

2011

PPCD Research Report

Parents for Parents Outcome Evaluation



Permanency Planning for
Children Department

National Council of Juvenile and
Family Court Judges

Reno, NV
September, 2011

The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges® (NCJFCJ) headquartered on the University of Nevada campus in Reno since 1969, provides cutting-edge training, wide-ranging technical assistance, and research to help the nation's courts, judges, and staff in their important work. Since its founding in 1937 by a group of judges dedicated to improving the effectiveness of the nation's juvenile courts, the NCJFCJ has pursued a mission to improve courts and systems practice and raise awareness of the core issues that touch the lives of many of our nation's children and families.

For more information about the NCJFCJ or this report, please contact:

National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges
Permanency Planning for Children Department
University of Nevada
P.O. Box 8970
Reno, Nevada 89507
(775) 327-5300
www.ncjfcj.org
caninfo@ncjfcj.org

©2011, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges

Mari Kay Bickett, J.D., Chief Executive Officer, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges

Nancy B. Miller, Director, Permanency Planning for Children Department, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges

Report Contributors

Alicia Summers, Ph.D., Research Associate, Permanency Planning for Children Department, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges

Stephanie, Macgill, M.P.A., Research Associate, Permanency Planning for Children Department, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges

Jesse Russell, Ph.D., Research Program Manager, Permanency Planning for Children Department, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges

Steve M. Wood, M.S., Research Associate, Permanency Planning for Children Department, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges

Table of Contents

Executive Summary..... 1

Juvenile Dependency and Parents for Parents 2

The King County Parents for Parents Program 4

Evaluation Overview 5

Method 6

Results 7

Conclusion..... 15

References 16

Executive Summary

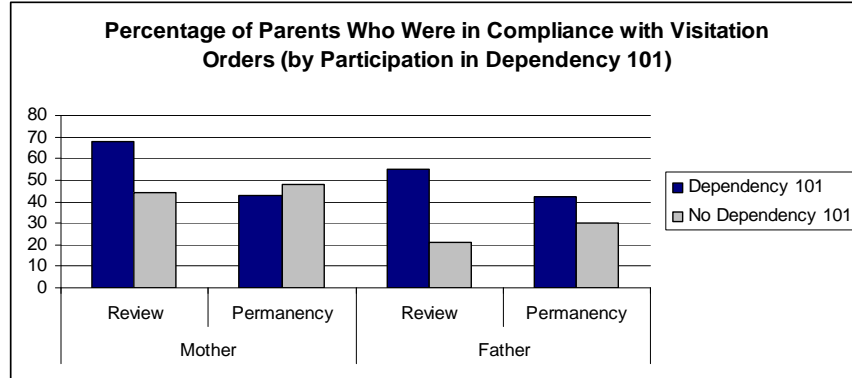
Introduction

The purpose of this assessment is to examine the effects of King County's Parents for Parents Program on engaging parents in the dependency process and case processing timeliness. A process evaluation of the Parents for Parents Program, completed by the Permanency Planning for Children Department of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges in July 2011, revealed that the program was helpful in improving parents' perceptions of the dependency process and in providing parents new to the dependency system with a support system.

Summary of Findings

The efficacy evaluation found that participation in Dependency 101 was related to:

- Increased compliance in the court-ordered case plan by both mothers (marginally) and fathers (significantly)
- Significant increases in parents' compliance with court-ordered visitation at the review hearing, but not at the permanency hearing



- Increased participation by the mother at key court events; mothers were more likely to be present for court hearings by 13%
- No differences in timeliness of case processing

The evaluation also found some race differences. Caucasian families benefited the most from Dependency 101, followed by African American fathers and Native American mothers.

This efficacy assessment is expected to be helpful to King County in terms of determining efficient allocation of resources and to contribute to a larger body of theoretical literature.

Juvenile Dependency and Parents for Parents

As of September 30, 2009, 10,894 children in the State of Washington were in foster care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). Researchers and policymakers have made it a priority to discover what factors might assist efforts to reunify children with their families. One factor that researchers have considered important in increasing the rates and timeliness of family reunification is parental engagement (Leathers, 2002; Wood & Russell, 2011). Yet, engaging parents may not be an easy task.

Low levels of parental engagement could be due to several factors. Families involved with the child welfare system face a number of stressors, including poverty, unemployment, low education levels, lack of transportation, health problems, and mental illness diagnoses (Dawson & Berry, 2002). These stressors, combined with incidences of domestic violence, criminal justice involvement, and substance abuse, as well as negative perceptions of the child welfare system, lead to much higher levels of familial distress (Nilsen, Affronti & Coombes, 2009) and may create physical and attitudinal barriers affecting parents' ability and willingness to appear in dependency court and participate in services. Another reason for low engagement may be a lack of fit between ordered services and family needs. Drop out rates from court-ordered services, such as parent training programs, are high, and often result in increases in children's time in care (Dawson & Berry; Barth et al., 2005). Findings from Child and Family Service Reviews, conducted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, have consistently identified the need to improve parental engagement (Thoennes, 2009).

One innovative approach to enhancing parental engagement has been emerging: peer-to-peer programs that pair parents who have been through the child welfare system (Veteran Parents or VPs) with parents new to the system (Marcenko et al., 2010; Nilsen, 2009). The VPs mentor new parents as they navigate the juvenile dependency process by providing social support, helping parents advocate for themselves, giving them a voice in the system, and helping ensure they receive the services they need. By sharing their experiences of struggles as well as successes in working with the court and child welfare professionals, VPs also offer inspiration and hope to parents.

VPs can potentially facilitate family engagement in the juvenile dependency field through several means. First, VPs provide support to new families; they may be seen as legitimate sources for social support because of their previous experiences in the juvenile dependency system. Second, VPs act as a liaison to

the professionals involved in the dependency process, helping parents understand, navigate and connect to the system. Third, VPs provide encouragement for parents to accept and participate in court-ordered services. Fourth, VPs serve as positive social comparisons for parents, an important concept in a system as laden with stigma and shame as the juvenile dependency system. Finally, VPs foster self-efficacy by teaching parents how to advocate for themselves throughout the dependency process (Nilsen, 2009). Despite the potential benefits, outcomes related to the effectiveness of peer-to-peer programs have not been systematically evaluated.

Although parental engagement and compliance with case plans have been found to have benefits (e.g., increased likelihood of reunification with the child, Jellinek et al., 1992), what is less clear from extant research is the role of parental engagement in the court process and the effects of dependency-related peer-to-peer programs on case outcomes. King County and Washington State continue to assess programs that increase parental engagement as a means of improving the efficiency of case processing and quality of outcomes in the juvenile dependency system. The King County Parents for Parents Program (P4PP) offers a potential catalyst for parental engagement because it seeks to help parents understand the juvenile dependency system, become active participants in the process, and build social supports. It is hypothesized that increased understanding, participation and support will increase compliance, reduce continuances or contested hearings, and alter parents' perceptions of Child Protective Services (CPS). This report offers an examination of whether P4PP increases parental engagement and compliance.

The purpose of the King County Parents for Parents Program (P4PP) is to engage parents early in the dependency process in order to reunite with their children more quickly. The program uses peer support from veteran parents (VPs) who have successfully navigated the child welfare system and education as strategies to engage parents.

The two primary components of the King County P4PP are VP support and Dependency 101. VPs contact parents before or at the 72-hour shelter care hearing and urge them to attend Dependency 101. When parents do not attend, the VPs make efforts to call the parent or try to contact them at subsequent hearings. Dependency 101 is a two-hour team-taught informational session that provides parents tools and resources intended to increase empowerment, engagement and self-advocacy. During the session, parents watch a video about the dependency process, meet some of the professionals involved (social workers, attorneys, etc.), and receive a packet of information about the dependency system. Professional stakeholders discuss their roles in the dependency process. Parents also hear from VPs, who tell their stories and talk about what it takes to reunify with their children. Based on a parental engagement program in Pierce County, Washington, King County implemented both components of the P4PP at the King County Superior Court (Seattle) in 2009 and at the Maleng Regional Justice Center (Kent) in 2010; at the Maleng Center, VP support began in March of 2010 and Dependency 101 began in April 2010

In partnership with the Washington Administrative Office of the Courts, the Permanency Planning for Children Department (PPCD) of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) examined the P4PP process and its effects on parent perceptions of the juvenile dependency system. The study found that all parents who participated in Dependency 101 reported that they learned at least one thing from the class and felt that the session was helpful (NCJFCJ, 2011a). Parents also reported reduced anxiety about the dependency process, increased trust in Child Protective Services (CPS), more awareness of how CPS could help reunify their family, and a better understanding of the roles of dependency professionals. Many parents reported they believed they were less alone after taking the class and some believed they had more control over the outcome of their case. These promising results of the process evaluation led researchers to move forward in examining the effect that the P4PP may have on case processing and outcomes.

Evaluation Overview

The process evaluation of the P4PP, conducted by NCJFCJ in July of 2011, revealed that the Dependency 101 session was effective in changing parents' perceptions of the dependency process and of Child Protective Services. Parents found the program components helpful in increasing their understanding of the dependency process.

The current assessment draws on the results of the P4PP process evaluation and observation of the Dependency 101 session in order to assess its effectiveness. The goal of P4PP is to enhance engagement of the parents in the dependency process. It is hypothesized that engaged parents will have higher compliance and more participation in hearings. It is also hypothesized that engagement may affect the timeliness of case processing, as engaged parents may contest fewer issues and work more collaboratively with system stakeholders to reach resolution. The current assessment specifically addresses whether Dependency 101 enhances parental engagement by increasing their compliance with case services and visitation orders and increasing their attendance at dependency court hearings and examines any effect participation may have on case timeliness and outcomes. The current assessment also examines any differences in engagement that might occur by race.

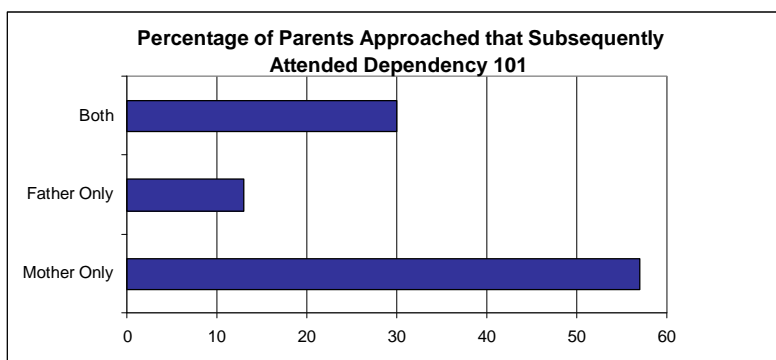
The specific research questions are:

- Does participation in Dependency 101 increase parent engagement in the dependency process?
- Is Dependency 101 more or less effective in engaging parents in some racial groups than others?
- Does participation in Dependency 101 increase the timeliness of case processing or dependency case outcomes?

Method

The P4PP coordinator provided researchers with information on parents who had been approached by a VP and referred to Dependency 101 beginning in January of 2010. This information included: (1) date the parent was approached, (2) gender of the parent, (3) race of the parent, and (4) date parent participated in Dependency 101 (when applicable). Utilizing structured case file review instruments, researchers reviewed and coded 80 cases of parents eligible to participate in Dependency 101 who were approached to participate. Of these, 43 cases had at least one parent who participated in Dependency 101 and 37 had no parent participation in Dependency 101.

The data provided by the P4PP coordinator included basic demographic information regarding the potential participations in Dependency 101. In 2010, a VP approached or otherwise contacted 647 parents, representing 497 dependency cases. An examination of the 806 new petitions filed in 2010 indicated that a VP approached at least one parent for 62% ($n=497$) of all the cases filed. Forty-five percent of those approached (291 of 497) attended Dependency 101. The majority of attendees were mothers (65%).¹ The sample selected demonstrated a consistent pattern with a VP approaching mothers (48%), fathers (10%) or both parents (42%). In 30% of the participating sample, both parents attended Dependency 101. When only one parent attended, it was most often the mother (57%). The following graph reflects the percentage of participants (in our sample) that were approached and subsequently attended Dependency 101.



Dependency 101 classes were held twice a month in Seattle and once a month in Kent. An average of eight parents attended each session. The majority of participants attended Dependency 101 within 21 days of the shelter care hearing (16 days for mothers and 27 days for fathers).

¹ These numbers may underestimate the percentage of parents who would typically be approached by VPs because Kent began the Shelter Care VP support later in the year. 2011 estimates may reflect a higher percentage of parents approached.

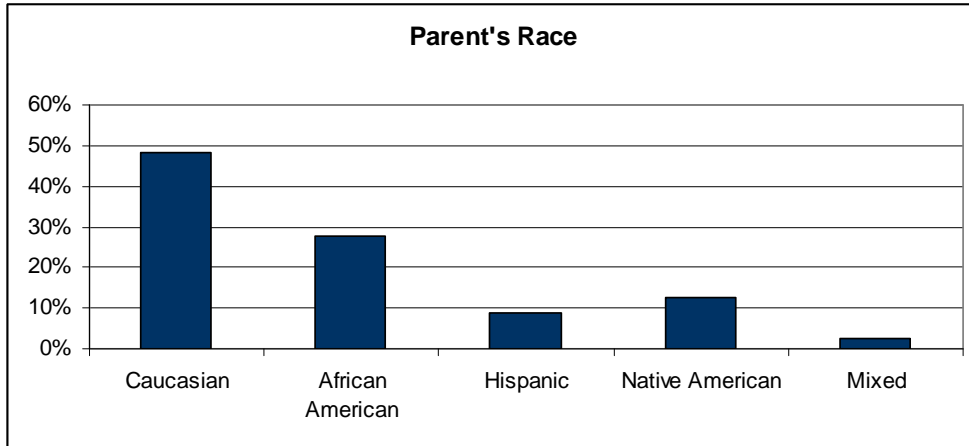
Results

Comparability of the Two Groups

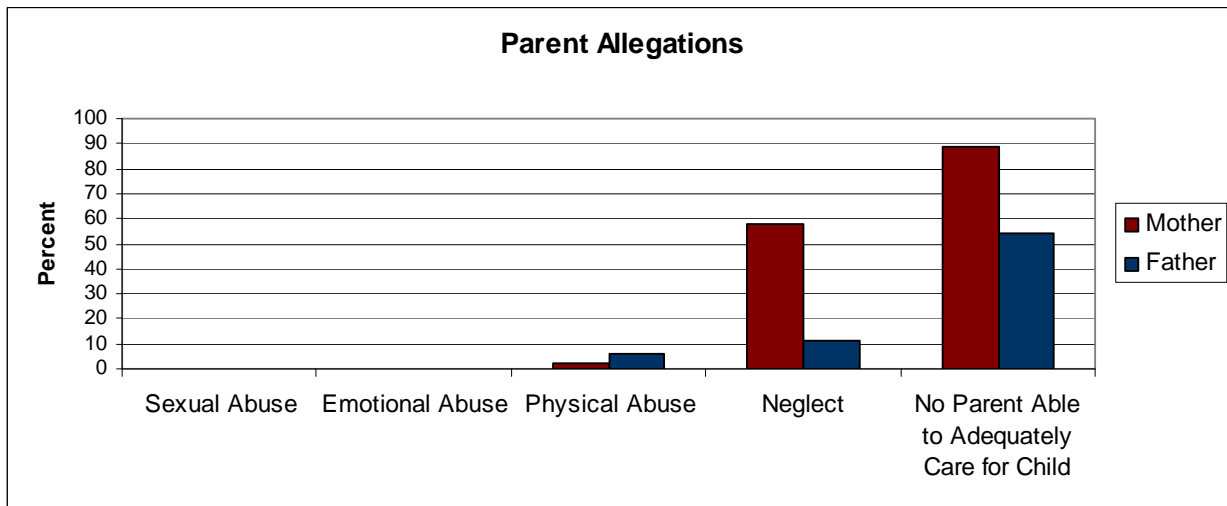
In order to make comparisons between the Dependency 101 participants and non-participants, researchers ensured that the two groups (those who were invited but did not attend and those who were invited and did attend) were comparable in terms of parent's race, child's age, the type and number of allegations against the parents, and presenting problems of the parents. A statistical test revealed that the two groups were similar. Case factors did not differ between the two groups, indicating that any further differences that might emerge are not due to case differences and are more likely due to participation in Dependency 101.

Case Demographics

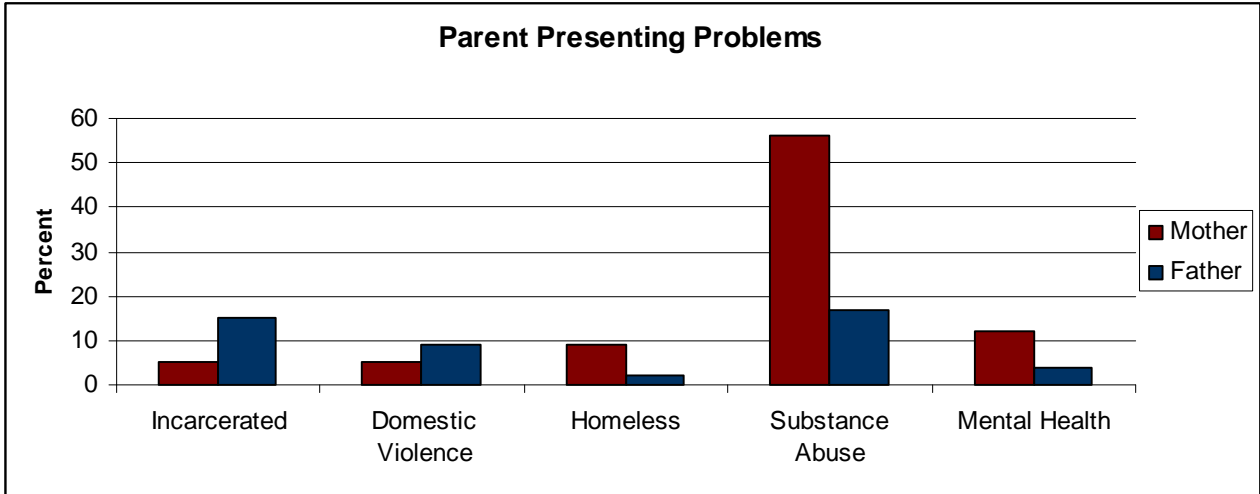
The average age of the child on the petition was 3.7 (range of 0 to 17). This age may be younger than the general foster care population due to the means that the P4PP coordinator uses to track cases. Cases are recorded by the youngest child's case number, which makes the entire sample younger than a random sample would reflect. The race of parents who were assessed in the case was primarily Caucasian (48%), followed by African American (28%), Native American (13%), Hispanic (9%) and Mixed race or Bi-racial (3%). The demographics of the sample are similar to the demographics of the overall foster care population: children in care are 30% Caucasian, 28% African American, 7% Native American, 9% Hispanic and 22% Mixed race. Differences in the samples may be due to the fact that researchers did not always have the race of both parents and therefore could not ascertain the race of the child. More children are of mixed race in foster care than are represented in the current study.



In Washington, a child is considered dependent if the child has been abandoned, is abused or neglected or “has no parent, guardian, or custodian capable of adequately caring for the child” (RCW 13.34.030). The most common allegations against parents in the King county P4PP study were that the child has no parent capable of adequately caring for the child, or some form of neglect. There were no allegations of emotional or sexual abuse and very few (2% for mother, 6% for fathers) allegations of physical abuse.



The most common presenting problem was substance abuse. Fifty-six percent of mothers and 17% of fathers had substance abuse issues noted on the petition. The second most common presenting problem for mothers was mental health issues; 12% of mothers face this issue. For fathers, the second most common presenting problem was incarceration (15%).



Effects of Dependency 101

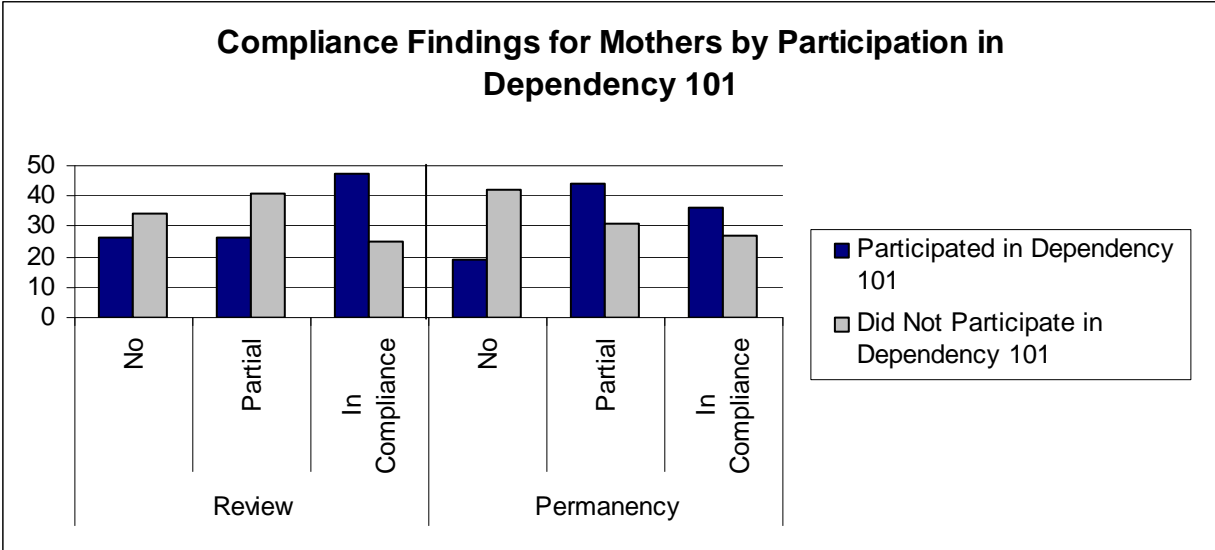
Participation in Dependency 101 was hypothesized to affect case processing and outcomes. For the following findings, researchers used statistical analyses to determine if parents who participated in Dependency 101 differed *significantly* from those who did not. The results are reported as to whether or not there was a statistically significant difference using a cutoff of $p < .05$. It should also be noted that some differences emerged that may appear to be quite different but were not found to be statistically significant, likely due to the small sample size.

Parental Engagement

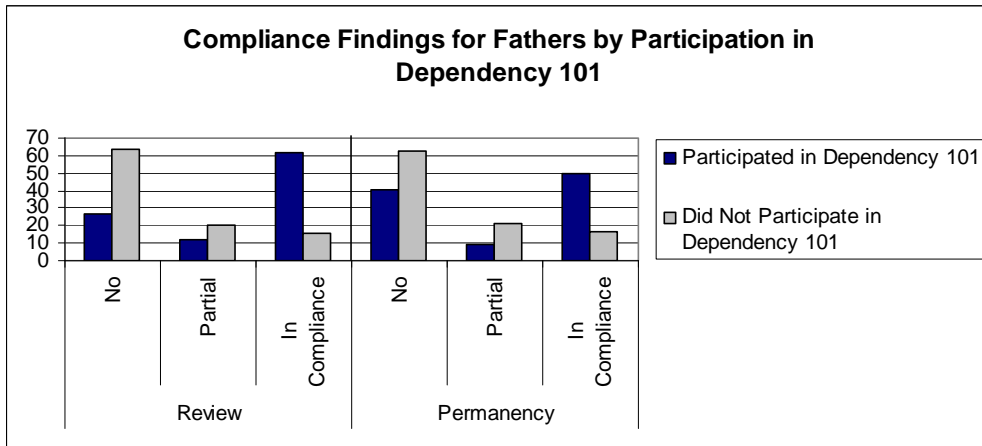
Participation in Dependency 101 was hypothesized to influence parent's engagement in the dependency process. Engagement, for this study was defined as parent's compliance with the case plan, compliance with visitation, and presence at key court hearings.

Case Plan Compliance

Compliance with the ordered case plan was measured based on a court finding of compliance. At each review and permanency hearing, judicial officers make compliance findings of *no*, *partial*, or *in compliance* for all parents who are a party to the case. The following graphs illustrate the percentage of parents with a finding of no, partial, or in compliance at the first review hearing and the permanency hearing. The findings are separated by participation in Dependency 101 and by gender of the parent.



Mothers who participated in Dependency 101 were more likely to be in full compliance at both the review and the permanency hearing than mothers who did not participate. This difference is clearly visible in the graphs, but was not statistically significant.

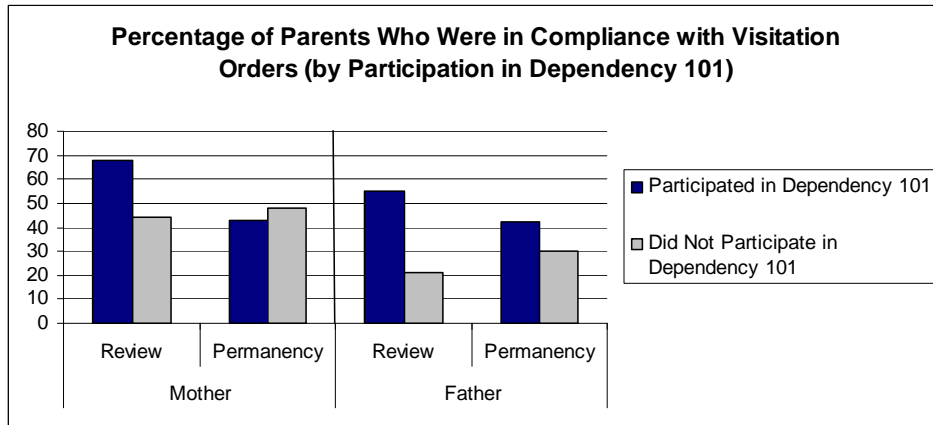


The findings for fathers were much more pronounced. Fathers who participated in Dependency 101 were significantly more likely to be in full compliance with the case plan than fathers who did not. This was true for findings made at both the review and the permanency hearing. This difference was statistically significant.

Visitation Compliance

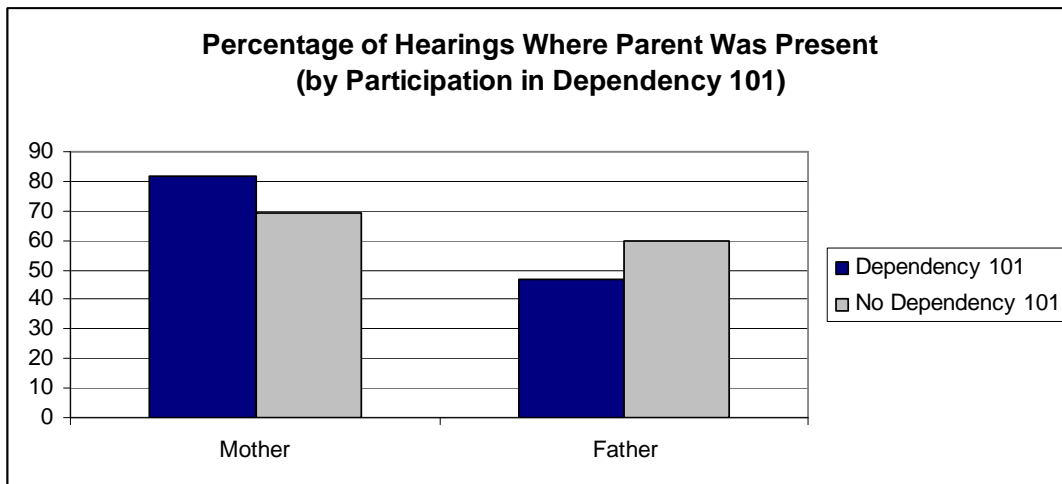
A second measure of engagement was the court’s finding of parental compliance with visitation orders. Beginning at the first review hearing, the judicial officer makes a finding regarding whether the parent has or has not had consistent visits with the child. The findings suggest that parents who participated in

Dependency 101 were significantly more likely to comply with visitation orders at the review hearing than non-participating parents were. There were no significant differences between these groups in visitation compliance at the permanency hearing, however.



Presence at Hearings

The final measure of engagement was the presence of parents at court hearings. A percentage of presence was calculated based on the hearings held and the parent’s presence or absence at these key hearings. Mothers were significantly more likely to be present at hearings if they had participated in Dependency 101 than if they had not (82% compared to 69%) and this difference was statistically significant. There was no statistically significant effect of Dependency 101 on father’s participation.

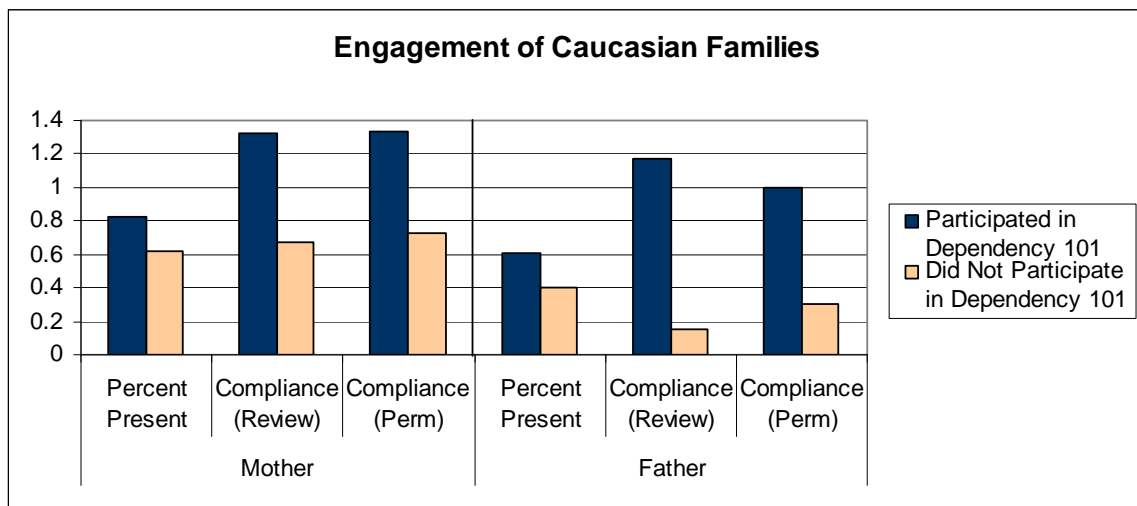


Race Differences in Engagement

Research has shown that across the country children and families of color are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system (NCJFCJ, 2011b). King County has disproportionate representation of both African American and Native American youth in foster care. This study of the affect of the P4PP includes an examination of the program’s effectiveness by race. This examination focuses on differences in parent’s engagement in the process. Parents’ participation in court hearings is operationalized as a percentage present. Higher numbers demonstrate an increase in the percentage of hearings the parent attended. Case plan compliance ranged from 0=no compliance to 2=in compliance. Average compliance is reported in the graphs below. Higher scores indicate better compliance.

Caucasian Families

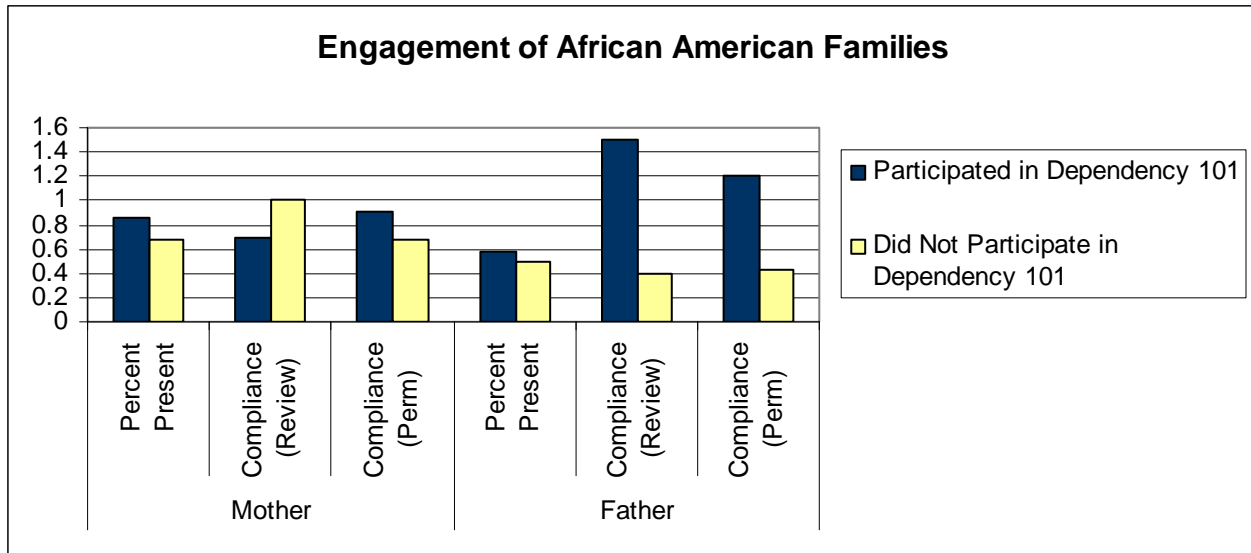
Dependency 101 appears to be most effective for Caucasian families. Caucasian mothers were significantly more likely to be present at hearings after participating in Dependency 101 than mothers who did not participate. Further, both mothers’ and fathers’ compliance with the case plan was higher for those who participated in Dependency 101 than for those who did not. The graph below illustrates these differences.



African American Families

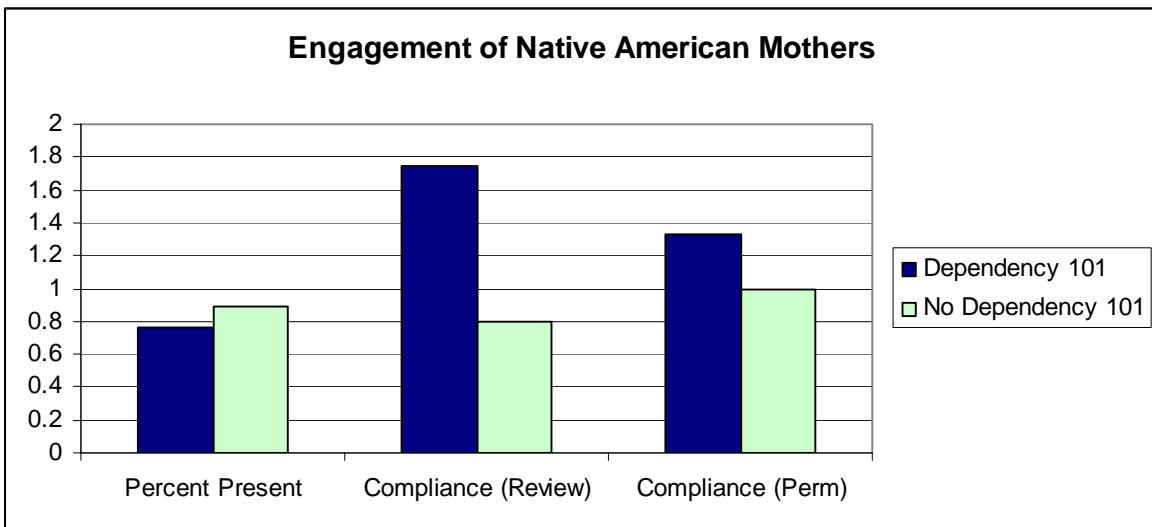
For African American families, mothers who participated in Dependency 101 were significantly more likely to attend court hearings than those who did not participate. However, there were no differences in father’s attendance at court hearings based on participation in Dependency 101. Participation in Dependency 101 had no effect on mothers’ compliance with the case plan but did appear to have a significant effect on fathers’ compliance at both the review and permanency hearings, with African

American father who participated in Dependency 101 demonstrating much higher compliance with the case plan than African American fathers who did not participate.



Native American Families

Participation in Dependency 101 appeared to be least effective for Native American families. The lack of statistical finding may be due to the small sample size as only 10 Native American families were coded for this research. For Native American families, only the mothers’ compliance at the first review hearing was significantly different for participators and non-participators. Mothers who had participated in Dependency 101 were significantly more likely to be in compliance at the review hearing than those who had not participated. No Native American fathers in the sample participated in Dependency 101.



Case Timeliness, Placement & Outcomes

A second part of the study examined the effect of the P4PP on case processing efficiency, including timeliness of case processing and outcomes. If parties are more engaged and more willing to work collaboratively, this may reduce the time it takes the case to move forward through key events.² No differences in case timeliness between participants and non-participants were found in this study. There were also no differences in the number of continuances ordered for the case, indicating that the P4PP does not appear to influence timeliness.

Future assessments could also examine outcome differences (such as comparing reunification rates and timely reunification). For the current assessment, ten Dependency 101 cases and only three non-Dependency 101 cases had reached case closure. The majority (85%) of the cases had not reached case closure, making it impossible to make comparisons on outcomes in this assessment.

² The majority of cases reviewed had not achieved a return home or case closure, making the analysis of time from petition filing to return home and case closure impossible.

Conclusion

The P4PP outcome assessment revealed that Dependency 101 is related to an increase in parental engagement in the dependency process. Parents who participated in Dependency 101 were more likely to be present at key court events, and comply with court-ordered case plans and visitation. Some race differences did emerge. Caucasian parents who participated in Dependency 101 were more likely to demonstrate a significant difference in presence at hearings and case plan compliance than Caucasian parents who did not participate in Dependency 101. For African American mothers, differences were small and not statistically significant; however, African American fathers who participated in Dependency 101 did show a significant increase in case plan compliance when compared to those who did not participate. As engaging fathers in the dependency system may often be difficult, this finding suggests that Dependency 101 can be a valuable tool for engaging fathers. For Native American parents, only the mother's compliance at the review hearing could be assessed and it was significantly different for those who attended Dependency 101 compared to those who did not. These numbers should be interpreted with caution. The sample size for the different racial groups was small. A larger sample size would provide better information regarding the effects of Dependency 101 on different racial groups.

The assessment found no effect on timeliness of case processing through the permanency hearing. Timeliness to case closure could not be assessed because the majority of cases were still open at the time of the assessment. Additionally, because the majority of cases were open, it is premature to make comparisons regarding case outcomes for children and families.

The results of this assessment clearly show that the P4PP enhances engagement in the process. Prior research has identified engagement in the process as an important element in improving safe and timely permanency for children. Increased parental participation in the hearings and compliance with visitation and case plans have led to increases in timely reunification (Leathers, 2002; Wood & Russell, 2011). Although it is impossible to say specifically that participation in the P4PP—and more specifically Dependency 101—increases timely reunification for children and families in King County, the P4PP does encourage parental engagement in areas that have previously been shown to improve outcomes. The P4PP is an effective tool in engaging parents. Future research should explore this program further to specifically examine any differences that may occur in case outcomes as a result of participation in Dependency 101.

References

- Alpert, L.T., & Britner, P.A. (2009). Measuring parent engagement in foster care. *Social Work Research*, 33, 135-145.
- Barth, R.P., Landsverk, J., Chamberlain, P., Reid, J.B., Rolls, J.A., Hurlburt, M.S., Farmer, E.M.Z., James, S., McCabe, K.M., & Kohl, P.L. (2005). Parent-training programs in Child Welfare Services: planning for a more evidence-based approach to serving biological parents. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 15, 353-371.
- Berry, M., Charlson, R., & Dawson, K. (2003). Promising practices in understanding and treating child neglect. *Child and Family Social Work*, 8, 13-24.
- Dawson, K., & Berry, M. (2002). Engaging families in child welfare services: an evidence-based approach to best practice. *Child Welfare*, 81, 293-317.
- Leathers, S. (2002). Parental visiting and family reunification: could inclusive practice make a difference? *Child Welfare*, 81, 595-616.
- Littell, J.H. (2001). Client participation and outcomes of intensive family preservation services. *Social Work Research*, 25, 103-113.
- Marcenko, M., Brown, R., DeVoy, P.R., & Conway, D. (2010). Engaging parents: innovative approaches in child welfare. Tampa, FL: Center for the Advancement of Child Welfare Practice. Retrieved from: www.centerforchildwelfare.fmhi.usf.edu
- National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (2011a). *PPCD Research Report: Evaluation of the Parents for Parents Program King County, Washington*. Reno, NV: NCJFCJ.
- National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (2011b). *Disproportionality Rates for Children of Color in Foster Care*. Reno, NV: NCJFCJ.
- Nilson, W.J., Affronti, M.L., & Coombes, M.L. (2009). Veteran parents in Child Protection Services: theory and implementation. *Family Relations*, 58, 520-535.
- Thoennes, N. (2009). What we know now: findings from dependency mediation research. *Family Court Review*, 47, 21-37.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2010). *Demographics: Child Welfare Summary – Washington: 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009*. Retrieved from: http://cwoutcomes.acf.hhs.gov/data/tables/demo_stats?states%5B%5D=48&state=®ion=
- Walten, E. (2001). Combining abuse and neglect investigations with intensive family preservation services: an innovative approach to protecting children. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 11, 627-644.
- Wood, S.M., & Russell, J. R. (2011). Effects of parental involvement and attorney involvement on reunification in juvenile dependency cases. *Child and Youth Services Review*. Doi: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2011.04.026.