ABSTRACT

STRENGTHENING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CHILDREN

IN FOSTER CARE AND THEIR BIRTH PARENTS:

THE POWERFUL FAMILIES INITIATIVE:

A GRANT PROPOSAL

By:

Jeanette Romero

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The purpose of this project was to create the Strengthening Relationships between Children in Foster Care and their Parents: The Powerful Families Initiative project. The goals are to: (a) create a program that increases the possibility of family reunification for children in foster care by engaging the children, their birth parents, their resource (foster) parents and their child welfare workers in a strength-based process known as family time; (b) improve teamwork among the parents, resource parents, and child welfare workers; and (c) identify a potential funding source. A literature search was conducted to identify accomplishments and barriers to visitation, renamed family time. A training program is described, which prepares birth parents, resource parents, and child welfare workers for family time. A detailed budget for project staffing and resources is described. The actual funding and submission of this grant proposal were not requirements for the successful completion of this project.

STRENGTHENING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE AND THEIR BIRTH PARENTS: THE POWERFUL FAMILIES INITIATIVE: A GRANT PROPOSAL

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Committee Members:

Eileen Mayers Pasztor, DSW (Chair)
Jo Brocato, Ph.D
Thomas Alex Washington, Ph.D

College Designee:

Nancy Meyer-Adams, Ph.D

By Jeanette Romero

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ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

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This thesis is dedicated to the recommended host agency, Children's Bureau in Los Angeles, because of its longstanding commitment to child welfare innovation. It would be a privilege to know that the resources provided here might be helpful in your service to the children and families who need and deserve "family time."

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

For most children, their families are the center of their worlds, so when they are separated from their parents, especially under traumatic circumstances, there is naturally loss and fear (Mallon & Hess, 2005). However, parents also experience distress when their children are separated from them and placed in the foster care system. Being able to see their children, know how they are doing, and know what they have to do to get them back are typically prevalent issues (Pine, Spath, & Gosteli, 2014). It is a mandate of the child welfare system, dating back to the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Reform Act of 1980, P.L.96-272, to make reasonable efforts to help parents connect with their children in order to reunify (Pecora et al., 2010).

The pioneer work of David Fanshel (1975) documented that regular contact between parents and children was the single largest indicator of family reunification and, in fact, parent–child visiting became known as the "heart of family reunification" (Pecora et al., 2010, p. 231). Over 20 years ago, it was documented that agencies needed to provide reassurance to children and parents that agency staff members were concerned about reunification and would help parents learn or relearn skills to take care of their children (Hess & Proch, 1988).

> *Example:* Mr. Cooper was an incarcerated 22-year-old father of two when his 2-year-old son was separated from his mother's care and placed in foster care due to abandonment. By the time that Mr. Cooper was released from jail, his son had been in foster care for more than 8 months. On his release, Mr. Cooper immediately contacted child protective services and informed them of his wish to be reunified with his son. Visits were initiated and Mr. Cooper planned to have his son live with him in the home of his current girlfriend, who was also mother to his younger daughter. The agency required him to demonstrate his ability to provide a stable and safe environment for his son and to complete mandatory anger management and parenting programs prior to reunification. During the time frame in which this work was scheduled to occur, Mr. Cooper began to experience difficulties. His girlfriend was less than willing to undergo the requirements for Mr. Cooper to reunify with his son. Mr. Cooper then lost his employment and was thus unable to obtain independent housing. Initially Mr. Cooper continued to visit with his son, but gradually it became clear that he had to choose between his new family and his son. Thus visits became too painful and less frequent, and the agency decided to terminate parental rights. (adapted from Pine, Spath, &Gosteli, 2005, p.389)

This example of Mr. Cooper and his son may have had a different outcome if a different set of interventions had been implemented. For example, there could have been a service plan that engaged both Mr. Cooper and the mother of his second child. Counseling could have been offered along with job training, and assistance with employment. Weekly contact with his son could have included the entire family with preparation, transportation, activities that were appropriate for both Mr. Cooper's son and his little sister, and family meetings to discuss family dynamics. These kinds of services would have met the practice guidelines for family reunification, such as: an emphasis on family strengths, a systemic focus on engagement and services, comprehensive culturally sensitive assessment for both strengths and risks, individual service plans that are response to parent-identified needs, and cross-systems services (Kemp, Burke, Allen-Eckard, Becker, & Ackroyd, 2014).

Visiting between children and parents must be used "deliberately as a therapeutic goal" to help maintain family ties, provide opportunities for family members to learn and practice new behavior and patterns of communicating with each other (Pecora et al., 2010, p. 231). This process is newly defined as "Family Time" and it includes five phases: preparing the children and parents, getting them together, being together, returning to their respective residences, and "debriefing" or dealing with feelings (E. Pasztor, personal communication, September 30, 2014). It is essential that there be the "assistance of social workers and foster parents" (Pecora et al, 2010, p. 231).

Definition of Terms

The following terms will be used for this project:

Adoption: The social, emotional, and legal process through which children who will not be raised by their birth parents become full and permanent legal members of another family while maintaining genetic and psychological connections to their birth family (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011b).

Birth parents or parents: The biological mothers and fathers of children in the foster care system (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011b).

Child protective services (CPS): The designated social services agency (in most states) to receive reports, investigate, and provide intervention and treatment services to children and families in which child maltreatment has occurred (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011b).

Developmentally appropriate: Contact between children and parents that relates to the child's age and stage of development, for example, activities that are different for

infants, preschoolers, grade school age children, and young and older adolescents (Child Welfare League of America [CWLA], 2009).

Evidence-based practice: Strategies that are identified, assessed, and implemented based on scientific research as being effective in improving outcomes for children and families, as well as having a strong research design, evidence of significant positive effects, sustained effects, and capacity for replication (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011b).

Evidence-informed: Use of the best available research and practice knowledge to guide program design and implementation within the context of the child, family and community characteristics, culture and preferences (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011b).

Family engagement: A family-centered and strengths-based approach to partnering with families in making decisions, setting goals, and achieving desired outcomes (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011b).

Family foster care: Updated in the early 1990s from foster family care to reflect the care of children in families, this is the full-time round the clock protecting and nurturing of children by families that are licensed or certified by public or private agencies; the goal is to provide community-based living with the aim of reunification or connecting children to other safe, nurturing relationships intended to last a lifetime (National Commission on Family Foster Care, 1991).

Family reunification: The planned process of safely reconnecting children in out-of-home care with their families through a variety of services and supports to the children, their families, and their foster parents or other service providers. It aims to help

children and families achieve and maintain, at any given time, their optimal level of reconnection-from full reentry of the children into the family system to other forms of contact, such as visiting, calling, or corresponding that affirms children's membership in their families (Pecora et al., 2010, p. 220).

Family time: The name this project is using to refer to what the child welfare field has historically labeled as "visitation." Family time is a process by which children and their parents are helped to have contact that is developmentally appropriate, strengths-based, planned, and supportive; and as indicated in the literature, "a deliberate therapeutic goal to help maintain family ties, provide opportunities for family members to learn and practice new behavior and patterns of communicating with each other" (Pecora et al., 2010, p. 231).

Resource parents: Foster or adoptive parents who are developed and supported to be members of a child welfare professional team that connects children to safe, nurturing relationships intended to last a lifetime (CWLA, 2009).

Visitation: Scheduled contact among children in out-of-home care and their family members. The purpose of visitation is to maintain family attachments, reduce the sense of abandonment that children may experience during placement, and prepare for permanency (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011b). Please see "Family Time."

Purpose of Project

The purpose of this project was to: (a) create a program that increases the possibility of family reunification for children in foster care by engaging the children, their birth parents, their resource (foster) parents and their child welfare workers in a strength-based process known as family time; (b) improve teamwork among the parents,

resource parents, and child welfare workers; and (c) identify potential funding sources for the program.

The program has the following objectives:

1) Provide parents with a safe opportunity to discuss the issues they experience before, during, and after Family Time (debrief/talk about it); 2) Provide parents with information and activities that can be used during Family Time and that are developmentally appropriate for their children; 3) Provide resource parents with the knowledge and skills (competencies) needed to support all phases of Family Time; 4) Provide child welfare workers with the knowledge and skills (competencies) needed to support the children, parents, and resource parents in all phases of Family Time; 5) Develop an evaluation plan that would make the Strengthening Relationships between Children in Foster Care and their Parents: The Powerful Families Initiative evidence-based or evidence-informed.

Relevance to Social Work and Multiculturalism

The National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (NASW, 2008) has six major principles: competence, dignity and worth of the person, integrity, importance of relationships, service, and social justice. For children and parents who have been separated and the children are placed in family foster care the principle of importance of relationships may be the most important. However, child welfare workers also must be competent and understand the dignity and worth of parents and children, as well. Family time requires integrity and considerable advocacy. Support is needed to empower the birth parents and help them become independent enough to reunify them with their children. However, many birth parents have been disempowered and unmotivated to

seek help. Parents may require help and encouragement to rebuild positive relationships with their children, especially when there has been trauma related to abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, or emotional maltreatment. Thus "Family time" embodies all six principles of the Code of Ethics and therefore is relevant to this profession.

This project also has multicultural relevance for ethnic minority children and families, who are disproportionately represented in foster care. According to "Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS, 2013) reveals that as of September 30, 2012, 56% of the 399,546 children were children of color, yet only 46.9 percent of all U.S. children were children of color" (McRoy, 2014, p. 680). At least one study in California investigated the impact of ethnicity and immigrant status on reunification, with significant policy and practice recommendations leading with agency staff cultural competence and language fluency (Osterling & Han, n.d.). Further, there is relevance for sexual minority children and families and, in either circumstances, attention must be given to the dynamic of demographic diversity (Pasztor, Petras, & Rainey, 2013). This means that children, parents, resource parents, and child welfare workers are diverse in age, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, spirituality, socioeconomic status, and education. Thus, a broad definition of cultural competency must be considered within the mandate of the NASW Code of Ethics.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This literature review is organized into the following sections: demographics of children in the foster care system nationally and in Los Angeles County, followed by research documenting the relationship between visitation/family time and reunification, and concluding with projects that support reunification through visitation or "Family Time."

Demographics

Child welfare data is obtained and disseminated through a national data collection system known as AFCARS, or Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System. According to AFCARS (2014), nationally, the number of children in foster care was 402,378, with 52% male and 48% female. Regarding ethnicity, 24% were Black or African American children, 42% were White, 22% identified as Hispanic, 2% were American Indian, and 2% were Alaskan Native. In 2013, the average length of stay was about 21.8 months, with 51% of the children reunifying with their parents or primary caregivers, and 21% being adopted.

As of 1997, The Adoption and Safe Families Act (P.L. 105-89) required child welfare agencies to submit data of children in foster care to AFCARS, including the number of children who entered and exited foster care, and the number remaining. It was found that children of color are disproportionately represented in the United States foster

care system. Research indicated that in 2000, while African American/Black children were only 16% of the general population, they represented 38% of children in foster care. This meant that African American/Black children were disproportionately represented at a rate of 2.5 times their rate in the general population (Summers, Wood, & Donovan, 2013). Native American children are also disproportionately represented with 1.9% in foster care in 2000, yet only encompassing 1.3% of the general population. Hispanic/Latino are not overrepresented nationally, but were disproportionately represented in seven states. Nonetheless, in 2010, 10 years later, the numbers changed. For African American/Black children the disproportionality rate increased between 2000-2004, but decreased to 2.0 from 2.5 nationally by 2010. On the contrary, the disproportionality rate increased to 1.5 to 2.1 for Native American children. Hispanic/Latinos are overrepresented in five states (Summers et al., 2013).

According to the Los Angeles County Department Children and Family Services (DCFS), in July 2014 there were approximately 36,422 children receiving child welfare in-home and out-of-home services, with 49.7% male and 50.3% female. Regarding ethnicity, 60.1% were Hispanic, 25.6% were African American, 11.0% were White, 1.4% Asian/Pacific Islander, 0.4% were American Indian/Alaskan Native, 0.7% Filipino, and 0.8% other. Within Los Angeles County, the disproportionality is evident as African American/Black children encompassed 9.2% of the general population, but represent 25.6% of children in foster care. Similarly, with the Hispanic/Latino population, as they comprise 48.3% of the population, but 60.1% are in foster care (United States Census Bureau, 2014; Los Angeles DCFS, 2014).

The number of children who are undocumented or whose parents are undocumented can have an impact on reunification outcomes. For example, in the United States there are more than 11 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States. In addition, 5.5 million children have parents that are undocumented, and about 4.5 million of those children are U.S. citizens (Wessler, 2011). Research reported that in the first 6 months of 2011 more than 46,000 parents of U.S. citizen children were deported (Dreby, 2012). When undocumented parents are detained or deported their children may be relegated to foster care. The separation of family can last for such extended periods that often, children lose the opportunity to ever see their parents again when a juvenile dependency court terminates parental rights (Wessler, 2011).

The Applied Research Center (ARC) collected data from six key states and analyzed the trend of 14 additional states with similar high numbers of foster care and foreign born, and estimated that there are at least 5,100 children currently placed in foster care because their parents have been either detained or deported. This is approximately 1.25% of the total children in foster care who face these threats to reunification with their detained and deported parents (Wessler, 2011). These children face unreasonable barriers to achieve reunification with their families. "Legal status complicates reunifications, placing the burden for the care of these children on state and federal governments. The total costs to foster each child (between administrative and maintenance costs) are significant—close to $26,000 per year" (Dreby, 2012, p.2).

Policy complicates the reunification process because of a number of systems barriers. Specifically, there are Immigration Enforcement barriers, such as the parents being on hold for an indeterminate amount of time. There are Child Welfare and Juvenile

Dependency barriers such as the inability of parents to meet the case plan when they are in another country which impacts their ability to reunify after a federal law restriction of 22 months. There are barriers between the parents and child protective service workers such as the ability to visit their children when they are detained (Wessler, 2011). All of these complex systemic challenges have significant implications for visitation or family time.

Research Documenting the Visitation/Family Time and Reunification Relationship

Research dates back over 35 years documenting that children who had contact with their parents (typically mothers) were 10 times more likely to be reunited (Davis, Landsverk, Newton, & Ganger, 1996; Fanshel,1975). Contact between children and at least one birth parent is not only a predictor for reunification, but also positively correlates to children's well-being. Contact between children and their birth parents is considered to be a protective factor against externalizing and internalizing problems (McWey, Acock, & Porter, 2010). For example, parent-child contact helps alleviate the anxiety and fear of abandonment, which creates stronger attachments (Nesmith, 2012).

Developing and maintaining a positive relationship between foster and birth parents may allow children to avoid the stress of divided loyalties and position foster parents to have a supportive role after reunification (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011a). Over a decade ago, it was identified that birth parents and foster parents need to have a positive working relationship, however this requires casework intervention and support. Child welfare agencies must consider staff experience, maturity, communication skills, ability to handle multiple roles, and providing foster parents with specialized training and ongoing support (Sanchirico & Jablonka, 2000). However, the relationship

between foster parents and birth parents is dependent upon the skill and support of social workers.

Research reports that birth parents are more likely to be involved in their children's lives and achieve reunification when there are supportive relationships with the children's social workers. It is critical for child welfare agencies staff to obtain the right skills to built rapport, in order to help engage birth parents. Some skills can be as simple as genuine respect and support. Studies have revealed that respect and support given to the birth parents by the social worker has given parents the motivation to be involved in their child's care. They feel welcomed and not judged for their mistakes (Sanchirico & Jablonka, 2000).

There are qualitative studies dating back over a decade addressing the relationship between social workers and birth parents. For example, a study of 61 families in a mid-size city of a Canadian Ontario province demonstrated how birth parents felt about the services they received from child protective services (CPS) workers. Palmer, Maiter, & Manji, (2006) reported that 93% of the mothers, 5% of the fathers, 1% jointly felt that they had received good services, such as arrangements for daycare, camps, counseling, education, psychological assessment and treatment, and psychiatric treatment for the parents.

Another Canadian study around the same time endeavored to demonstrate a strong partnership with birth parents in urban and suburban areas of Ontario and British Columbia. Dumbrill (2006) reported significant findings: social workers must acknowledge how their power is perceived by parents during the case planning process, demystify feelings of birth parents that social workers hold pre-conceived ideas about

their familial problems, and that social workers are joining with the parents in the best interests of their children. Therefore, training on clear communication and balance of power is needed for the child welfare agencies staff.

More recently Gladstone et al. (2012) reported that a quite special factor had to be addressed, and this is one of "hope." Parents who believed that their children would be safe and there was hope for the future fared better in having a good relationships to work together towards reunification. Therefore, social workers must have the skills to know how to balance power, communicate clearly, and genuinely support the birth parents not just by referring but emotionally supporting and instilling hope.

According to the National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice and Permanency Planning (2008), "Although family visiting is a core reunification service, planning and implementing visits is time-consuming, and is easily undermined by a lack of agency resources, such as insufficient funding or adequate staff" (p. 1). Furthermore, parent-focused services such as visitation, parenting interventions, mental health, and substance abuse treatment and supportive services are often contracted to other services leaving child welfare workers with limited opportunities for sustained work with birth families, increasing the likelihood that parents will experience child welfare services as fragmented and unwelcoming.

Support, relationship, and collaboration between social workers, birth parents, and foster parents are crucial for reunification. All parties should feel welcomed and involved in the process to reunify birth parents with their children. Research dates back over 20 years indicating that involving parents in the case planning increases the success of reunification and decreases re-entry (Fein, 1993; Leathers, 2002; Miller, Fisher,

Fetrow & Jordan, 2006; Tam & Ho, 1996). Barber and Delfabbro (2004) explored the impact of parental involvement and contact and found that children who had frequent contact with their parents in the early months while placed in foster care were more likely to be reunified. In addition, a 2 year longitudinal study of 235 children who entered the foster care system between 1998-1999 in South Australia, indicated that less changes in the frequencies of contact with their parents were more likely to reunify (Barber & Delfabbro, 2004).

Visitations and contact between birth parents and children is important, but it can also be a barrier if not assisted effectively. Prutch (2003) conducted an exploratory study regarding factors that contribute to family reunification. The study demonstrated how visitation is important because it was seen as a barrier to achieving reunification along with employment, housing, and child care. However, the study also showed how involving family in decision making helped with reunification. Parents found services, such as parenting classes, residential substance abuse programs, counseling, and family decision meetings helpful to achieve reunification.

Visitations are important because they provide the opportunity to assess parents' investment in reunification and parenting skills. This time can also be used for parents to practice new skills as they learned to parent and strengthen their relationships with their children (Corcoran, 2000; Monck, Reynolds, & Wigfall, 2005; Pine et al., 2005).

Projects Supporting Reunification through Visitation or Family Time

Parent-child contact is critical for reunification, however family time planning is essential. Individualized service plans that are responsive to family-identified needs are necessary (Kemp, et al., 2014). Written contact plans are helpful tools to achieve

reunification because it helps shape parent's visiting patterns (Hess, 2003). Although findings have demonstrated that written contact plans are effective, only 78.4% of states had policies requiring the need to document written plans in their records (Hess, 2003). It is crucial to educate social workers on the evidence for this practice so they can support birth parents, resource parents and, of course, children, in the value of maintaining consistent contact with the safety needs of children taken into consideration of course.

However, an effective contact plan goes beyond the logistics of scheduling and transportation; it must provide parents with opportunities to strengthen parenting skills and improve parent-child interaction (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2011a). Research has documented that interventions must have a behavioral, skill-building focus, and address family functioning in multiple domains such as home, school, and community. For example, parent-child contact must include the following strategies: placing children in proximity to parents; placing siblings together unless otherwise indicated; encouraging foster parents to allow family contact in the foster family unless contraindicated; requiring written plans that specify purpose, frequency, length, and location; selecting activities appropriate to the children's ages and stages of development; providing opportunities for parents to learn more effective parenting skills; and not only preparing children, parents, and foster parents for each contact but, also, "debriefing" after (Pecora et al., 2010, p. 232).

Research indicates that parent-child contact should have a therapeutic focus and be supervised and supported by individuals with clinical knowledge and skills (Haight, Sokolec, Budde, & Poertner, 2001). There are numerous psycho-social, emotional, economic, and other institutional factors that precipitate the separation of children from

their parents, such as poverty, homelessness, substance abuse, family violence, and mental illness (Rockhill, Green, and Newton-Curtis, 2008). Each of these issues must be addressed for parents to reunify with their children. The core of achieving reunification is "…the essential bonds of the family, in the family's ability to make change, and in the importance of focusing on a family's strengths to achieve (and maintain) reunification, and a commitment to providing the services and supports that each family and child needs" (Pine et al., 2005, p. 389).

One of the initial innovations to increase parent–child contact was the three-year pilot program titled The Connection Project: A Relational Approach to Engaging Birth Parents in Visitation. The program demonstrated the importance of worker-parent relationship. A worker-parent relationship encompasses of mutual respect, effective communication, and emotional support (Drake, 1994). Having a strong worker-parent relationship creates trust, and increases parents self-esteem and completion of service (Hiden, Biebel, Nicholson, & Mehnert, 2005). However, not only the relationship between workers and parents is important to help with the visitation process, but also the relationship between foster parents and birth parent. Research indicates that effective visitation reflects on setting of visitation ("homelike setting"), preparation of parents and children for visitation, visits tailored to children and family needs, and supportive involvement of foster parents (Haight, Black, Mangelsdorf, Giorgio, Tata, Schoppe, & Szewczyk, 2002, p. 201; Hess, 2005; Sanchirico & Joblonka, 2000).

The Connections Project served 34 birth families with 57 children drawn from four DCFS offices in Washington State; 30 were birth mothers, 11 birthfathers, and 31 foster mothers participated. However, 29 of the 34 birth parents participated in the 6-

month follow-up interview, and 17 participated in in the 12-month follow-up interview**.** It was reported that 25% parents participated in between 60% and 85% of their visits, 25% participated in 90 to 95%, and 50% participated in 99 to 100% of their visits. During the project birth parents and foster parents reported extensive contact before and after the visits, either by telephone calls, social activities, and shared visits to medical appointments and other services. In addition, to assist with the visitation process, workers would meet with the birth parents when possible before the visit. In the initial meetings, workers explained the visitation process and the expectations, including sharing to the birth parents that the worker would be taking notes to record their progress that would be shared with them and their child's DCFS worker.

The project also recognized the pain of ending contacts, therefore goodbyes were ritualized with songs, snuggling, pictures, reassuring script, and exchanges of boxes that contained treats and transitional objects. They also reaffirmed the next contact to help view that they were saying goodbye temporarily. The project was successful in engaging parents, but less successful in assisting parents and DCFS caseworkers to use the connections to meet other mandated requirements. In addition, family time was frequently supervised by less skilled workers and, as research has documented, professionalism is essential because of the therapeutic nature (Gerring et al., 2008).

The Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) created the Point of Engagement (POE) project to engage families when they first came to the attention of the agency. The POE project was funded by Los Angeles County Family Preservation Fund, and created ongoing partnerships with Shields for Families. The purpose was to reduce the number of children in foster care and help increase

reunification and permanency efforts. The project focused on Compton because of the large number of unmet needs and the potential of opening new DCFS offices in the area. Data was collected from May and August 2006 from four focus group meetings and 17 individual interviews.

One of the core findings was that both social workers and community partners consistently reported strengths and needs of children and families. This was significant because, historically, the agency had overlooked the relationship and well-being of the children and families, and focused much more on systems functions (Marts et al., n.d.). POE philosophy viewed families as full partners, rather than "cases" that needed their problems solve. They embraced family involvement as a crucial part of intervention because it is their lives. With POE, goals and services were administered faster because of the contribution families had within the goal and decision-making process (Marts et al., n.d.).

It was also reported that the agency had a great deal of turnover and interoffice mobility among the child welfare staff and the majority did not have social work graduate degrees, although they did have on-the-job training (Marts et al, n.d.). The Compton regional office worked with the community partners in explaining the benefits of the new philosophy. This collaboration and relationship building led to 50% reduction in the number of children being separated from their parents and significant increase of family reunifications and number of children being placed in permanent housing (Marts et al, n.d.).

The ongoing relationship helped to utilize existing mental health and Cal Works. Research, found that many DCFS staff in Los Angeles, viewed "community

partnerships" as referrals instead of more involved in decision-making (Marts et al, n.d.). Collaboration among children welfare agencies and community organizations is needed to assist with family reunification. This collaboration was intended to create awareness of resources and a safety net for families and their children. In addition, it assisted with cross-referring and allowing for follow-up.

The Point of Engagement project demonstrated a decrease of number of children removed from their families, an increase of family reunifications, within 12-months in 2004, and an increase of placement permanency. The project reduced preliminary detentions from 487 (before PEO) to 232 in 1 year, then by 2005 to 2006 to 188. In addition, reunifications increased from 20% to 67% cases, and the length of stay in care decrease 777 to 368 days (Marts et al., n.d.). "The partnership between the family, child protective services, and community providers builds a strong community safety net that is often missing in traditional services. Intersecting culturally competent domestic violence, substance abuse, and child welfare services could also help provide a multi-systemic approach to service delivery for vulnerable families of color" (Marts et al., 2006, p.356).

Birth Parents Challenges/Barriers

Birth parent involvement in child protective intervention has a positive impact in their children's well-being, however, many factors can hinder parents' participation, physically and mentally. For example, a domestic violence worker was interviewed, and shared how parents have difficulty acknowledging that there is even an issue, which affects parent's participation. The family or individual would say " 'I don't see that's there's a problem, I'm not wanting to engage, I don't want to have anything to do with the process'" (Darlington et al., 2010, p.1023).

There are many other birth parents who do not want to be part of the child protective process because of other barriers, and decide to relinquish their children. However, literature tends to overlook or downplay birth mothers who relinquish their children. Birth parents, especially mothers who terminate their rights, are often perceived negatively and even ostracized by society. Further, women who have become pregnant out of wedlock experience additional blame and shame, while their male partners were often excused or overlooked. They might, however, often be threatened by the rejection their children will experience because of lack of paternal financial and emotional support (Hollingsworth, 2005). There continues to be a lack of resources to assist birth mothers with their psychological, somatic, and relational losses of their children (Hollingsworth, 2005). While birth mothers are acknowledged and represented in the child welfare, birth fathers tend to be underrepresented (Hollingsworth, 2005).

Many policy reforms, such as the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), have authorized the use of the Federal Parent Locator Service (FPLS) in order to increase involvement of fathers. Many fathers still reported that they were not notified by a child welfare worker that their child was being considered for placement (Pate, 2005). Low-income noncustodial fathers are stereotyped as irresponsible, non-involved parents, however studies how found that noncustodial fathers are closely connected with their children (Pate, 2005). Nonetheless, the birth fathers face various numbers of obstacles, such as employment status, housing, interaction with the justice system, child support policy, and race (Pate, 2005). Birth fathers require support and education through other various systems that prevent them from reunifying with their children. In addition, both birth mothers and fathers face many other obstacles, such as substance abuse.

A quasi-experimental finding on providing substance abuse treatment for parents whose children were placed in foster care was conducted. It was discovered that only 8% of participants had no other problems besides substance abuse, while 30% reported to struggle with substance abuse and one other problem. Then, 35% reported to struggle with substance abuse and two other problems, and 27% had three or more problems and substance abuse (Testa & Smith, 2009). For the parents who only struggled with substance abuse, 21% achieved reunification. Parents who struggled with substance abuse and one or more problems were reunified about 11% of the time. It was reported that more than just service integration was needed. Outreach and retention services can ensure client progress in their co-occurring problems if they complete substance abuse treatment (Testa & Smith, 2009). As long ago as 1990, Brown and Little reported that to achieve reunification, social services professionals must listen to what the family is expressing through their words and actions. That must be followed by helping them connect with support systems and encourage them to find answers to critical questions they are facing.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Introduction

This methods chapter includes the target population and the recommended host agency. Then it describes the potential funding sources and selection strategies, followed by the description of the selected potential funding source. The chapter then concludes with the grant needs assessment.

Target Population

There are three target populations for this project. The primary target group includes children, birth parents, resource parents, and child welfare workers from a nonprofit agency in Los Angeles County. This is the site of a current research project titled the PRIDE Model of Practice to Develop and Support Resource Parents as Team Members in Child Protection. An essential component of this project, which aims to reunify children and parents as the primary goal of family foster care services, involves the birth parents in a process known as Family Time (visitation). A secondary target group would be the child welfare agencies that could use this program. The third target group would be all the children, birth parents, and resource parents who could benefit from participating in this program through the agencies that work with them.

Host Agency

The recommended host agency is the Children's Bureau, a nationally accredited (Council on Accreditation) nonprofit multi-service child welfare agency located in Los Angeles County that provides programs aimed at helping children live happy, healthy, and productive lives. They provide child abuse preventative services by working with families and communities, and offering them quality programs. Children's Bureau was first established in 1904 by a volunteer group that was led by Mrs. E.K. Foster. The group advocated for legislation to protect children. In the 1920s the agency then became one of the first professional providers of foster care in the nation. The agency began to play a vital role in the community and to ensure quality service for children began recruiting and training foster parents. They even established their own training program for social workers. In the 1940s, during World War II, Children's Bureau expanded their services to meet the changing social needs for refugee children and war orphans by initiating adoption services and finding families for them (Children's Bureau, 2015a). Throughout the years, Children's Bureau services continued to expand. According to Children's Bureau (2015a), focuses on nurturing children, strengthening families, and building caring communities.

To achieve these goals, Children's Bureau (2015c) provides mental health services, such as comprehensive assessment, child abuse therapy, family-focused therapy, group therapy, intensive day treatment for young children, medication management, case management, therapeutic behavioral services, and assistance for the caregivers and support person(s) in the children's lives. In the 1980s, one of many services, the prevention and family development program, was created to address the problem of child

abuse which led to the creation of a nationally recognized evaluation tool, Family Assessment Form. It aimed to help counselors assess families, develop individualized family service plans, monitor family progress, and assess outcomes for individual families and programs.

The agency is committed to provide vulnerable children with the foundation necessary to become caring and productive adults. Children's Bureau is partnering with the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) to evidence the PRIDE Model of Practice to develop and support resource parents as team members in child protection. One of the core components of the project is to support children's relationship with their parents with the goal of reunification (Children's Bureau, 2013). To that end, Family Time is essential as staff, foster or resource parents, and birth parents work together to achieve that goal. This project reflects both the vision and mission statements of the Children's Bureau (2015b) which, according to its website, are:

> Vision: to significantly change the lives of at-risk children by providing state of the art child abuse prevention and treatment services. While increasing the scope, depth and volume of services, we will engage in continuous discovery through research to determine and implement what works and be a passionate advocate on behalf of children and families. By providing the services we do, spreading information, and being a dedicated advocate, our aim is to give children and their families every opportunity to build and live in an nurturing and safe environment (as in "Vision").
>
> Mission: "the Children's Bureau mission is to help children succeed and excel at leading happy, healthy, productive lives through a combination of prevention,

treatment, research and advocacy. Children's Bureau is committed to providing vulnerable children—especially in the early years—the foundation necessary to become caring and productive adults by:

- Preventing child abuse and neglect both at home and in the community;
- Protecting, nurturing and treating abused children;
- Enhancing the potential of families and communities to meet the needs of their children by bringing them together to create safe and secure environments;
- Advancing the welfare of children and families through superior programs in foster care, adoptions, child development, parent education, mental health, research and advocacy (as in "Mission").

Potential Funding Source Identification and Selection Strategies

Search engines will be used to identify potential funding sources and sites, such as grants.gov, GrantWatch, and DailySmarts. Connecting to the Foundation Center may also help find grant opportunities. Local, state, and federal sources will be considered. Search terms will include: "grants family visitation programs," "grants visitation programs," "grants birth parents engagement," "grant psycho-educational support groups," "grants child welfare," "grants family reunification," and "grants Los Angeles." "Foster parent-birth parent contact" and "foster parent–visiting" may also provide suggestions. With this researching and networking, grant providers should be identified.

The search is based on national, state, and local foundations and for-profit organizations, specifically funders who have history of donating to child welfare agencies. A focus on family reunification and Family Time was emphasized throughout the search. Research for funding sources began at the California State University, Long Beach Library database which presented a number of search engines, and then websites that offered financial funding possibilities.

Variation of search terms were used in order to cover all potential funding resources regarding the issue of children in foster care and their parents, their resource parents, social workers, relationships and training, and visitation. Foundation websites were searched, such as: Annie E. Casey Foundation, RGK Foundation, Stuart Foundation, The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation, and The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation. Multiple methods were used to identify potential funding sources for this project. Internet and grant database searches were used to gather information about each potential funding source, and to determine compatibility with that of the proposed program.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation was created in 1948 by Jim Casey and his siblings in honor of their mother who was a single mother of four children. Jim created what is known today as United Postal Service, and established the foundation to support a camp for disadvantaged kids in Seattle. UPS headquarters shifted from Seattle to New York City in 1973. In 1976, Casey Family Services was established to provide foster care services in Connecticut and Vermont. Now the Annie E. Casey Foundation headquarters is in Baltimore, and works toward "…strengthening families, building stronger communities and ensuring access to opportunity, because children need all three to succeed" (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2015, para. 2).

RGK Foundation is an independent foundation that was established in 1966 by Ronya and George Kozmetsky. Its areas of interest include education, community, and health/medicine. The headquarters of RGK Foundation is in Austin, Texas; its mission is

> "…to be a catalyst for progressive change in humanitarian concerns. Guiding the Foundation is a deep reverence for democracy and civil society together with the

> founders' values of foresight, imagination and discovery. By seeking innovative projects in the area of health, education, human services and community affairs, the Foundation strives to advance knowledge, improve society and help realize human potential" (RGK Foundation, 2015, para. 1).

The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation was created in 1954 with the assistance of Dr. Garland D. Murphy, Jr. The foundation entered into a trust agreement with Dr. Murphy. Headquartered in Indianapolis, IN, its mission "… is to provide other nonprofit organizations with the means to educate the public about the special needs of children across this nation" (Child Welfare Foundation, 2008, as in "Mission").

The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation was created in 1961 by Ralph M. Parsons as charitable giving arm. Mr. Parson was a former engineer and business man, who owned Parson Company. When Mr. Parson passed away, he funded the foundation with 600,000 shares of Parsons Company stock and $4 million in cash. In 1976, the foundation became independent of the company. In 1978, The Ralph M. Foundation became and transitioned into a multidisciplinary grantmaking program. The foundation headquarters is in Los Angeles, its mission is to help improve "…the well-being of Los Angeles County residents by investing in quality non-profit organizations responding to people's social, civic and cultural, health, and education needs" (The Ralph M. Parsons, 2014, para. 6).

Criteria for Funder Selection

Several criteria were considered when deciding which funders would be most appropriate for this grant proposal. First, each funder's area of interest and their overall mission was reviewed. Second, criteria such as geographical location, target population,

grant limitations, and potential range of funding allocation were taken in consideration. It was essential that the funder's mission include child welfare as well as serving children and families in California in general and Los Angeles County specifically.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation was not selected, because grantees need a formal invitation in order to participate in projects and to apply. RGK Foundation was not selected because they do not accept unsolicited proposals. The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation was not selected because the foundation does not give grants for coordinating seminars, training programs, personnel expenses, i.e., salaries. The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation was dismissed because its mission did not seem as closely aligned with this project.

Description of Selected Funding Source

The Stuart Foundation was selected as a potential funder for this project. It was founded in 1985 by the merger of three foundations: Elbridge Stuart Foundation (1937), Elbridge and Mary Stuart Foundation, and the Mary Horner Stuart Foundation (1941). The founder of Elbridge Stuart Foundation was Elbridge A. Stuart who began the creation of what is known today as the Stuart Foundation, which is "…dedicated to the protection, education and development of children and youth" (Stuart Foundation, 2009, as in "About Us"). Headquartered in San Francisco, its mission is to ensure "...that all children grow up in caring families, learn in vibrant and effective schools, and have opportunities to become productive members of their communities. We focus our investments on projects, programs and organizations making an impact in the States of California and Washington" (Stuart Foundation, 2009, as in "About Us"). The

Foundation may be the best opportunity for funding because their focus is to transform lives and expand opportunities for children and youth in foster care.

The Stuart Foundation also partners with public and private child welfare agencies to systemically provide resources and services for children and youth in foster care to realize long-term, positive outcomes in five focus areas: Safety, Permanency, Well-Being, Educational Opportunities, and Youth, Family, and Community Engagement (Stuart Foundation, 2009). Grant recipients in the past have included Alex Smith Foundation, Alliance for Children's Rights, American Youth Work Center, California CASA Association, and California Community Foundation (Stuart Foundation, 2013).

Grants Needs Assessment

For this grant a needs assessments was conducted by gathering information from various resources; scholarly journals, child welfare websites, interviews from local, state, and federal government statistics, interviews with child welfare workers, birth parents, and resource parents, agencies statistics, and consultation with PRIDE Model of Practice research project staff. The information is essential for Family Time because it relates to the needs and well-being of families involved in the foster care system. The grant writer would need to consult with the recommended host agency, Children's Bureau, in order to obtain information regarding the agency, such as data from past program evaluations, number of foster parents, birth parents, and children, and number of birth parents and foster parents attending existing resources. The recommended host agency would also have to determine if the proposed project fits with its resources. In addition, budgeting and specific information was assessed through consultation with the agency's family

foster care and adoption program director. The following Chapter 4 describes the actual grant proposal.

Resources for the Grant Problem Statement

The grant problem statement is aimed to explain the rationale for offering Strengthening Relationships between Children in Foster Care and their Parents: The Powerful Families Initiative or the "Family Time" intervention for birth parents, foster parents, and children involved with child welfare services. Most of the resources used in this grant project include scholarly articles that address the importance of parent-child contact for family reunification, the visiting process, and interventions used to assist with family reunification. The resources should show potential funders the importance of The Powerful Families Initiative and the importance of teamwork among parents, foster parents, and child welfare staff to achieve reunification.

CHAPTER 4

GRANT PROPOSAL

Introduction

The following chapter is divided into five sections starting with the project purpose, goal, and objectives. The second section describes the program activities. The third section includes the monthly timeline and tasks. The fourth section describes the program evaluation to meet the proposed outcomes. The chapter concludes with the budget narrative; the line-item budget is located in Appendix B.

Project Purpose

The purpose of this project was to: (a) create a program that increases that possibility of family reunification for children in foster care by engaging the children, their birth parents, their resource (foster) parents, and their child welfare workers in a strength-based process known as family time; (b) improve teamwork among the birth parents, resource parents, and child welfare workers; and (c) identify potential funding sources for the program.

The program has the following objectives:

1) Provide parents with a safe opportunity to discuss the issues they experience before, during, and after Family Time (debrief/talk about it); 2) Provide parents with information and activities that can be used during Family Time and that are developmentally appropriate for their children; 3) Provide resource parents with the knowledge and skills (competencies) needed to support all phases of Family Time; 4)

Provide child welfare workers with the knowledge and skills (competencies) needed to support the children, parents, and resource parents in all phases of Family Time; 5) Develop an evaluation plan that would make the Strengthening Relationships between Children in Foster Care and their Parents: The Powerful Families Initiative evidence-based or evidence-informed.

Research dates back decades documenting that Family Time (visitation) is essential for the reunification of children and their birth parents (Davis, et al., 1996; Fanshel, 1975). Numerous barriers to reunification have been documented which include: giving parents and children the opportunity to express their feelings and have them affirmed; training resource parents to support the process; ensuring that child welfare workers understand the value of family time and have the skills to support it (Palmer, et al., 2006). It is essential that children, parents, resource parents, and child welfare workers have clarification of their respective roles and supports to fulfill those roles to achieve the program goals and objectives.

Program Activities

The purpose of Strengthening Relationships between Children in Foster Care and their Parents: The Powerful Families Initiative project is to increase reunification by engaging and team working with the children, birth parents, resource parents, and child welfare workers around the process of family time. The rationale is that, for family time to be effective, everyone involved has a special role and needs preparation and support for that role. Additionally, family time is actually a five-part process and each participant has to be prepared and supported around these five distinct parts. Please see Appendix A for a description of the Family Time Participants and Process Steps.

The support of family time feelings and the teaching of roles and expectations throughout the five family time process steps will be offered for birth parents, resource parents, and child welfare workers. For this project, the host for the "The Powerful Families Initiative" is a private family foster care agency. However, because public child welfare agency workers have overall administrative responsibility for birth parents and their children, they will be invited to participate, as well. It is hoped that both groups of child welfare workers (private and public agency) would collaborate to identify those birth parents who might have the most willingness and ability to participate. However, a special emphasis should be on parents whose contact with their children has been minimal and/or who at risk having their parental rights terminated.

Project staff would invite potential birth parent participants to a brief orientation. The invitation would include incentives such as bus or gas travel vouchers and store coupons. The potential members would have the opportunity to complete consent forms or make arrangements for ongoing participation. Following the orientation, a series of hybrid groups would be offered to allow time for participants to have both emotional support and then learn skills. Meeting once a week for two hours over a four week period, birth parents would have the opportunity to address feelings and issues relating to the family time experience, and then learn aimed at making family time successful, including age appropriate activities with their children.

Simultaneously with the birth parent group, there will be a hybrid group for foster parents. This is because foster parents also have concerns related to family time, and need support for the process. Meeting once a week for two hours over a four week period, resource parents would be able to address feelings and issues they may have

regarding the family time experience, and then learn skills to help the birth parents and children have a successful family time experience. These skills would also encourage the resource parents to serve as mentors for the birth parents which could help strengthen their relationships.

Lastly, there will be eight hours of training for the child welfare workers to learn effective skills to utilize or assist during Family Time. These would be two four-hour workshops over a two week period. Child welfare workers would gain knowledge of appropriate age activities, such as how to facilitate and model playful verbal interactions between parents and children. In addition, workers will learn appropriate use of advocacy for the children, birth parents, and foster parents since many tend to take the child's side. The trainings will also cover skills on how to assist birth parents with referrals for additional assistance, in order to help with reunification.

At the end of each cycle, participating birth parents, foster parents, and child welfare workers would be invited to attend two more follow-up meetings. The aims would be to share concerns and achievements. Lessons learned from these experiences could be applied to the next cycle of groups.

An additional special part of this project is creating a Powerful Families Advisory Committee comprised of individuals who can contribute their expertise to support the project. The committee would meet monthly via teleconference and focus on how to strengthen family time activities and relationships. The committee would be comprised of birth parents who have successfully reunified with their children, resource parents who have helped children reunify, former youth in care who experienced reunification, and child welfare professionals with expertise in family time issues.

Timeline

The project aims to offer six cycles, rotating in English and Spanish over the course of one year.

Months 1-2:

1) Hire project staff, including: Program Manager/Family Time Group Facilitator, and a Family Time Group Facilitator (bilingual required for one position); Project Assistant for administrative support (bilingual preferred); and Project Evaluator; 2) Set up project office (equipment, supplies, internet); 3) Recruit one MSW student intern and one second year BSW intern, and sign learning agreements; 4) Recruit and convene Advisory Committee; 5) Provide orientation for staff, interns, and Advisory Committee; 6) Inform public agency leadership and staff about the project; 7) Purchase supplies; 8) Identify meeting rooms for the family time groups; 9) Obtain incentives as donation from local businesses; 10) Develop outreach materials and process; 11) Outreach birth parents; 12) Outreach foster parents; 13) Create consent forms (foster parents and birth parents); 14) Prepare and develop agenda for orientation (dates, times, location, and requirements; 15) Develop research design (method, instruments, data collection process, data analysis process); 16) Obtain Institutional Review Board approval from the public and/or private agency, and/or the project evaluator's university if so affiliated.

Month 3:

1) Set up room(s) for the meetings; 2) Set dates for guest speakers; 3) Set agenda for groups; 4) Contact birth parents and obtain consents; 5) Contact resource parents and obtain consents; 6) Contact child welfare staff and obtain consents; 7) Coordinate transportation services for family time.

Months 4-12:

1) Purchase snacks, refreshments, or food per session; 2) Prepare material to be presented in appropriate time; 3) Remind group members of group meetings and important announcements; 4) Offer psycho-educational and process group sessions for birth parents and resource parents for 10 weeks (10 sessions each cycle); 5) Provide and schedule child welfare workers in trainings; 6) Provide pre- evaluation; 7) Schedule and prepare for team working meeting with birth parents, resource parents, and child welfare workers; 8) Collect community resource referrals for future group sessions; 9) Contact guest speakers and community organizations as needed; 10) Convene Advisory Committee; 11) Develop quarterly reports and share with staff and Advisory Committee; 12) Use results of project evaluation to help seek funding for year 2; 13) Develop final report (including evaluation) to share with staff and Advisory Committee; 14) Transition to year 2, pending secured funding.

Evaluation and Outcomes

The proposed program aims to serve six groups of approximately 60 birth parents, 60 resource parents, and 60 child welfare workers respectively within a one-year period. The program will be evaluated based on pre and post-tests administered to the participating birth and resource parents and child welfare workers. The evaluations will be provided at the first and last meetings of the respective groups of participants. Available in both English and Spanish, the tests will be a Likert scale format consisting of questions that are unique to each participant's role and to each phase of the family time process.

Budget Narrative

The budget includes the costs to operate The Powerful Families Initiative as a one-year pilot program. The budget includes that costs of staffing for a Program Manager/Family Time Group Facilitator and a Family Time Group Facilitator (bilingual required for one position). Project staff will also include Project Assistant for administrative support (bilingual preferred) and also a Project Evaluator. In addition, the budget will also include stipends for 1 MSW and 1 BSW student interns, honorariums for foster parents and birth parents, outreach materials, mileage, bus tokens, supplies, and refreshments during training; and in-kind supports, such as office space, equipment, insurance, and administrative leadership.

Staffing and Salaries

Program Manager/Family Time Group Facilitator: This is a 40-hour full-time position for a MSW Social Worker, LCSW preferred. This person must have a minimum of 10 years of experience in the child welfare field, especially working with family reunification and family foster care services. Group facilitation skills are essential, bilingual (Spanish) preferred. This position will oversee all aspects of the program including completing and coordinating intake documentation and delivering presentations. Program Manager is also responsible for networking with other resources and developing and attending events, related to child welfare. The position will also facilitate 50% of the groups, and the advisory committee.

Family Time Group Facilitator: A 40-hour full-time position to assist the Program Manager to oversee the program. The qualification includes a minimum of 10 years of experience in the child welfare field, especially working with family

reunification and family foster care services. Group facilitation skills are essential, bilingual (Spanish) preferred. The responsibilities include assisting with intake documentation, overseeing the child welfare workers involved in the program, student interns, and updating necessary documents. However, their main focus will be coordinating and facilitating group sessions and maintaining linkages with the community resources, including recruiting guest speakers.

Project Assistant: This a half-time position with a minimum of five years of administrative support experience, bilingual (Spanish) preferred. Project assistant will prepare consents, outreach parents and resource parents, prepare and develop agenda for orientation, inform public agency leadership and staff about the project, set dates for guest speakers, and assist to develop final report.

Project Evaluator: This is a 10 percent position, and the qualifications are a Ph.D/MSW and with experience researching child welfare projects. It is expected that the person may work at a School of Social Work or be an agency based researcher. The responsibilities include designing the research method, creating the instrument, creating the sample, facilitating the data collection, analyzing the data, and reporting the findings.

Student Interns: Two student interns will act as co-facilitators to assist the Program Manager and Family Time Group Facilitator to facilitate and fulfill the program's goals and objectives. One intern will be a MSW student and one BSW student who in their second year of the program. The student interns will be responsible for co-facilitating the program contracted through MSW stipends. The interns would be responsible for organizing activities, researching community resources, and encouraging discussion among group participants.

Guest Speakers: An honorarium is established for guest speakers. These may include for example, birth parents who have successfully reunified with their children, resource parents who have facilitated family time and reunification, former youth in foster care, and social workers with expertise in family time and in reunification. Representative of the legal system will also be invited.

Advisory Board Members: These are representatives from advocacy organizations, such as the National Foster Parent Association, the CWLA Director of Training and models practice, and members from the community who are committed to achieve reunification and support birth parents. The advisory committee will meet through audio visual communication.

Direct- Cost

Direct cost includes transportation services, such as bus and gas vouchers for birth and resource parents. It will also include office supplies, such as telephone, internet, printing, postage, software, and writing materials. Hospitality includes training session refreshments and snacks.

Indirect-Cost

Indirect cost is administrative overhead, calculated at 15 percent of the direct cost and staffing combine.

The total amount requested from the funder is $263,925. The in-kind support for the project is $12,000, which includes the training room, the administrative office, and utilities.

CHAPTER 5

LESSONS LEARNED

Introduction

This chapter is divided into six sections. The first section includes a description of the grant writing process. The second and third sections explain the process of selecting a host agency and identifying a funding source. The fourth section describes the limitations of creating and researching a family time initiative. The fifth section discusses the relevance to the NASW Code of Ethics. The chapter concludes with the implications for social work policy, practice, and social justice.

Grant Writing Process

The grant proposal was a productive, learning experience that allowed the grant writer to think creatively during the process and gain knowledge of accessible resources for the target population. Grant writing is challenging because there are various ideas or ways to serve the target population, especially increasing communication among birth parents, resource parents, and child welfare workers to meet the needs of the children they care about. Narrowing the focus for the project was overwhelming, however, with consultation from the thesis advisor the ideas became focused to create and meet the goals and objectives for the Powerful Families Initiative and family time. Another challenge was that the thesis advisor has a Children, Youth, & Families background, while the grant writer has an Older Adults & Families concentration. At first it took some time, but the different perspectives resulted in an intergenerational project.

This process required communication, organization, and time management skills. The grant writer kept in regular contact with the thesis advisor as needed. Meeting dates to discuss each aspect of the thesis assignment were scheduled and respected. Completing the thesis required time to research the literature and update information related to the project. For the grant writer, visiting the Thesis and Dissertation website from the University Library was also helpful.

Selection of Host Agency

Selecting an appropriate host agency for the proposed Family Time project was challenging because there were so many child-welfare agencies. However, research was done to identify the appropriate host agency with goals that aligned with the project's purpose. In addition, the grant writer sought consultation from the thesis advisor to identify a prospective host agency that might be willing and able to make the project come to life.

Identification of Funding Source

Identifying grants or funding resources was a new experience, and far more difficult than expected, especially when there was no previous knowledge or access to resources. Although the search for a funder was challenging, it became a fascinating learning experience. The grant writer learned many different strategies to increase a funding opportunity. In addition, the grant writer learned the different ways funders work, such as by inviting proposals, requiring a letter of inquiry, and meeting qualifications, criteria, and locations of the project. Searching for potential funders was a time consuming process, however, certainly essential.

Program Limitations

Although this project's purpose is to increase communication among birth parents, foster parents, and child welfare workers to achieve reunification there are still some limitation to this innovative project. For many child welfare workers, their goal is to protect the children in care from neglectful or unsafe environments. However, some child welfare workers tend to advocate for the children more than for the birth parents. Although they may have good intentions, many approach the family time task with frustration and fear, especially when visitations – their language - become infrequent. When child welfare workers are unable to intervene effectively, parent-child contact can appear to be unproductive. This causes the child welfare worker, foster parents, birth parents, and children to get frustrated, which can result into stopping the contact (D. Petras, personal communication, January 14, 2015). In addition, not only do child welfare workers play a vital role on how family time occurs, but also do judges. Judges have the final say on how the case plans occur. While child welfare workers make their recommendations to the court, may order all or parts of the case plan to be carried out. This may include parenting classes, individual counseling, family counseling, alcohol or drug abuse treatment, special programs and classes, and visits with their child (California Courts The Judicial Branch of California, 2015).

Relevance to the NASW Code of Ethics

The National Association of Social Workers has Code of Ethics (2008) has six major principles: competence, dignity and worth of the person, integrity, importance of relationships, service, and social justice. For children and parents who have been separated and have the children placed in family foster care, the principle of importance

of relationships may be the most salient. However, child welfare workers also must be competent and understand the dignity and worth of parents and children, as well. Family time requires integrity and considerable advocacy. Support is needed to empower the birth parents and help them become independent enough to reunify them with their children. However, many birth parents have been disempowered and unmotivated to seek help. Parents may require assistance and encouragement to rebuild positive relationships with their children, especially when there has been trauma related to abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, or emotional maltreatment. Thus family time embodies all six principles of the Code of Ethics and therefore is relevant to this profession.

This project also has multicultural relevance for ethnic minority children and families, who are disproportionately represented in foster care. Almost 50% of the children are of color, compared to the overall United States child population (McRoy, 2014, p. 680). At least one study in California investigated the impact of ethnicity and immigrant status on reunification, with significant policy and practice recommendations leading with agency staff cultural competence and language fluency (Osterling & Han, n.d.). Further, there is relevance for sexual minority children and families and, in either circumstances, attention must be given to the dynamic of demographic diversity (Pasztor, Petras, & Rainey, 2013). This means that children, parents, resource parents, and child welfare workers are diverse in age, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, spirituality, socio-economic status, and education. Thus, a broad definition of cultural competency must be considered within the mandate of the NASW Code of Ethics.

Implications for Social Work Policy and Practice

Reunification is the required legal mandate to the fullest possible extent. Teamwork among birth parents, foster parents, and child welfare workers for the children is essential for reunification. Family time emphasizes needed communication. Rather than pushing families away, working and finding the families' strengths and supports allows parents to be involved (Palmer, Maiter, & Manji, 2006).

Of the children in out of home care, approximately one-third were reunified (Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services [DCFS]. 2014). However, reunification rates do not identify recidivism. In fact, it was reported that DCFS has a 15% reentry rate, indicating that children and families may be reunified before they are ready or that they do not receive post-reunification services (Hughes, 2013). Those children for whom permanency is not achieved (reunification with parents or relatives, legal guardianship by extended families or adoption) tend to transition out of the foster care system without, stated in the PRIDE Model of Practice, essential connections to safe and nurturing relationships intended to last a lifetime (CWLA, 2009). Early intervention is needed, in order to reunify the families and decrease the numbers of youth who are more prone to enter the criminal justice system, become homeless, or trafficked.

Conclusion

Reunification requires family time, but that cannot be achieved without the skills and training for the birth parents, resource parents, and child welfare workers to achieve reunification. Sometimes it can appear that child welfare agencies find it easier to help birth parents cope with the loss of their children rather than educating and empowering them. It is essential to overcome the stereotype that low-income non-custodial parents

are irresponsible and do not want to be involved. However, in reality, these parents are calling out for help. They have been disempowered and stigmatized, so it is essential that child welfare agencies empower them and reunify them with their children to the fullest possible extent. The Strengthening Relationship Between Children in Foster Care and Their Birth Parents: The Powerful Families Initiative aims to achieve that goal.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:

DESCRIPTION OF FAMILY TIME PARTICIPANTS AND PROCESS STEPS

Appendix A: Description of Family Time Participants and Process Steps

PARTICIPANTS

PROCESS STEPS	Birth Parents	Children	Resource Parents	Social Worker
Prepare for family time*				
Travel to family time *				
Experience family time*				
Return from family time*				
Process feelings from family time*				

As the chart demonstrates in the row across the top, there are four distinct participants in the family time process: the child, the child's birth parent, the child's resource parent, and the agency child welfare worker. It should be noted that there may be more than one child if there are siblings in the same foster family. There may be a mother and a father who have separate family times because they are not together. There may be a resource mother or father assisting with the family time transportation or there may be a case aide. And there may be more than one child welfare worker if there is both a private foster family agency and a public agency involved.

In the vertical row, there are five distinct steps in the family time process. These include *preparing* for family time such as the logistics as well as the activities that would happen during the family time and making them appropriate for the children's ages and stages of development. This might also be a step to discuss the feelings that the child, the

parents, and resource parents and even the child welfare worker may have about the experience.

The second step is the actual *travel* to the family time and attention should be given to how the person bringing the child talks with the child about where they are going and what will happen there based on the children's ages and stages of development.

The third step is the actual *family time experience* which should reflect the activities that were planned in the first step. It should be remembered that the purpose of the family time activities is to give parent the opportunity to practice parenting skills. While most family time activities require a monitor (at least in the beginning months when relationships are not yet established), it should be remembered that family time can be an awkward experience. It should be designed to give them empowerment and self-confidence in their parenting role.

The fourth step is return from family time. Whoever takes the children back to their foster families after family time must have the skills to address the range of feelings that the children have after the experience of being with their parents. The parents no doubt may also have an array of feelings (sadness, anger, happiness, guilt, relief) and would need someone to talk with about those feelings. The resource parents also may have a range of feelings about the family time experience depending upon their participation. That is why resource parents must have training to be a supportive team member for the child, the birth family and the agency. The child welfare workers also must be able to assess the quality of the family time experience and work with all members of the team to factor those dynamics into the next family time experience. The child welfare workers may also need to reflect on their own feelings about the

experience, any challenges they experienced, and talk with their supervisors about appropriate next steps.

The fifth step is the debriefing process which flows from the family time experience and the return from that experience. It is the responsibility of the child welfare workers to work with the child and the parents, as well as the resource parents, to ensure that family time is meeting the objectives of the service plan.

APPENDIX B:

LINE-ITEM BUDGET

Appendix B: Line-Item Budget

PROJECT BUDGET – 12 MONTHS			
Staffing and Salaries		Foundation Support	In-Kind
	Program Manager/Family Time Group Facilitator FTE 100%	$ 65,000	
	Family Time Group Facilitator FTE 100%	$ 65,000	
	Project Assistant at 50% time	$ 15,000	
	Project Evaluator at 10% time	$ 7,000	
	Guest Speaker honorarium	$ 3,000	
	Project Advisory Committee (8) stipend	$ 37,500	
	Including CWLA Director of Training and Models of Practice at 10% time	$ 10,000	
	MSW Student/BSW Student (2) stipend	$ 1,000	
	Fringe Benefits – 25% of full-time staff	$ 32,500	
	Total Salaries with Benefits	**$ 202,500**	
Direct Costs			
Transportation Services	Bus and gas travel vouchers	$ 12,000	
Office Supplies	Telephone, internet, printing, postage, software, and writing materials	$ 10,000	
Hospitality	Training session refreshments and snacks	$ 5,000	
Office Space	Training room and administrative		$12,000
	Total Direct Costs	**$ 27,000**	**$12,000**
Indirect Costs			
	Administrative overhead at 15%	$34,425	
	Total Indirect Costs	**$34,425**	
TOTAL PROJECT COST		**$263,925**	**$ 12,000**

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