

Locating family connections for children in foster care

Child Welfare

Literature review updated August 2017.

As part of WSIPP’s research approach to identifying evidence-based programs and policies, WSIPP determines “what works” (and what does not work) to improve outcomes using an approach called meta-analysis. For detail on our methods, see our [Technical Documentation](#). At this time, WSIPP has not yet calculated benefits and costs for this topic.

Program Description: These programs are intensive efforts to find extended family or fictive kin for children in foster care. Typically, a designated worker attempts to identify and locate family members and to engage them in decision making for children in order to provide more options for legal and emotional permanency for children. Three of the four studies included in this analysis, utilized the Family Search and Engagement (also known as Family Finding) developed at Catholic Family Services in Tacoma. Program duration ranged from 2 to 5 months.

Meta-Analysis of Program Effects

Outcomes measured	No. of effect sizes	Treatment N	Adjusted effect sizes and standard errors used in the benefit-cost analysis						Unadjusted effect size (random effects model)	
			First time ES is estimated			Second time ES is estimated			ES	p-value
			ES	SE	Age	ES	SE	Age		
Externalizing behavior symptoms	3	467	0.038	0.093	14	0.018	0.049	17	0.091	0.330
Internalizing symptoms	2	331	0.032	0.107	13	0.023	0.084	15	0.032	0.768
Permanent placement	3	509	-0.064	0.100	14	n/a	n/a	n/a	-0.064	0.520
Placement stability	2	227	0.124	0.098	14	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.124	0.208

Meta-analysis is a statistical method to combine the results from separate studies on a program, policy, or topic in order to estimate its effect on an outcome. WSIPP systematically evaluates all credible evaluations we can locate on each topic. The outcomes measured are the types of program impacts that were measured in the research literature (for example, crime or educational attainment). Treatment N represents the total number of individuals or units in the treatment group across the included studies.

An effect size (ES) is a standard metric that summarizes the degree to which a program or policy affects a measured outcome. If the effect size is positive, the outcome increases. If the effect size is negative, the outcome decreases.

Adjusted effect sizes are used to calculate the benefits from our benefit cost model. WSIPP may adjust effect sizes based on methodological characteristics of the study. For example, we may adjust effect sizes when a study has a weak research design or when the program developer is involved in the research. The magnitude of these adjustments varies depending on the topic area.

WSIPP may also adjust the second ES measurement. Research shows the magnitude of some effect sizes decrease over time. For those effect sizes, we estimate outcome-based adjustments which we apply between the first time ES is estimated and the second time ES is estimated. We also report the unadjusted effect size to show the effect sizes before any adjustments have been made. More details about these adjustments can be found in our [Technical Documentation](#).

Citations Used in the Meta-Analysis

- Landsman, M.J., Boel-Studt, S., & Malone, K. (2014). Results from a family finding experiment. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 36, 62-69.
- Leon, S.C., Saucedo, D.J., & Jachymiak, K. (2016). Keeping it in the family: The impact of a Family Finding intervention on placement, permanency, and well-being outcomes. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 70, 163-170.
- Malm, K., Allen, T., Williams, S.C., McKlindon, A., Vandivere, S. (2013). A rigorous evaluation of family finding in San Francisco. *Child Trends*.
- Malm, K. Vandivere, S., Allen, T., Williams, S.C., McKlindon, A. (2014). A rigorous evaluation of family finding in North Carolina. *Child Trends*.

Vandivere, S., Malm, K. E., Allen, T. J., Williams, S. C., & McClindon, A. (2017). A randomized controlled trial of Family Finding: A relative search and engagement intervention for youth lingering in foster care. *Evaluation Review*.

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