Fathers and Continuous Learning in Child Welfare

Evidence suggests that positive father involvement can improve a range of outcomes for children. Father involvement is also related to positive child welfare outcomes, including enhanced child well-being, a reduced likelihood of entry into foster care, shorter stints in foster care, and increased rates of reunification. Despite the potential for positive impacts, systematic reviews of strategies to engage fathers and paternal relatives in child welfare reveal little empirical evidence to guide practice. This project attempts to fill this gap and address the longstanding challenge of engaging fathers and their relatives in the child welfare system.

The project team will review the evidence in the areas of father and paternal relative engagement in child welfare, identify key touchpoints for engagement, and review collaborative continuous learning processes. This work will inform identification of high-priority father and paternal relative engagement strategies. The project team will then plan and conduct a pilot study in four sites to test the engagement strategies using collaborative continuous learning processes.

Mathematica Policy Research and the University of Denver are conducting this project under contract with the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, within the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Partnering with the Office of Family Assistance (which oversees the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood discretionary grant program) and the Children's Bureau, this project includes the following key tasks:

- Review information on engaging fathers and paternal relatives of children and youth involved in the child welfare system

- Map potential touch points for engaging fathers and paternal relatives of children and youth involved in the child welfare system

- Review information on the use of continuous learning approaches in child welfare settings

- Conduct a pilot study using a detailed plan for implementing the engagement strategies using collaborative continuous learning processes

The project began in September 2017, and will run through March, 2020.

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