

ARIZONA CHILD WELFARE WAIVER DEMONSTRATION
FINAL REPORT

I. Overview

Provide a brief summary of major demonstration activities completed to date, as well of any significant evaluation findings. Summarize any major changes to the design of the demonstration or to the evaluation since the previous semi-annual report (NOTE: Any significant changes to the design of the proposed demonstration or evaluation must be approved by the Children’s Bureau before they are implemented).

The Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS, Department) began initial implementation of Arizona’s title IV-E waiver demonstration project, known as Fostering Sustainable Connections (FSC), on July 1, 2016. The reporting period of this final report is July 1, 2019, through September 30, 2019. The final evaluation report will be submitted March 31, 2020.

During this time, the contracted agency, Arizona’s Children Association, has maintained two Supervisors and 13 Family Engagement Specialists (FES). These FESs support multiple site-based teams (SBT), and continue to focus on youth placed in group homes. The contracted agency’s current contract was extended beyond the IV-E waiver demonstration project end date of September 30, 2019, and will continue through January 2020. The Fostering Sustainable Connections program will continue indefinitely, as DCS released a Request for Proposal and will award a new FSC contract in January 2020.

A Peer Mentor Program was implemented with FSC in January 2019. FSC data revealed that in 2018, 22% of youth engaged in the Family Finding intervention who had relative or kinship placements identified chose to remain in congregate care. The FSC Peer Mentoring Program is designed to provide the youth valuable resources to assist them in making informed decisions to improve their well-being, support permanency, and nurture meaningful connections. Since the implementation of this program, FSC has found that youth enjoyed learning from someone with shared lived experience and having a relatable advocate.

The Peer Mentor program was implemented with a relatively small sample of youth who had family living arrangements identified through FSC but chose to remain in congregate care. Within this small sample, two youth made informed decisions to move to a less restrictive living arrangement after engaging with the Peer Mentor. The Peer Mentor assisted them with accurate information about resources to include education, employment, transportation, housing, advocacy, and how they could continue to receive those same services while living with the identified families. FSC recognizes other factors impacted these youth’s decisions, however the youth reported the experience with the Peer Mentor to be valuable in their decision making.

During this IV-E waiver project, FSC has not only demonstrated an ability to improve the outcomes for children who have been placed in congregate care, and the capacity to bridge the gap between the system and the communities that we serve by nurturing and empowering the networks that were preexisting to the Department’s involvement. FSC will continue as part of the DCS programs to support children exiting congregate care and finding permanent connections.

II. Demonstration Status, Activities, and Accomplishments

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Provide a detailed overview of the status of the demonstration in the following areas:

A. Numbers and types of services provided to date. Note in particular the implementation status of any innovative or promising practices.

Fostering Sustainable Connections attempts to reduce the time children spend in congregate care settings by enhancing family/fictive kin search and engagement activities, introducing the Life Long Connections Team Decision-Making (TDM) type, and supporting the action plans created in partnership with the family/fictive kin with available in-home reunification, placement stabilization, and other needed services. The work of the Family Engagement Specialists is a key factor for achieving the desired outcomes. In order to track the work the FESs are completing, they are required, monthly, to enter data into the FES Tracking Workbook. This assists the FES supervisors and the Department, and helped ASU to evaluate program fidelity and outcomes. The data collected in the workbook include:

- Total number of children referred to FSC
- Age of child
- ‘Before FSC’ placement type
- Engagement activities the FES completed with child/youth
- Pre-FSC Family/Supports identified
- Database searches used
- ‘After FSC’ placement type
- Post-FSC Family/Supports found
- Services identified & referred during FSC
- The number of children receiving Blended Perspective and Life Long Connections Meetings

To date, the FESs have worked to engage 576 children and their family/fictive kin. The children’s ages ranged from three to eighteen years old, all of whom were in either in shelter or group home settings at the start of the FES’s involvement. Innovative Family Finding activities have included 199 connectedness maps, three eco maps, 27 genograms, 277 mobility maps, 39 safety circles, and 81 Tree of Life activities. Five hundred fifty-five children/youth received Family Finding interviews. Database searches have been conducted through the DCS Family LocateUnit, Lexis Nexis, Seneca, White pages, Zaba Search, and social media. FES staff report that Seneca searches and the use of social media have been the most effective electronic resources in family finding. For the 434 children whose services have been closed, these search and engagement activities have resulted in 122 (28%) children being placed with relatives, 27 (6%) pending placement with relatives, and 69 (16%) placed in less restrictive family-like settings. These activities also identified an additional 4,104 family members and other individuals as supports for the children. Services put in place for children and their family/fictive kin included 47 referrals for behavioral health services, 42 linked to community-based services, and 24 referrals for in-home services. FSC would like to see an increase in preservation services in the future, as there is a need for additional support for families/supports and connections.

B. Other demonstration activities begun, completed, or that remain ongoing

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(e.g., introduction of new policies and procedures, staff training).

The final Statewide Implementation team meeting occurred in September 2019, and included internal and community stakeholders. The Implementation meeting spotlighted all implementation sites and one Family Engagement Specialist. The Family Engagement Specialist shared success stories about positive outcomes for youth who engaged with FSC. The Implementation meeting has been successful in increasing the understanding of FSC and has provided immense support in identifying the right type of communication to reach the courts, youth, Department staff, and community.

During this final Statewide Implementation meeting, the Family Engagement Specialist presented on a youth who had not had contact with either biological parent since being legally freed for adoption. Once referred to FSC, the FES was able to make contact with biological parents and discovered an additional 38 connections. The youth gained committed connections/supports including both of the biological parents, siblings, and many family members participated in the Life Long Connections TDM where several living arrangement options were planned. Ultimately, the youth self-advocated and notified the DCS Specialist of the desired placement as of their 18th birthday. The youth remains in contact with biological family via telephone calls, and successfully completed DCS's Independent Living Skills training program prior to moving to the desired placement at 18. Without the intervention and advocacy by FSC, the youth may not have had such a positive outcome or be reunited with the biological family.

Updates have been made to the FSC procedures and FES standard work to include clarification regarding the process workflow, the selection of children for FSC, and the documentation workbook has been updated and streamlined to gather the data more efficiently. This has expedited data collection for the master summary report. Additional updates have been made to the documentation of the family and child contacts made by the FESs. The Statewide Coordinator created two data roll-ups evaluating the outcomes of individual FESs, as well as individual implementation offices. This data has been helpful in identifying where outstanding efforts are being made, and where there is need for additional coaching. The monthly report was amended to include stage of service, referral date, and ongoing action items. The context and documentation of the monthly report is currently being monitored for quality assurance.

Blended Perspectives Meetings (BPMs) are facilitated by the FESs and bring the family and other key participants together to connect or reconnect the child and family. These meetings bring together the family network and others who support the child to provide a blended perspective so family/fictive kin that do not know the child or have not been in contact with the child for some time can learn about the child and his or her greatest strengths and needs. There have been 122 BPMs held with a total of 790 family members and supports in participation. Additional coaching has been provided to FES staff to conduct BPMs for each child/children served, ensuring the essential program component occurs. Fidelity monitoring continues through observation of BPMs. One fidelity observation per FES is completed each quarter by the FSC Statewide Coordinator, utilizing a monitoring tool and the BPM Quality Assurance summary report.

The FSC Statewide Coordinator has observed many positive outcomes during BPMs. Supports and connections may attend in person or via telephone, and often include individuals who live out of state. BPMs allow for discussions about strengths of the children and families, and assessment

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of their needs. The children and connections feel heard by the team and are encouraged to keep open dialogue throughout the meeting.

The Department's Learning & Development Unit, and the Permanency & Youth Services Unit that oversees FSC, are able to deliver Family Finding Training. The contracted agency also has the ability to deliver the training and has been facilitating training to their newly hired employees. The Department has the full ability to facilitate the training for internal or external stakeholders as needed.

C. Challenges to implementation and the steps taken to address them.

No challenges have been identified.

II. Conclusion

The DCS continues to be supportive of the Fostering Sustainable Connections program by continuing the program after the IV-E Waiver Demonstration Project period. DCS looks forward to serving many more children and youth to find supportive connections and permanency options for those remaining in congregate care settings.