Evaluation of the Collaborative Family Engagement Pilot Project

Year One Report

Report to the 85th Legislature of Texas

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Submitted by:
Cynthia Osborne, Ph.D.
Director, Child and Family Research Partnership
Authors

Cynthia Osborne, Ph.D.
Director, Child and Family Research Partnership
Associate Professor
Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs
The University of Texas at Austin

Jennifer Huffman, MPAff
Research Associate
Child and Family Research Partnership

Anna Lipton Galbraith, MPAff
Senior Research Associate
Child and Family Research Partnership

Research Support

Allison Dubin, MPH
Research Associate
Child and Family Research Partnership

Cassie Gianni
Graduate Research Assistant
Child and Family Research Partnership
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Child welfare agencies frequently engage extended family in child protection cases as a means for identifying foster or adoptive parents for children who have been removed from their parents’ custody. However, research over the last decade has increasingly shown that a more comprehensive family engagement approach, one that looks beyond engaging family exclusively to identify placement options, can be valuable for supporting children and parents.\(^1\) In addition to potentially serving as legal guardians for children who are removed, a network of extended family and fictive kin can provide children with familiarity and consistency, potentially lessening the impact of stress and instability experienced by a child who has been removed from their parents’ custody. Family members can also be a resource for parents who are working toward reunification with their children by supporting parents in meeting the goals of their service plans.\(^2\)

Family engagement in child welfare is a family-centered and strengths-based approach that focuses on building up the natural supports for families involved in the child welfare system. Family engagement models recognize that extended family members and fictive kin are an asset, often untapped, for child welfare agencies who can be used to support timely resolution of child protection cases and safe permanence for children.\(^3\)

Recognizing the important role that engaged family can play in supporting children who are in the child welfare system, the 84\(^{th}\) Texas Legislature approved funding for the Collaborative Family Engagement (CFE) pilot project to test promising practices for a more comprehensive approach to engaging family in child protection cases in Texas. Through the CFE pilot project, Texas Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) and the Texas Child Protective Services program (CPS) within the Department of Family Protective Services (DFPS) are working collaboratively to implement an adaptation of the Family Finding Model, a structured approach for extensively searching for and engaging caring and supportive adults to support children who are in foster care.

CFE has two primary objectives: 1) To increase the number of adults serving as a support system for parents and children involved in CPS cases by searching for and engaging family and fictive kin; and 2) To strengthen collaboration between CASA programs and local CPS staff to facilitate better case management and planning for children in substitute care. Under the CFE model, CPS and CASA begin working collaboratively when a child is removed to Temporary Managing Conservatorship (TMC), using search and engagement tools from the Family Finding Model to identify and involve a support network as the family works toward the best permanent placement for the child. With the current funding, Texas CASA and CPS are implementing CFE in nine pilot sites across the state: three sites (Nueces, Fort Bend, and Montgomery Counties) began implementation in January 2016 (Year One sites) and five additional sites (Chambers/Liberty, Hidalgo, Hood/Somervell, Johnson, Parker/Palo Pinto Counties) will begin serving families using
the CFE model in January 2017 (Year Two sites). At each site, select CPS conservatorship units are working with the local Texas CASA program to serve a subset of families with children in substitute care using the CFE model.

Texas CASA contracted with Dr. Cynthia Osborne and the Child and Family Research Partnership (CFRP) to conduct a two-year implementation study of the CFE project. The primary purpose of this report is to describe the evaluation findings from the first year of CFE implementation related to two broad research aims:

1. Assess the ways in which the CFE model enhances standard practice for engaging family and fictive kin to support children and parents; and

2. Examine the extent to which the new CFE model facilitates effective collaboration between CASA and CPS.

CFRP’s evaluation aims to inform future CFE implementation by providing the Texas Legislature, CPS, and Texas CASA with a better understanding of the components of the CFE model that are most useful for engaging families, how Family Finding meetings and tools can be integrated with the Texas CPS hearings and meetings timeline, and if and how CFE improves collaboration between CASA and CPS.

Findings from the first year of the evaluation focus on the implementation of CFE, including findings related to staff and advocate perceptions of the potential for CFE to enhance standard practice, alignment of the CFE elements with the CPS legal process and timeline, as well as variation in the ways the CFE elements have been used thus far to enhance practice for engaging families in child welfare cases. Overall, both CPS staff and CASA volunteers report that the CFE approach offers innovative tools and strategies for engaging families and provides a framework for strengthening collaboration between the two entities. Local staff who used CFE during Year One describe experiencing a shift in philosophy toward a more comprehensive approach to engaging extended family and fictive kin in conservatorship cases and a new understanding of the ways that these connections can support case planning and management beyond simply serving as placement options for children. Importantly, both CPS staff and CASA advocates also report that CFE provides tools and resources that enhance the way they serve families, particularly through enabling CASA advocates to play a more significant role in the case process.

These findings indicate support both for CFE as an approach for increasing involvement of family and fictive kin and increasing collaboration between CASA and CPS. We discuss the specific model elements CASA and CPS identified as contributing to the increase in family engagement and collaboration, along with lessons learned and ongoing implementation challenges the two entities will need to continue to address during Year Two. The specific findings from the first year
of implementation are outlined in more detail below and discussed in the findings section of this report.

- Collaborative Family Engagement provides a framework and tools to enhance standard family engagement practices and strengthen collaboration between CASA and CPS.

- During Year One, CASA and CPS focused on building implementation capacity and aligning the Collaborative Family Engagement approach with CPS processes and timelines.

- CPS and CASA identified many components of Collaborative Family Engagement that can be implemented widely to enhance family engagement and collaboration.

- CPS and CASA staff report that using the CFE approach increases meaningful family engagement, enhancing case management and planning.

- CPS and CASA staff identified ways that CFE improved local collaboration during Year One.

In Year Two, CPS and CASA will build upon the implementation lessons described in this report and continue to improve upon this promising approach for increasing family engagement and strengthening collaboration. In addition, CPS and CASA will expand implementation of CFE to five additional sites, training additional staff and serving more families using the approach. As a result, the evaluators will be able to provide more information on outcomes related to family engagement and CPS-CASA practice in Year Two. Specifically, Year Two will allow for a more quantitative analysis of CFE given the increased number of sites and the fact that more Year One cases will reach permanency during Year Two.
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Purpose

Texas CASA contracted with Dr. Cynthia Osborne and the Child and Family Research Partnership (CFRP) at the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin to conduct a two-year evaluation of the Collaborative Family Engagement Model (CFE) pilot project. CFE is a Texas-specific family engagement approach that uses the Family Finding Model to enhance standard family engagement practices in child welfare cases. Ultimately, the goal of the initiative is to provide the Texas Child Protective Services program (CPS) and Texas Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) with resources and skills to create a network of support for families and foster legal and emotional permanence for children during and after their time in substitute care.

The primary objectives of CFE are to:

1. Increase the number of adults serving as a support system for parents and children involved in CPS cases by searching for and engaging family and fictive kin, and

2. Strengthen collaboration between CASA programs and local CPS staff to facilitate better case management and planning for children in substitute care.

CFRP’s evaluation is examining the implementation of CFE from September 2015 to August 2017 to provide Texas CASA, CPS, and the Texas Legislature with an understanding of the extent to which CFE enhances family engagement practices in child welfare and to identify how CFE can be used to inform CPS and CASA’s approaches for working with families across the state.

The evaluation has two primary research aims:

1. Assess the ways in which the CFE model enhances standard practice for engaging family and fictive kin to support children and parents; and

2. Examine the extent to which the new CFE model facilitates effective collaboration between CASA and CPS.

The current report presents findings from the first year of the CFE pilot project (Year One), with a focus on early implementation. The report discusses findings related to the perceived value of CFE as an approach for enhancing casework, alignment of the CFE elements with the CPS legal process and timeline, as well as variation in the ways the elements were used across the CFE sites.
Child Welfare in Texas

CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES AND COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATES

In Texas, the CPS program within the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) is responsible for investigating reports of abuse and neglect of children, providing services to children and families in their homes, placing children in foster care, providing services for youth in foster care, and placing children in adoptive homes. As the state child welfare agency, CPS is charged with the following responsibilities related to cases of confirmed abuse and neglect:

1. Preventing further harm to the child and keeping the child with his family when possible;
2. Providing permanence for a child in substitute care by resolving family dysfunction and returning the child to the family; and
3. Providing permanence for a child who cannot return to the family by recommending permanent placement of the child with another family or caretaker.

In fiscal year 2015, of the 108,167 children in confirmed investigations of abuse or neglect statewide, CPS removed 17,151 children from their homes. After a removal, CPS places a child in substitute care with family (kinship care) or in foster care. During this period, referred to as Temporary Managing Conservatorship (TMC), parents have 12 months to complete court-ordered services and plan for permanent placement of their child through a series of court appearances, as well as meetings and conferences with CPS. The primary goal during this period is to return the child to his or her parent’s custody if the parent complies with his or her service plan and CPS determines it is safe. Legally, this case outcome is referred to as reunification.

When reunification is not possible, CPS begins pursuing an alternative permanent placement for the child, which could include placement with a relative, adoption, or permanent custody granted to DFPS. If the court terminates parental rights and the child is not adopted (by family or other adoptive parents), the child is placed in Permanent Managing Conservatorship (PMC), which can be granted to a relative or to the state.

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) are community volunteers who serve as advocates for children who have been removed from their parents’ custody while the children are in substitute care. Although practices vary in CASA programs across states, in Texas, CASAs are volunteers who are appointed by the judge to advocate for the needs of children, monitor placement conditions, and speak in court on behalf of the children on the case. CASA volunteers are tasked with promoting the best interest of the children on the case to which they are assigned and ensuring children are placed in safe, permanent homes as soon as possible.

Texas CASA is a state-wide organization that provides financial support, training, and services to local CASA programs, with the mission “to support local CASA volunteer advocacy programs and
to advocate for effective public policy for children in the child protection system”.\textsuperscript{8} There are 72 local CASA programs across the state of Texas. In 2015, almost 8,500 volunteer advocates served approximately 26,000 of the more than 47,000 Texas children in foster care (including children in TMC and PMC).\textsuperscript{9}

CASA volunteers can play a critical role in supporting CPS to ensure child safety and facilitate timely permanent placements for children who have been removed to substitute care. The reality in many Texas jurisdictions is that CPS caseworkers have a heavy workload and must prioritize responding to the most urgent needs within their caseload. As such, CPS caseworkers may not always have the time and resources to engage with all of the extended family on their cases to the extent that they would like to. In contrast, CASA volunteers typically only work one case at a time, and as a result, volunteers have more time to invest in a single case than CPS caseworkers. CASAs may be able to dive more deeply into the dynamics of a case, support assessments of safety and risk, and help identify resources to support reunification for children in TMC or legal permanency for children in PMC.

The rationale for collaborative interagency partnerships, such as the relationship between CASA and CPS, is grounded in child welfare best practice. Since the mid-1980s, many child welfare agencies have increasingly implemented collaborative practices to align uncoordinated service delivery systems to improve outcomes for children and families.\textsuperscript{10} Generally, best practices in child welfare focus on interagency collaborations and family-centered services, with an emphasis on professional cooperation and communication among providers.\textsuperscript{11} As a result of enhanced communication, flexibility in role performance, shared expertise, and renewed enthusiasm, public-private agency partnerships have been able to improve permanency outcomes for children.\textsuperscript{12} In addition to improving outcomes for children, organizational partnerships also strengthen workforces by fostering ongoing learning and sharing diverse perspectives.\textsuperscript{13}

**FAMILY ENGAGEMENT ON CHILD PROTECTION CASES**

Over the last decade there has been an increased emphasis on the value of engaging extended family and fictive kin in child welfare cases. In particular, the passage of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act in 2008 signaled this greater focus nationwide on finding family and fictive kin and engaging them in the child welfare process as a way to achieve better permanency outcomes for children.\textsuperscript{14}

Connections to family and other supportive adults can benefit children while they are in foster care as well as once legal permanency is reached. These connections are particularly important for youth aging out of foster care, for whom a caring, long-term relationship with an adult or mentor can lead to a more successful transition out of foster care and into adulthood and result in improved feelings of self-worth among the youth.\textsuperscript{15} Research has also shown that having larger...
networks of support is associated with a reduced likelihood of experiencing psychological distress among children in foster care.\textsuperscript{16}

Connections with family and fictive kin can also benefit caregivers or parents whose children are removed by CPS. For example, a comparison of mothers’ social connections found mothers who had neglected their children had fewer instrumental resources, such as babysitting assistance, and fewer emotional resources, such as companionship and decision-making assistance, compared to mothers who had not neglected their children.\textsuperscript{17} Further, greater social support for caregivers has been associated with children displaying fewer severe behavioral issues (internalizing and externalizing behaviors).\textsuperscript{18} In addition, when child welfare caseworkers believe a caregiver has less social support they may be more likely to place children outside the home.\textsuperscript{19} Stronger levels of social support for the parents have been associated with increased likelihood of reunification and lower chances of subsequent neglect.\textsuperscript{20}

Family engagement can also enhance case planning and management by strengthening the relationship between caseworkers and families, promoting family buy-in to the case plan, and building family decision-making skills.\textsuperscript{21} When compared to standard child welfare case management practices, family engagement approaches have been shown to increase the involvement of noncustodial and incarcerated parents, and strengthen relationships between family members.\textsuperscript{22} Active involvement of parents, extended family members, fictive kin, and the community nurtures a support system that further “promotes safety, increases permanency options, and can provide links to needed services”.\textsuperscript{23}

Most family engagement approaches work to improve communication with and among the family in a way that addresses family dynamics and cultural differences to best meet the needs of the family and children.\textsuperscript{24} For example, a family team may meet to create a plan on how they can support the parents in completing their service plan as they work towards reunification with their children. The plan could include identifying family members who will give the parents a ride to parenting classes, call parents to make sure they attend mandatory counseling or drug treatment appointments, or drive the children to visits. In this way, families are able to “recognize their own needs, strengths, and resources and to take an active role in working toward change”.\textsuperscript{25}

**THE FAMILY FINDING MODEL**

One promising practice for increasing family engagement in child protection cases is the Family Finding Model, which was developed by Kevin Campbell in 2001. Family Finding is a structured approach and set of tools for extensively searching for and engaging a network of adults to support the legal and emotional permanence of a child who is in substitute care. Family Finding aims to support timely legal permanency by engaging family and fictive kin who will support parents as they work toward reunification and serve as placement options for children, however,
the model is not focused solely on legal permanency. Instead, Family Finding emphasizes providing a child with emotional permanency regardless of the legal outcome of the case by fostering life-long relationships with adults who commit to unconditionally care for, support, and maintain contact with the child throughout the child’s life. The Family Finding Model has been used with children who were recently removed from their homes, as well as with children who have been in foster care for an extended period of time.

Family Finding provides child welfare practitioners, typically CPS caseworkers, with a framework and set of tools to find biological relatives and fictive kin (close friends or other adults who have been closely involved in the child’s life) and engage them in a process of making concrete commitments regarding the ways they will support the child. This support network collaboratively develops and implements a plan to provide for the child’s emotional and legal stability. Family Finding can also be a resource to identify legal permanency options for a child with a relative through adoption or legal guardianship when a child will not be reunified with his or her parents.\textsuperscript{26}

In 2011, the federal Administration for Children and Families (ACF) awarded Family Connection Discretionary grants to 12 sites to implement and evaluate Family Finding Models. A 2015 review of 11 of the federally-funded models and two privately-funded Family Finding studies found substantial variation in the effectiveness of the programs. Of eight experimental evaluations, which included treatment and control groups, three studies found positive impacts of the program on legal permanency and the one evaluation that assessed emotional permanency found positive impacts in this area.\textsuperscript{27} The evaluations did consistently find, however, that children who received Family Finding developed more meaningful connections with family and fictive kin than children in the control groups. The review concludes that inconsistent implementation is likely a major reason for the variation in outcomes. Implementation challenges cited in the studies include lack of stakeholder buy-in, negative attitudes toward relatives among child welfare workers, lack of communication and collaboration among stakeholders, and high caseworker workload.\textsuperscript{28}

**Collaborative Family Engagement**

The 84\textsuperscript{th} Texas Legislature funded Texas CASA through DFPS to implement a two-year Collaborative Family Engagement (CFE) initiative in partnership with CPS, from September 2015 through August 2017. The CFE pilot project adapts the Family Finding tools and meetings, described in the next section, to support a team-based approach wherein local CASA programs and CPS staff identify and engage family and fictive kin, beginning when children are initially placed in TMC. Because collaboration was identified as a barrier to success in previous evaluations of Family Finding, Texas partners intentionally designed CFE with a focus on strengthening collaboration between CPS and CASA.
Under CFE, each case is supported by a team consisting of the CPS conservatorship (CVS) caseworker and CASA volunteer assigned to the case, as well as the CPS supervisor, CASA volunteer supervisor, a CPS family meeting facilitator, and potentially other professionals such as the attorney _ad litem_ and additional CPS caseworkers. The team members work together to use Family Finding tools and techniques to find and engage family members and other important people in a child’s life, known as connections. The CFE team meets with these connections to develop a shared plan for supporting the child and, as appropriate, to involve these connections in case planning while the child is in TMC. The logic model shown in Figure 1 presents the CFE elements and activities, as well as the outcomes targeted by CFE, including outcomes related to family engagement and collaboration between CPS and CASA.

### Figure 1: Collaborative Family Engagement Logic Model

**Inputs**

- Training
- Coaching
- CFE Tools
- CASA Advocates
- CPS Caseworkers
- Eligible Cases

**Elements & Activities**

- Tools
  - Used to identify, invite, and involve family and fictive kin connections in the case process
  - Search Tools
  - Mapping Tools

- Meetings
  - Meetings are used to create a consensus on case goals, identify the children’s needs and create action plans to support permanency.
  - Team Meeting
  - Blended Perspectives Meeting
  - Decision Making Meeting
  - Lifetime Network Meeting

**Family Engagement**

- Increase in number of connections identified, invited, and attending meetings
- Increase in family support to achieve service plan
- Increase in number of connections who commit to support meeting children’s needs
- Stronger commitment from connections

**Collaboration**

- CASA and CPS report:
  - Increase in collaboration
  - Increase in workload sharing

**Outcomes**

*Note: Connections are defined as extended family and fictive kin who are close to or care about the children and family.*

As shown in Figure 1, CFE has two primary objectives: 1) To increase the number of adults serving as a support system for parents and children involved in CPS cases by searching for and engaging family and fictive kin; and 2) To strengthen collaboration between CASA programs and local CPS staff to facilitate better case management and planning for children in substitute care. The CFE model includes both the use of tools for finding and engaging family and fictive kin and the use of meetings with the family and fictive kin. Below are descriptions of the tools and meetings that are being used in the CFE pilot project. The descriptions of CFE meetings and tools often refer to “connections”, which are defined as relatives or other people close to the child, youth, or family who can act as a support network for the child, youth, and/or family.
COLLABORATIVE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT TOOLS

CFE provides caseworkers and CASA volunteers with a number of tools for finding and engaging a support network for children and parents involved with the child welfare system, described in more detail in Table 1. Search tools, including Quick Finds & Diligent Search, Seneca Search, Find Families in Mexico (FFIM), and internet/social media searches are often used as a first step to identify and contact family and fictive kin of the children involved in the case. Reviewing case records is another common activity undertaken by caseworkers and CASA volunteers to gather the names of family and fictive kin. Although some of the search tools are frequently used by CPS outside of CFE, under CFE CASA volunteers also have access to and training on the search tools.

Another category of tools made available to CPS caseworkers and CASA volunteers under CFE are mapping tools, which are used to engage children and parents in an interactive process to identify family and fictive kin who may not have been found through more traditional search tools. While interviews may be intimidating, particularly for children, mapping tools such as Genogram or Ecomap, offer a creative alternative to interviewing that can also enhance the relationship between the child or parents and the CPS caseworker or CASA volunteer. Mapping tools may be used by CPS and CASA to present information gathered from the search tools to the child, parents, or connections for their input and feedback or to explore potential connections if the searches generate little or no information.

These tools are not used exclusively within CFE. In particular, CPS caseworkers use the search tools and Genogram extensively independent of CFE. Many of the mapping tools, however, are new to CPS caseworkers and both the search tools and mapping tools are likely new to CASA volunteers.
**Table 1: Collaborative Family Engagement Tools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tool</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Search Tool</th>
<th>Mapping Tool</th>
<th>Used with Child, Parent, or Adult Connections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quick Finds &amp; Diligence Search</td>
<td>Used to identify and locate family members.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seneca Search</td>
<td>Used to identify and locate family members.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find Families in Mexico (FFIM)</td>
<td>Used to identify and locate family members in Mexico.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genogram</td>
<td>Visual representation of family tree used to map family and fictive kin relationships.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>Child, Parent, Connections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecomap</td>
<td>With the child or parent at the center, surrounding circles map different spheres of influence with important people from each sphere listed.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>Child, Parent, Connections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connectedness Map</td>
<td>The child and/or parent is at the center surrounded by connections listed by family members. If few connections are listed, this indicates an urgent need for connections.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>Parent or Connections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connectedness Gram</td>
<td>Circles are used to represent connections to the child or parent, who is placed at the center. Circles are placed in proximity to the center to represent closeness to the child.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>Parent or Connections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobility Map</td>
<td>A visual timeline in which the child or parent illustrates and reflects on important people and events at each place they've lived.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Houses</td>
<td>Signs of Safety™ tool. The child draws people and things into three categories: House of Worries, House of Good Things, and House of Dreams.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tree of Life</td>
<td>The child draws her hopes, dreams, gifts, people, and other important things in the areas she thinks they fit on a tree.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapid Appraisal</td>
<td>Participants create an inventory of resources for all participants to help them determine their role in the safety and permanency planning process.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>Connections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rescue and Engage 100</td>
<td>Participants think of 100 ways to support and engage the child and then decide which of those things they can commit to doing and create an action plan.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>Connections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Collaborative Family Engagement Manager, Texas CASA*

*Note: Connections are defined as extended family and fictive kin who are close to or care about the children and family.*
COLLABORATIVE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT MEETINGS

The CFE meetings were originally designed as part of the Family Finding model and adapted for the CFE pilot project. The objective of the CFE meetings, described in Table 2, is for the CFE Team to work collaboratively to meet the child’s immediate needs while she or he is in TMC and plan and prepare for permanency, progressively engaging family and fictive kin connections in this process. Four meetings define the CFE model: the Team Meeting, Blended Perspectives Meeting, Decision Making Meeting, and Lifetime Network Meeting. Each meeting can occur more than once if the CFE team or family needs more time to talk and plan, or if case dynamics change unexpectedly. Although Table 2 outlines the meeting structure and timeframe as the model was designed, there is some variation in the approach across sites and at the case-level under CFE.

Table 2: Collaborative Family Engagement Meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CFE Meeting</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Key Activities</th>
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| Team Meeting                 | Once case is designated for CFE and CASA is assigned.  | The CFE Team meets to discuss the needs of the child and family and develop a plan for finding and engaging family and fictive kin connections. | • Define needs of children and family  
• Divide responsibilities for finding and engaging connections  
• Schedule the first family meeting |
| Blended Perspectives Meeting | Within 45 days of removal (Typically at Family Group Conference) | The CFE Team and connections meet to develop the family service plan and identify ways to support the plan and to identify the biggest unmet need of the children. | • Define the biggest unmet need for each child in the case  
• Develop the family service plan and/or identify ways for connections to support service plan  
• Use CFE tools to identify other potential connections (as needed) |
| Decision Making Meeting      | Within 60-180 days of removal                           | The CFE Team and connections develop action plans to meet the needs of the children and support the family in completing the service plan. | • Develop plan of support for connections to assist family with completing service plan. |
| Lifetime Network Meeting     | Around 180 days after removal (Typically at Fifth Month Permanency Conference) | The CFE Team and connections who commit to becoming a part of a lifetime support network for the family meet. They revise the plans of support as needed and ensure the support network is sustainable. | • Commit to a lifetime of support for the children and family.  
• A connection co-facilitates and network members take responsibility for support planning.  
• Ensure that support is sustainable. |

Source: Collaborative Family Engagement Manager, Texas CASA
Under CFE, CPS meeting facilitators, who normally conduct CPS Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) meetings are trained to schedule and administer the CFE meetings. The meeting facilitator is a member of the CFE Team and is involved from the beginning of the CFE process. A co-facilitator, who is a CASA staff member, CASA volunteer, or the CFE Manager, may also attend the CFE meetings to provide support and guide the meeting.

**Implementation of Collaborative Family Engagement**

**COLLABORATIVE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT PILOT SITES**

Texas CASA and DFPS chose three local CASA programs for the first year of the CFE pilot project (Year One sites) and they chose five additional sites to begin serving families with CFE in January 2017 (Year Two sites). Texas CASA and DFPS selected the local programs because they are high-quality, have strong working relationships with local CPS, and the majority of cases in the counties served by the programs are assigned CASA volunteers. Texas CASA also chose Year One pilot sites that they felt had strong family engagement skills. Additional information about the Year One and Year Two pilot sites, including the CASA coverage, rate of confirmed abuse and neglect, and county child population are shown in Table 3, and descriptions of the units implementing CFE in the Year One sites are provided below.

In Fort Bend County one specialty CVS unit is implementing CFE. The CFE unit in Fort Bend exclusively receives severe abuse and neglect cases from the local infant and child specialty court, which was an important implementation factor during Year One because the unit experienced a relative slowing in assignment of cases in early 2016, resulting in a delay in the first CFE case assignment until early March 2016. Another relevant characteristic of Fort Bend County is that the court in Fort Bend uses legally-binding mediation to create the family service plan at the time of the Adversary Hearing, within 14-days of removal. Two CVS units are implementing CFE in Montgomery County. One of these units focuses on severe abuse and neglect cases. The other is a standard CVS unit. In Nueces County one standard CVS unit is implementing CFE. Neither Montgomery nor Nueces County use legally-binding mediation in family service planning.
Table 3: Collaborative Family Engagement Pilot Implementation Sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CASA Program</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>Children Served by CASA</th>
<th>CPS Region</th>
<th>Rate of confirmed abuse or neglect per 1,000 children</th>
<th>County Child Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year One</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASA of the Coastal Bend</td>
<td>Nueces</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9.33</td>
<td>88,747</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Advocates of Fort Bend</td>
<td>Fort Bend</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>6b</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>200,969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASA Child Advocates of Montgomery County</td>
<td>Montgomery</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>6b</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>141,316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year Two</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASA of Hidalgo County</td>
<td>Hidalgo</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>286,544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASA of Liberty/Chambers County</td>
<td>Liberty</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>6b</td>
<td>9.05</td>
<td>20,328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chambers</td>
<td></td>
<td>6b</td>
<td>6.27</td>
<td>10,845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASA of Johnson County</td>
<td>Johnson</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>3b</td>
<td>9.27</td>
<td>43,808</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASA of Hood &amp; Somervell County</td>
<td>Hood</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>3b</td>
<td>14.74</td>
<td>11,195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Somervell</td>
<td></td>
<td>3b</td>
<td>5.94</td>
<td>2,190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASA- Hope for Children</td>
<td>Parker</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>3b</td>
<td>8.16</td>
<td>32,833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Palo Pinto</td>
<td></td>
<td>3b</td>
<td>19.62</td>
<td>7,188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Statewide Comparison</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>14.79</td>
<td>7,311,923</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


YEAR ONE IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

From April through August 2015, Texas CASA and CPS selected the Year One sites (Nueces, Montgomery, and Fort Bend Counties) and developed the training and implementation plan for Year One, which spanned from September 2015 through August 2016. Texas CASA also consulted with Family Finding Model author Kevin Campbell regarding Family Finding implementation strategies and hired a CFE Manager. The CFE Manager developed the CFE implementation model and curriculum, conducted trainings at each pilot site, and provided ongoing coaching and support throughout the year.

Between November 2015 and January 2016 each Year One site received four days of training on the Family Finding model, including one two-day overview training and one two-day tools training. The overview training presented the CFE model, including the theory behind the development of the model, and broadly described the meetings and tools. The tools training
provided CPS and CASA with additional instruction on the specific tools, meetings, and activities used in the model and allowed participants to practice the skills. More than 260 CASA and CPS personnel and other community stakeholders were trained, as shown in Table 4. CASA and CPS participants included CPS conservatorship caseworkers from the units participating in CFE implementation, other CPS caseworkers, CPS supervisors and program directors, CASA volunteers, CASA casework supervisors, and CASA program directors from the local CASA programs. Other stakeholders trained include members of the legal community and child placing agencies.

**Table 4: Year One Collaborative Family Engagement Training Participation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Two-Day Overview Training</th>
<th>Two-Day Tools Training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CPS</td>
<td>CASA &amp; Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nueces</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montgomery and Fort Bend</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Collaborative Family Engagement, Texas CASA

Notes: Most of the 111 Tools Training participants also received the Overview Training.

In addition to these trainings, the CFE Manager and Texas CASA staff held regular planning meetings and teleconferences with each of the local CASA programs and their respective CPS counterparts at the pilot site locations. Planning elements included when and where each CFE meeting would occur, agendas for the CFE meetings, and how the CFE tools would be used.

In January 2016, the Year One sites began selecting cases to serve using the CFE approach. In all sites, cases referred to one of the conservatorship units selected to implement CFE were assessed at the time of removal by the CPS Program Director and local CASA Program Director to determine if the CFE approach would be used. If it was determined that the CFE approach would be used, a CASA volunteer was assigned to the case shortly thereafter. The initial goal was to randomly assign cases to CFE, but several factors made this challenging, including the small number of new cases assigned to some of the CFE-implementing units and a local preference to screen for CFE suitability. As a result, during Year One, each site selected cases to receive CFE using its own criteria and the characteristics of CFE cases varied by site.

The Texas CASA CFE Manager conducted ongoing coaching activities to support CFE implementation. Coaching continued throughout the year and will continue into Year Two.
Coaching activities include case consultations, participating in and/or facilitating the CFE meetings, and guiding CASA volunteers, CASA staff, and CPS staff through the model and the various tools. Coaching assistance is flexible to the needs of the particular site, staff member, and case. The CFE manager delivers the coaching through in-person site visits or meetings, teleconference, and email. Monthly teleconferences also provide the opportunity for the three CFE sites to connect and learn from one another.

Nueces County and Montgomery County began assigning CFE cases in January 2016 and Fort Bend County assigned their first CFE case in early March 2016. In the first year of CFE implementation, CFE served 20 families and 48 children across the three pilot sites, shown in Table 5.

**Table 5: Number of Children and Families Served by Collaborative Family Engagement in Year One**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Families Served</th>
<th>Number of Children Served</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nueces County</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montgomery County</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Bend County</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>48</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Collaborative Family Engagement Manager, Texas CASA*

**Overview of the Evaluation**

Texas CASA contracted Dr. Cynthia Osborne and CFRP to conduct a two-year evaluation of the CFE pilot project. The evaluation is examining the implementation of CFE from September 2015 to August 2017 to provide Texas CASA, CPS, and the Texas Legislature with an understanding of the extent to which CFE enhances family engagement practices in child welfare and ways in which CFE can be used to inform CPS and CASA’s approaches for working with families across the state. The study focuses on understanding the components of CFE (inputs and elements described in Figure 1) that enhance the standard practices of CPS and CASA related to family engagement, including the elements of CFE that facilitate increased collaboration between CPS and CASA, the alignment of the CFE elements with the CPS legal process and timeline, as well as variation in the way CFE is used to enhance practice across the CFE sites.

The study is also examining the extent to which CFE increases meaningful engagement of family and fictive kin and improves collaboration between CPS and CASA. Ultimately, the study will assess whether the two-year implementation of CFE accomplishes the two primary objectives of: 1) Increasing the number of adults serving as a support system for parents and children involved in CPS cases by searching for and engaging family and fictive kin; and 2) Strengthening collaboration...
between Texas CASA and CPS to facilitate better case management and planning for children in substitute care and their families.

The evaluators examine the extent to which use of CFE leads to increased family engagement in supporting case planning, including the number of connections identified for children who are in TMC and the quality of engagement of these connections. To assess collaboration, the evaluators are examining whether the CFE model allows CPS caseworkers to share components of their workload with CASA and more effectively utilize CASA volunteers to identify and engage family and fictive kin during the conservatorship period. Finally, the evaluation examines whether there are certain case characteristics, such as permanency goals or age of children, which make some cases better suited for CFE. Although the study is not able to assess the extent to which CFE is associated with better case or child outcomes, the evaluation identifies the ways CFE can be used to enhance standard practice for engaging family and fictive kin and provides an understanding of the extent to which CFE improves collaboration between CASA and CPS to support families with children in substitute care in Texas.

**The Current Report**

The current report presents findings from the first year of the CFE pilot (Year One), with a focus on early implementation, including the perceived value of CFE as an approach for enhancing casework, alignment of the CFE elements with the CPS legal process and timeline, as well as variation in the ways the elements were used to enhance practice across the CFE sites. The report presents early findings related to family engagement and collaboration between CPS and CASA, however, these findings are preliminary because the first year was primarily a year of training, implementation, and alignment with current practice. In Year Two, the evaluators will be able to provide more information on outcomes related to the use of CFE as sites are added and the sites serve more families. Year Two data collection will also facilitate a more quantitative analysis of the impact of CFE than was possible in Year One.
DATA SOURCES AND ANALYTIC APPROACH

The current report is primarily informed by qualitative data collected by the evaluators during Year One through observations of CFE trainings, interviews and meetings with implementing partners at the state and local level, and focus groups with the front-line CPS and CASA staff delivering the model. During the reporting period, CFRP also developed and began administering case logs to CASA staff who are serving families using CFE. The case logs allow the evaluators to assess the elements of the model used in each CFE case, the quantity and quality of family engagement at the case level, as well as collaboration between CPS and CASA. The case log data presented in this report are preliminary and focus on the elements of CFE because the sites remain in the early stages of implementation at the time of the report. As a result, the findings presented in this report focus on the qualitative data collected by CFRP during Year One, including the interview, observation, and focus group data.

Case-level data collection will continue during Year Two and as more families are served these data will be used to assess family engagement and CPS-CASA collaboration at the case level. In addition, during Year Two the evaluators will administer the Collaborative Family Engagement Survey (CFE Survey) to CPS and CASA staff at two time-periods: before staff receive training on the Family Finding model and after 6-months of implementing the CFE approach. The CFE Survey will provide quantitative data to allow the evaluators to assess changes in knowledge, attitudes, and practice associated with the CFE approach.

Data Sources

The data sources CFRP is using to inform the evaluation are described in more detail in this section, including the data collected during Year One and data collection that will begin or continue during Year Two.

Interviews and Meetings

To understand the elements of CFE and the ways in which the approach is enhancing family engagement practices, CFRP conducted interviews and meetings with CPS and CASA staff responsible for CFE implementation at the state and local level on an ongoing basis during Year One. Through the interviews CFRP collected data on staff perceptions of CFE and the successes and challenges during Year One. The evaluators conducted initial phone interviews with the CPS supervisors and CASA program directors overseeing local implementation of CFE in February 2016 and subsequently held in-person interviews with these staff in July 2016 during visits to each site. CFRP will begin interviewing the Year Two sites in November 2016 and will continue to conduct regular interviews with the Year One sites. The evaluators also held regular stakeholder meetings...
with the CPS and Texas CASA leadership overseeing CFE implementation throughout Year One and will continue having these meetings regularly during Year Two.

**Observations**

To collect information on the elements of the Family Finding Model used under CFE in Texas, the evaluators observed one of the initial two-day overview trainings for CPS and CASA staff in Fort Bend and Montgomery Counties on Family Finding in November 2015. The evaluators will also observe the two-day overview training for CPS and CASA staff on Family Finding in one of the Year Two sites in September 2016.

**Focus Groups**

CFRP conducted focus groups with CPS and CASA staff at each of the Year One sites in July 2016 to collect information on the first year of implementation, including staff perceptions of CFE and the successes and challenges during the first year of implementation. Focus groups were led by CFRP Director, Dr. Cynthia Osborne, using a focus group instrument designed by the evaluators for this study. Through the focus groups, CFRP collected qualitative data from 18 CPS staff and 27 CASA staff, shown in Table 6. To collect additional information about regional variation and the implementation of CFE beyond the first year, evaluators will conduct additional focus groups with select CFE sites during Year Two.

**Table 6: Focus Group Participants by Pilot Site**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pilot Site</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Number of Focus Group Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CPS Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corpus Christi</td>
<td>July 1, 2016</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Bend</td>
<td>July 26, 2016</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montgomery</td>
<td>July 26, 2016</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CFE Case Logs**

During Year One, CASA staff began completing the CFE Case Logs, which were developed by the evaluators to collect data on the elements of the model used in each CFE case, the quantity and quality of family engagement, as well as collaboration between CPS and CASA at the case level. CASA volunteers assigned to a CFE case are asked to complete a case log after each of the first three CFE meetings: Team Meeting, Blended Perspectives Meeting, and Decision Making Meeting. The case logs record information on the implementation of CFE meetings, including what occurs at each meeting, the CASA’s assessment of the value of the meeting components, the effectiveness of Family Finding tools for identifying and engaging connections, and the CASA volunteer’s perception of collaboration between CASA and CPS. The case logs also record data on
the number of family and fictive kin who are identified, invited, and in attendance at each meeting.

Case log data collection began in June 2016 and data on ten meetings for seven cases were collected during Year One. During Year Two, CASA volunteers at all sites will continue to complete the case logs, although the evaluators will change the case log collection schedule to streamline the process and collect these data on a bi-monthly basis rather than after each meeting. As more families are served these data will be used to assess family engagement and CPS-CASA collaboration at the case level.

**CFE Training Survey**

The evaluators also developed the Collaborative Family Engagement Survey (CFE Survey), an original survey instrument designed for this study that will be administered to all CPS and CASA staff who are trained on Family Finding at two time-periods during Year Two: before staff receive training and after approximately 6-months of implementing the CFE approach. The CFE Survey will provide quantitative data to allow the evaluators to assess changes in knowledge, attitudes, and practice associated with the CFE approach during Year Two among all staff who are trained on the approach. As such, the CFE Survey will allow the evaluators to assess the use of the CFE approach beyond those staff who are in the select CFE implementation units. The evaluators will also administer a short post-training survey after staff complete the second two-day training to collect data on trainees’ understanding of CFE and intentions to use the CFE components.

**Analytic Approach**

The findings presented in this report are informed by the data sources described in the previous section, with a focus on the qualitative data collected by CFRP through interviews and meetings with implementing partners at the state and local level, as well as focus groups with the front-line CPS and CASA staff delivering the model. The evaluators analyzed the qualitative data by research aim, identified themes and sub-themes and coded the data using an iterative process to categorize the findings from the first year of implementation. The findings presented in the current report reflect the themes that emerged and focus on alignment of the CFE elements with the CPS legal process and timeline, the elements of the CFE approach that are perceived to enhance standard family engagement practice, variation in the ways the CFE elements were used to enhance practice across the CFE sites, and the successes and challenges during Year One.

The findings also include preliminary findings related to changes in the quantity and quality of family engagement, as well as to changes in collaboration between CPS and CASA associated with the CFE approach based on staff perceptions. In addition to the qualitative analyses described above, the evaluators conducted descriptive analyses of the case log data to identify the number and type of connections identified, invited to CFE meetings, and involved in CFE activities.
Findings related to the case logs are preliminary and will be expanded upon during Year Two as more families are served using CFE. In addition, in Year Two the evaluators will examine change over time in CPS staff and CASA volunteers’ knowledge, attitudes, and practice using data collected through the CFE Survey.
FINDINGS

During Year One, Texas CASA and CPS trained staff and volunteers on Family Finding in the Year One sites, adapted the CFE approach to three different local contexts, and began serving families using CFE in January 2016. Findings from the first year of the evaluation focus on the implementation of CFE, including findings related to staff and volunteer perceptions of the potential for CFE to enhance standard practice, alignment of the CFE elements with the CPS legal process and timeline, and variation in the ways the CFE elements have been used thus far to enhance practice for engaging families in child welfare cases.

Overall, both CPS staff and CASA volunteers report that the CFE approach offers innovative tools and strategies for engaging families and provides a framework for strengthening collaboration between the two entities. CPS staff and CASA volunteers who used CFE during Year One describe experiencing a shift in philosophy toward a more comprehensive approach to engaging extended family and fictive kin in conservatorship cases and a new understanding of the ways that these connections can support case planning and management beyond serving as potential placement options for children. Importantly, both CPS staff and CASA volunteers report that CFE provides tools and resources that enhance the ways they serve families, particularly through enabling CASA volunteers to play a more significant role in the case process.

These findings indicate support both for CFE as a mechanism for increasing involvement of family and fictive kin and increasing collaboration between CASA and CPS. We discuss the specific elements staff identified as contributing to the increase in family engagement and collaboration, along with lessons learned and ongoing implementation challenges CPS and CASA will need to continue to address during Year Two.

Collaborative Family Engagement provides a framework and tools to enhance standard family engagement practices and strengthen collaboration between CASA and CPS.

CPS staff and CASA volunteers who were trained in CFE describe that the model expanded their typical goals for engaging extended family and fictive kin in a conservatorship case, broadening their family engagement approach to include recruiting a supportive network for children who have been removed and for their parents. CASA volunteers and CPS staff highlighted that one of the most important aspects of their training on CFE was the emphasis on recognizing the ways that extended family and fictive kin can be an asset for both children and parents. For example, one CASA volunteer described:

“If you find family from the beginning and then the child goes back to mom, you haven’t hurt anything. You’ve helped mom have a friend, someone who [she has] never had support in her life...she can now go to Aunt Betty Sue, who says ‘Hey, look, I’ll help you’...so mom doesn’t have to turn back to.... [selling drugs] to pay rent. Aunt Betty Sue says ‘You can come to me, I’ll help you
out, I’ll give you a reference for a job.’ And if she does turn to negative behaviors, the Aunt is another set of eyes. She can say, ‘don’t leave the kids home alone [while you work the night shift], bring them to me’.

In this way, local CPS staff and CASA staff and volunteers describe how CFE has helped them move past the traditional CPS mindset of engaging kin solely to serve as a potential placement option for removed children to an approach driven by a belief that engaged family and fictive kin can enhance case planning, support parents as they work toward reunification, provide emotional permanency for children, and ultimately support better case outcomes. This shift in philosophy was particularly salient for CPS staff, whose standard practice is shaped by a desire for kinship placements and restricted by service planning timelines. In contrast, with their CFE cases, all relatives are considered to be potential sources of support for the children and family. Family and fictive kin are invited and encouraged to attend CFE meetings to help the parents take steps to accomplish their service plan, to find ways to help the children while they are in substitute care, and, ultimately, to create a support network that will be there to help the family once CPS is no longer involved in the family’s life.

In addition to this philosophical shift, CPS and CASA also report that CFE provides a set of tools and resources to enhance family engagement and support more collaboration between CPS and CASA. CASA and CPS agree that access to and training on the Family Finding tools can be useful for CPS, but the provision of these resources to CASA volunteers is invaluable. Locating and engaging family and fictive kin is outside the role traditionally played by CASA volunteers. Under CFE, however, there is an expectation that CASA volunteers will help with finding and engaging family. In addition, CASA volunteers are provided with tools to support CPS in finding and engaging family and fictive kin that they otherwise would not have training on and access to. For example, training in the Genogram tool allows CASA volunteers to spend time with a parent or a relative mapping out the family tree. The volunteer can then call the extended family members identified during the mapping session to let them know their support is needed on the case, creating a wide network of contacts who can attend meetings and find ways to support the family.

CFE also provides strategies and tools to more actively engage family members in a way that could ultimately reduce the burden on CPS and improve outcomes for families. CPS supervisors describe how CFE transfers responsibility to members of the support network as they are ready for it. This eases resource constraints in a way that empowers family and fictive kin to take on responsibilities for supporting children and parents. CPS caseworkers and CASA volunteers describe that although CFE may require additional work up front, in the long run they believe the approach can save time and resources if family members support parents to complete their
service plan more quickly, provide more placement options for children, or provide transportation and other types of support to children who are in care.

**During Year One, CASA and CPS focused on building implementation capacity and aligning the Collaborative Family Engagement approach with CPS processes and timelines.**

Although CFE provides a framework and resources for enhancing family engagement and collaboration, Year One was largely an implementation period during which CPS and CASA focused on training staff, adapting the model to the local context, and aligning the model with CPS processes and timelines. As with any new approach, it took time for CPS and CASA to learn the philosophy and the elements of the approach and develop competence in their roles under CFE. In addition, at the state level CPS and CASA spent time identifying the ways that CFE complements existing practices and the areas in which adjustments are needed to minimize duplication of efforts and foster efficient collaboration.

CFE represents a substantial shift in practice for many CPS staff and CASA volunteers and the approach requires participants to learn many new tools, skills, and processes. Although CASA and CPS participated in two trainings on CFE, time and hands-on experience are required to develop competency in the new approach. Staff report that the technical assistance and coaching provided by the CFE Manager was instrumental as they learned the model. However, they needed to go through the steps themselves and practice applying the concepts. CPS staff’s ongoing training needs center on the philosophy of CFE, understanding the components of the CFE meetings, and alignment with the CPS process. CASA volunteers and staff express the need for more training related to the use of the tools and the different model components. The inclusion of facilitation training for CASA would also be useful given CASA’s role co-facilitating the meetings at several pilot sites.

Another critical implementation element that CPS and CASA encountered during Year One was alignment of the four CFE meetings (Team Meeting, Blended Perspectives Meeting, Decision Making Meeting, and Lifetime Network Meeting) with CPS timelines and family meetings required by DFPS policy or local court jurisdictions. In some of the pilot sites, local CPS and CASA staff struggled with the best way to schedule CFE meetings to complement family meetings that are already part of the case process, such as Family Group Conferences (FGCs), which must occur within 45 days of removal, as well as service plan mediation in the case of Fort Bend. The program sites decided to combine the Blended Perspectives Meeting with the FGC, however, scheduling the combined meeting was a challenge because of the additional planning and preparation needed for the Blended Perspectives Meeting, particularly the first few times CPS and CASA conducted the meeting. Further, only one or two CPS meeting facilitators were initially trained to facilitate CFE meetings at each site, which created an additional scheduling constraint given the facilitators’ other job responsibilities. Local staff needed guidance on how best to align
the CFE meeting schedule with existing CPS meeting requirements to streamline the process and avoid creating additional obligations for CPS staff and family involved with the case.

Better integration of the CFE meetings into the CPS process and conference structure is imperative for ensuring that CFE increases collaboration and efficiency and does not further burden CPS staff. During Year One, caseworkers, particularly those with high caseloads, expressed concern with the requirements of CFE. Ultimately as CASA volunteers learn the approach they should be able to alleviate some of the burden, however, some CASA volunteers perceive CPS caseworkers’ difficulty managing the demands of CFE with their other cases as lack of “buy-in” for the model from CPS, which can frustrate the working relationship between CPS and CASA.

During Year One, CPS and CASA worked to address tensions between the CPS timeline and CFE to ensure CFE is implemented in a way that complements existing processes and requirements. CPS and CASA decided that ideally, the first CFE Team Meeting should occur directly after the Adversary Hearing or at the same time as the Post-Removal Staffing. The Blended Perspectives meeting should subsequently occur in combination with the FGC. If implemented in this way, the only additional meetings would be the Decision Making meeting, as ideally the Lifetime Network meeting should then occur at the same time as the fifth month Permanency Conference.

Throughout Year One and in planning for Year Two, CASA and CPS have made adjustments and adaptations to better integrate CFE into the existing case process, allocate tasks to the CASA volunteer, and identify the most important parts of the model in order to focus energy on key elements. Adjustments include scheduling CFE meetings at the same time as other required case meetings to avoid adding meetings to a caseworker and families’ schedule, having CASA volunteers play a larger role in inviting family to CFE meetings, and using a CASA meeting facilitator in addition to the CPS facilitator at CFE meetings. Integrating CFE activities within the existing CPS case process will be an ongoing effort during Year Two. CPS and CASA should be able to leverage the work done and lessons learned during Year One to support the Year Two sites to come up to speed on the model and begin serving families more quickly.

“With Collaborative Family Engagement…We’re starting to utilize more individuals to help the department...Utilizing CASA advocates, they can sometimes make more contacts with the family, and get their confidence and stuff. We might not have that initially, but they can. And they’re seen as the neutral party sometimes, because we’re seen as the adversary…So they gain the confidence of the parents, family...the more people we have involved, the better the outcomes should be for children and families.”

- CPS Caseworker
CPS and CASA identified many components of Collaborative Family Engagement that can be implemented widely to enhance family engagement and collaboration.

The greatest strength of CFE is that the tools and strategies can be adapted based on local needs and limitations, as well as at the case level. CPS staff note that the flexibility of CFE is an advantage compared to other CPS initiatives, which require stricter adherence to all model components in implementation. One CPS leader described the advantage of CFE in this way:

“One of the most important things in this process [of rolling out CFE] is that when we [CPS] said that some of the meeting deadlines were unrealistic for us...it was flexible and adaptable to make it easier. We can stay true to the values and connectedness of CFE, but be flexible with the timeframe. We get to listen to staff [and their needs], which doesn’t always happen.”

CPS and CASA each describe elements of the CFE approach that will enhance their standard practice for collaborating and engaging families as they develop competence in implementing the components. Specifically, CPS and CASA note enhancements in practice associated with the CFE tools, the more intensive role of CASA volunteers, the CFE meeting structure, and the coaching provided by the CFE manager. Each element highlighted by CPS and CASA as important for enhancing practice is described in more detail below.

**Collaborative Family Engagement Tools**

CASA focus group participants describe that the CFE tools enhance their ability to find and engage family members, whereas previously CASAs did not have training in or access to many of the tools. In addition, volunteers in Fort Bend and Montgomery County note that the mapping tools facilitate more constructive interactions with the children. Specifically, volunteers share that the mapping tools help them get to know the child, encourage the child to become more comfortable sharing information, and sometimes facilitate information sharing between parents and extended family and CASA. Staff also describe instances when they learned important information about a child’s needs based on the child’s responses to some of the mapping activities that the child was otherwise unable or unwilling to verbalize.

There is variation in CASA volunteers’ ratings of the CFE tools; volunteers prefer some tools to others. This again illustrates one of the great strengths of the CFE approach: it provides a menu of tools that CPS staff and CASA volunteers have at their disposal, but does not require the use of all tools in all cases. During Year One, CASA volunteers identified seven tools as useful for their CFE cases, shown in Table 7. In addition, during the focus groups CASA volunteers reported that the Genogram, Mobility Map, Three Houses, and Connectedness Gram are the tools they find most useful. CASA volunteers also noted that interviews with relatives and fictive kin, interviews with the child or children, and reviewing the case record are important tools for finding and engaging family connections.
### Table 7: Usefulness of Family Finding Tools to CASA, N=8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Popular Tools</th>
<th>Unpopular Tools</th>
<th>Tools Not Used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&gt;50% respondents &quot;strongly agree&quot; or &quot;agree&quot; tool is useful</td>
<td>&lt; 50% respondents &quot;strongly agree&quot; or &quot;agree&quot; tool is useful</td>
<td>No respondents used tool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case record review</td>
<td>Culturagram</td>
<td>Ecomap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search tools (Seneca Search, Quick Finds &amp; Diligent Search)</td>
<td>Rapid Appraisal</td>
<td>Fairies &amp; Wizards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewing connections</td>
<td>Research &amp; Engage 100</td>
<td>Fire House Intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewing child or youth</td>
<td>Tree of Life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genogram</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connectedness Gram</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobility Mapping</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Collaborative Family Engagement Case Logs (August 2016).*

*Notes: Blue highlight indicates tools used by CPS outside of CFE.*

There was overlap in the CFE tools that CPS caseworkers described as most useful during the focus groups, with caseworkers identifying the Mobility Mapping, Three Houses, and the Diligent Search as the most useful tools. Many CPS caseworkers, however, report that the CFE tools are duplicative of approaches they already used to find family members prior to CFE implementation. CPS caseworkers did note that new caseworkers or those in units without a rigorous emphasis on finding family and kin placements would benefit from training on and access to the CFE tools.
The Role of the CASA Volunteer

CASA volunteers play an expanded role in finding and engaging family on CFE cases, which both CPS and CASA identify as central to ensuring the success of the approach. CASA volunteers’ access to and training in the Family Finding tools provides them with practical skills and empowers them to find and engage family connections to support the children and parents involved in the case to which they are assigned. As a result, CASA volunteers are endowed with more skills and resources to supplement the work of the CPS caseworker assigned to the case, whose ability to find and engage connections for purposes beyond placement may be limited by workload pressures and deadlines. In contrast, CASA volunteers, who typically carry one or two cases at a time, have more time to identify connections and more substantively engage with each connection.

Another essential element of CFE that enhanced the role of CASA during Year One was that CASA volunteers were assigned to CFE cases earlier in the TMC process, allowing volunteers to participate in planning and decision-making during the first weeks of the case. Typically a CASA volunteer is assigned to a case at the Adversary Hearing or a subsequent hearing if the judge determines a CASA appointment is appropriate. However, for CFE cases, the pilot sites prioritized CASA assignment at the Removal Hearing, two weeks prior to the Adversary Hearing. Under CFE, CASA volunteers are thus able to begin learning the facts of the case prior to the Adversary Hearing and begin teaming with CPS to support the case and prepare for the Team Meeting between CPS and CASA, which is generally on the same day as the Adversary Hearing. CASA and CPS staff consistently report that one of the most important parts of CFE is the early creation of this team in which CASA and CPS work collaboratively from the start.

During Year One, the sites also found that it was beneficial to use this earlier appointment as an opportunity to involve the CASA volunteer and CASA casework supervisor in the Post-Removal Staffing, shortly after the Adversary Hearing, during which CPS investigators meet with the CPS conservatorship caseworker and supervisor who will be taking over the case. At the Post-Removal Staffing, CPS staff discuss the details of the case and prepare the conservatorship workers to take over. CASA volunteers note that their inclusion in this meeting helped them better understand the case and gather detailed family history earlier than they could from the case report, which is often not complete for several weeks after the Post-Removal Staffing. CASA also discussed the benefit of being able to ask the investigator questions and obtain contact information to begin calling relatives. During the focus groups, participants noted an example where this extended...
Post-Removal Staffing led to the children being moved to a kinship placement with close relatives rather than foster care, demonstrating a concrete benefit of early CASA involvement under CFE.

**Collaborative Family Engagement Meetings**

CPS and CASA report that the family engagement meetings (Blended Perspectives and Decision Making meetings) are one of the primary ways that CFE enhances standard practice for engaging family during the conservatorship period of a child welfare case. CPS caseworkers and CASA volunteers describe how the facilitation techniques used in the meetings create an open, positive, and family-driven environment that is not always present during CPS meetings with families. In addition, CPS and CASA note that attendance of supportive family and friends encourages parents to be more active participants in the meetings and provides emotional support for the parents that can help facilitate better outcomes as the parents work their service plan.

Several aspects of the CFE facilitation style help to create a positive environment in which parents feel supported and empowered to complete their service plan, rather than overwhelmed by the obstacles to reunification with their children. CASA and CPS report that maintaining a 70/30 ratio of family to professionals (CPS and CASA staff) changes the dynamics of the CFE meetings by setting an expectation that the group will be working toward a family-centered solution that family and friends will support rather than reviewing a

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**CFE: A Success Story**

To CASA, CPS, and the family, the CFE model made a major impact on one case in particular. In this case, at the time of removal the parents were angry and in denial and were completely isolated from anyone they felt could help them through the process.

Through CPS and CASA collaboration at the very beginning of the case, the children were moved to their grandparents early in the case rather than spend unnecessary time in foster care.

Over the course of five months the parents connected to support groups, rebuilt their relationship with one another, and transformed into parents who are empowered to raise their children in a safe and loving home.

CFE specifically is considered the difference maker through early collaboration of CPS and CASA and the cultivation of strong support networks for the family. Members of their local support groups attended the CFE meetings, as did more relatives than they knew they had!

These connections empowered the parents to feel like their service plan was achievable and helped them to spring into action to prepare for reunification with their children.

The children, parents, and grandparents are now a much stronger family unit and reunification is occurring months ahead of schedule.
mandate from CPS. Another facilitation technique CASA and CPS describe as creating a more inclusive environment is the removal of all tables and placement of chairs in a circle. CASA volunteers from Montgomery County note that this approach also keeps participants actively engaged rather than distracted by their phones or talking amongst themselves. Finally, CPS and CASA describe the value of a process used in many sites, during which the facilitator goes around the room and asks everyone to answer the same questions. CPS staff and CASA volunteers report that this also helps to create an open environment where everyone recognizes that they are there for the same reason; to do what is best for the children.

CASA described that whereas parents often leave CPS meetings feeling overwhelmed by their service plan, in CFE meetings, parents are often surprised and empowered by the number family and friends who attend to support them. Although the CFE meetings are not always a supportive environment right away, particularly when family relationships are complex and tense, a strong CFE facilitator can address the tensions and foster positive engagement. Some CASA volunteers and CPS staff have expressed concerns that the parents may not approve of the attendance of certain relatives and have raised confidentiality concerns, however, focus group participants report several examples of how, with strong facilitation, the CFE meetings were used to move families past relationship issues to constructive interactions, ultimately strengthening family bonds.

**Collaborative Family Engagement Coaching**

The final component of CFE that both CPS and CASA indicate is central to enhancing standard practice for working collaboratively to engage family is the coaching provided by the CFE Manager. CPS and CASA describe that the coaching was instrumental for getting CFE up and running and creating a model that is adaptable to needs at each site. The CFE Manager also facilitated the first few CFE meetings at each site to help facilitators learn the techniques and process of CFE meeting facilitation. The Year One sites report that this was very valuable as they were learning the model, and that ongoing facilitation examples and support related to facilitation is needed as they build confidence and competence in the CFE approach.
CPS and CASA staff report that using the CFE approach increases meaningful family engagement, enhancing case management and planning.

Among the limited number of cases for which CFE was used during Year One, CASA and CPS observe that the approach was associated with more meaningful engagement of family and fictive kin and identify a number of ways that this engagement enhances case management and may lead to better outcomes for families. CFE cases, from the perspective of CASA volunteers and CPS staff, involve extended family and fictive kin connections in family meetings, service plans, and the overall case process in ways that non-CFE cases do not. CASA volunteers and CPS staff consistently describe the importance of these family connections for children in substitute care, both in cases where reunification is expected and in cases where reunification is unlikely.

Overall, CASA volunteers, CASA staff, and CPS staff at the Year One sites view CFE as a way to provide children and families with a supportive network during substitute care and lay the groundwork for lifelong relationships that can facilitate better emotional and legal permanency outcomes for children. Identifying family and fictive kin connections, inviting them to CFE meetings, and creating an environment in which everyone can have a role in the case process allows family members to build upon their strengths to support one another to meet the needs of the child while he is in care and create a lasting support network to increase the capacity of the parents or permanent primary caregivers after the TMC phase ends. In Year Two, as more families are served using the CFE approach, the evaluators will use the case logs to assess quantity and quality of family engagement at the case level.

CPS and CASA staff identified ways that CFE improved local collaboration during Year One.

Across all three pilot sites, CPS and CASA report that CFE provides them with resources and skills to collaborate more effectively. CPS caseworkers and CASA volunteers describe more information sharing, better division of tasks, and more intentional communication with one another in their CFE cases. CPS and CASA also describe that there is a different, more positive and team-oriented dynamic between the CPS caseworker and CASA volunteer on CFE cases, though the degree to which collaboration reportedly increased varied by site and across cases. To CASA and CPS, CFE facilitates more information sharing and better communication. Further, the communication typically occurs much earlier in the case, allowing CASA to search for family and fictive kin and get to know the children more quickly. The additional deadlines and requirements incorporated in the CFE model motivates caseworkers and volunteers to work as a team to get everything finished on time. Overall,
the majority of focus group participants from both CPS and CASA perceive an increase in collaboration in their CFE cases as compared to their non-CFE cases.

As such, early results from Year One suggest that CFE shows great promise for strengthening collaboration between CASA and CPS to facilitate better case management and planning for children in substitute care. In Year Two CFE sites, the evaluators will use the CFE Survey and the case logs to quantify changes in CPS-CASA collaboration in areas such as CASA participation in Post-Removal Staffings, CPS sharing case information with CASA, and CASA contributions to identifying and engaging family and fictive kin.
LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS

In this report we presented findings from the first year of the CFE pilot project, with a focus on early implementation and understanding the components of the approach that enhance the standard practices of CPS and CASA related to family engagement. Overall, we find that CFE provides a framework and tools to enhance standard family engagement practices and strengthen collaboration between CASA and CPS in Texas. CPS staff and CASA volunteers who used CFE during Year One describe experiencing a shift in philosophy toward a more comprehensive approach to engaging extended family and fictive kin in conservatorship cases and a new understanding of the ways that these connections can support case planning and management beyond simply serving as potential placement options for children. Importantly, both CPS staff and CASA volunteers report that CFE provides tools and resources that enhance the way they serve families, particularly through enabling CASA volunteers to play a more significant role in the case process.

As the Year One CFE sites continue to serve additional families and the Year Two sites begin to serve families, the evaluators will begin to look at outcomes related to meaningful engagement of family and fictive kin and collaboration between CPS and CASA. In Year Two, the evaluators will continue to collect case level data on a bi-monthly basis to assess family engagement and collaboration at the case level. The evaluators will also examine whether there are certain case characteristics that make some cases better suited for CFE. In addition, during Year Two the evaluators will administer the CFE Survey at two time-points, which will allow the evaluators to assess changes in knowledge, attitudes, and practice associated with CFE.

Also during Year Two, CFRP will focus on further identifying which aspects of the CFE model are most important for increasing family engagement and collaboration so that the key components can be widely implemented by CASA and CPS. The post-training survey will assess general casework attitude and practices, the impact of key components of CFE, and the progression of CFE-designated cases to more fully assess the factors of the Collaborative Family Engagement Model that facilitate family engagement and collaboration between CASA and CPS. Table 8 presents an overview of the Year Two implementation schedule and timeline for the evaluation, including data collection and the evaluation deliverables.
Table 8: Year Two Implementation and Evaluation Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| September | Year Two Begins  
            | CFE Pre-Survey for Year Two sites  
            | Overview Trainings for Year Two sites  
            | Begin Bi-Monthly Case Logs for Year One sites |
| October and November | Tools Trainings for Year Two sites |
| December | Year One Report to the Texas Legislature |
| 2017   |                                                                         |
| January | Year-two sites begin assigning CFE cases  
            | Begin Bi-Monthly Case Logs for Year Two sites |
| March  | CFE Post-Survey for Year Two sites |
| June   | Focus Groups & Interviews with CFE sites |
| August | Final Evaluation Report to Texas CASA and CPS |


The Child and Family Research Partnership is an independent, nonpartisan research center under the direction of Dr. Cynthia Osborne at the LBJ School of Public Affairs at The University of Texas at Austin. CFRP specializes in rigorous research on policy issues related to young children, teens, and their parents. CFRP seeks to understand how current demographic trends affect parents and their children, what factors contribute to both positive and negative child outcomes, and what policy and programmatic changes can be implemented to improve child and family wellbeing.

Research Areas

Family Supports
Community Impact • Economic Security

Fatherhood
Paternity Establishment • Supports for Fathers • Child Support

Early Childhood
Home Visiting Programs • Public Pre-Kindergarten

Child Welfare
Child Welfare Workforce • Child and Family Outcomes

Adolescent Health and Wellbeing
Teen Pregnancy Prevention • Youth Homelessness

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