

Frontline Connections Quality Improvement Center



Northwest Institute for Children and Families
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Highlights of the Frontline Connections Quality Improvement Center Project Activities 2001-2006

The Frontline Connections Quality Improvement Center (FCQIC) at the University of Washington received funding starting in 2001 through the Children's Bureau, Department of Health and Human Services. The FCQIC was one of four regional Quality Improvement Centers (QIC) that was funded in a decentralized initiative.

These Quality Improvement Centers were in a position to work more closely with and offer technical assistance to agencies in their geographic area. The goals of the initiative were (1) to support projects that would generate new knowledge that could inform child welfare practice and (2) to

disseminate that information to the field.

The FCQIC requested proposals and awarded funding to three subgrantees that included a community agency in Seattle, a Native Village in Alaska, and a tribe in Washington state.

The FCQIC provided funding and technical assistance for three years of project implementation, October 2002-September 2005 that was followed by six months when the subgrantees were to evaluate their respective projects and focus on dissemination of their project knowledge.

Focus of the Frontline Connections Quality Improvement Center

These are the Frontline Connections Quality Improvement Center subgrantees:

- NIFTY Project, Eklutna Child Advocacy Center (ECAC), Anchorage, Alaska
- Strengthening Families Trail to the Tribe (SF-TTT), Nooksack Indian Tribe, Deming, Washington
- Culturally Competent Professional Practice (C2P2) Model, UJIMA Community Services and Office of African American Children's Services (OAACS), Seattle, Washington.

The subgrantees demonstrated culturally specific ways to interact with African American, Alaska Native, and Native American families that had been involved with Child Protective Services due to neglect or were at risk for involvement. Through the projects, the subgrantees also carried out their practices that were effective in engaging kin and the extended community as resources of support for children and families.

Background to the focus of the Frontline Connections Quality Improvement Center

<p>Two issues had been identified nationally and in this region as challenging to Child Protective Services (CPS). The system tends to produce poor outcomes with two kinds of families: families coming to the attention of the agency due to neglect and families of color. A comprehensive literature review and needs assessment conducted during the first year of the project confirmed this finding.</p> <p>A recent child welfare review¹ concluded that the scant research that</p>	<p>is specific to the disproportionate involvement of children of color in the child welfare system does not describe the process of how families and children of color enter and stay involved in the child welfare system.</p> <p>The reviews suggested that outcomes could be improved by focusing on one key aspect of practice – the engagement of parents, kin, and community in caring for children at risk.</p>
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Underlying assumptions – Frontline Connections Quality Improvement Center

- Culture influences the style of communication and the ways in which family members will be engaged in interactions involving the larger child welfare system. Specifically, a family’s cultural context can be a key strength helping families engage in the healing process and helping parents and families keep children safe and strong.
- When a social worker has a different culture from families in the community, that helps to explain how the social workers in the CPS system may not understand the dynamics of a family, the resources of extended family, or the strengths of the surrounding cultural community.
- Culturally insensitive interventions result in *lack of engagement*; this failure to tap into the strengths and resources of African American and Native American and Alaska Native families and communities results in poor outcomes in terms of the protection and care of children.
- Building on cultural strength promotes engagement and positive outcomes. Natural helping systems and cultural strengths within African American and Native American/Alaska Native families and communities, if activated, best provide for the care and protection of children.



¹ Hines,A.M., Lemon,K., Wyatt,P.& Merdinger,J. (2004) Factors related to the disproportionate involvement of children of color in the child welfare system: a review and emerging themes. Children and Youth Services Review, 26(6):507-527

What have we learned through the implementation of three projects in the Frontline Connections Quality Improvement Center?

Communicating cross-culturally: Across the three projects, the staff, project lead, or family advocates were often working at bridging communication between family members and the encompassing Child Protective Services system. One objective was to improve patterns of understanding between families and the state Social Workers who were assigned to cases. The advocates in one project and the specialist in another project often accompanied family members to explain the court orders or other requirements to which parents were expected to comply. The project team members also met with state Social Workers or had means to provide Social Workers with coaching or information to explain family members' situations, personal losses, and disruptions in their lives. As a result of the FCQIC projects, there is improved communication among representatives in partner agencies that are now in position to continue the focus of the FCQIC projects to engage parents and supportive extended family members when children have come into the Child Protective Services system.



- The Native Village of Eklutna Child Advocacy Center (NVECAC) established different patterns of communication with the local agencies that included the State of Alaska Office of Children's Services (OCS) and Indian Child Welfare (ICWA) workers to support children and families in the Anchorage Bowl.

Involving family members: One outcome was increased connection of children to supportive relatives which was related to increased involvement of family and community in family decision making and problem solving when children have come into CPS.

- The engagement of families was evident in family members' strengths being assessed, family members being consulted in decision making, family values and lifestyles being considered in child health and safety assessments, and extended family members being considered as resources to support the child and parents.
- In the Nooksack Trail to the Tribe Project, by the last year of the project, 47 families had been counted that had received multiple services and sources of support. There were other families who had been assisted in informal ways. Among the many improved outcomes that occurred because of the consistent efforts of the Cultural and Family Specialist, a grandmother who was caring for her grandchildren received support when the youngsters had challenges in school and a relative was located in Eastern Washington to care for a young child when her mother had to heal and recover her health and mental health.
- In the Eklutna NIFTY Project, in one project year, there were 25 cases that received intensive services and 36 case consults. The project team effectively activated their contacts in villages and towns to identify extended family members

who would care for children when their parents were overcoming substance abuse issues, recovering from illness, and finding housing and employment.

- In the C2P2 Project with UJIMA and OAACS, there were 63 families who indicated increased satisfaction in being heard when they completed surveys following their involvement in family decision making that pertained to their young relatives. (Additional families were receiving direct services through the Social Workers assigned to the office, the number refers only to families completing a survey that was a focus for the C2P2 Project).



Ensuring safety: The models that were implemented have focused attention in the Child Protective Services system to assess families' cultural norms and include cultural values in any safety assessments and plans. The results of the projects also show that any focus on cultural assessment must include a risk assessment to protect the safety and well-being of children referred to the CPS system for neglect.

- The Nooksack Cultural and Family Specialist (CFS) continues to interact with families on a regular basis which is an opportunity to provide parenting information and education to tribal members that supports them in keeping their children safe. The intergenerational tribal activities and cultural events also help to strengthen families, and that is a step to ensure that children will be cared for in a nurturing community.
- The Eklutna Child Advocacy Center (ECAC) project team members assessed cultural values evident in the families' lifestyles while also assessing potential or actual sources of injury that could be found in homes. The ECAC Tribal Advocates were successful with family re-unifications after they had addressed safety issues. Their work involved helping some Native families to see that their village lifestyles would not keep their children safe in the city.

The three subgrantees were effective in stating that their unique cultures and lifestyles and patterns of communication should be respected and appreciated. They cautioned against generalizations or applications to other cultural groups. The FCQIC has shared this value of cultural relativism and tried to be a voice for our grantees' views and we acknowledge their strength and wisdom.



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