A Pathway to Engaging Fathers and Paternal Relatives in the Child Welfare System

FCL Fathers and Continuous Learning in Child Welfare

In the **Fathers and Continuous Learning in Child Welfare (FCL)** project, sponsored by the Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services, five child welfare agencies tested strategies to strengthen father and paternal relative engagement in child welfare. This infographic shows opportunities to engage fathers and paternal relatives during a family's involvement in the child welfare system and examples of potentially promising engagement strategies developed by FCL project sites. Some strategies may be used at multiple stages of a family's child welfare involvement.

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Initial contact, hotline report, and screening. When a report is made, staff determine whether the report merits investigation.

- ***Father engagement strategy:*** Include questions about the father's identity and contact information in the hotline protocol.

Initial system response, investigation, and intake. If a report needs investigation, staff collect additional information to assess the risk to the child.

- ***Father engagement strategy:*** Develop a protocol to ask about fathers' and paternal relatives' suitability for placement as a first option.

Courts and hearings. Families with children removed from the home participate in hearings to determine whether the child should be in the court's jurisdiction. Hearings are ongoing for these families while the case is open.

- ***Father engagement strategy:*** Assign staff to attend hearings with fathers to help them understand the process and identify next steps.

Coordination and planning meetings. Families participate in meetings to identify services they might need, provide input on their case, and review progress towards permanency.

- ***Father engagement strategy:*** Assign advocates to help fathers and paternal relatives participate in these meetings.

Services provided to the family, overseen by child welfare. Families receive referrals for services to address their needs, such as parenting classes or treatment for substance misuse.

- ***Father engagement strategy:*** Require that fathers receive a needs assessment and identify community partners who provide programs for men and fathers.

Visitation. When children are removed from their homes, staff schedule visits between children and their parents, siblings, and/or other relatives.

- ***Father engagement strategy:*** Provide virtual visits for incarcerated and non-local fathers.

Critical appointments, meetings, and events. Staff can help biological parents attend doctor visits, school meetings, and other important events for children in out-of-home placements.

- ***Father engagement strategy:*** Educate fathers about their rights to participate in these meetings.

Reunification, adoption, and system exit. A family may achieve permanency in a variety of ways, such as reunifying the family, adoption, or naming a legal guardian for the child, which could involve termination of parental rights.

- ***Father engagement strategy:*** Prompt supervisory discussions to uncover unconscious biases and determine whether a child in foster care could be reunified with their noncustodial father.

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