers is available at [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/programs\\_fund/index.htm#child](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/programs_fund/index.htm#child).



support through a myriad of system reform efforts. These efforts include the implementation of evidence-based and evidence-informed practices that focus on meeting the specific needs of children and their caregivers, such as: Child-Parent Psychotherapy, Functional Family Therapy, Homebuilders Healthy Families America, Nurse-Family Partnership, Parent-Child Interaction Therapy, Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, and the Incredible Years (Children's Bureau, 2012c). Several demonstration projects also intend to focus on improving the quality of and access to in-home services, with a few states working toward implementing a differential response pathway for screened-in allegations of abuse and neglect as an alternative to traditional Child Protective Services (CPS) investigation. Other demonstration proposals include a focus on supporting families as youth transition out of residential or congregate care settings back to their home and community. These strategies and many others demonstrate a commitment to family engagement and family support initiatives.

### **Conclusion**

The Children's Bureau incorporates family engagement and family support through many of its state formula and discretionary grant programs and within the technical assistance provided for grantees. At this point, those two strategies have been clearly recognized and valued especially for individuals working with families brought to the attention of the child welfare system. Formula grants provide a relatively stable, albeit limited, source of funds for states that want to infuse parent engagement and family support into their programs. The discretionary grant programs are opportunities to test and evaluate new and innovative approaches at engaging and involving parents and other family members in services. Tailored technical assistance for all grantees is definitely an important federal investment. New opportunities to redesign child welfare through the Child Welfare Waiver Demonstration projects and other discretionary grant initiatives are underway, and more will be learned about family engagement through these efforts.

It is important to recognize that many of these initiatives are still fairly new. Our past experience and research efforts demonstrate that there is a mixed record of success across each of the grant projects funded. There is still much more work to be done to generate greater knowledge and ensure the meaningful involvement of parents and families regarding their own case planning, program planning, and policy development. Lessons learned from the provision of technical assistance on these issues highlight that there is no one-size-fits-all approach in

terms of the type of technical assistance that is most effective or useful for states and grantees. There is a multitude of individual, organizational, community, environmental, and contextual factors that all come into play for the grantees and the families they are serving; these factors can facilitate or impede implementation efforts. Nonetheless, there is no escaping the fact that a transformed child welfare system that focuses on safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes requires parent and family engagement and family support. The Children's Bureau's experience emphasizes that parent and family involvement within a system of care requires mutual respect and meaningful partnerships between families, professionals, and communities. The Children's Bureau's vision for the future of child welfare recognizes that we must do more to support families and communities in ways that will ultimately prevent child maltreatment and keep children within their families and communities (Mitchell et al., 2012). This is not an easy or straightforward task, but it is fundamental for moving into our future.

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