



OVERVIEW OF CAPP FORMATIVE EVALUATION

Background

This document is a summary of the California Partners for Permanency (CAPP) formative evaluation activities conducted through Spring 2014. CAPP is funded through the federal Permanency Innovations Initiative (PII), a 5-year, \$100 million, multi-site demonstration project designed to improve permanency outcomes among children in foster care who face the most serious barriers to permanency. Formative evaluation is the process of monitoring the relationships between program outputs and the achievement of key intended short-term outcomes. This evaluation phase also includes the development and testing of evaluation measures and methods to assess whether the intervention worked as intended. The formative evaluation was conducted by the PII-Evaluation Team (PII-ET) with input from CAPP. It serves as a tool for CAPP leadership in making decisions about the intervention and its implementation prior to moving to a summative evaluation (which is a rigorous evaluation of the final, long-term impact of the intervention).

PII includes six grantees, each with a unique intervention to help a specific subgroup of children leave foster care in fewer than three years. Some PII interventions had an extensive evidence-base and were quickly able to begin implementation, whereas other models were developmental, requiring more time and adjustment prior to implementation and formative evaluation. The CAPP intervention, the Child and Family Practice Model (Practice Model), is developmental and was initially rolled out in one of the four counties participating in CAPP. The Practice Model is a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional approach to child welfare practice based on a theoretical framework, values and principles, organizational and system standards and 23 practice behaviors. CAPP aims to simultaneously improve permanency outcomes for all children and reduce disparities in permanency outcomes among those who are in care the longest, especially African American and American Indian children. CAPP's formative evaluation began when the Practice Model was first being implemented.

In implementing the Practice Model, CAPP sites apply the principles of implementation science at all levels of child welfare, from frontline social workers and supervisors to leadership and the larger organizational systems that protect children. Community and Tribal Partners have provided critical perspectives and contributions since the beginning of CAPP and continue to be involved in implementation and evaluation—specifically, training, coaching and fidelity assessment.

A small dataset from the first social workers to implement the Practice Model in Fresno County, the site of formative evaluation, was studied for early signs that children and families were participating in, and benefiting from, the Practice Model. Specifically, formative evaluation focused on: changes in the way CAPP-trained social workers conducted case-management activities, parent and guardian perceptions of their interactions with CAPP-trained social workers, and early indicators of expected changes in permanency outcomes.

Formative Evaluation Process

Working with CAPP, PII-ET created data collection instruments, measures and analysis methods to understand whether the Practice Model was leading to expected short-term outcomes and to test the feasibility of applying the newly created measures and analysis methods in later, more intensive phases

of evaluation. These activities included developing a parent/legal guardian survey and identifying data fields and records that provided information about key casework events such as team meetings or visitations. The analysis profiled Family Reunification cases which were open during the first 6-month period of CAPP installation and which were being served by the first two groups of CAPP-trained workers in Fresno County. The areas studied included:

1. *Local Administrative Data* – Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) administrative data was used to analyze a sample of CAPP-served children comparing the number of contacts, collaterals, meetings, and Fresno-supervised visitations in pre-CAPP and post-CAPP periods.
2. *Parent/Legal Guardian Survey* – A sample of parents and legal guardians served by CAPP-trained workers was surveyed to learn about their perceptions and test the feasibility of telephone administration.
3. *Case Record Review* – Case records were analyzed for a sample of cases in which parents and legal guardians responded to the telephone survey and consented to case record review. The purpose was to gather additional information about case-management activities and casework events such as team meetings and visitations.

Permanency Outcome Analysis – Though there was not sufficient time to study long-term permanency outcomes, early work was done in identifying datasets, constructing variables and testing analyses that could be used to develop matched comparison groups of CAPP and non-CAPP children.

Challenges and Learnings

CAPP is a developmental site. In other words, the intervention was created as part of the PII project, in contrast to other PII grantees that adapted an evidence-supported intervention. Developmental sites are important to the overall field of child welfare as they test innovative strategies aimed at improving permanency outcomes. However, the evaluation of developmental sites poses many challenges, such as determining which short-term outcomes would accurately indicate that the Practice Model was working as intended. Partly due to the complexities of evaluating a developmental site, the formative findings were inconclusive. That is, the formative evaluation did not indicate whether the Practice Model was leading to the expected changes in casework practice. Evaluation challenges stemmed from the complex nature of the Practice Model and its continuing development; hard-to-measure systemic factors such as availability of a local continuum of culturally sensitive services and supports to meet individualized family needs; errors, gaps and limitations in CWS/CMS administrative data; and a low response rate to the parent/legal guardian survey. These challenges and learnings are described more fully below.

The formative evaluation analyzed CWS/CMS administrative data during a period in which the Practice Model and implementation supports were being developed, tested and refined in Fresno County. The evaluation period began as CAPP-trained social workers and their supervisors were actively learning to apply the 23 CAPP practice behaviors in real world family contexts, cultures and situations. At the same time, organizational leaders were working to identify and address system barriers, and create the implementation supports and complementary services needed to ensure the Practice Model effectively served children and families. In addition, other key stakeholders involved in decisions about services for children in foster care and their families, such as courts, foster family agencies and mental health providers, were just becoming aware of the Practice Model and beginning to consider its impact on their work. Other system issues such as staff turnover, transfers, promotions and leaves that affected worker assignment of cases created further complexities in identifying CAPP-served children and families for the evaluation.

An intervention is ready for formative evaluation when it has been sufficiently defined and consistently implemented. However, some aspects of the Practice Model cannot be fully implemented by social workers and experienced by children and families until needed organizational supports and system changes are in place. Not having the Practice Model fully operational impedes the evaluation. This issue is not unique to CAPP, as similar initiatives across the country are experiencing challenges in evaluation of developmental interventions. While numerous child welfare systems have launched case work practice reform and system change initiatives, establishing proven methods of evaluating these multi-faceted practice and system-level interventions remains a challenge.

Errors, gaps and limitations in CWS/CMS administrative data precluded accurate measurement of changes in case work practice after implementing CAPP. CWS/CMS data entry is driven by long-established local court and child welfare agency requirements and protocols, while also being impacted by a worker's caseload and workload at a given point in time. Documenting required monthly visits and developing court reports and case plans are priorities. While data fields exist to enter team meetings, visitations and other relevant interactions and events, they may not be consistently used and when they are, information is generally limited to frequency rather than quality or outcome of the casework event. The formative evaluation confirmed early concerns that CWS/CMS is not an effective data source to analyze changes in case-management activities as a result of CAPP implementation.

While a newly created parent/legal guardian survey appears to be an effective instrument in measuring parents' perceptions of their interactions and relationship with their caseworker, telephone administration of the survey yielded a low response rate. Survey responses for 13 parents and legal guardians were generally positive. For example, many respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had positive relationships with their social workers, their circles of support were involved in case planning and problem solving, and they had a sense of hopefulness and feelings of control over their families' future. However, the small number of respondents cannot be considered representative of the CAPP-served population. Court reports, notes from delivered service logs, and miscellaneous documents contained in case records provide a level of precision in casework event measurement that was not attainable through CWS/CMS data. The case records revealed evidence of the activities; however because consent for case record review was tied to consent for the parent/legal guardian survey, this part of the formative evaluation also had a small sample size and the findings could not be generalized to the CAPP-served population.

Finally, as the CAPP evaluation is using a matched comparison group rather than randomized control group evaluation design, various data sources and comparison group variables were tested to inform future permanency outcome analyses. This analysis clarified the strengths and weaknesses of national data sources and highlighted the very different patterns of achieving permanency and exiting from foster care across California counties. Much was learned about the challenges in developing matched comparison groups of CAPP and non-CAPP children, an important evaluation issue in determining whether CAPP implementation impacts local permanency outcomes.

Much has been learned from the formative evaluation to inform the next phase of CAPP evaluation. CAPP and PII leadership are working together to make changes to the CAPP Evaluation Plan and coordinate next steps in the evaluation.

Summary and Next Steps

California's CAPP Child and Family Practice Model is a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional frontline practice intervention based on 23 front-line practice behaviors, introduced to workers through a basic CAPP training and integrated into practice with the help of observation and coaching of workers engaged in casework activities. The Practice Model seeks to reduce racial disparity through improved culturally sensitive casework and other changes in practice.

The formative evaluation included an examination of early findings and results for a small number of participating children and families. However, as CAPP is a developmental intervention, the overall results of the evaluation were inconclusive. Following formative evaluation, there will continue to be discussions of the complexity of the CAPP Child and Family Practice Model and its system-wide implementation. Furthermore, it is believed that more time is needed to observe children's permanency, particularly in the context of the project's goal to reduce long-term foster care.

The CAPP formative evaluation has provided a solid foundation for improving the measures and methodologies for evaluating the Practice Model. It is recommended that CAPP summative evaluation be deferred and a second, more conclusive formative evaluation be conducted that includes a shift in the methodology. Targeted focus on four areas using data from each CAPP site should lead to an evaluation that will provide a better indication of short- and long-term Practice Model outcomes. This next stage of evaluation, although different from what was originally envisioned, will advance CAPP and PII-ET in developing the most rigorous evaluation achievable in the remaining months of the project.

The need for site collaboration and participation with the PII-ET is critical in conducting the next stage of evaluation. Additionally, analysis of CWS/CMS administrative data will be limited to identifying children and families that participate in CAPP. Use of case record review will continue to be explored, as this method is able to provide a level of detail in casework event measurement not found in CWS/CMS.

The first focus area is to incorporate worker fidelity assessment observation data into the permanency outcome analysis to explore whether fidelity influences permanency outcomes. The second focus area is to analyze worker training data from the Decision Support Data System (DSDS) as well as CWS/CMS worker assignment history to accurately identify when a child began being served by a CAPP-trained worker. Because CAPP training is being rolled out over time, it is critical to pinpoint when a CAPP-trained worker began serving a child to calculate a child's start of CAPP services, and the length of time served by CAPP. The third focus area is to administer the parent/legal guardian survey in all sites, once a minimum threshold of workers have completed CAPP training, in order to understand whether CAPP is achieving desired improvements in social worker-client interactions and related short-term outcomes. Alternative methods of administering the survey in addition to or instead of a telephone survey will be explored in an effort to increase response rate. In addition, a caregiver survey will be added to measure improvements for children who are not being reunified. The fourth focus area is to identify an established dataset to be used in permanency outcomes analysis, develop methods to create fair comparison groups, and consider systemic factors to be incorporated into the analysis for each CAPP site. Child welfare program perspectives will be brought together with evaluators skilled in analysis to identify the most promising data and matching variables to help CAPP and PII leadership understand whether CAPP is achieving the intended long-term outcomes of reduced long-term foster care and reduced disparity in permanency outcomes.

As the CAPP journey continues, California Department of Social Services (CDSS), CAPP staff members and implementing county and office sites (Fresno, Humboldt, Los Angeles-Pomona, Los Angeles-

Wateridge, and Santa Clara) will collaborate closely with PII leadership, with a goal of completing the extended formative evaluation activities described above by the end of the Permanency Innovations Initiative grant.



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