Getting to Good Policy Decisions

How Can Policy and Practice Best Support the Most Vulnerable Children, Youth and Families

IPPSR Public Policy Forum
May 2, 2018

www.michiganschildren.org
Who We Are

• A statewide, independent policy voice for children, youth and their families.

• We want Michigan’s public policy and programs to help children, youth and families access the opportunities they need to succeed.

• To make that happen, we work to ensure that policymakers prioritize the needs of children, youth and families facing the most challenges.

• We believe that better public policy is built when those directly impacted by it are engaged with decision makers.
Why Do We Need to Improve Policy In This Area?

• Predictably Poor Outcomes for Kids, Youth and Families Involved in the System
• Over-Representation of Children of Color in the System
• Unique Public Responsibility for Children and Youth in the System
Under-Resourced System

• Three of Every Four Dollars in MDHHS Federal
• Virtually All Child Welfare and Foster Care Driven Federally, Only Required State Investment
• Positive Practices Remain “Pilots” or Not Available Statewide
• Privatization Contributes to Inequities in Services
• Support Services Required Also Under-Resourced

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Funding Choices

Family Preservation/Prevention Services Expenditures

By FY 2000-01 budget, most GF/GP was removed from program. Merit Award Trust Funds were appropriated in FY 2007-08 to better position the state to draw down additional TANF contingency funds. Most federal funding in this area is TANF block grant.
Policy Made In Points of Crisis

• Publicized **Tragedies**
  • Creates Worst-Case Scenario Narrative

• Court Involvement
  • Michigan’s Foster Care System Sued in 2006
  • Required Spending in Certain Areas
  • Latest Agreement 2/16 Considered an “Exit Plan”
  • Created Some Transparency/Available Information
  • **Contributed to Winners and Losers**

• Current Sexual Abuse Situation
  • Reactive Policy
Information + Research/Evidence + Lived Experience = Good Public Policy Investment and Strategy
What Information We Need?

- LOTS of Information Available
- Lots of Great Research and Evidence
- Real Question: Do Policymaker Have Access to The Right Information to Help Them Make The Best Decisions?
  - Who Comes Into the System? Why?
  - How Are They Doing Under Our Care?
  - Are They Better Prepared When They Leave?
Keeping Families Out of the System: Stability

• We Know A Lot About What **Stabilizes Families**
• And What **Destabilizes Them**
  • Domestic Violence
  • Substance Use/Misuse
  • Mental Health Challenges
  • Lack of Parenting Knowledge and Skill
  • Lack of Connection to Supports
• Not Having Enough Resources for Basic Needs or the Skills to Get Them
  • Unstable Housing
  • Limited Education and Workforce Success
ACEs and Child Welfare

• Abuse and Neglect ARE ACEs and Trauma
• Most other measured ACEs are contributors to families entering into the system.
• Growing recognition that trauma and stress change our biology – change our brain function
  • Adversity can cause traumatic stress
  • Stress changes the brain, making it difficult for kids to pay attention and engage
  • Often results in fight, flight or freeze responses
  • Over time leads to problems in school and health problems

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Assessing and Serving Families: Protecting Children in Michigan

• A Complaint is Made
  • Mandated Reporters and Others
  • Centralized Intake System

• For Some Families, There is An Investigation
  • Almost 250,000 Children in These Families
  • This is Growing

• Investigations Have Five Possible Outcomes
  • Assess Risk and Prescribe Services
  • Nearly 40,000 Confirmed Victims Annually
  • Vast Majority Confirmed for Neglect
Removing Children From Home

• Result of a Substantiated Investigation AND
• A Court Order
• Determination of Imminent Risk of Harm
• DHHS Becomes the Responsible Caretaker
• We Remove About 7,000 Kids a Year
• Foster Care Considered a Short-Term Solution Leading to Permanent Placements
  • Back Home (Reunification)
  • Relatives (Kinship Care)
  • Adoption

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What Do Kids in Care Need?

- Supportive **Caregivers**
  - Connections To Birth Families
  - Preference of Family Placements
  - Trained in Trauma; Supported

- Consistent Placements

- Normal Environments

- Timely **Services**
  - More Complex Needs
  - Often Dependent On Other Under-Resourced Systems
    - Early On
    - Child Care
    - Mental Health Services
  - Dependent on Many Systems Working Well Together
    - Health, Education, Workforce

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What Do Kids Need To Succeed Into Adulthood: Transition

• Kids Leave Foster Care For Three Reasons
  • Reunification
  • Adoption
  • Aging Out of Care

• As They Leave, What Do They Need?
  • Connections and Skills
  • Time To Build Those Things

• Option to Extend Foster Care Benefits to Age 23; Educational and Medical Services to Age 26

• Expanded Services as Opt-In
  • Young People Leave Traditional Foster Care at 18
  • RE-Apply for Youth Voluntary Foster Care (YVFC)

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Where Does This Lead Us For Policy Recommendations?

• To Keep Families Out of the System
• To Better Serve Children, Youth and Their Caregivers In Foster Care
• To Better Prepare Young People For Life Success
• Need for State Investments – Current Budget Decisions
• Need for Policy Change

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Prevention Policy Needed

• Invest in Practices That **Address What Destabilizes Families**
  • Researched Strategies for Family Support
  • Based In Community Priorities and Needs

• Improve Access To Supports that **Stabilize Work and School**
  • Child Care
  • Transportation

• Improve Access to Services That Keep **Young People Moving On Positive Paths** Before They Become Parents
  • Mental Health, Substance Use, Targeted Educational Support

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Foster Care Policy Implications

• Training and Support for Caregivers – Including Formal and Informal Kin
• Use of Child Care Subsidy to Better Serve Families in Care
• Expand Early On for Consistent Access Statewide
• Timely, Appropriate Access to Behavioral Health Services
• Improving Trauma Informed Practice in All Systems
• Targeted Education System Resources
  • For Identification, Assessment and Services
  • Help to Catch Up and Inspire Success

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Children’s Assurance of Quality Foster Care Act, House Bills 5121-5123

• Puts Into State Law Current Federal Requirements and DHHS Policy
  • Service Access
  • Timeliness of Service
  • System of Complaints

• Recommended Expansions
  • Better Definitions of Timeliness
  • Onus of Responsibility for Complaints
  • Placement of Monitoring

• Supported By Youth in Care and Caregivers

• Must Pass the Senate in 2018

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Transition Policy Implications

- **Continue Foster Care Services** As Opt Out vs. Opt In
  - Maintain Physical and Mental Health Coverage
  - **Maintain Basic Needs Supports**
- **Build Universal High School Diploma Success**
  - Regardless of Time
  - Supporting Alternative and Adult Education
- **Build Supports and Skills** Through MYOI
- **Increase Investments in Post-Secondary and Workforce Options**
  - Don’t Base Service Availability on Time or Age
  - Base On Skill Building and Successful Outcomes
- **Improve the Tax System to Support**
  - Lower the Age of the EITC
  - Incentivize Employers Through Tax Breaks

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We Can Do Better

We Must Do Better
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