

PROTECTOHIO EVALUATION FINDINGS

Human Services Research Institute Evaluation Brief

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Ohio's IV-E Waiver Demonstration

IV-E waivers allow states the flexibility to use federal IV-E dollars, which can normally be spent only on foster care, for a range of child welfare purposes instead. In this way, states can test new approaches to improve outcomes in the areas of safety, permanency, and well-being. During its third five-year waiver period, all 16 participating county child welfare agencies agreed to implement two common interventions for Ohio's waiver demonstration project: Family Team Meetings (FTM) and Kinship Supports.

An evaluation of Ohio's waiver examined outcomes for children and families that received each of the individual interventions, to understand the impact of FTM and Kinship Supports, and also examined outcomes for all children served under the waiver, including those who were ineligible for intervention services, to gain a broader understanding of the effects of flexible funding alone. Additionally, a cost study was conducted to examine the effect of the waiver on child welfare spending patterns.

Evaluation Findings

The findings from the evaluation of Ohio's third waiver period support findings from evaluations of other waiver demonstrations over the past 18 years: targeted use of flexible funds for specific family preservation efforts can and does promote improved outcomes; however, flexible funds *alone* are not likely to achieve significant improvements in child and family outcomes. Ohio's intervention-specific analyses found improved outcomes for children and families who received the FTM and Kinship Support interventions, whereas the funding analyses did not find significant differences in outcomes based on flexible funding alone.

However, when examining core strengths of each intervention, it became clear that waiver flexibility—that is, having the ability to use IV-E funds flexibly—was integral to both interventions. While the interventions themselves were key to identifying needed services and supports, FTM and Kinship Support staff indicated that having the ability to provide families with services and hard goods they may have been ineligible for under traditional IV-E rules was central to the success of each intervention.



"The waiver allows us to utilize our people differently and more effectively in working with an entire family."

- County Child Welfare Director



Kinship Supports

The Kinship Supports intervention is a method designed to promote kinship placement as best practice, increasing attention to and support for kinship placements, caregivers, and families. Its purpose is to ensure that kinship caregivers have the support they need to meet the child's physical, emotional, financial, and basic needs.

In each of the 16 ProtectOHIO demonstration counties, a trained kinship coordinator serves as an expert resource on kinship practice. The kinship coordinator (or, at times, other designated staff) completes specific activities, assessments, and caregiver support plans.

Demonstration vs. Comparison Counties

Demonstration counties appeared to place a much greater emphasis on kinship care than did comparison counties. Whereas all 16 demonstration counties had, at a minimum, a designated kinship coordinator, only 4 of the 16 comparison counties had staff dedicated to serving kin beyond conducting home studies. Kinship caregivers in demonstration counties also appeared to receive more services than caregivers in comparison counties; an analysis of case services suggested that staff in demonstration counties provided significantly more services to kinship families than staff in comparison counties. Types of services also varied substantially, likely a result of waiver flexibility. For instance, financial support—cited by caregivers as key to supporting kin placements—was the most common type of non-case management service provided to kin families in demonstration counties (60%). In contrast, financial support accounted for less than 1% of non-case management services provided to kin families in comparison counties (see chart below).

Kinship Supports Outcome Findings

Overall, among children placed in out-of-home care, children in demonstration counties were more likely to be placed with kin (i.e., avoid foster care), more likely to be initially placed with kin (i.e., avoid emergency temporary placements), and more likely to spend a greater proportion of their time in out-of-home care with kin than similar children in comparison counties.

Kinship Outcomes (continued)

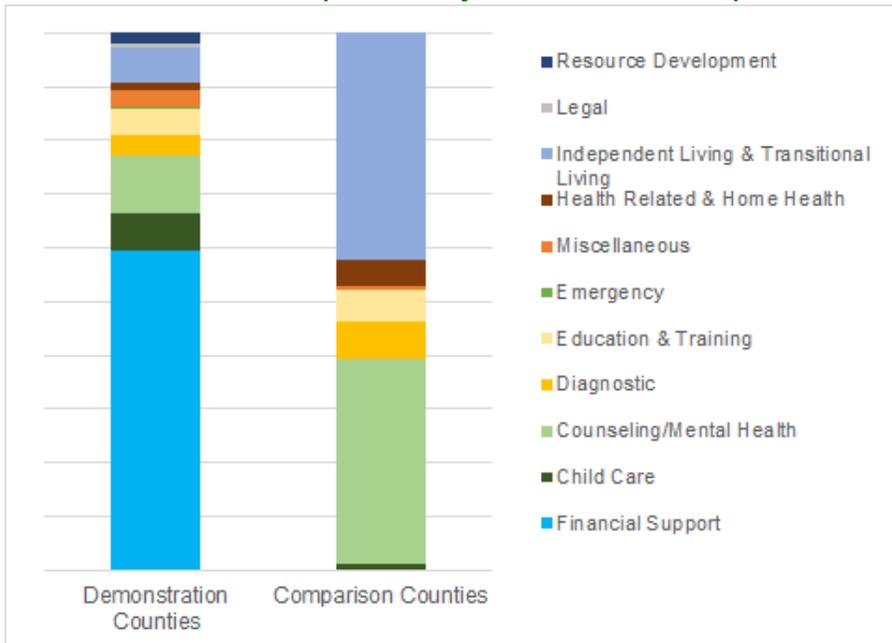
The outcome analyses also found that, when compared with **similar children placed in foster care** in comparison counties, children who were placed with kin and received Kinship Supports services:

- Were significantly less likely to experience a subsequent report of abuse or neglect.
- Experienced significantly fewer placement moves.
- Spent significantly fewer days in out-of-home care.
- Were significantly less likely to reenter out-of-home care.

And, when compared with **similar children also placed with kin** in comparison counties, children who were placed with kin and received Kinship Supports services:

- Experienced significantly fewer placement moves.
- Experienced significantly fewer days in out-of-home care.

Services Provided to Kinship Families by Demonstration & Comparison Counties



*Services categorized as "case management" were excluded in the above chart.

"I could not have survived without the kinship program. They are there to help you help the kids. I felt 100% supported."

- Kinship Caregiver



FTM Fidelity

Three FTM fidelity components were measured:

1. Initial FTM is held within 35 days of case opening.
2. Subsequent FTMs are held at least quarterly.
3. At least one parent or primary caregiver, at least one agency staff member, and at least one other person (such as a family support) attends the FTM.

Across the 16 demonstration counties:

- 79% of initial FTMs were held on time.
- 75% of subsequent FTMs were held on time.
- 53% of initial FTMs included the minimum attendee mix.
- 47% of subsequent FTMs included the minimum attendee mix.

“FTMs are a way to hold everyone accountable, not just the families but the caseworkers too, to make sure we’re following through with services and offering any assistance we can.”

- FTM facilitator



Family Team Meetings

Family Team Meetings are a method for engaging family members and people who can support the family—including extended family, friends, service providers, advocates, etc.—in a process of shared case planning and decision-making. The approach involves regularly scheduled meetings that are facilitated by a trained professional. The goal of FTM is to come up with creative and effective solutions to case challenges, link families to more appropriate and timely services, and ultimately reduce the need for foster care placement and improve permanency outcomes.

Demonstration vs. Comparison Counties

The core components of ProtectOHIO FTM include: 1) all cases that transfer to ongoing services are eligible to receive FTM; 2) meetings are led by a trained, neutral facilitator; 3) meetings include a range of participants; and 4) meetings are held on an ongoing basis throughout the duration of the case.

In a 2014 survey of comparison counties, administrators in 9 of 16 counties indicated they are holding some sort of meeting that aligns with one or more components of the ProtectOHIO FTM model. However, only 2 comparison counties were implementing a practice very similar to ProtectOHIO FTM—in that all four core components listed above are utilized as a part of these counties’ family meeting practices.

FTM Outcome Findings

When children in demonstration counties who received FTM were compared with **similar children in comparison counties**, the analyses suggested that:

- Of children placed in out-of-home care, children who received FTM were significantly more likely to be placed with kin (i.e., avoid foster care).
- Cases that received high-fidelity FTM had significantly shorter case episodes.
- Children who received FTM (regardless of fidelity) were significantly less likely to reenter out-of-home care.

Isolated Impact of Flexible Funds

The evaluation of flexible funding alone without attention to the receipt of particular interventions found few differences in outcomes between demonstration and comparison children. While these findings, on the surface, may appear to be contradictory to those found in the FTM and Kinship Support outcome findings, it must be noted that individual county capacity for providing the interventions played a role in whether families received those services. Several counties randomly sampled from their larger pool of cases or implemented interventions in particular county regions only. Thus, the analyses focusing on the impact of flexible funds included entire subsets of families that were served under a flexible IV-E funding structure, yet were deliberately excluded from the FTM and/or Kinship Support interventions.

Cost Findings

The cost study found that differences in the distribution of average annual changes were in the hypothesized direction (that is, among demonstration counties, a shift from foster care to other types of child welfare expenditures would take place); however, the models did not reveal statistically significant distinctions in those changes between the demonstration and comparison counties.

The social and economic environment varies considerably across the state, and local conditions can largely influence removal rates, which in turn impact foster care expenditures. Furthermore, because Ohio has been implementing its waiver demonstration since 1997, some demonstration counties had already dramatically decreased placement days, and related child welfare expenditures, prior to the third waiver study period.

Lessons Learned

The two interventions implemented as a part of Ohio's IV-E Waiver Demonstration, FTM and Kinship Supports, appear promising. The outcome studies found that children and families receiving these interventions had more favorable outcomes than similar children and families in comparison counties, including:

- A higher likelihood of placement with kin than foster care, when out-of-home placement was necessary;
- Greater placement stability;
- Fewer days in out-of-home care;
- Shorter case episodes; and
- Lower likelihood of re-entry into out-of-home care.

Although significant differences in outcomes based on flexible funds alone were not found, the flexibility offered by the waiver likely contributed to the success of the FTM and Kinship Supports interventions. ProtectOHIO administrators have expressed their belief that the implementation and intersection of these interventions, in the context of a flexible IV-E funding structure, contributed to the success of each. The favorable outcomes demonstrated by each intervention merit further exploration toward the benefits of family meeting and kinship support models, as well as approaches to shifting the federal child welfare financing structure to better support children and families involved with child protective services.

Additional Information: For more detailed information related to the findings presented in this brief, please see the ProtectOHIO Third Waiver Period Final Evaluation Report:

www.hsri.org/project/evaluation-of-ohio-title-iv-e-waiver/publications.

“Before the waiver with traditional IV-E, the agency was heavy backdoor—group homes, placements, foster homes—and it’s just been flipped. Now it’s more service oriented... You keep the kids in the home, which reduces the number of kids you have in placement. That flexibility allows new things today that otherwise we wouldn’t be able to do through traditional IV-E reimbursement.”

- PCSA Administrator

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