



Child Welfare System: Reducing the Risk of Adverse Outcomes Study Scope

August 2017

Background

Amid concerns about Idaho's child welfare system, an interim foster care committee was established during the 2016 legislative session to study several issues affecting children and youth placed in foster care. At the same time, the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee directed our office to evaluate the child protection and foster care systems.

We released Child Welfare System in February 2017 to the Oversight Committee. The report identified the importance and interconnectedness of the many aspects and partners that comprise the child welfare system. Similarly, the interim committee acknowledged the importance of a system-wide corrective approach for improving outcomes for children and youth placed in foster care.

The work completed by the 2016 interim committee, in addition to findings from our evaluation, sparked questions leading three legislators to request a continued and expanded evaluation of the child welfare system. The requesters asked that we evaluate efforts and options in three areas: (1) diverting children and youth from entering foster care, (2) preventing youth from crossing between the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, and (3) preparing youth who are exiting the child welfare system and transitioning to independent living as adults.

Scope

Each of the three areas is a point along a continuum of risk. With the appropriate intervention, a child or youth is hopefully diverted from progressing along that continuum, reducing the risk of adverse outcomes.

This evaluation will identify intervention strategies used to divert children and youth from progressing along the continuum of risk. To the extent possible, we will determine how successful the strategies are in preventing children and youth from experiencing adverse outcomes. We will also identify additional or alternative strategies that could be implemented.

Evaluation requesters, policymakers, and stakeholders should expect this evaluation to provide information, findings, and where appropriate, recommendations specific to the following questions for each of the three areas.

1. Divert children and youth from entering foster care

What strategies do the Department of Health and Welfare use to divert children and youth from entering foster care?

What criteria do the department use to select which children, youth, and families will receive diversion services?

What quality assurance practices are in place to help ensure diversion strategies are consistently implemented?

How effectively do diversion strategies keep children and youth safe without the need for foster care?

How are diversion strategies funded?

What strategies have other states developed to help increase the number of children and youth diverted from foster care?

2. Prevent children and youth from crossing between the child welfare and juvenile justice systems

How many children and youth in Idaho have contact with both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems?

What are the characteristics of these children and youth?

What strategies do the Department of Health and Welfare, the Department of Juvenile Corrections, and the courts use to prevent children and youth from having contact with both systems?

How effectively have prevention strategies limited the number of children and youth who have contact with both systems?

Have other states developed strategies that could be implemented in Idaho to help prevent children and youth from having contact with both systems?

3. Prepare youth who are transitioning to independent living as adults

What resources and services are available to youth through Idaho's Independent Living Program?

What criteria are used to determine eligibility for resources and services for youth transitioning to independent living as adults?

What quality assurance practices are in place to help ensure youth receive adequate, appropriate, and consistent services?

How effectively are youth advised and prepared to access resources and services needed for independent living as adults?

How are services funded?

What opportunities exist for the Department of Health and Welfare, either through the Independent Living Program or other programs, to meet the needs of youth transitioning out of foster care to life as independent adults?

Projected completion date: January 2018