

Child Welfare-Early Learning Partnership Project

Recommendation to CHSW EHS Leadership Group To Modify Selection Rating Scale

Context

Children's Home Society of Washington (CHSW) received a two-year federal grant in Fall 2012to:

- Increase access by families who are pregnant or have children ages birth to 5 and are involved in the child welfare system in King County to evidence-based early learning and child development programs by developing policies and practices to routinely provide linkages to those families between the child welfare and early learning systems.
- Expand protective factors and mediate the effects of adverse experiences of those families.

This is a system-change grant, designed to put in place linkages that will result in reaching families involved in the child welfare system but whose children are not in foster care or formal kinship care. These families are seldom linked to evidence-based early learning programs.

Participation in evidence-based early learning programs for the children and families can provide high-quality services to meet the developmental needs of infants, toddlers and preschoolers, and build positive parent-child relationships and other protective factors that can prevent the families from later entering the child welfare system after their situation further deteriorates.

CHSW seeks to demonstrate its leadership in achieving the project goals by finding opportunities within its own early learning programs that fit its mission of nurturing and stable families; fostering effective parenting; improving school readiness; developing social and emotional competence; and working to keep children safe and secure. By modeling internal changes, we hope to influence other providers to take similar steps.

For example, for new slots CHSW has received for the Parent-Child Home Program and Parents as Teachers, staff is actively seeking families involved in the child welfare system.

Recommendation

Modify the CHSW EHS Selection Rating Scale by assigning 500 points for "family is currently or was under CPS supervision in the last two years."

Rationale

By assigning 500 points to families who meet the criteria, they would have the same priority as a child in foster care or formal kinship care. This would demonstrate a strong commitment by CHSW to provide access to these families and to devote its early learning resources to a major underserved category of highly vulnerable families.

Compelling research shows:

- The vast majority of children who come into contact with the child welfare system remain at home, some with basic child welfare services and many others with no services at all after investigation. Serious developmental and behavioral problems are as frequent among these children as among children removed from their homes.
- Children referred to child welfare have high developmental and behavioral need regardless of the level of child welfare involvement. Mechanisms need to be developed to address disparities in access to intervention.

- Both toddlers (41.8 percent) and preschoolers (68.1 percent) who are involved in the child welfare system have high developmental and behavioral needs. However, few children are receiving services for these issues (22.7 percent overall). Children that remain with their biological parents have similar needs to those in out-of-home care but are less likely to use services. Children younger than 3 years of age are least likely to use services.
- Across age groups, approximately half of young children in the child welfare system had developmental or behavioral problems that likely would qualify them for early intervention services.
- Over the course of one year, slightly fewer than one quarter (22.7 percent) of young children in contact with the child welfare system received any developmental or behavioral intervention from the education, mental health, or primary care sectors. Differences were seen by age; only 12.9 percent of infants and toddlers and 31.6 percent of preschoolers received services during that period.
- The severity of problems observed among many young children in contact with the child welfare system extends beyond delay and into impairment.
- Contact with the child welfare system should be seen as a signal that other compensatory or protective factors are likely not to be in place in many families, suggesting that identified problems are likely in many cases not to improve substantially without intervention.
- Increased focus on children remaining in their homes after contact with the child welfare system is particularly warranted because of the small proportion of child abuse reports that will result in a placement into out-of-home care or even an open case.

Because CPS focuses primarily on physical safety of children for formal court dependency cases and out-of-home placement, the vast majority of children CPS encounters who are experiencing emotional abuse and neglect, chronic toxic stress, lack of nurturing parent/caregiver relationships critical to brain development, and more are not receiving intervention services of which they have great need.

Determination of Whether Family Meets Criteria

EHS staff would use the existing system of talking with families to determine whether they meet the criteria for the proposed category of “family is currently or was under CPS supervision in the last two years.”

This definition would cover situations in which the family is “voluntarily” receiving services after coming to the attention of CPS.

(If the child is in foster care or formal kinship care, the 500 points for that category would remain the same.)

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