



CDSS

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DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

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GOVERNOR

September 7, 2010

ALL COUNTY INFORMATION NOTICE NO. I-70-10

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS
ALL CHILD WELFARE PROGRAM MANAGERS
ALL CHIEF PROBATION OFFICERS
ALL TRIBES WITH TITLE IV-E AGREEMENTS

SUBJECT: FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AS A PERMANENCY STRATEGY

REASON FOR THIS TRANSMITTAL

- State Law Change
- Federal Law or Regulation Change
- Court Order
- Clarification Requested by One or More Counties
- Initiated by CDSS

The 2008 Federal Child and Family Services Review indicated some practices intended to achieve permanent, stable homes for children and youth are not always used throughout the life of a case. Specifically, reviewers raised concerns regarding inconsistent practices in concurrent planning and reunification efforts. As a result of this concern, the state chose to build on several successful initiatives that improve practice in this area that have momentum. Some of these, such as the use of cultural brokers or guides, and the use of parent partners, are examples where counties have successfully implemented models to help engage parents in developing their case plan, meeting their goals, helping them navigate systems, and mentor them throughout the life of a case.

California's 2009 Program Improvement Plan (PIP) incorporates significant actions designed to ensure that outcomes for children and families continue to improve. One of the major strategies of the PIP is to sustain and enhance permanency efforts across the life of a case. This document highlights two initiatives that counties may use to help accomplish the PIP strategy of sustaining and enhancing permanency efforts.

Cultural Brokers

One promising approach to community engagement involves the use of Cultural Brokers. Cultural Brokers may be foster care alumni or parents who successfully reunified with their children. In Fresno County, Cultural Brokers are supported by the Fresno County Department of Social Services (DSS), and are paid a stipend for their activities. They receive extensive training on the child welfare system, DSS program activities and purposes, child welfare mandates, and the Juvenile Court. Cultural Brokers receive training on the Family-to-Family (F2F) Initiative – including Team Decision Making (TDM) and Family Group Conferences, and have experience serving as a TDM representative. The services of a Cultural Broker are always provided with the consent of the family.

Ideally, Cultural Brokers are of the same culture as the family or have an extensive knowledge base of the family's culture. Some Cultural Brokers have extensive knowledge not only of specific ethnic groups, but also of specialized topic areas such as substance abuse, domestic violence, the Indian Child Welfare Act, or immigration status. Knowledge and expertise in these specialized areas greatly enhance efforts to ensure that families from diverse backgrounds receive effective and appropriate services, support, and advocacy.

The services of a Cultural Broker may be referred to a family at any point in the system, and are especially helpful to both the family and to DSS at key decision points. Cultural Brokers support families in a variety of ways, including linking the family with local supportive resources, assisting with team meetings, encouraging the family to work with the case manager, or attending court with the family. Cultural Brokers also help DSS through activities such as providing written reports to the case manager, alerting DSS to possible risk factors, or assisting agency staff with assessment, support, and safety plans. Cultural Brokers work to increase the quality of the relationship between DSS and the families it serves, so that better outcomes are achieved for the families.

Parent Partners

There is wide recognition that engagement with families is an essential factor in achieving positive outcomes. The addition of Parent Partner programs in child welfare settings is one strategy that several counties are using to promote the full engagement of parents throughout the development and implementation of their case plans. As is done with Cultural Brokers, Parent Partner services are provided with the consent of the family. Parents who have experienced removal of a child, received child welfare services, and successfully reunified are recruited and are compensated. The parents are trained and supported to provide services to other parents whose families are involved in the child welfare system, and, in some cases, are able to bridge gaps between various systems.

In Los Angeles County, several Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) offices have a Parents in Partnership program and expansion is continuous, with 30 Parent Partners currently collaborating with the Department. In this model, one parent performs in the role of "Lead Parent Partner," and the Departmental Program Coordinators oversee all Parent Partners countywide. Program successes are noteworthy and feedback from participating parents, staff, and community agencies is positive.

Partner Partners in Los Angeles County share their expertise with various DCFS operated focus groups, senior management committees, panels, and Parent Leadership conferences. For example, Parent Partners participated in the Statewide Self Assessment, Strategic Planning Redesign, and Juvenile Dependency Court Focus Groups. Last year 12 Parent Partners received praise for their participation in a Self Assessment Focus Group. In addition, Parent Partners attend the National Parent Leadership Conference each year, and facilitate PIP-related workshops at national summits and local conferences.

While some elements of a Parent Partner program may vary among counties, one of the primary roles of Parent Partners is to help parents successfully navigate the child welfare system and meet case plan goals. Many parents involved in the child welfare system feel isolated, and they may be unaware of services that can help. Parent Partners are a supportive resource to help a parent access services and navigate the complex child welfare system. In addition to the trust that comes from shared experience, Parent Partners also give parents hope that successful reunification is indeed possible.

In order to help counties understand the various models of Parent Partner programs that exist in California, the California Department of Social Services' Office of Child Abuse Prevention, the Parent Leadership State Advisory Committee, and Parents Anonymous® Inc. developed the California Parent Engagement Center (CPEC). The CPEC is an online resource for parent engagement and parent involvement in California communities. This resource includes parent engagement programs and strategies where parents collaborate in meaningful ways with professionals to deliver direct services, trainings, public awareness, public education, policy development, and systems change. It is designed to assist the state with increasing the use of evidence-based and evidence-informed projects.

The CPEC supports parent engagement programs that increase awareness, knowledge, skills, and abilities of parents working in child-serving organizations. Through this increased knowledge, widespread adoption of evidence-based and evidence-informed approaches is anticipated, and efforts to strengthen families will improve.

For further information about the CPEC, please visit the CPEC web site at www.cparentengagement.org.

Should you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact Lee Ann Kelly, Assistant Chief, Office of Child Abuse Prevention at (916) 651-6960.

Sincerely,

Original Document Signed By:

LINNÉ STOUT, Chief
Child Protection and Family Support Branch