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Casey Family to Family Initiative

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BACKGROUND: The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 identified key child welfare outcomes of safety, permanency, and well-being. The subsequent Child and Family Service Reviews evaluated the quality of casework practice and systemic factors that promote these outcomes. However, there has been much debate regarding the best way to measure child welfare outcomes such as permanency. The Child and Family Service Reviews measure permanency through point in time data. Others in the field have suggested that permanency outcomes must be measured longitudinally, or there is an inherent bias toward children who have remained in the system for prolonged periods of time.

The Casey Family to Family Initiative has funded efforts in a number of states to promote permanency and other child welfare outcomes through a focus on maintaining family connections, the use of kinship care, keeping siblings together, and placing children in natural neighborhoods. Other key skills are facilitated staffings (family team meetings) and targeted recruitment efforts. Jefferson County was one of the grantees of the Casey Family to Family organization for the past five years.

METHODOLOGY:

- Data extract obtained from the Cabinet for Health and Family Services Information System Department
- Extract converted into a longitudinal format in order to analyze permanency data over time versus single point in time
- Children were assigned to cohorts based upon time of entry into system
- Analyzed type and number of placements, length of time in care, and other permanency outcomes

KEY FINDINGS:

- Decrease in use of private child care and increase in use of kinship care since Casey involvement
- Kinship care is the most stable placement
- Increase in length of time to re-entry into the child welfare system
- Children placed in kinship care are significantly less likely to re-enter the system
- Increase in percentage of children placed with siblings since Casey involvement
- Decrease in number of placements since Casey involvement

USEFULNESS TO CABINET:

- The lessons learned from this research have important policy and practice implications related to placement types and patterns.
- Children who are placed in kinship care experience much greater stability and a reduced risk of re-entering the system.
- This data also confirms that with concerted effort, sibling groups can be maintained together in order to maintain family connections.
- The University of Louisville has developed expertise in the longitudinal analysis of outcomes, which has applications to numerous issues in the child welfare and health systems.