

# Florida's IV-E Waiver Demonstration Project

January 2017

## *Purpose of the IV-E Waiver Evaluation Report*

The evaluation determines, under the expanded array of services made possible by the flexible use of Title IV-E funds, the extent to which the State was able to:

- Expedite the achievement of permanency through reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship;

- Maintain child safety;
- Increase child well-being; and
- Reduce administrative costs associated with providing community-based child welfare services.

## *Interim Evaluation Summary*

The interim evaluation report is available on-line at Florida's Center for Child Welfare <http://centerforchildwelfare.fmhi.usf.edu/Index.shtml>.

The interim evaluation report includes four related components: (a) a process analysis comprised of an **implementation analysis** and a services and practice analysis, (b) an **outcome analysis**, (c) a **cost analysis**, and (d) two **sub-studies**. The interim report includes findings from both components of the process analysis (implementation analysis and services and practice analysis), outcome analysis (permanency, child safety, and child and family well-being indicators), cost analysis, and the sub-study on cross-system services and costs. A summary of the **outcome analysis** is below.

The **outcome analysis** on permanency and child safety tracks changes in three baseline years (SFY 11-12, SFY 12-13 and SFY 13-14) for successive entry and exit cohorts of children who were followed from the time they either entered the child protection system or exited out-of-home care. Overall, there is a considerable variability among Circuits on measured indicators. Two overarching trends were observed. One trend indicates a decreasing proportion of children over time who experienced expedited permanency in general and who achieved permanency for reason of reunification, guardianship, or adoption. The second

## *Florida's Title IV-E Waiver Demonstration*

Florida received approval of the first statewide waiver for flexible use of foster care funds under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act on March 31, 2006. As the only state with such a broad federal waiver, Florida has dedicated resources to keeping more families together and helping parents change their lives and make their homes safe so they can keep or be reunified with children. The flexibility puts funding in line with the program goals of maintaining the safety and well-being of children and enhancing permanency by providing services that helped families remain intact whenever possible. The Administration for Children and Families authorized the Department to continue its participation in the Waiver Demonstration Project through September 2018.

The Florida Title IV-E Waiver requires the state to agree to a number of Terms and Conditions, including an **evaluation** of the effectiveness of the Demonstration. The Terms and Conditions explicitly state three goals of the Demonstration project:

- Improve child and family outcomes through the flexible use of Title IV-E funds;
- Provide a broader array of community-based services, and increase the number of children eligible for services; and
- Reduce administrative costs associated with the provision of child welfare services by removing current restrictions on Title IV-E eligibility and on the types of services that may be paid for using Title IV-E funds.

trend indicates improved performance statewide on child safety based on three out of four examined indicators.

Specifically, there is a decrease in the number of verified child maltreatment cases per 1,000 child population over time, an increase in the proportion of children who remained home after their dependent case was opened, and there is an increase in the proportion of children with no verified maltreatment within 6 months of services termination. Re-entry into out-of-home care remained stable over time.

The outcome analysis on Child and Family Well-Being is based on state fiscal year 2015-16. This is the year that the state transitioned from quality of practice case reviews and quality service reviews and adopted use of the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR)—federally-established guidelines to conduct ongoing case reviews. The evaluation examined the status of three CFSR outcomes that focus on improving the capacity of families to address their children's needs; and providing services to children related to their educational, physical, mental health needs.

Consistent with the findings for permanency and child safety, there was substantial variation across Circuits in their performance for the well-being indicators. A few Circuits stand out as consistently obtaining strength ratings for the relevant performance items. Across well-being outcomes and performance indicators according to these reviews, three Circuits appear to be less effective in the quality of child welfare practices relevant

to the safety, permanency, and well-being of children. The performance item related to enhancement of a family's capacity to provide for the needs of their children is an area of concern. This performance item rates the frequency and quality of visits between caseworkers and children's parents to promote achievement of case goals in ensuring the safety, permanency, and well-being of the child. This item was rated as a strength in only about one-third of the cases that were reviewed statewide.

### *Recommendations*

Policy and practice recommendations begin on page 135 of the interim evaluation report. Recommendations applicable at the local level include:

- Review current outreach strategies and educational opportunities for key stakeholders external to DCF including the judicial system, Guardians ad Litem, and providers. Discuss ways to increase engagement around training events.
- Continue to provide ongoing training, coaching, and mentoring for both CPIs and case managers on the implementation of Florida's practice model, including ongoing assessment and monitoring of fidelity to identify areas of focus for continuous quality improvement efforts.
- Ensure that standardized processes and expectations for collaborative casework between CPIs and case managers are in place and adhered to, such as joint home visits and family

assessments during the transition from investigation to case management.

- Encourage among CBCs the expansion of approaches such as family team conferencing, family group decision making, or family group conferencing at the front-end of system involvement.
- CBCs should ensure that service providers comply with contract language relating to the evaluation and demonstration of service effectiveness and requirements for assessing and reporting client outcomes to the child welfare agency/case manager.
- Continue to identify strategies to fill current service gaps at the community-level.
- To further prevent re-entry into out-of-home care, more intensive services, such as frequent visitations by a case manager, in-home parent education, and various supports (e.g., providing information about specific resources, connecting families with necessary services) should be provided to families immediately after reunification or adoption.