

## Building on Strengths: Current Status and Opportunities for Improvement of Parent Training for Families in Child Welfare

**Richard P. Barth, Ph.D.**

University of Maryland, School of Social Work  
rbarth@ssw.umaryland.edu

November 29, 2007



University of Maryland School of Social Work

## Primary Goals of Talk

- Characterize current status of parent training (education) for families involved with child welfare services
- Evince the centrality of parent training to almost every aspect of child welfare
- Argue that CWS parent training is improvable because we have a strong base on which to build
- Suggest policy options for improving child welfare outcomes via enhanced parent training



University of Maryland School of Social Work

## Functions of Parent Training in CWS

- Reduce maltreatment and improve outcomes
  - Children remaining at home (with and without court ordered services)
  - Children returning from foster care
  - Children remaining in foster care
  - Post-permanency services
- Improve child development trajectories
- Inform the courts and agency about parental progress



University of Maryland School of Social Work

## Why Focus on Parent Training?

- Part of the social contract of child welfare services—the opportunity for parents to improve and be free of CWS involvement
  - Parents report that CWSs are good but services are poor
- The most common service—may be provided to as many as 800,000 families each year
- Relatively little attention devoted to parent training services for families in child welfare



University of Maryland School of Social Work

## Why Focus on Parent Training?

- Developmental deficits and behavioral problems are common among maltreated children and place children at substantial risks for maladaptive outcomes.
- Good parent practices are the active antidote
  - Good parenting practices are strongly associated with good developmental trajectories.
  - Poor parenting practices predict re-reports



University of Maryland School of Social Work

## Study Data Sources and Methods

- NSCAW data for in-home families receiving child welfare services (N=2,017)
- Key informant interviews with child welfare program managers, Caring for Children in Child Welfare study (N=78)



University of Maryland School of Social Work

## Organization and Delivery

	Primary Provider %
Child welfare staff	30
CWS contracted providers	35
Community based organizations	27
Mental health agencies	6
Other	3



University of Maryland School of Social Work

## Organization and Delivery

Agency requires that specific program(s) be used <sup>1</sup>	1%
Delivered in conjunction with non-CWS families	84%
At least in part, provided at no cost to child welfare by community-based organizations	61%



University of Maryland School of Social Work

## Organization and Delivery

- Parent training sessions are typically less than 15 occasions.
- About 72% of parents receive 20 hours or fewer
  - less than 10% receive 30 hours or more



University of Maryland School of Social Work

## Parent Training is Well Targeted

- Multivariate models indicate that parent training is given to families with the highest levels of need re:
  - Poor parenting skills
  - Perception of risk to child
  - Child behavior problems
  - Low cognitive stimulation at home



University of Maryland School of Social Work

## Could Effective Parent Training Help?

- Tested parent training models for child conduct problems are very promising.
  - Changes in parenting behaviors
  - Reductions in child behavioral difficulties
  - Changes retained over time



University of Maryland School of Social Work

## Model Parent Training Programs

- Examples
  - Parent Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT)
  - The Incredible Years
  - Parent Management Training
  - Safe Care
- Have 30 year old shared roots in social learning theory
- Strong match between foci of model parent training programs and developmental needs of children



University of Maryland School of Social Work

## Model Parent Training Programs

### Common features:

- Require completion of behaviorally specific homework each week
- Require frequent behavioral practice in session
- Methods for monitoring individual progress
- At least 15 hours (individual), 25 (group)
- Relatively intense supervision



University of Maryland School of Social Work

## Model Parent Training Programs

- Model programs beginning to be tested in child welfare
  - PCIT Reduced Recurrence of Maltreatment for Physically Abusive Parents of Younger Children
    - Usual parent training           49%
    - PCIT                                   19%
- Demonstrated cost-effectiveness



University of Maryland School of Social Work

## Implementation Conclusions

- Model programs are not in use
- Amount of parent training received frequently lower than model programs
- Child welfare agencies demonstrate little exercise of control over what parent training programs are used is not strong
  - Beggars can't be choosers



University of Maryland School of Social Work

## Policy Conclusions: Child & Family Service Reviews (CFSR)

- Little attention to parent training, per se
- No requirement of developmentally appropriate parent training
- Emphasis on *interagency coordination*—e.g., referral to mental health services—is emphasized in CFSR
  - Recall the lessons of Fort Bragg
  - Effective parent programs are critical to all systems of care



University of Maryland School of Social Work

## Policy: CFSR Redux

- Expectation of *evidence based* parent training
  - Assess whether components of effective parent training are present
- Expectation of developmentally appropriate parent training
  - Parenting programs should vary with the very different parent and child needs associated with the child's age



University of Maryland School of Social Work

## Policy Conclusions: Parent Training Overlooked

- Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) now provides no incentives to improve the *quality* of parent training
- A dedicated source of research funding is needed to develop and evaluate the application of evidence-based parenting programs in CWS
  - Funding of parent training research should be predictable so that this field can grow
  - Building on existing non-CWS programs is strongly indicated



University of Maryland School of Social Work

## For More Information

**Hurlburt, M, Barth, R.P., Leslie, L., Landsverk, J. & McCrae, J.M.** (2007). "Building on Strengths: Current Status and Opportunities for Improvement of Parent Training for Families in Child Welfare." In R. Haskins, F. Wulczyn, & M. B. Webb (Eds.). *Child protection: Using research to improve policy and practice* (pp. 81-106). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Support from the U.S. DHHS, ACF; the NIMH, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation

Questions?



University of Maryland School of Social Work