

STUART FOUNDATION

INVESTING IN CHILDREN & YOUTH

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS Final Narrative Report

Grant Number: 2003-451

Report period from-to (date): _____

Report Due Date: _____

Name of Organization: University of Washington School of Social Work

Contact Person/Title: Maureen Marcenko/Associate Professor

Mailing Address: University of Washington
Street or P.O. Box: School of Social Work
City, State, Zip: 4101 15th Avenue NE
Seattle, WA 98105

Telephone: (206)543-3546

e-mail (for contact person): mmarcenk@u.washington.edu

INSTRUCTIONS

The Foundation requires final reports on all grants. The purposes of this report is to provide information useful in tracking progress toward the objectives of the funded work; to document what is being learned and help provide a basis for charting future work; and to help ensure accountability for the use of funds awarded by the Foundation. After you submit a report, the Foundation's program staff will contact you about any further questions we may have.

Due dates for reports on your grant are contained in the grant agreement. If you want to request a change in the reporting schedule, please contact the program officer or program associate responsible for your grant. An organization that fails to provide the required reports on a grant may become ineligible for future funding from the Foundation.

All reports should be submitted to the address below to ensure proper record of receipt. Reports will be forwarded to Program Officer for review and approval. If you have any questions regarding the contents of these reports, please contact your Program Officer or Program Associate at (415) 393-1551. Please refer to the grant number on any related correspondence with the Foundation.

**Grants Management
Stuart Foundation
50 California Street, Suite 3350
San Francisco, CA 94111**

COMPLETING THE NARRATIVE

Please complete your answers in the provided table boxes (the boxes will expand as you type).

Please report on your work in meeting each objective listed on the most recent grant agreement and carrying out the overall activities and objectives stated in your funded proposal.

The original objectives of the grant and progress towards each objective are reported below.

Objective #1:

To implement the Parent Mentoring Program in Vancouver and Olympia, serving 110 families.

Progress Toward Meeting Objective # 1:

Ninety-seven parents with a total of 157 children in care received PMP services

Objective #2:

To measure the efficacy of the program through an independent evaluation.

Progress Toward Meeting Objective # 2:

An evaluation was conducted by Maureen Marcenko at the University of Washington. The results are reported in the next section of this report. A full evaluation report is attached to this document.

Objective #3:

To use the evaluation outcomes to refine the model and accompanying program materials so that the program can be replicated in other public child welfare offices.

Progress Toward Meeting Objective # 3:

Feedback from birth parents and mentors led to extension of the program to a maximum of 6 months. Furthermore, the PMP staff have developed materials that have been used to replicate the program in additional DCFS offices.

Objective #4:

To disseminate the program and supporting materials statewide.

Progress Toward Meeting Objective # 4:

The project staff and evaluator have presented at several statewide meetings and one national meeting. The list includes:

Local and Statewide Presentations:

- 6 CASA trainings
- 3 Reasonable Efforts Symposia
- 2 Foster Parent Conferences
- 2 Newspaper Articles
- 1 Statewide Parent Engagement Conference
- 1 University of Washington publication
- 1 Statewide DCFS Conference
- 1 Region-wide DCFS Supervisor's meeting
- 2 "good news" stories on DCFS intranet
- Governor Gregoire site visit
- Presentations to MSW students at UW

National Presentation:

(2005). *The Birth Parent/Foster Parent Mentoring Program: From Program Design to Program Evidence*. Building on Family Strengths: Research and Services in Support of Children and their Families, Research and Training Center on Family Support and Children's Mental Health, Portland State University.

In addition to the presentations reported above, the program developed a video which will be sent under separate cover by the Program Coordinator.

What did the project accomplish? Please summarize the evaluation results as well as your own views.

Accomplishments:

- (1) **Reunification:** 85% of children in the mentoring group were reunified compared to 44% of the comparison group children.
- (2) **Length of Stay:** Children in the mentoring group stayed in foster care 224 fewer days than comparison group children.

The qualitative analysis indicated high satisfaction with the program on the part both of mentors and parents. Mentors established supportive, non-judgmental relationships with birth parents and provided highly valued assistance with parenting skills, organization, and practical help.

Evaluation Conclusions

The Parent Mentoring Program has proven to be a promising child welfare program. Parents who participated in the PMP were more likely to reunify with their children than comparison group parents. Furthermore, children in the PMP group spent fewer days in foster care. These are important findings because they go to the heart of the goal of child welfare intervention - to reunify parents and children whenever safely possible. There was no significant difference between the two groups in re-entry to care post-reunification, although there was a trend for children in the PMP group to return to care more frequently. Anecdotal data support the theory that a surveillance effect was operating for PMP families due to the ongoing involvement of mentors.

An additional benefit of the program is its grounding in every day child welfare practice. Most evidence-based models have been developed outside of child welfare and imported with uneven success. The fact that this program was developed by line public child welfare social workers increases the likelihood that it will be taken up and implemented within the system, creating systemic change.

This evaluation points to the potentially positive outcomes of the program. To test whether or not the positive findings are a result of the program, it is necessary to conduct a randomized controlled trial. This design would also allow for a benefit cost analysis. Therefore, the primary recommendation emerging from this evaluation is that the PMP be tested against a similar intervention utilizing random assignment to conditions. Only under these conditions can we test whether or not the positive findings are attributable to the PMP.

Were there any disappointments or aspects of the project left incomplete?

Initially the program staff experienced challenges in implementation related to paying mentors for the work they did with families. The DCFS business functions were not structured to pay non-employee, non-contracted service providers. The requirements of contracting were cost prohibitive for mentors, primarily due to insurance issues. Ultimately, the DCFS administration intervened and a new payment stream was created specifically for the mentors. The experienced mentors remained loyal to the program through many months without compensation, but the program staff was reluctant to aggressively recruit cases or train additional mentors until the payment process was established. As a result, fewer families were served than would have been had the program been able to implement fully in July 2005. Nonetheless, the PMP only fell short of its goal by thirteen families (97 of 110 families).

Were there unanticipated benefits or successes as a result of the work?

At least five unanticipated and positive outcomes were observed.

- 1) Six babies were born to families in the PMP Group during the time they were working with a mentor or after the mentoring period was over and none were placed in foster care.
- 2) While the original goal of the program was to increase reunification, other permanent plans were achieved for children whose parents worked with mentors at a greater rate than those in the Comparison Group. Of these permanent plans, which included the relinquishment of parental rights, changes of custody and guardianships, 13 were achieved by agreement and without contested court action. Parents in the PMP Group were better able to understand the needs of their children and participate in making alternate parenting plans for their children.
- 3) Most of the parents in the Program had abused drugs and alcohol and had fractured relationships with their extended families. As a result, their family members were distrustful of them and not available to provide the more natural supports that parents need. Mentors worked with the parents' relatives to help the families rebuild trust and come together to support reunification.
- 4) Foster parent retention was enhanced by the foster parents' involvement with PMP. Foster parent mentors reported increased satisfaction with foster parenting and often remained licensed to provide care after adopting children or when they may have otherwise chosen to leave the program. Consequently, the wisdom and skill of experienced foster parents was not lost to the agency or to the families.
- 5) Mentors continued their relationships with the parents they worked with long after the structured mentoring period was over. As a result, they were able to support parents beyond the official mentoring program.

What has been learned from the project that would be helpful to others working on similar issues in the future?

Systemic change has occurred in the ways that foster parents and DCFS staff work together. The culture in the offices which were offered PMP has been changed in terms of the way birth parents are included in developing case plans and in team meetings. Social workers report that their enthusiasm for the work they do has been enhanced by the success of the parents they've referred to PMP. They indicate that their respect for foster parents has increased and that they are relating differently to all foster parents, not just those who are mentors. The mentors have served as ambassadors to the foster parent community as well and the Division of Licensed Resources reports that foster parents are more willing to engage birth parents at visits and to team with them around parenting their children. Prior to the implementation of PMP it was thought that a DCFS office had to be culturally "ready" to support this level of foster parent/social worker/birth parent engagement. This experience indicates that the activity impacts the culture and benefits foster parents and social workers whether or not they directly participate in the program.

How did lessons learned from this project inform/influence the organization's structure, practice, and/or capacity?

The project has had a positive influence on social work practice in the offices it has served as well as other offices within Region 6 and the State. Region 6 has adopted the PMP model as the model it intends to utilize in other offices wishing to engage the intervention. At this point, the Regional Administrator has selected two additional offices to receive the program. The Region has committed to continued funding for the Vancouver and Tumwater offices and expanded program implementation in two additional offices.

The Regional Administrator in Region 5 has embraced the program as an effective intervention and has implemented the PMP program in the Bellingham office. It is the intention of Region 5 to add additional offices as the budget allows.

Additionally, the administrator in Region 6 and the statewide Director of Program Operations have discussed the program and support the agency participating in a more rigorous evaluation of the program to bring it to an evidence-based level. This represents implementation in more offices in the region and elsewhere. Clearly the State realizes the value of the program and wishes to expand the capacity of the program to serve additional clients. Planning is underway to determine the organizational structure that will be required to support the expanded efforts.

Has the grant stimulated other work or projects?

As a result of the PMP's success, parents who reunified with their children and who may otherwise have lost contact with the Department remained connected through the relationships they had with their mentors. They continued to do well and reached a point where they wanted to give back to the system that had helped their families and to offer support to parents who were where they had once been. In June 2007 a work group was convened to develop a program that would meet the needs of parents in Clark County. Child welfare professionals and successful birth parents came together and designed a program with three main components:

- An Advisory Group of successfully reunited birth parents would meet regularly to offer assistance and information on parents' issues to the Department and the community.
- A monthly course called "Here's The Deal" would be presented to parents currently working toward reunification which would introduce the relevant child welfare professionals and explain their roles, feature a birth parents telling the story of their experience with DCFS and their reunification and offer a skill-building workshop on topics selected by the Advisory Group and felt to be of importance to parents in the system.
- Experienced birth parents would offer education, support and self-advocacy skills to parents involved with the child welfare system.

In January 2008 a successfully reunified birth parent was hired by the Department and housed in the DCFS office in Vancouver. The impact the Program has had on the culture of DCFS, the families involved, and the community has been far-reaching. While some of the benefits of the Program may be difficult to quantify the following data has been collected:

- The Parent Advisory Group has continued to meet monthly. They have presented at the Reasonable Efforts Symposium, the monthly PRIDE training for new foster parents, quarterly trainings for new CASA volunteers, the DCFS staff, the foster parents in Cowlitz County, Washington and supported parents at Family Team Decision Making (FTDM) meetings. They served an important role in selecting the Area Administrator for the Vancouver DCFS Office.
- Monthly "Here's The Deal" classes have been conducted. Attendance, which is voluntary

but encouraged by social workers, parents' attorneys and CASA's, has grown steadily with the most recent class drawing 30 parents. Entrance-Exit surveys indicate that parents feel better informed and more hopeful after attending the classes. The Juvenile Court has requested that "Here's The Deal" begin offering a twice monthly Professional Panel at the courthouse during the lunch break between court sessions in addition to the evening class. These noontime sessions are to begin in December 2008. Also, the Parent Partner Lead and a foster parent member of the Work Group teach a parenting class together weekly. Nurturing Families in Substance Abuse Treatment and Recovery serves over 20 families a month and is the only parenting class many social workers refer parents to at this time.

- The one paid staff member and two active volunteers assist over 100 families each month. They meet parents at the initial Shelter Care hearings or are referred by social workers, parents' attorneys and CASA volunteers. A recent survey of the parents and referring agents indicated nearly 100% satisfaction with the Program. Both parents and professionals surveyed indicated that the Parent Partners' involvement with a family had promoted their engagement in services and improved their ability to work cooperatively with their DCFS social worker. A Parent Partner is now present at almost all FTDM and they have been instrumental in resolving many cases without costly court actions. Parent Partners are members of the Family Treatment Court's team and are active on the Meth Action Team.

Final Financial Report

The financial report has been submitted.