

6-2019

## Parent Partners Contribution to Reunification Rates

Marilyn Obispo

Cynthia Cuevas

*California State University - San Bernardino*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd>



Part of the [Social Work Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Obispo, Marilyn and Cuevas, Cynthia, "Parent Partners Contribution to Reunification Rates" (2019).  
*Electronic Theses, Projects, and Dissertations*. 893.  
<https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd/893>

This Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Office of Graduate Studies at CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses, Projects, and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@csusb.edu](mailto:scholarworks@csusb.edu).

# PARENT PARTNERS CONTRIBUTION TO REUNIFICATION RATES

---

A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master in Social Work

---

by  
Marilyn Obispo  
Cynthia Cuevas  
June 2019

# PARENT PARTNERS CONTRIBUTION TO REUNIFICATION RATES

---

A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master in Social Work

---

by  
Marilyn Obispo  
Cynthia Cuevas

June 2019

Approved by:

Janet Chang, M.S.W., Research Coordinator  
Janet Chang, Faculty Supervisor, Social Work

© 2019 Marilyn Obispo and Cynthia Cuevas

## ABSTRACT

The following research study aimed to discover the relationships and contributions that parent partners have in the reunification process of parents and children within the child welfare system. The study utilized a quantitative secondary data analysis design and the data were obtained from a Southern California Children and Family Services agency within the CWS/CMS database, as well as the parent partner database. Data were analyzed through SPSS software and descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were conducted to describe and assess the variables of interest. A total of 296 participants were used in the study and the majority of parents (73%) had an open case due to multiple allegations.

The study found that there existed a statistically significant relationship between the utilization of the parent partner service and the likelihood of reunification. Furthermore, the study also revealed that as the number of contacts between a parent and a parent partner increased, the more likely the parent was to accomplish his/her goals. The study found that, specifically, during their open case, as 60% of parents reunified when they met 11 to 20 times with their parent partner. This study suggests that it would be a beneficial resource for child welfare agencies to incorporate the parent partner program as part of their practice. Furthermore, the agencies and counties that have already implemented the parent partner program may encourage their social workers to continuously recommend a parent

partner for their clients. The research study would benefit from further research to assess the types of interactions parents and parent partners have during contacts.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to acknowledge and thank the Social Work program faculty and staff at California State University of San Bernardino for providing us with the skills to professionally and personally grow. Through this prestigious program, we have had the opportunity to meet and build lifelong connections that we will carry on into our profession. The staff and faculty's effort to shape us into competent social workers does not go unrecognized. This program has granted us the ability to pursue our careers and our passion.

We would also like to sincerely thank Dr. Janet Chang for guiding us through this process and being supportive in every step. Dr. Deirdre Lanesskog, we are remarkably grateful and appreciative for the genuine support you provided us with. Your guidance and comfort granted us the strength to move past obstacles. We cannot thank you enough for helping us when we needed assistance or welcoming us into your office to talk.

We would also like to thank the agency where the data for this research was retrieved from. We truly appreciate the resources the agency provided us with and for the grand gesture of extending continuous support. A special thanks to our supervisors, managers, and the statistical analyst who worked directly with us to ensure our success in the completion of this project.

Lastly, a huge thanks to our family and friends for inspiring us to become young successful women. All of you have been so effortlessly

supportive of our decision in pursuing this career and to us, that means everything.



## DEDICATION

Cynthia:

I dedicate this project to my parents. Thank you, mom and dad, for supporting me and allowing me to have focused on my education as my main priority for so long. This would not be possible without all your support. Thank you, dad, for showing me what true hard work is. I hope I'm continuing to make you proud and showing you that your hard work is paying off. You've pushed me and motivated me to always strive for success and to not give up. I see all your sacrifices for the family, and I want to make them worth it by earning my Masters and pursuing my dreams. Thank you, mom. You've always been there for me, but especially in the last few months when you became my personal nurse after my accident. We've never been closer and I am forever grateful for how much you've helped and sacrificed for me. As your eldest daughter, I want to set an example for the girls and make you proud. I love you both so much.

To my little sisters, Daniela and Erika, I want to be the best sister, role model, advisor, mentor, and best friend to both of you. I hope you see me and know that if I can get through everything I have been through, so can the both of you. I feel extremely lucky and blessed to be your older sister and to help guide you through life. Daniela, you are in your final stages and getting ready to graduate high school. You're going to go on to accomplish amazing things in college, your career, and your life. I admire your strength. I'm proud of you and can't wait to see you walk across that stage. I love you my Vanilla. Erika,

you're only 8 years old but you have such a mature soul. You're smart beyond your years and I couldn't be prouder of you. Through every down moment I've had, you've been there to hold my hand and motivate me to keep pushing forward. I love you mama. I want you both to follow your dreams always, and to know that you will forever have me as your biggest supporter.

I also want to dedicate this project to my significant other, Alexander. Thank you, babe, for being my rock, my comfort, my motivator, and a huge support throughout this journey. I want to always make you proud and continue working towards our future. Thank you for motivating me when I've wanted to give up, thank you for helping me through the endless nights. Thank you for listening to me vent, because you know I love to talk. Thank you for being my best friend and making me laugh when I needed it the most. Thank you for being so strong for me and loving me the way you do. Thank you for helping me become a better person. I couldn't have done this without your continuous support. I love you 8 tons.

Lastly, I want to dedicate and thank all the doctors and medical staff at LAC+USC Medical Center, Kaiser Fontana and Riverside, who worked endlessly day and night. January 19, 2019, my life changed after my car accident. It is a true miracle I am able to walk, talk, and am on the road to a full recovery after having sustained a fractured cervical spine, fractured fibula, fractured ankle, cranial hemorrhage, cranial blood clots, and internal stomach

damages. I truly feel blessed to be given this second chance at life and to be able to continue to pursue my dreams. Two surgeries, one halo brace, one wheelchair, one walker, one walking boot, one hard collar neck brace, a few physical therapy sessions, and too many scars later, I'm finally here. I made it.

Without all of you, I would not be here today. This one's for you.

Marilyn:

First and foremost, I want to dedicate this project to my parents because without them, I would have not made it this far. As young adults, you made the decision of leaving your own families in search of a better future. You traveled terrains in the harshest weather conditions fighting for what you wanted. Both of you have overcome all odds in order to secure a future where my sisters and I would be successful. Through all of your sacrifices, you have taught me to persevere through the obstacle's life sets out for me. In my journey to obtaining this degree, your faith and support motivated me to become the young successful woman I am. I cannot thank you enough for believing I could achieve anything I set my mind to. Mom, you have contributed to my success in so many ways that you are unaware of. All those all-nighters I pulled; you were always by my side encouraging me to push through it. Your heartfelt late-night conversations reassured me everything would be alright as long as I moved forward. You prayed and held me in your arms as I strived to push through it all. Dad, you have set an example for me and showed me what hard work looks like. I want you to know that I have seen all the sacrifices you have made in order to provide a home for my sisters and I. As a team, you and my mom worked hard to teach us proper values, to love our culture, be humble, and be strong-willed. You have supported the decisions I made and showed me what a hard-working

individual looks like. I hope I continue to make you guys proud and I love you both so much.

I also want to dedicate this to my sisters, who have stood by me through thick and thin like true sisters. You guys have been part of my inspiration and I want to set the right example for you two. Ingrid, I have seen you grow and become your own person in these last couple of years. Do not let anything get in the way of what you want to achieve. You know we love and support you every step of the way. Sashi, you are the baby of the family and your future is just as bright as ours. Take the opportunities given to you and keep pushing forward. You have so much ahead and you are ready for it. Trust in us to guide you in the right path and thank you for being always you. I will always support you both.

To the love of my life, the word thank you is not enough to express my sincere gratitude for everything you have done. As you sit next to me, unaware of what I am writing, I am dedicating this to you as well. This comes straight from my heart when I tell you, I love you. Luis, thanks to you, I know what success is and how to obtain it. You kept me grounded through this journey and without your love and support, I would not be here. For so many years, you looked in my eyes and gave me nothing but your full attention. You provided me with comfort through the hardest times and you gave me a shoulder to lean on when I needed it. You never hesitated to come my way to help me. I cannot pinpoint a day that you were not there for me. You are so

smart and strong-willed. So, thank you, my love, my heart, my rock, and my everything.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
LIST OF TABLES.....	xvi
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO PARENT PARTNERS CONTRIBUTION IN REUNIFICATION RATES IN CHILD WELFARE	
Introduction.....	1
Problem Statement.....	1
Policy Context.....	4
Purpose of the Study.....	5
Significance of the Project for Social Work Practice.....	6
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	
Introduction.....	9
History and Roles of Parent Partners.....	9
Outcomes of Parent Partner Programs.....	13
Theories Guiding Conceptualization.....	18
Summary.....	20
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS	
Introduction.....	21
Study Design.....	21
Sampling.....	23
Data Collection and Instruments.....	24
Procedures.....	26

Protection of Human Subjects.....	27
Data Analysis.....	28
Summary .....	29
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS	
Introduction .....	31
Participants Demographics .....	31
Child Welfare Outcomes.....	32
Summary .....	36
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION	
Introduction .....	37
Discussion .....	37
Limitations.....	41
Recommendation for Social Work Practice, Policy, and Research.....	42
Conclusions.....	43
APPENDIX A: DATA EXTRACTION FORM.....	45
APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL.....	48
REFERENCES.....	50
ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE.....	55



## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Demographics of Participants.....	34
Table 2. Child Welfare Outcomes.....	35

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION TO PARENT PARTNERS CONTRIBUTION IN REUNIFICATION RATES IN CHILD WELFARE

#### Introduction

This chapter will provide an introduction to the present research study of parent partners contribution to reunification rates within the child welfare field. There will be an explanation of the problem statement, the current policy context, the purpose and the goals of the study, and the significance of the project for social work practice. As Title IV-E recipients, the current study is significant for the specific field of child welfare within social work.

#### Problem Statement

Parents involved in the child welfare system are faced with an array of information and legal terminology that can often be deemed intimidating, whether it is their first time or multiple times having an open child welfare case. To mitigate the feelings of intimidation and process, counties, including several California Counties, have implemented a parent partner program. Parent partners are parents who successfully reunified or navigated the child welfare system and have been employed by the county to aid other parents in the process by giving them advice, guidance, and advocating (Knittel, 2004). These

parent partners are a subset of a larger resource, Wraparound Services, which were implemented through California Senate Bill 163, and was offered by counties to implement more intensive, consistent services to families in the home and in agency settings (Levine, 2007). In addition, according to Levine (2007), the roles of a parent partner include supporting the family during meetings and pre/post- court hearings, acting as a resource person, a mentor, an advocate, and as a family liaison.

Parent partners are utilized to support parents who are currently involved in the child welfare system by collaborating with the social workers, court system, and other agencies involved, while aiding the parent(s) currently maneuvering the child welfare system, as well as encouraging positive changes and reducing recidivism (Parent Partners, 2018). Within California, there are 47 counties utilizing parent partners within their Wraparound Services program as of 2011 (Family Centered Services, n.d.). The issue lies in that, not every parent involved in the child welfare system utilizes these resources; furthermore, parents may not be aware of the benefit these resources offer. Awareness of resources available or further encouragement to utilize these resources is suggested for parents who need additional assistance outside of their support network.

At this time, service providers knowing other forms of intervention can bring unity between worker and families. Parent partners can help parents understand the process of child welfare involvement and introduce them to effective ways of managing stress from agency interaction. The service

provider's goal is to understand the effectiveness of parent partners so they can make an informed decision about whether to continue to implement or fund such peer mentoring programs. The researchers are also concerned about whether counties should continue funding and encouraging services, as well as identifying who is more likely to utilize these services or barriers to utilizing parent partners. Contingent on effectiveness, the goal is also to encourage Southern California County Children and Family Services to further employ and implement services that benefit families, as well as encourage other counties to use resources such as parent partners. This specific topic is important because the entire child welfare open case process is long and intimidating, and often times parents may feel as though they are set up to fail or feel overwhelmed (Child Welfare, 2016). Counties have implemented resources such as Wraparound Services and parent partners. Given the lack of long-term data available, the effectiveness of these resources requires further assessment to determine how agencies and families can collaboratively work together and increase reunification rates.

According to National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care (2010), Wraparound services include a variety of subsequent programs, including parent partners, which are mostly governed by Systems of Care grant communities. Most communities' needs are diverse, so the Children's Bureau gave the flexibility to implement the Systems of Care initiative in order to meet the local's particular needs. Systems of care grants support family involvement programs by providing support to recruit, train, and support parent

partners (National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care, 2010). Additional forms of involvement this grant does are creating partnerships with local nonprofit organizations to help implement family involvement programs.

### Policy Context

The specific policy from which parent partners were derived from is Senate Bill No. 163 Children: Wraparound Services. This bill consists of existing laws that foster aid to families with Children-Foster Care program; which cover a combination of federal, state, and county funds (Solis, 2018). Specifically, Sec. Three(c) illustrates the process for parent support, mentoring, and advocacy ensuring parents understanding of, and participation in, Wraparound Services Programs like parent partners. Section 18252 of the Welfare and Institutions Code adheres that each county should develop a plan for intensive wraparound services and monitor the provisions of those services in accordance with the plan implemented (Solis, 2018). The constant interaction parent partners have with their clients (parents) is a component of micro practice. In peer-level family involvement, parent partners often attend children and family team meetings, where they provide support to family members and advocate for services on their behalf (National Technical Assistance, 2010). These forms of involvement

facilitate in diminishing any gaps in services to help parents smoothly transition out of the child welfare system.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to assess how parent partners within the Southern California County Children and Family Services agencies contribute to reunification between parents and their child(ren). There is existing research data regarding social workers' perception of parent partners within County Children and Family Services; which also utilizes a quantitative questionnaire study. This study focuses on social workers' response to the parent partner program, their experiences of a support system for parents, and the effectiveness of collaborative interventions (Albert-Alexander & Wheeler, 2013). However, there is currently no existing research that delves into the reunification rates of parents and child(ren) who have utilized a parent partner within Southern California's County Children and Family Services.

Within Southern California's Children and Family Services, the children and family services agency that is being studied currently has nine parent partners and three open positions. The nine parent partners are dispersed in each regional office with the designated children and family services county. Rinewalt (2018) reported the average number of closed cases for parent partners within a year and a half span is approximately 150. He further disclosed that

there are various services parent partners provide, which include but are not limited to: court support, meeting support, office visits, home visits, emotional support, check-ins, and assisting clients to meet their goals. The problem lies in that parent partners are providing various services to families, but there is no data currently tracking the relationship between this program and the outcomes for the families involved.

This research question benefits from utilizing a quantitative secondary data analysis study design, given that the data needed is already being recorded in a database as part of the parent partner program. The researchers will need to analyze data through an existing Parent Partner database, with reports run by a Southern California County Children and Family Services Statistical Analyst. Data collected from the county will include basic demographics of families, frequency of meetings, type of service provided, and the outcome of the case, either successfully reunified or continuance/termination of services.

#### Significance of the Project for Social Work Practice

This topic directly relates to child welfare social work in that parent partners are a resource offered by many child welfare agencies within California. The Children and Family Services agency that is being utilized had requested further research to be conducted on the effectiveness of parent partners, which would help understand the benefits and limitations of the program. The findings of this study would impact social work in that the counties within California and nationwide could advocate for more grants or funds to employ more parent

partners if they are deemed effective through research. On a micro level, the findings of this study could increase awareness of parent partners within social workers as well. This may lead to social workers advocating for their families to participate in parent partner services and advocating for more parent partner hires. Furthermore, there could be a push for identifying and implementing more programs that benefit clients and child(ren). This could be accomplished through the programs providing education, advocacy, encouragement, and skills that would promote the overall safety, permanency, and well-being of children, which is the goal of child welfare agencies (San Bernardino County, n.d.). In regards to the social work generalist intervention model, the research question will focus on the evaluation step, in that the program is already being implemented in several Southern California County Children and Family Services agencies; however, there is a lack of research that evaluates its contribution to reunification rates. For the purpose of this study, the research question will be, how do parent partners contribute to reunification rates in child welfare.

As Title IV-E research recipients, the proposed research question relates directly to child welfare. The findings of the research study will provide essential insight as to the contribution and effectiveness of the voluntary parent partner program. If shown to be an effective resource, child welfare agencies in various counties can begin to implement a parent partner program. On the contrary, if the parent partner program data is deemed to have no relationship to reunification



rates, child welfare agencies can discuss and implement necessary changes for successful outcomes.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

The parent partner program is a service founded on experienced parents and caregivers who carry a unique history with child welfare, making them qualified to serve as mentors to future parents struggling. In this section, there will be a review of the literature on the role parent partners play in the lives of families. The history of Wraparound Services will demonstrate how the inclusion of the parent partner program was generated. Existing studies regarding the outcomes of parent partners will be also examined. Lastly, the two theories guiding conceptualization will be discussed; which are systems theory, the focus on how individuals react to different environments and its relations and strengths-based theory, to identify parent strengths and the collaboration process of the parent partner service.

#### History and Roles of Parent Partners

Wraparound Services has housed the parent partner program designed to strengthen and create support networks, as systems theory suggests more positive outcomes with a supportive network, which can include a parent partner

(Suter & Bruns, 2009). Suter and Bruns (2009) stated that there was sufficient research that demonstrates the effectiveness of program such as Wraparound Services, as they implement a team approach that guides the parents and families through the overwhelming process. Parent partner program rated a three out of five, suggesting there is promising research evidence of the effectiveness of the program, which is based off family outcomes of the service (Parent Partner Programs, n.d.). This implies that while parent partners have shown to be effective, there may be a need for further training and other modifications for improvement.

In 2013, after reviewing research on the success of parent partner programs implemented in other counties, Sonoma County, California, proposed a grant to implement parent partners in child welfare with the intentions of increasing reunification rates and reducing recidivism for closed cases (Castaneda Martinez et al., 2013). Research suggests that with the implementation of a parent partner program, parents receive further support throughout the process which may lead to more positive outcomes. Parent partners are currently being implemented nationwide in states including California, North Carolina, Iowa, and Colorado (as cited in Castaneda Martinez et al., 2013).

Currently, parent partners are being implemented throughout the United States. However, limited research exists indicating which states are utilizing this program, or it is not explicitly stated as part of the states' Wraparound Services

program. Parent partners are a relatively new component to many agencies throughout the nation. In 2001, California implemented the first parent partner training program to assist parents with additional support in various areas, which was then followed by various other states including Iowa and Colorado (as cited in Castaneda Martinez et al., 2013). Based on the level of support parent partners provide and research suggesting the importance of support networks, states are working towards strengthening these bonds to assist parents currently involved in the system. As of 2011, within California, there are 47 counties utilizing parent partners within their Wraparound Services program (Family Centered Services, n.d.). As the program ages and evolves, more research will likely be conducted, with the hopes of further evidence being collected regarding the effectiveness of such programs that assist families.

Leake et al. (2012) indicated the parent partner program serves as a mentorship that brings upon hope, realistic expectations, support, and guidance to parents working toward reunification. The parent partners understand what it takes to be successful and have personal qualities that lend themselves to collaboration on various levels with numerous agencies. Leake et al. (2012) examined for any evidence to support whether or not parent partners are an effective tool used in child welfare services. The mentoring program is an innovative way for child welfare agencies to recruit and train parents who have had involvement in the system and have successfully resolved identified allegations. With the involvement of parent partners, service recipients are able

to receive social and emotional support, advocacy, and practical advice for navigating a challenging system. The trusting relationship built between the two similar systems provides a collaborative working relationship with the agency and the family. Not only does it benefit the service recipient, but it aids the parent partners in building professional skills, self-esteem, provides an avenue for social support, and possibly prevent recidivism (Leake et al., 2012).

Within a Southern California County Children and Family Services agency, parent partners have the following mission statement, “The mission of the Parent Partner Program is to give hope, encourage and mentor clients in navigating the Child Welfare System, to develop life skills with the resources to help them succeed. The mission is accomplished with collaboration from community agencies, CFS staff and the client” (Children and Family Services, 2014). Within the county, parent partners, along with domestic violence services and substance abuse services, are a component of the Family Advocate Resources Services (FARS) unit, which has been implemented since July 2012 (Children and Family Services, 2014). As part of the FARS Unit, parent partners are given voluntary cases. These cases can range from Family Reunification and they provide an array of services, including support throughout the court process, case questions and support, housing assistance, and job search assistance (Children and Family Services, 2014).

## Outcomes of Parent Partner Programs

Through accumulation and extensive research, there is data suggesting the characteristics of improvement rates in reunification for families who have utilized parent partners. Berrick (2011) demonstrated that the parent partner program motivated clients to change. Parents who used the services were more likely to reunify with children compared those who were in the child welfare system before the program implementation. Berrick (2011) found that children whose parents were involved in the program demonstrated a greater chance of reunification within 12 months compared to parents who did not utilize the program. In the study, 58.9% of the parents utilizing the parent partner program successfully reunified with their child(ren), compared to the 25.5% of children whose parents were not involved in utilizing the program (Berrick, 2011).

This study utilized a quasi-experimental design to examine outcomes of the parent partner program in a large county in a western state. Limitations in this study were identified to state the trial was not feasible because of the lack of partnership with the public child welfare agency. The lack of data from the county did not give this study sufficient information on parents who were offered the services, but turned them down or know about the characteristics that made them turn it down compared to the families that accepted the services. The quasi-experimental approach was stated to be a strong substitute; however, using the historical cohort as a comparison group was not ideal. Preliminary data does indicate low rates of re-entry into the child welfare system is low, but it

should not be dismissed and considered as a limitation that should be furthered studied with a larger sample size (Berrick, 2011).

Specifically, in California, parent partners are utilized as a part of Wraparound Services, which are provided through child welfare agencies, mental health agencies, and some criminal justice agencies (Polinsky et al., 2013). The researchers were concerned with the lack of information regarding the qualifications, roles, and training that parent partners received or were required to have. Furthermore, they were concerned with the outcomes of parent partner collaborations, which were self-reported from participants in the study.

In a statewide survey and through a partnership with Parents Anonymous, Polinsky et al. (2013) found that parent partners consistently and reliably followed their designed requirements, roles, and training, as provided through Wraparound Service experts and agencies. The study also assessed cultural differences between English-speaking clients utilizing parent partners and Spanish-speaking clients but found that these cultural differences had minimal effect or correlation, but found that the longer time an English-speaking parent worked with a parent partner positively correlated to higher engagement on the parent partner's behalf. However, the researchers also concluded that further research should be conducted on this issue. They further determined the utilization of parent partners resulted in mostly positive experiences during the engagement, planning, implementation, and transition phases, due to the extra support and clarifications throughout the process. The limitations of this study

included a low representation of Hispanic participants and a small sample size of only 14 Wraparound Service programs within California (Polinsky et al., 2013).

Enano et al. (2017) conducted a study to determine potential barriers that influenced the likelihood of clients participating in parent partner programs, and if parent partner programs influenced reunification rates. To collect data, the researchers utilized case records and did not obtain any new data. This quantitative study separated participants with child welfare cases from the years 2009-2011, into two groups, one who utilized parent partners, and a control group that did not utilize parent partners. Then, the researchers compared reunification rates among the two groups by analyzing court records and case records. Enano et al. (2017) found that minorities, such as African American women were less likely to utilize parent partner programs based on distance, versus Caucasian parents. Furthermore, they found that mothers and African American parents who utilized parent partners had significantly higher rates of reunification (Enano et al., 2017). Their study further concluded that in general, males were more likely than females to participate in parent partner programs. The researchers concluded that parent partner programs were successful and should be implemented in more counties and agencies to increase accessibility, as well as encourage more parents to utilize the resources available to them. Limitations to the study included not being able to assess why parents were more likely to participate, not assessing how often the parents utilized this resource, and having a small sample size of 98 participants.



Leake et al. (2012) also supported the importance parent partner programs play in the child welfare agencies. Results presented from preliminary studies done in Contra Costa County demonstrate focus groups with clients and parent partners being able to identify three major benefits from working with a parent partner. These included the value of sharing experiences, communication skills, and support, all which encouraged trust and hope for the family. Leake et al. (2012) stated that families highly valued the support of a parent partner; the parent partners also claimed to personally benefit from taking on a helper role. This study also examined in depth how the parent partners role benefit in building self-confidence and self-efficacy. In addition, the needs of the families were still being met through the working relationship and reduced recidivism.

This study used a qualitative design with semi-structured interviews and focus groups as part of a larger mixed methods study of services to engage families. The focus group and interviews were conducted with different systems, including agency members, community resources, and parent partners that interacted with the family which involved three phases. Leake et al. (2012) started by inviting individuals via email to the program: 12 key stakeholders and parent partners were partners and candidates for interviews, and four families were invited to participate in an in-depth case study. Limitations of this study were identified to be the lack of job experience parent partners have or familiarity with professional workplace conduct. Leake et al. (2012) were also concerned with parent partners having criminal records and previous substance and/or

mental health problems, which can prolong a process of being eligible to become parent partners. Other limitations from this study were identified to be confidentiality and the sample size.

Parent partner programs have been found numerous times to work in favor of the agency by helping families work to empower one another. The role of leadership parent partners are given, promote confidence in them needed to overcome their past experience within the child welfare system (Leake et al., 2012). The most common challenges identified were the lack of a large sample size and/or the cooperation from the county. Retrieving data from the county has several steps, but the information could provide further characteristics of the families who did and did not utilize the parent partner service. The studies were in favor of the research question and can further help identify limitation early on in order to address it. The proposed study will be to identify whether rates of reunification will increase or decrease with the utilization of parent partners through existing secondary data. A limitation to the current study includes a lack of existing information regarding negative attitudes or biases (from the social worker, the parents, the parent partners, etc.) about utilizing parent partners. There is not sufficient data to determine any potential negative attributes for utilizing parent partner programs. Much of the research available focuses on the positive aspects of parent partners and the support, guidance, and advocacy they provide. This study will build on existing studies made to further explore what studies shown here did not cover. This study will differ in that it will include

a larger sample size. Also, data provided through a Southern California Children and Family Services agency will cover characteristics that may describe why the parent partner service was not utilized by families. Possible factors of this can include availability, distance, or lack of knowledge of the parent partner resource. This information may provide insight into some of the limitations mentioned in other studies.

### Theories Guiding Conceptualization

One of the theories identified to connect to idealizations of parent partners is systems theory. The focus of this theory is how an individual interacts with its environment. Primarily, systems are interrelated with one another in order to constitute something as a whole (Payne, 1997). Through networking identified in the subsystems, individuals can facilitate change that will improve quality of life. Each subsystem in the individual's life can impact all other systems in a negative or positive way based on the interaction each system has on one another. Therefore, parent partners are part of a system in an individual's life function that can enrich contextual understanding of the behaviors based on the systems surrounding it. Navigating and working with systems theory allows identification of the interactions between three levels of organization: micro, mezzo, and macro. Ecomaps and genograms can serve as a tool to understand and visually see the system's dynamics; which can make the identification of a weak or strong

system more straightforward. Through the lens of systems theory, parent partners and agency workers could be able to identify a part of the system that is in need of help or become part of its system to strengthen the individual. It can also help to know what parts of the systems were affected and what services the client can be connected to in order to alleviate the pressure.

The strength-based theory was also identified as a theory that could be used to conceptualize parent partners in this research study (Social Care Institute, 2015). Social Care Institute for Excellence (2015) identified this perspective to be a positive, collaborative process between those who were supported by strength-based services and their support network. Most importantly, the theory can pinpoint the work that is done to emphasize the parent's strengths, involvement, participation, and utilization of programs available to them. Working from this perspective gives social workers, parent partners, and the families to work from identifying skills that work for them to collaboratively come up with plans to increase the ability for reunification. The collaboration and working relationship between all systems involved in the family are drawn from the family's strengths, which promotes the opportunity to see families in a different manner.

## Summary

As aforementioned, this study is seeking to determine how parent partners contribute to child welfare services agencies, with specific regards to reunification rates. While a similar study was conducted in regards to social workers' perception of parent partners, this exact topic has not specifically been researched within Southern California Children and Family Services agencies. This study is of particular importance due to it still being considered a fairly new program within children and family service agencies. Literature has demonstrated a positive correlation between the use of a parent partner and successful outcomes. Based on existing research, it is presumed that the parent partner program utilizes both systems theory and strengths-based theory as guiding models.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Introduction

In this section, an overview of the research methods utilized in the study of parent partners contributions to reunification rates will be presented. Specifically, in this study's section, the researchers discuss in detail the study's design, the sampling methods, the data collection and instruments, the procedures, the protection of human subjects, and the methods for data analysis.

#### Study Design

The current study's purpose is to explore linkages between the use of parent partners and the reunification rates of families. This study explores if parent partners have a significant influence on the reunification rates of service recipients involved with children and family services. The research question is, "How do Parent Partners Contribute to Reunification Rates in Child Welfare?" A one-tailed research hypothesis is being presented; which would indicate that clients who utilize parent partner advocates have higher rates of reunification than clients who do not utilize the parent partner service. In addition, it would also

indicate that the services parent partners provide, helps parents and child(ren) reunify.

This study employed a quantitative design using secondary data obtained from Children and Family Services agency in a Southern California county. This research question most benefits from using a quantitative research design because researchers want to examine the relationship between two variables. Indicated by the parent partners database, the two main variables researchers closely examined were parents who have a closed case and parents who were able to close with goals met. In addition, the rationale behind utilizing a secondary data analysis design is because it allowed researchers to follow clear guidelines and objectives in order to retrieve statistical data. According to Eyisi (2016), the use of these research methods is time efficient and saves resources because data can be calculated through a computer program such as SPSS. Furthermore, Eyisi (2016) discussed that issues of researchers being biased are eliminated when data collection or data analysis is not in direct contact with the participants. Since researchers had no direct contact with participants, the data collection was from a parent partner database in a Southern California county. Therefore, researches most benefited from using secondary data analysis for this study. In addition, another benefit noted for using secondary data analysis is that it is cost efficient, meaning it allowed researchers to retrieve a bigger data sample and one that is reflective of the wider society in terms of samples, contents, and patterns (Eyisi, 2016).

Contrary to the strengths of quantitative research design and secondary data, several methodological limitations apply. The first limitation of this study is not having a large sample size; which would better define the population of those who use the parent partners service. A small sample size would not allow researchers to generalize the findings to a larger population. Another limitation was that the researchers were not able to further assess or ask questions regarding clients or social workers experience with parent partners. This accessibility would help researchers further analyze what parents find most useful in the services parent partners provide or give researchers a better indication as to why the services helped parents have a closed case or closed with goals accomplished.

### Sampling

Closed case files for this study were obtained from a Southern California county child welfare agency. For this study, a list of approximately 296 closed case files were collected from the agencies' parent partner database; which included files that were closed and closed with goals accomplished. Researchers looked at closed client case records from January 1, 2015, to December 31, 2017; which provided the most up-to-date findings. Researchers chose this sample size and time frame to be realistic about the time constraints and the availability of resources for the study. From the parent partner database, 296



closed case records were utilized for this study. Participants that were excluded from the study were parents who are under the age of eighteen, as to protect minors. In addition, participants also omitted from the study were clients whom parent partners attempted to make contact three or more times and services were terminated as a result of no response. This eliminated any confusion between parents who had a closed parent partner case because they were not interested in the services or parents who were not able to be reached due to conflicting factors, such as but not limited to: conflicting schedules, fear, or unavailability.

#### Data Collection and Instruments

Data was collected from one of Southern California's agency's parent partner database, as well as through the agency's global database, CWS/CMS. The data analyzed was already being recorded by the county, therefore the researchers solely utilized the pre-existing data. The parent partner database was utilized to gather data regarding demographics, which included ethnicity, the number of children, whether it was a mother or father utilizing parent partner services, allegation type, the frequency of contacts, and data regarding the outcome of the case in the CWS/CMS database and the parent partner database. The parent partner database primarily closes cases as one of two options: 1) closed, and 2) closed with goals accomplished.

Given that the parent partner's database outcomes are vague, the agency's database was analyzed in conjunction. Through CWS/CMS, data was utilized to compare the outcomes in the parent partner database. Each case, determined closed or closed with goals accomplished, were subsequently searched in the CWS/CMS database, to provide a more specific outcome. The outcomes that were analyzed in CWS/CMS are: 1) reunification with all children 2) reunification with some but not all children 3) parental rights terminated (did not reunify). The two databases were needed for this research study to provide a thorough analysis of the relationship and contribution parent partners have in regards to reunification rates, as the parent partner database itself is too vague to solely utilize.

For this study, the independent variable is, did the parents utilize a parent partner? There will be two dependent variables: 1) did they close the case with goals accomplished or just closed? and 2) did the parents reunify with or without a parent partner service? The strength of the instruments utilized is that the outcomes are already mandatorily tracked by the children and family services agency. The limitation of this form of data collection and instrument is that the researchers were not able to ask or gather information regarding follow-up questions. Also, some of the data inputted were too vague to assess, as most of the information needed is inputted in the form of a contact note and is left up to the discretion of each individual social worker or parent partner.

## Procedures

The first step that was conducted was seeking approval for the research study from a Southern California Children and Family Services agency. A Research Project Assurance letter, describing the specific details of the study, was submitted and presented to the administration department at the designated agency. The participants include parents who had a child welfare case closed between January 1, 2015, through December 31, 2017, and utilized a parent partner at some point during their child welfare case. The researchers did not request access to individuals, therefore, questionnaires, surveys, informed consent, debriefing statements, and follow-up forms were not be provided.

Participants were selected through stratified random sampling technique and systematic sampling, to allow for an equal number of cases closed and cases closed with goals accomplished were randomly chosen for comparison.

For the purposes of this research project, data collection occurred from January 2019 to March 2019. Only closed cases were accessed from a Southern California children and family services office. The data collected and analyzed is continuously being tracked by the county, therefore, getting county approval sufficed for informed consent. Gathered data was obtained in the form of IBM SPSS Statistics software data file. Results were further analyzed through data analysis procedures, with the guidance of the research advisor, Dr. Chang.

## Protection of Human Subjects

The confidentiality of client case records is a primary concern for the researchers. Therefore, in order to protect client case records the following precautions were taken. First, the researchers minimized the amount of personal identifying information collected that would connect clients, social workers, or parent partners to a specific case. There were no inclusions of names, addresses, date of birth, or other information in order to protect the anonymity of the participants. In order to accomplish this, researchers gave each case file an identification number that helped distinguish the case files instead of using names or addresses.

Second, all data collected was kept confidential by limiting the number of individuals who have access to the data. Those who had access to data were the faculty research advisor and researchers. Transportation of the data was minimal and was kept stored in a password protected USB drive and password protected county email server. There was no direct questioning towards parent partners or families who have used parent partners. Therefore, researchers did not provide an informed consent.

Third, once data is collected via case records, the information will be stored in a password protected computer and will be an encrypted file on an excel document that will only be able to be accessed through a password, in which only the researchers and research advisor will have access to. The data collected was accessed from the county records after the Research Project

Assurance was completed and approved. The children welfare agency's Research Project Assurance is composed of two categories, Publication Assurances, and Confidentiality Assurances. Publication Assurances states that researchers agree to submit final drafts before publishing any material. The agency then requested a review or cause to determine if there is information that would in any way identify a client, an opinion of children and family services director, release invalid information, or inappropriate information. The Confidentiality Assurance was necessary for researchers to agree with the provisions of Sections 10850 and 827 of the Welfare and Institution Codes, and the Division 19 of the California Department of Social Services Manual Policy and Procedures. This assured that researchers ensured that all records concerning any individual kept by the agency remained confidential and were not to be open for examination for any purpose. In addition, no person would use or permit, or cause to publish or disclose confidential information regarding recipients of services. After completion of the research study, data extracted via case files were destroyed.

### Data Analysis

This research study utilized quantitative analysis techniques. The data analysis utilized descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. In regards to descriptive statistics, the measures of central tendency (mean, median, and

mode) and measures of variability (variance, standard deviation, and range) were used. Descriptive statistics, including frequency distribution, were used to present all the variables.

Furthermore, bivariate inferential statistics, such as Chi-square tests, will be implemented, as there are two nominal, dependent variables being studied (did the cases close as closed, or closed with goals met, and did the parents reunify with their child). Inferential statistics will be utilized to determine the generalizability of the data results, as well as the confidence of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The independent variable is a nominal level of measurement, and the dependent variables are also nominal levels of measurement, therefore requiring chi-square tests to be conducted. The chi-squared test will help further analyze the relationship between the utilization of parent partners and reunification rates between parents and their children. These statistics will help determine the sampling error (p-value), accept or reject the null hypothesis, the degree of freedom, the alpha level or significance level, and the presentation and conclusion of the results.

### Summary

This study analyzes the relationship between utilization of a parent partner and reunification rates through the use of a quantitative research design. Participants for this research study were randomly selected through stratified random sampling and systematic sampling from the designated Southern

California child welfare office. A secondary data analysis study design will be utilized, as the necessary data is already being recorded by the county. The parent partner database and CWS/CMS database will conjunctively be used to compare how parent partners contribute to reunification rates. The outcomes measured from the parent partner database will be closed and closed with goals met. Further analysis will be conducted from the county database to determine if the parents reunified with their children. Both descriptive (bivariate) and inferential (chi-squared) statistical tests will be utilized for data analysis.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

In this section, an overview of the result from the study of parent partners contributions to reunification rates within the child welfare agency is presented. Specifically, the demographics of the participants, child welfare outcomes from the parent partner database, and child welfare outcomes from the CWS/CMS database are shown. Additionally, findings from two chi-square tests completed to demonstrate significant relationships between the variables: 1) parent partner and CWS/CMS outcomes and 2) frequency of contact and CWS/CMS outcome.

#### Participants Demographics

In this quantitative study, there were a total of 296 participants. Nearly 56% were mothers and 44% were fathers. For ethnicity, approximately 41% of the participants reported being White, 35% stated to be Hispanic/Latino, 22% reported to be Black, 2% indicated to be Asian/Pacific Islander/Filipino, and .4% reported to be other. The language spoken in participants were reported to be 94% English, 5% Spanish, and .8% other (see Table 1).



## Child Welfare Outcomes

From the CWS/CMS database, child welfare outcomes for the types of allegations were examined. The highest finding concluded of multiple allegations at 73%, meaning that two or more of the following allegations were found: general neglect, severe neglect, physical abuse, caretaker absence/incapacity, at-risk/sibling abused, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and mental health impairments. Nearly 15% were general neglect, 3% were severe neglect, 3% were physical abuse, 3% signified caretaker absence/incapacity, 2% were at-risk/sibling abused, .4% signified emotional abuse, .4% were sexual abuse, and .4% indicated mental health (see Table 2). There was an average of 2 children per parent. Findings demonstrated 75% of participants had 0 to 2 number of children, 25% had 3 to 5 children, and only 1% had 6 or more children.

The parent partner database indicated 42% of the parents who utilized a parent partner accomplished their goals and nearly 41% were not interested in the utilization of parent partner services. Approximately 8% were of “other” category, 4% signified no family reunification/services terminated, 2% were noted to be due to parent’s schedule not permitting, 2% were out-of-county transfer, and 1% were enrolled in wraparound. CWS/CMS database found that 48% of total cases did not reunify, 45% indicated participants did reunify with all of their children, and 7% reunified with some but not all of their children (see Table 2). For the purpose of this research, the combined total of those participants who reunified with all of their children and some of their children will be considered

successful outcomes. Chi-square test was conducted to determine an association between the utilization of parent partner outcome and CWS/CMS outcome. The finding was statistically significant ( $\chi^2=30.822$ ,  $df=14$ ,  $p=.006$ ). The parents who utilized parent partner services were more likely to reunify with their child(ren) at the end of their child welfare case than those who did not use the service. Findings indicated that 53% of participants who accomplished their goals within the parent partner database, successfully reunified. Approximately 59% of the participants reunified with some of their children and accomplished their goals with parent partners. Nearly 28% of the participants did not reunify but did accomplish their goals. Approximately 34% of participants not interested in having a parent partner reunified with their children. Around 41% not interested participants reunified with some of their children but not all. Roughly 47% of the participants not interested did not reunify.

On average, parents met with their parent partner approximately 6 times on average throughout their open case with the parent partners. Nearly 62% met 1 to 5 times, 20% showed participants met 6 to 10 times, 14% met 11 to 20 times, and only 4% met over 21 times (see Table 2). The study analyzed the relationship between the frequency of contact made between parents and parent partners, and reunification outcomes. Chi-square test was conducted to determine an association between the frequency of contact and CWS/CMS outcome. The finding was statistically significant ( $\chi^2=15.708$ ,  $df=6$ ,  $p=.015$ ). As the number of times the participants met increased, their reunification rates also

increased. Findings demonstrated that approximately 40% of participants reunified when they met 0 to 5 times, 51% reunified when they met 6 to 10 times, 60% reunified when they met 11 to 20 times, and 46% reunified when they met 21 or more times. The study also analyzed the findings of parents reunifying with some, but not all, of their children. Approximately 6% of participants who met 1 to 5 times reunified with some children, 7% who met 6 to 10 times reunified with some children, 10% who met 11 to 20 times reunified with some children, and 28% who met 21 or more times reunified with some children.

Table 1. Demographics of Participants

Variable	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
The parent who utilized Parent Partner		
Mother	165	55.9
Father	130	44.1
Ethnicity		
White	103	40.7
Black	89	35.2
Hispanic/Latino	55	21.7
Asian/Pacific Islander/Filipino	5	2.0
Other	1	.4
Language Spoken		
English	218	94.0
Spanish	12	5.2
Other	2	.8

Table 2. Child Welfare Outcomes

Variable	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
<b>Allegation type</b>		
Multiple Allegations	202	73.1
General Neglect	41	14.9
Severe Neglect	9	3.3
Caretaker Absence/Incapacity	8	2.9
Physical Abuse	7	2.5
At Risk, Sibling Abused	6	2.2
Emotional Abuse	1	.4
Sexual Abuse	1	.4
Mental Health	1	.4
<b>Parent Partner Outcome</b>		
Goals Accomplished	123	41.6
Not Interested	120	40.5
Other	25	8.4
No Family Reunification/Services Terminated	12	4.0
Parent schedule does not permit	6	2.0
Out-of-County Transfer	6	2.0
Enrolled in Wraparound	4	1.4
<b>CWS/CMS</b>		
No	141	47.6
Yes	133	44.9
Some	22	7.4
<b>Frequency of contact</b>		
1-5	184	62.2
6-10	59	19.9
11-20	42	14.2
21+	11	3.7
<b>Number of Children</b>		
0-2	220	74.5
3-5	73	24.7
6+	2	.7

## Summary

The hypothesis of the research study indicated that there would be a significant relationship and increase in reunification among parents in the child welfare system who utilized a parent partner versus their counterparts who chose not to utilize a parent partner. After analyzing the data, a significant relationship was identified between the utilization of a parent partner and increased reunification rates as compared to parents who did not. A significant relationship was also identified between the frequency of contact between participants and reunification rates. The current study's data support the hypothesis that utilizing a parent partner resource contributes to reunification rates in child welfare.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

In this section, an overview of the discussion from the study of parent partners contributions to reunification rates will be presented. Specifically, this study's section explains in detail the major findings of how parent partners significantly improve reunification outcomes of parents, the most dominant types of allegations, and how the frequency between parent partners and parents affects reunification outcomes. In addition, this section will explore the study's limitations, recommendations for social work practice, policy, and research.

#### Discussion

The purpose of the study was to explore and examine how interactions between parent and parent partners affect the parent reunification process. This hypothesis was generated through observations of the positive interactions noticed between both parties and wanting to understand how the interactions serve parents at the end of the process.

The study's major findings show that, overall, parent partners have a significant influence on reunification rates. As mentioned earlier in the study, over

half of the parents who accomplished their goals with a parent partner, reunified with some or all of their children. When being compared to those who were not interested, less than half would reunify. These results were also consistent with research findings of Berrick's (2011) study, who examined individuals utilizing the parent partner program. This similar study also discovered that over half of their parents reunified with their children. This can be due to parent partners becoming part of their support network and assisting them through an unfamiliar process. Additionally, parents are often stepping on foreign territory when working with a child welfare agency and have a wide range of emotions that make them feel isolated. However, since starting the program in 2005, Contra Costa County has since experienced an increase in reunification rates and a reduction in recidivism (Dunaway, n.d.). Additionally, Berrick's (2011) findings also concluded that parents involved in the program had a greater chance to reunify within a twelve-month period due to parent partners motivating clients to change. Parent partners are demonstrating to be an asset to the team in child welfare by providing support and guidance for those who are willing to participate. Castaneda Martinez et al. (2013) was able to review the successful implementation of parent partners in various counties; which led to a proposition of a grant to implement parent partner programs in child welfare, with the goal of increasing reunification rates. Corwin (2012) found parents in the program were able to experience more frequent reunifications. This indicated children of parents in the program experienced shorter times in foster care.

During the study, it was also discovered the most prominent allegations were not one single form of abuse, but a mixture of several allegations of abuse. This study's finding demonstrated a significant amount of cases had multiple allegations; which had to be group together for the purpose of this study. Additionally, allegations were not limited to the welfare and institution codes, it also had other categories that would be deemed as a form of neglect or abuse. As indicated by the National Statistics on Child Abuse (2014), the most common form of maltreatment is neglect and has found children who have suffered more than one form of maltreatment are called poly-victimized. Parent partners involved in these cases are experienced individuals; however, Polinsky et al. (2013), expressed concern with lack of training that parent partners received or are required to have. With most cases having multiple allegations, it is an important topic to discuss and ensure our parent partners are receiving the training needed to handle cases with multiple allegations.

As indicated by Leake et al. (2012), the program brings upon hope, realistic, expectations, support, and guidance to reach their ultimate goal of reunifying with their children. In improving parent partner engagement, Corwin (2012) found that strategies for being able to achieve positive engagements would be through early outreach and frequent contact with participating parents. This study found that, on average, parents who frequently met with parent partners had a high chance of reunifying with some or all of their children. By providing a supportive atmosphere through each interaction, parent partners are



able to establish clear goals, in efforts to remove logistical barriers such as transportation or child care (Corwin 2012). Findings provided a clear indication that with each contact, parents had an increased chance of completing goals and reunifying with child(ren). Even if contact meant providing some form of assistance, the contact was able to provide aid to ensure parents had the opportunity to meet agency requirements. When meeting parent parents six to twenty times, over half were able to reunify. Dunaway (n.d.) found that parent partner contact with clients will be expected to be higher during the first six months and less frequent contact as the partner transitions resources to the client's natural community. Indicating how important it is to increase engagement and later be able to retract in order to make a smooth transition when no longer utilizing a parent partner. Additionally, Corwin (2012) addressed that increasing the frequency or intensity of contacts/check-ins, incentivizing and rewarding participation, was able to lead to concrete services to families. The parent engagement through frequent contact is shown to be able to alleviate stressors between parents and child welfare agencies (Corwin, 2012). Thus, demonstrating the benefits parent partners interactions have on parents' outcomes in child welfare.

## Limitations

One of the limitations of the research study is the inability to generalize the results to all child welfare agencies. Due to the sample size of 296 participants, it is unclear if the data is representative of all the parents who utilized parent partners services. The study aimed to discover a relationship between the utilization of child welfare agency resources (parent partners) and reunification rates of the parents who utilized the resource. This study solely looked at a Southern California county population rather than a larger population. Furthermore, another limitation of the study was that it only analyzed data between the dates of January 1, 2015, to December 31, 2017. This was done to depict the most up-to-date findings but is not representative of a longer period of parent partner utilization. Another limitation of this study is that not all participants who utilized parent partners within the designated time frame were evaluated and analyzed. The researchers did not utilize those parents who were minors at the time of their child welfare case, due to the protection of their rights, nor the participants who did not respond to the parent partners attempts of reaching them, as to not skew the results. A final limitation of the study is not knowing the type of interaction that the participants had with the parent partner (or the specific services provided during the interactions). The data extraction form utilized, which was created by the researchers, did not consider the forms of interaction, only the frequency of interactions. It was discovered that the more frequently the participants and parent partners met, the higher the percentage of reunification.

## Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy, and Research

The purpose of the research study was to identify significant linkages between the use of the parent partner resource available in many child welfare agencies and its contribution to the reunification outcome of a child welfare case. The study found statistically significant relationships, indicating that parents who utilized parent partners had a greater percentage of reunification with some or all of their children, as opposed to those parents who chose not to utilize the resource. This finding suggests that it would be a beneficial resource for child welfare agencies to incorporate as part of their practice, as approximately 53% of participants who accomplished their goals also reunified with their children. Some, but not all child welfare agencies currently offer this resource. Furthermore, the agencies and counties that have already implemented the parent partner program may encourage their social workers to continuously recommend a parent partner for their clients, as the resource is available throughout the life of the case.

A further recommendation based on the findings of the research study is to implement the parent partner program as a policy change, which would require that agencies employ former parents who successfully endured the child welfare system and have shown how they have benefitted and reunified with their child(ren). The study demonstrates a statistically significant finding that parents in the child welfare system who utilized a parent partner were more likely to accomplish their goals. It is also the researchers' intention to shed light on the

findings and encourage child welfare agencies to provide more information on parent partners during new hire trainings, as well as undergraduate and post-baccalaureate social work programs to inform students of this available resource as part of their lesson plans. This would be a policy change that would help bring more attention to the importance of the resource and its contributions to child welfare.

While the study found statistically significant results, there is a need for further research to examine how different forms of interaction between parents and parent partners impact reunification rates. The present study did not analyze the types of interaction; therefore, it is unknown if specific interactions and services provided during these interactions were more or less likely to contribute to reunification. Furthermore, this study would benefit from a longer time frame of data and to analyze data from across several counties. A longer period of data collection and larger population range would allow for a sense of generalizability.

### Conclusions

In conclusion, this study demonstrated statistically significant findings which support the researchers' hypothesis that the utilization of parent partners contributes and supports the reunification of parents and child(ren). The current study demonstrated the importance of implementing and utilizing resources to aid in successful navigation of the child welfare system. The results of this study are

supported by the literature, in that there is evidence supporting the importance of parent partners and the positive impact the resource has on reunification. It would be a beneficial service for more child welfare agencies to implement and encourage. Further research is recommended to identify the specific interactions, traits, services, and contact methods used between parents and parent partners to determine the impact each has on the reunification outcome.

APPENDIX A  
DATA EXTRACTION FORM:  
CREATED BY RESEARCHERS

## Data Extraction Form

### Demographics

Ethnicity:

1. Black
2. White
3. Hispanic/Latino
4. Asian/Pacific  
Islander/Filipino
5. Other

Frequency of Contact:

1. 1-6
2. 7-11
3. 12+

Language Spoken:

1. English
2. Spanish
3. Other

Number of Children:

1. 0-2
2. 3-5
3. 6+

Who is utilizing parent partner services?

1. Mother
2. Father

Allegation type:

1. General Neglect
2. Severe Neglect
3. Emotional Abuse
4. Physical Abuse
5. Sexual Abuse
6. At Risk, Sibling Abused
7. Caretaker  
Absence/Incapacity
8. Mental Health
9. Multiple Allegations

### Parent Partner Database

Outcome:

1. Goals Accomplished
2. No Family Reunification/Services Terminated
3. Enrolled in Wraparound
4. Parent schedule does not permit
5. Out-of-County Transfer
6. Not Interested
7. Other

## **CWS/CMS Database**

Did the parents reunify with their child(ren)?

1. No
2. Yes
3. Some

\*Survey was created and utilized by the researchers.



APPENDIX B  
IRB APPROVAL

**CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN BERNARDINO**  
**SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK**  
**Institutional Review Board Sub-Committee**

Researcher(s) Cynthia Cuevas & Marilyn Obispo  
Proposal Title How do parent partners contribute to Reunification Rates in Child Welfare?  
# SW1910

Your proposal has been reviewed by the School of Social Work Sub-Committee of the Institutional Review Board. The decisions and advice of those faculty are given below.


-----

Proposals:

- approved
- to be resubmitted with revisions listed below
- to be forwarded to the campus IRB for review

Revisions that must be made before proposal can be approved:

- faculty signature missing
  - missing informed consent  debriefing statement
  - revisions needed in informed consent  debriefing
  - data collection instruments missing
  - agency approval letter missing
  - CITI missing
  - revisions in design needed (specified below)
- \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Committee Chair Signature

2/25/2019  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Distribution: White-Coordinator; Yellow-Supervisor; Pink-Student

## REFERENCES

- Albert-Alexander, M., & Wheeler, M. (2013). *Social Workers' Perception of the Effectiveness of the Parent Partner Program of San Bernardino County*.
- Berrick, J D.; Cohen, Edward; and Anthony, Elizabeth (2011) "Partnering with Parents: Promising Approaches to Improve Reunification Outcomes for Children in Foster Care, "Journal of Family Strengths: Vol. 11: Iss. 1, Article 14. Available at:  
<http://digitalcommons.library.tmc.edu/jfs/vol11/iss1/14>
- Bruns, E. J., Burchard, J. D., Suter, J. C., Leverentz- Brady, K., & Force, M. M. (2004). Assessing Fidelity to a Community-Based Treatment for Youth: The Wraparound Fidelity Index. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 12, 79–89.
- Castaneda Martinez, N., Potts, Marilyn K., Jennings, Lisa, & Meyer-Adams, Nancy. (2013). *Implementation of the Parent Partner Project to Improve Reunification Rates in Sonoma County: A Grant Proposal*, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.
- Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2016). *Understanding Child Welfare and the Courts*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau

- Children and Family Services 2014 Annual Report. (2014). Retrieved October 10, 2018, from [http://hs.sbcounty.gov/cfs/Documents/2014 Annual Report.pdf](http://hs.sbcounty.gov/cfs/Documents/2014%20Annual%20Report.pdf)
- Cohen, Edward, & Canan, Linda. (2006). Closer to Home: Parent Mentors in Child Welfare. *Child Welfare*, 85(5), 867-884.
- Corwin, T. (2012, July). Strategies to Increase Birth Parent Engagement, Partnership, and Leadership in the Child Welfare System: A Review. Retrieved from <https://www.casey.org/media/BirthParentEngagement.pdf>
- Dunaway, P. (n.d.). Lessons from Contra Costa County's Parent Partner Program. Retrieved from <https://mackcenter.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/chi-2016-05-06/CHI/TOC-CHI-117.pdf>
- Enano, S., Freisthler, B., Perez-Johnson, D., & Lovato-Hermann, K. (2017). Evaluating Parents in Partnership: A Preliminary Study of a Child Welfare Intervention Designed to Increase Reunification. *Journal of Social Service Research*, 43(2), 236-245.  
doi:10.1080/01488376.2016.1253634
- Eyisi, Daniel. (2016). The Usefulness of Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches and Methods in Researching Problem-Solving Ability in Science Education Curriculum. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 7(15), 91-100.

Family Centered Services California Wraparound. (n.d.). Retrieved October 10, 2018, from [http://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/Foster-](http://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/Foster-Care/Family-Centered-Services)

[Care/Family-Centered-Services](http://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/Foster-Care/Family-Centered-Services)

Knittel, J. (2004, November 9). Parent Partner Job Description. Retrieved from

[https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/CA\\_ParentPartnerJobDescription.pdf](https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/CA_ParentPartnerJobDescription.pdf)

Leake, R., Longworth-Reed, L., Williams, N., & Potter, C. (2012). Exploring the Benefits of a Parent Partner Mentoring Program in Child Welfare. *Journal of Family Strengths*, 12(1), 1– 15. Retrieved from

<http://digitalcommons.library.tmc.edu/jfs/vol12/iss1/6>

Levine, M., ACSW, MSSA. (2007, May 29). California SB 163 Wraparound Parent Partner Survey Findings. Retrieved from

[https://www.ideas4kidsmentalhealth.org/uploads/7/8/5/3/7853050/california\\_parent\\_partner\\_survey\\_findings\\_copy.pdf](https://www.ideas4kidsmentalhealth.org/uploads/7/8/5/3/7853050/california_parent_partner_survey_findings_copy.pdf)

National Statistics on Child Abuse. (2014). Retrieved from

<https://www.nationalchildrensalliance.org/media-room/nca-digital-media-kit/national-statistics-on-child-abuse/>

National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care. (2010, November). Retrieved from

[https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/FamilyInvolvement\\_Report.pdf](https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/FamilyInvolvement_Report.pdf)

- Oats, T., Lint, S., Persons, S., & Reinburn, J. (2016, August 12). Developing a Parent Partner Program. Retrieved from [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/cw\\_podcast\\_parent\\_partner\\_program\\_transcript.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/cw_podcast_parent_partner_program_transcript.pdf)
- Parent Partner Programs for Families Involved in the Child Welfare System. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.cebc4cw.org/topic/parent-partner-programs-for-families-involved-in-the-child-welfare-system/>
- Parent Partners. (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.uacf4hope.org/parent-partners>
- Parents Anonymous. (2010, August). Retrieved from <http://www.cebc4cw.org/program/parents-anonymous/>
- Payne, M. (1997). *Modern Social Work Theory*. Lyceum Books
- Polinsky, M., Levine, M., Pion-Berlin, L., Torres, A., & Garibay, J. (2013). Development and Validation of a Wraparound Parent Partner Fidelity Tool. *Social Work Research*, 37(2), 111-120.
- Rinewalt, C. (2018, November 15). MSW Intern Research Question [E-mail].
- San Bernardino County Children and Family Services. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://hs.sbcounty.gov/cfs/AboutUs/Pages/default.aspx>
- Social Care Institute for Excellence (2015, March). Retrieved from <https://www.scie.org.uk/care-act-2014/assessment-and-eligibility/strengths-based-approach/what-is-a-strengths-based-approach.asp>

Solis (2018). [online] Leginfo.ca.gov. Available at:

[http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/97-98/bill/sen/sb\\_0151-0200/sb\\_163\\_bill19971009\\_chaptered.pdf](http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/97-98/bill/sen/sb_0151-0200/sb_163_bill19971009_chaptered.pdf)

Suter, Jesse C., & Bruns, Eric J. (2009). Effectiveness of the Wraparound Process for Children with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders: A Meta-Analysis. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 12(4), 336-351.

## ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE

This research project was completed as a collaboration between two partners: Cynthia Cuevas and Marilyn Obispo. The research study and paper portion shared equally, with each researcher completing half the sections of each chapter. The following sections were completed as follows:

1. Data Collection and Data Analysis: Cynthia Cuevas and Marilyn Obispo
2. Written Report and Presentation of Findings
  - a. Abstract: Cynthia Cuevas
  - b. Acknowledgments: Marilyn Obispo
  - c. Chapter One. Introduction: Cynthia Cuevas and Marilyn Obispo
  - d. Chapter Two. Literature Review: Cynthia Cuevas and Marilyn Obispo
  - e. Chapter Three. Methods: Cynthia Cuevas and Marilyn Obispo
  - f. Chapter Four. Results: Cynthia Cuevas and Marilyn Obispo
  - g. Chapter Five. Discussion: Cynthia Cuevas and Marilyn Obispo
3. Supplemental Materials
  - a. IRB Application: Cynthia Cuevas and Marilyn Obispo
  - b. Agency Approval Packet and Research Project Assurance Letter: Cynthia Cuevas and Marilyn Obispo
  - c. Creation of Data Extraction Form: Cynthia Cuevas and Marilyn Obispo



4. Formatting and Edits: Cynthia Cuevas and Marilyn Obispo
5. Presentation of Findings to Agency: Cynthia Cuevas and Marilyn Obispo