



Plan Do Study Act (PDSA) Collaborative Charter on Identifying and Engaging Non-custodial Parents

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Introduction

In 2019 in Wisconsin, 34,973 children across 21,492 cases were assessed by the Wisconsin Child Protective Services system as alleged victims of child maltreatment (Wisconsin Department of Children & Families, 2019). A substantial portion of these children live in single-parent household families. The U.S. Census Bureau's 2019 American Community Survey found that 31% of all Wisconsin children lived in single-parent household families. (Casey Foundation, 2019). Approximately 9% of these single parent households are father-only and approximately 22% are mother-only (Casey Foundation, 2019). Thus, in a significant number of Child Protective Services (CPS) reports, access and initial assessment workers may need to identify, locate, contact, and engage non-custodial parents to gather important information for safety decision making and case planning.

Non-custodial parent (NCP) definition:

A parent who does not have placement of, live in the home with, or have legal physical custody of their child(ren)/youth.

Children living in single-parent families typically do not have the same economic or human resources available to them as those living in two-parent families. These reduced economic and human resources are a risk factor for coming to the attention of the child welfare system. These reduced resources also impact safety and permanency for children once their case is open for child protective and/or youth justice services. Therefore, ongoing and youth justice workers also need to consider how to identify, locate, and engage non-custodial parents to promote child safety, permanency, and well-being. If the non-custodial parent and their relatives are not engaged, it is a significant missed opportunity to gather information for improved decision-making and increase supports and resources for service and case planning.

The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the Wisconsin Child Welfare Professional Development System (WCWPDS) are collaborating to offer teams of agency child welfare workers training and technical assistance in organizational improvement methods to improve Child Protective Services and Youth Justice practices in identifying, locating, contacting, engaging, and collaborating with non-custodial parents.

Wisconsin Data Indicates Opportunity for Improvement in Practice with Non-custodial Parents

Various data sources indicate there are opportunities for improvement in identifying and engaging in meaningful ways with non-custodial parents during the CPS process. The Safety Action Workgroup (SAW) was formed in 2019 with the purpose to review the aggregate qualitative and quantitative data from completed Systems Change Review (SCR) case reviews, identify common themes, and form considerations for possible systems change. To be eligible for a Systems Change case review, the case must involve an incident resulting in a child death, near death, or other serious or egregious injury involving a child/family that has had prior child protective services agency contact that is recent and/or extensive.

The SAW reviewed SCR data from 2017-2019, which included 62 qualified cases, 50 of which were presented at regional mapping teams. The SAW identified the themes of household members, collateral contacts, and non-custodial parents as the largest factors to consider for systems-level change. The SAW found during the case review process that there was no or minimal effort made to locate and/or engage with non-custodial parents in information gathering, assessment, or case planning during child protective services.

The Wisconsin DCF Initial Assessment (IA) Case Reviews also indicate improvements are needed in working with NCP. The IA case reviews took place in 2019, 2020, and 2021 and included 900 (300 from each year) random initial assessments from around the state. The IA case reviews found that of the 900 IAs, 186 did not include a NCP. Of the remaining 714 IAs, non-custodial parents were not interviewed during the IA process in 52% (374) of cases. Of those 52% of cases without NCP contact, 36% (n=133) had a justifiable reason for not interviewing the NCP.

Lastly, the 2018 Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) identified the quality of caseworker contacts with parents as an improvement area. While the quality of visits with both mothers and fathers were both rated as needing improvement, the data indicated that the frequency of quality contacts occurring with fathers was lower (40% of visits were rated as a strength for quality) than with mothers (57% of visits were rated as a strength for quality). The CFSR reviews do not assess whether visits are with a NCP specifically, it still highlights the need for an improvement in engagement with fathers, who are more commonly the non-custodial parent.

While the case review data above points to a need to improve in identification and engagement of NCP, the electronic case management system, eWISACWIS, does not clearly identify non-custodial parents in all cases and there are no automated reports (eWreports) that track identification or engagement of NCP at all stages of CPS process. In addition, the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families does not have data related to youth justice and identification and engagement of non-custodial parents.

Reasons to Locate, Identify, and Engage Non-Custodial Parents in the Child Welfare Process

A plethora of research has demonstrated the benefits of involving noncustodial parents in the child welfare process. Most of this research has focused on non-custodial father involvement. Non-residential fathers may alleviate the risk factors that led to abuse and/or neglect (Gordan et al., 2012; Malm et al., 2008). Having an involved non-custodial parent has been found to increase protective factors for the child/youth through increased financial support, more shared caregiving responsibilities, access to positive role models, emotional support, the child knowing they are loved by more adults, improved self-esteem, and improved child identity, cognitive, and moral development, and strengthened cultural connections (Martinez et al., 2013; Coakley et al., 2014). Studies have also found longer-term effects for engaging non-custodial parents including lowering the chances of early sexual activity, school failure, juvenile delinquency, and adult criminality (Coakley et al., 2014).

The placement and permanency benefits of involving NCP in the child welfare process also include a greater likelihood of reunification with biological family, shorter lengths of stay in out of home care, and fewer placement episodes (Coakley, 2008; Malm et al., 2008; Campbell et al, 2015; Burrus et al., 2012). Children with more highly involved non-resident fathers were also discharged from foster care more quickly than those whose father have less or no involvement (Malm et al. 2008). Another study found that when both parents were engaged in the child welfare process there was reduced trauma among the children due to lower rates of separation from the family (Campbell et al., 2015). For children who have been reunited with a parent, usually a mother, higher level of non-resident father involvement is associated with a substantially lower likelihood of subsequent maltreatment allegations (Malm et al., 2008).

Barriers to Identifying, Locating, and Engaging Non-Custodial Parents

However, there are several barriers to identifying, locating, contacting, and engaging non-custodial parents within the case planning process. Once again, the academic literature has focused largely on fathers as the non-custodial parent. One plausible cause for workers to have trouble identifying and contacting a non-custodial father is that mothers are effectively gatekeeping fathers from child protective services workers (Huebner et al., 2008). Gatekeeping may occur due to domestic violence or safety concerns of the mother but also may be due to the mother's view of the relationship ending badly, not wanting the father to know about child welfare involvement, custody concerns, and mother's concern that financial assistance from the father may be negatively impacted (Maxwell et al., 2012; Campbell, 2015; O'Donnell, 2005).

Actions and biases of the child welfare caseworkers, specifically biases against fathers (Bellamy, 2008; Brewsaugh et al., 2018; Campbell et al., 2015), are also limiting the number of efforts made to contact noncustodial parents as well as the quality of those efforts. For example, research has found that workers often trust and treat mothers as the sole protectors of children without gathering collateral information (O'Donnell, 2005). Another study found that workers were more likely to adopt an all-good or all-bad view of fathers and if labelled bad, then the father involvement was limited or absent (Maxwell et al., 2012). Qualitative research has also found that fathers are aware of negative bias against them by their caseworkers and that this bias is a barrier to an effective relationship (Campbell et al., 2015). The bias against and lack of contacting fathers may also contribute to racial disproportionality in the child welfare system. A study conducted by Arroyo and colleagues (2019) found that the fathers of Black and Latinx children were less likely to be located when identified and less likely to be contacted when located compared to the fathers of White children. Non-custodial fathers may also be difficult to locate and engage in the child welfare process if they are experiencing issues such as homelessness, unemployment, alcohol and/or drug use, and incarceration.

Child welfare systemic factors include that high caseloads may make overburdened workers hesitant to spend time locating and engaging non-custodial parents and that case documentation leads workers to document household members and to identify mothers as the case head which may influence which parent that workers prioritize for engagement (Casey Family Programs, 2019).

The Need - Problem Statement

Non-custodial parents (NCP) can provide valuable assessment and case planning information and physical and emotional supports for children. However, systems, standards, processes, and documentation are either missing, unclear or inconsistently applied in identifying, finding, and engaging NCP early and often during the agency's involvement with the family. The lack of finding and engaging NCP can negatively impact case work as incomplete information may be gathered during the Child Protective Services (CPS) or Youth Justice processes, supports and resources may be missed during safety and/or case planning, permanency may be delayed in CPS cases, and the overall wellbeing of children and youth may decrease.

The Opportunity

WCWPDS and DCF are partnering to offer a Plan Do Study Act (PDSA) Collaborative on identifying, locating, contacting, and engaging with non-custodial parents to promote child and youth safety, permanency, and well-being. The PDSA Collaborative is a systematic approach to organizational improvement in which agency teams decide on change ideas they believe would improve their practice, test, and measure changes, and share their experiences with other agencies to accelerate learning and identify and spread implementation of best practices. The PDSA Collaborative will offer opportunities for innovation and critical thinking in a focused environment. Agency and participant benefits include improving shared topical understanding, learning organizational improvement methods, empowerment of worker voice in identifying and implementing practice changes, engaging in data-driven decision-making, and building connections between team members and across other agencies. Child welfare agency staff have many competing demands for their time and resources that impact their ability to make changes, the structure of the PDSA Collaborative is designed to address these constraints by supplying already identified tools and resources and incorporating change strategies that will save staff time while improving direct practice.

DCF and WCWPDS have drawn upon the knowledge and expertise of the Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Advisory Committee for selection of this topic and for setting this collaborative's goals and measures. The CQI Advisory Committee includes participants from approximately 13 county child welfare agencies and 1 tribal child welfare agency as well as DCF staff.

PDSA Collaborative Mission

During 2021, the CQI Advisory Committee engaged in planning exercises to develop a PDSA Collaborative mission and goals to make improvements in Wisconsin practice related to non-custodial parents. These planning exercises included analysis of the Wisconsin administrative data related to non-custodial parents, review of the academic literature related to non-custodial parents, root cause analysis, and a causal chain exercise.

The mission of the 2022 Plan-Do-Study-Act Collaborative is to transform agency culture and practices to prioritize early, persistent, and continual efforts to identify, locate, contact, and engage non-custodial parents during the agency's involvement with the family to:

- increase natural supports and resources to children and families,
- benefit child and youth well-being in identity and moral development and cultural connections,
- provide resources for increased Child Protective Services in-home safety plans or Youth Justice evidence-based in-home services or interventions,
- increase likelihood that the child or youth remains with family through facilitating timely permanence with a custodial or non-custodial parent or placement with kin (congruent with Family First legislation), and
- improve county and/or tribal agency outcomes by engaging the non-custodial parent in child(ren), youth, and/or families' lives.

Collaborative Change Goals

Three themes were identified by the CQI Advisory Committee as the top contributing factors that must be addressed during the PDSA Collaborative to achieve the 2022 Collaborative mission.

CONTRIBUTING FACTOR 1: There is a lack of clear and consistent expectations about how to identify, locate, contact, and engage the non-custodial parent (NCP) during the entirety of agency involvement with the family.

GOAL: PDSA teams will apply consistent, realistic expectations for Access, Initial Assessment, Ongoing, and Youth Justice Intake and Ongoing workers on how and when to identify, locate, contact, and engage non-custodial parents (NCP).

- a. Child welfare professionals will demonstrate the importance of incorporating the non-custodial parent in assessment and planning to increase support for children by prioritizing consistent, persistent, and continual efforts to contact and engage NCP early and often during the agency's involvement with the family.
- b. Child welfare professionals will have guidance and/or tools to clarify when and how to identify, locate, contact, and engage non-custodial parents as a part of their standard workflow that is appropriate to the family situation.
- c. Guidance/tools will also clarify appropriate next steps for including the non-custodial parent in case planning to support positive child outcomes.

CONTRIBUTING FACTOR 2: Child welfare agencies lack measurement and accountability systems to track consistent and continual efforts to identify, locate, contact, and engage non-custodial parents during the agency's involvement with the family.

GOAL: PDSA teams will use measurement systems to increase accountability for continual efforts to contact and engage non-custodial parents during the agency's involvement with the family.

- a. Measurement systems will improve child welfare professionals' communication, information-sharing, and decision-making when working with non-custodial parents.
- b. Supervisors will consistently use data in supervision and training to create a culture where non-custodial parents are consistently identified, located, contacted, and engaged.
- c. Teams will explore ways to use measurement systems to identify cases where engaging non-custodial parents improved child/family outcomes and/or improved agency workload.

CONTRIBUTING FACTOR 3: Identifying, locating, contacting, and engaging non-custodial parents may create stressors for child welfare professionals as they balance their workload with concerns about conflictual parent relationships and well-being of all people involved (e.g., child(ren), both parents).

GOAL: Child welfare professionals will increase confidence in navigating conflictual and/or complicated relationships for families with non-custodial parents and their relatives.

- a. Supervisors and agency leadership will provide supports and encouragement to child welfare professionals to decrease their concerns when engaging non-custodial parents/relatives.
- b. Child welfare professionals will have guidance and support on how to contact and engage non-custodial parents when concerns about conflictual relationships and well-being of case participants arise.
- c. Child welfare professionals will be able to set appropriate, beneficial boundaries with non-custodial parents and custodial parents that improve child outcomes.
- d. Child welfare professionals will improve communication about the child welfare role and case planning/progress to custodial parents and non-custodial parents/relatives.

Collaborative Expectations

The Collaborative's Goals will be supported through the Organizational Process Improvement Unit (OPI) of the WCWPDS and the Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) statewide advisory group members being held to the following expectations. They will:

- Provide information on the subject matter and provide guidance on applications related to the subject matter;
- Offer technical assistance (TA) and coaching to agency teams on methods for process improvement both during and between learning sessions;
- Host TA calls between learning sessions to promote application of knowledge and provide accountability to change; and
- Provide communication strategies to keep agencies connected to other collaborative teams and the CQI advisory group.

Participating agency teams are expected to:

- Connect the goals of the PDSA Collaborative to their agency's strategic goals;
- Regularly communicate about their involvement in the PDSA Collaborative with senior management at their agency;
- Recruit a PDSA team and send them to all PDSA Collaborative planning sessions and TA calls (see application for more details).
 - **PDSA TEAM MEMBERSHIP REQUIREMENTS:**
 - Teams will be formed by agency work unit and must include at least one supervisor and 1-7 workers that perform the same job function.
 - Agencies may send multiple teams from different work functions if they wish to address the issue of identifying and engaging non-custodial parents for all job functions at their agency.
 - Examples:
 - Agency 1: Wants to work on how they identify and contact/engage non-custodial parents only at access and initial assessment. They send two PDSA teams to the collaborative. Team 1 has an access supervisor and 2 access workers. Team 2 has an initial assessment supervisor and 3 initial assessment workers.

- Agency 2: Wants to look at the how they identify and engage non-custodial parents at all stages of CPS processes. They bring 3 PDSA teams: team 1 has an access supervisor and 2 access workers; team 2 has an initial assessment supervisor and at 3 initial assessment workers, and team 3 has an ongoing supervisor and 4 ongoing workers.
- Agency 3: At this agency, the same workers perform initial assessment and ongoing duties. They will look at identifying and engaging non-custodial parents during initial assessment and ongoing. They send 1 team with an IA/Ongoing supervisor and 4 IA/Ongoing workers.
- Agency 4: Wants to work on how they identify and contact/engage non-custodial parents during CPS ongoing and youth justice case planning. They send two teams: team 1 has an ongoing supervisor and at least 2 ongoing workers. Team 2 has a youth justice supervisor and at least 2 youth justice workers.
 - The Collaborative facilitators will work with your agency during the application process to help you determine the best team members to send given what work functions your agency wants to target for improvement efforts.
- Provide the resources necessary to support their team including resources necessary to participate in collaborative planning sessions and technical assistance (TA) calls and time to devote to this effort;
- Perform tests of change leading to process improvements in their agency; and
- Share information with the collaborative group including details of changes made and data to support these changes both during and between planning sessions and TA calls.

Planning Sessions

The planning sessions are meetings bringing together (virtually or in-person) participating agency teams to plan changes and exchange ideas. Participating agencies will be asked to send one or more ‘PDSA team’ (see PDSA team membership requirements above) to planning sessions. After planning sessions, the PDSA team is expected to communicate their PDSA plans with agency leadership and, in some cases, communicate with and spread changes to additional agency staff to make successful PDSA tests agency wide. Full participation of the PDSA team members is expected at all planning sessions.

At planning session one, collaborative facilitators will first explore the mission, problem statement, and goals for improving identification and engagement of non-custodial parents in child protective and youth justice practice. PDSA teams will explore their current practice and agency culture as it relates to the topic and identify areas for improvement. Then, collaborative facilitators will teach teams the Plan Do Study Act (PDSA) model which will enable teams to test their change ideas locally and then reflect on, learn from, and refine these tests. Teams will leave planning session one with a completed PDSA plan that they will bring back to their agency and immediately begin their first test of change.

At planning session two, team members and participating collaborative agencies will learn from each other as they report on successes, barriers, and lessons learned from their PDSA tests. PDSA teams will also explore strategies for measuring change, discuss effective communication planning, and supports for spreading successful change ideas to others at their agency.

At planning session 3, the focus shifts to sustaining change. Participating teams will celebrate successes, make plans for sustaining gains for changes implemented, and propose recommendations for other agencies and the Department of Children and Families based on their lessons learned.

Action Periods

Between planning sessions, PDSA teams will engage in action periods that provide time of maximal applied learning as teams engage in repeated PDSA tests of change. The goals of action periods are to support teams in their PDSA tests, build collaboration and shared learning, and assess progress.

Action periods include the following supports:

- **All-team agency technical assistance calls:** Approximately 3 weeks after each learning session, individual agency teams will participate in a one-hour call with the collaborative facilitators to discuss progress on PDSA tests, plan for next steps, and address questions or barriers.
- **All-collaborative calls:** Approximately 6-7 weeks after each learning session, all agency teams will participate in a two-hour all-collaborative call. These calls are led by Collaborative facilitators and features storyboard sharing where teams can highlight their learnings. Calls will also include presentations and shared learning on changes being implemented related to the collaborative goals.
- **Extranet:** Between Learning Sessions and conference calls, teams will share their work on a shared electronic workspace housed by WCWPDS. Teams will be able to access resources, report measures, and share their work.

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Appendix A

SUMMARY OF WISCONSIN STATUTES AND DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES STANDARDS AND POLICIES REGARDING 'NON-CUSTODIAL PARENT' REQUIREMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Below, please find a summary of the guidance around non-custodial parents within Wisconsin Statute, the Department of Children and Families' Standards, and the Department of Children and Families' Memos.

Wisconsin Statutes

Chapter 48 of Wisconsin Statutes is the "Children's Code" and describes jurisdiction and duties regarding child welfare. This chapter was reviewed, and some guidance was provided regarding parental and relative involvement in child welfare cases.

Disposition

Wisconsin Statute require that the Disposition Order occurring for a child in need of protective services attempt to preserve the child's family unit, and only as a last resort to place the children while requiring the agency to consider a relative placement whenever possible. Specifically, s. 48.355(1) Wis. Stats. states, "The disposition shall employ those means necessary to maintain and protect the well-being of the child or unborn child which are the least restrictive of the rights of the parent and child... consistent with the protection of the public. When appropriate, and, in cases of child abuse or neglect or unborn child abuse, when it is consistent with the best interest of the child or unborn child in terms of physical safety and physical health, the family unit shall be preserved and there shall be a policy of transferring custody of a child from the parent ... only when there is no less drastic alternative. If there is no less drastic alternative for a child than transferring custody from the parent, the judge shall consider transferring custody to a relative whenever possible. "A copy is to be provided to the parent, and the parent should be allowed to view the placement (s.48.355(2)(b)2. Wis. Stats.). The first placement option listed in statutes is "the home of a parent or other relative of the child..." s. 48.345(3) Wis. Stats. Other options are later stated, and the parent in this statute is not stated to be the required first consideration.

Permanency Plan

When creating a Permanency Plan for a child in OHC for more than 60 days, requires inclusion of the family when possible. According to s. 48.38(3m) Wis. Stats., "If a child is placed in a qualified residential treatment program, the agency that placed the child or arranged the placement or the agency assigned primary responsibility for providing services to the child under s. 48.355(2)(b)6g shall invite all of the following to participate in permanency planning and may invite others at the agency's discretion: (a) all appropriate biological family members, relatives, and like-kin of the child, as determined by the agency." Statute continues to state that the permanency plan is required to have the name, address, and telephone number of the child's parent, guardian, and legal custodian.

Statute goes on to state that there needs to be a statement as to the availability and suitability of each relative as a placement resource for the child and, if the child is not placed with the relative, the reasons why the placement with the relative is not safe or appropriate (s. 48.38(4)(bm), Wis. Stats.).

Investigation into reported child abuse or neglect

Finally, in. s. 48.981(3)(c) Wis. Stats., it states that if in an investigation is of a report of child abuse or neglect or of threatened child abuse or neglect, the investigation shall also include observation of or an interview with the child, or both, and, if possible, an interview with the child's parents, guardian, or legal custodian.

WI Department of Children and Families Standards

OVERVIEW

The Department of in their casework: Safety Intervention, Access and Initial Assessment, Ongoing Services, and Youth Justice (in progress). These Standards were reviewed to determine what if any guidance was provided Children and Families maintains four Standards to guide Agency child welfare and youth justice workers on how to engage with non-custodial parents in child welfare and youth justice.

Overall, the Standards stated the potential positive impact that non-custodial parents can have on a case and provided guidance on how and when to make diligent efforts to find these parents and engage them in the child's best interest, when possible. An outline by each subject area is provided below. Safety Intervention Standards do not specifically address non-custodial parents, but they do state parents have 'constitutional rights' regarding their child in a CPS case. Access and IA Standards go further, instructing the worker to engage with the parent if possible, acknowledges potential difficulty with safety concerns, and informs the worker and supervisor to discuss if involvement of the non-custodial parents are in the best interest of the case. The Access and IA Standards also state that the Case Transition Staffing from IA to Ongoing is to specifically discuss all efforts to find these parents. Both the Safety Standards and the Access and IA Standards state that the parents have rights regarding their child and may have the right to knowledge about their child, but these specific rights are not expounded upon or cited.

The Ongoing Standards have the most to say regarding non-custodial parents. These Standards go into further detail regarding how non-custodial parents could benefit the child and provides much more detail regarding when and how to find these parents, engage with them, and when to not attempt to locate them. These Standards also state that CPS workers are required by Wisconsin law to consider OHC placement with a relative when necessary. The specific law is not stated but is likely (s. 48.355(2)(b)2. Wis. Stats.).

The summary of non-custodial parent findings by Standards are below.

[Child Protective Services Safety Intervention Standards \(April 2021\)](#)

The CPS Intervention Standards do not specifically address non-custodial parents and/or absent fathers or mothers but does speak to parental involvement in a case. When speaking of parents, the CPS Safety Standards state that the parents / caregivers are the primary authority in the family and those most responsibly for the child's safety, and that it is important to seek out involvement from extended family

and others when necessary to ensure safety. When necessary, CPS seeks to have a partnership with the parents to ensure safety (Pg. 4-5).

CPS Standards also states the respect for the constitutional rights of each family member and seeks to utilize the least intrusive intervention needed to keep the child safe. When a child is found to be unsafe, CPS will engage parents in the development and implementation of a protective and/or safety plan, and parents will also be assessed for their protective capacities (pg. 5).

Finally, when a Safety Analysis has been done and a Safety Plan is needed, the Standards say that CPS should inform parents / caregivers about their rights and should also work with them to understand and accept the need for a Safety Plan, as well as enlist the parents in the process of identifying options for the plan. When it is time to evaluate the plan, the CPS professional is to gather information from the parents / caregivers (Pg. 14-16).

[Access and Initial Assessment Standards \(April 2021\)](#)

The Access and IA Standards make two specific references to non-custodial parents. First, it states that the CPS professional must interview the non-custodial parent whenever possible but acknowledges potential difficulty in interviewing these parents. Specifically, the standards stress that the CPS worker consider the non-custodial parent's history with domestic violence and the safety of the child and others before attempting to engage with these persons (Pg. 53-54).

After acknowledging potential difficulties when engaging non-custodial parents, the Access and IA Standards state multiple potential positives of engaging with these individuals, including their unique knowledge of CPS history in other states, child needs, other family resources, and they also may have a legal right to know about their child's health and safety needs. Standards instruct CPS workers and supervisors to consult regarding the decision to engage or not engage these individuals (Pg. 53 – 54).

The second and final reference to non-custodial parents is regarding Case Transition Staffing. When passing on a case, CPS workers are to communicate the status of involvement of any non-custodial or absent parent as well as the due diligence and actions to locate and involve that parent that has been done by the worker (pg. 58).

Overall, Access and IA standards stress the importance of non-custodial parents and how they must be interviewed *if possible*. The language stating that the parent 'may' have a legal right to know about their child is not clarified further.

[Ongoing Service Standards \(September 2021\)](#)

The Ongoing Service Standards provide the bulk of the information regarding how CPS Professionals are to work with non-custodial parents. As seen in Access and IA Standards, the bulk of the information relates to the case transition staffing process as well as the need to make attempts to find the non-custodial parent.

Case Transition and Explaining the Potential Impact of Non-Custodial Parents to the Family

The Ongoing Standards state that when transitioning a case from IA to any type of Ongoing case (CHIPS, JIPS, or Youth Justice), the caseworkers must discuss the "status of involvement of any non-custodial or

absent parent and the caseworker's due diligence to locate and involve" that parent (pg. 4). Standards also state that the caseworker must discuss the "purpose for involvement of non-custodial parents, relatives, and informal supports as potential resources for the child and family" (Pg. 13, pg. 41). Likewise, when planning and developing goals with the family in an in-home case or permanency planning in an OHC case, the CPS worker and family are to discuss, "planning to identify, locate, and involve non-custodial parents...as resources for children" (pg. 17, pg. 111). All efforts to locate and engage non-custodial parents must be documented in SACWIS (pg. 24).

Diligent Efforts to Search for Non-Custodial Parents, Alleged Fathers or Relatives

Specific instructions on when to search for the non-custodial parent are also provided. Ongoing standards state that, "A diligent search for non-custodial parents, alleged fathers, and relatives includes the identification, consideration, and determination of non-custodial parents, alleged fathers, and relatives either as resources or placement options for children and families. The identification of relatives should begin at access and continue through initial assessment and ongoing case management. Identifying and locating relatives should begin when a caseworker is considering or recommending out-of-home care for the child, which will allow better planning for the child's transition. For example, in cases where it is likely that the parent will be incarcerated, when a voluntary placement agreement appears to be ineffective, or when based on the family's history with child protective services removal seems likely, the caseworker should speak with the parent or legal guardian about relatives who might be a resource for the child. Talking with parents regarding their preference for placement of their child, should that become necessary, is often more effective than waiting until the child is removed." (pg. 183). Standards inform the caseworker that these parents, "have specific rights regarding their children that must be protected when intervention occurs". Standards do not clarify what the specific rights are. These relative searches are to continue until the caseworker believes the child's needs are met (pg. 23).

Ongoing Standards list all requirements for when a diligent search is required, including:

- "It is likely that a child will be placed in out-of-home care.
- The child is placed in out-of-home care on either an emergency basis or with planning.
- It is likely that the child's placement will change.
- A concurrent permanence goal is established.
- Reunification is no longer the primary goal.
- A child is determined to be subject to the Wisconsin Indian Child Welfare Act (WICWA), Active Efforts to locate and involve relatives must be made" (pg. 183).

Non-custodial parents are cited as a potential resource in concurrent planning, either as a placement option or as respite. (pg. 182).

If a parent refuses to provide information about a non-custodial parent or other relatives, "the caseworker must consult with the corporation counsel or district attorney to determine the appropriateness of having the court order the parent or legal guardian to provide the information" (pg. 23). Standards also state that if a parent objects to contacting the non-custodial parent or relative, an evaluation of the parent's objections should be done, and the caseworker may still place the child with the non-custodial parent or relative, "after the safety of the home has been assessed and confirmed and required background checks have been completed. The parent should be informed that they may express their objections to the juvenile court judge at either the temporary custody or change in placement hearing" (pg. 188).

OHC Specific-Instruction

Ongoing Standards provide further specific instruction regarding non-custodial parents and children in OHC. First, when creating a Permanency Plan Evaluation, CPS workers must review the progress made in locating and engaging non-custodial parents (pg. 69). Also, when a child is in OHC and, "reunification is with a non-custodial parent, the agency shall continue to work with the non-custodial parent to obtain a family court order that supports the current situation. Until the family court order is modified the agency shall not close its case" (pg. 147). And finally, when a child is in an Other Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (OPPLA), the workers are instructed to continue diligent efforts to locate and engage non-custodial parents (pg. 152).

Further, Ongoing Standards state that, "Wisconsin law requires that when children are placed in out-of-home care, placement with a relative must be considered, and, if a child is not placed with a relative, the reason(s) for nonplacement must be documented in the Permanency Plan. When a child is being removed from his or her home, caseworkers have a responsibility to search out and locate relatives and make attempts to involve them in the child's life either as a placement or as a resource and potential future placement. This policy provides minimum standards, guidance, and tools which will assist agencies in identifying, locating, and involving non-custodial parents, alleged fathers, and relatives as resources for children, especially children who have been removed from their homes" (pg. 182).

Tips on Locating Non-Custodial Parents

Ongoing Standards includes an appendix with search tools relating to locating non-custodial parents and relatives. First, it directs users to databases that may be accessed through the KIDS system, including the Center for Health Statistics, Department of Corrections, Department of Transportation, a national directory of new hires, and a federal child support case registry. Other Federal sources are also available only when KIDS is actively looking for someone, including the Federal parent locator system which includes the Social Security Administration, Department of Defense, Internal Revenue System, Department of Veteran Affairs, etc. (pg. 302).

When a search for a non-custodial parent is not required

A CPS worker does not need to make diligent efforts to locate the non-custodial parent when the parent anonymously relinquishes the infant within the first 72 hours of life., under s. 48.195 Wis. Stats. may do so without notifying the other parent. Standards do note that if the relinquished child is an American Indian child, the Tribe must be notified.

Consideration of the KIDS Family Violence Indicator

DCF recommends that agency staff enter into agreements with local child support agencies to allow access to systems and information. Specifically, it is recommended to have an agreement so the child welfare case worker have access to the, "KIDS Family Violence Indicator, which is placed on a KIDS participant record when a claim or finding of good cause for noncooperation with child support is entered in the KIDS system, or if a temporary restraining order or injunction has been entered to protect the participant, or if the child support agency has reason to believe that releasing the information might result in physical or emotional harm to the participant. The indicator will appear on all case screens". Agencies should specifically know about this to help them determine if they can safely contact a non-custodial parent while still maintaining required confidentiality and safety and well-being of the family and child.

Termination of Parental Rights

Ongoing Standards states it is important to document diligent and active efforts to search for non-custodial parents and relatives as this documentation may be "critical in an action to terminate parental

rights to demonstrate that the agency made diligent or Active Efforts to locate, involve, and place a child with a noncustodial father, an alleged father, or a relative (pg. 191) "

Youth Justice

No information specific to Youth Justice and non-custodial parents was found.

Department of Children and Families Policies

One DCF policy was found that provided guidance regarding non-custodial parents: DCFS Memo Series 2007-01 "[Locating and Involving Non-Custodial Parents, Alleged Fathers and Other Relatives](#)" dated February 1, 2007.

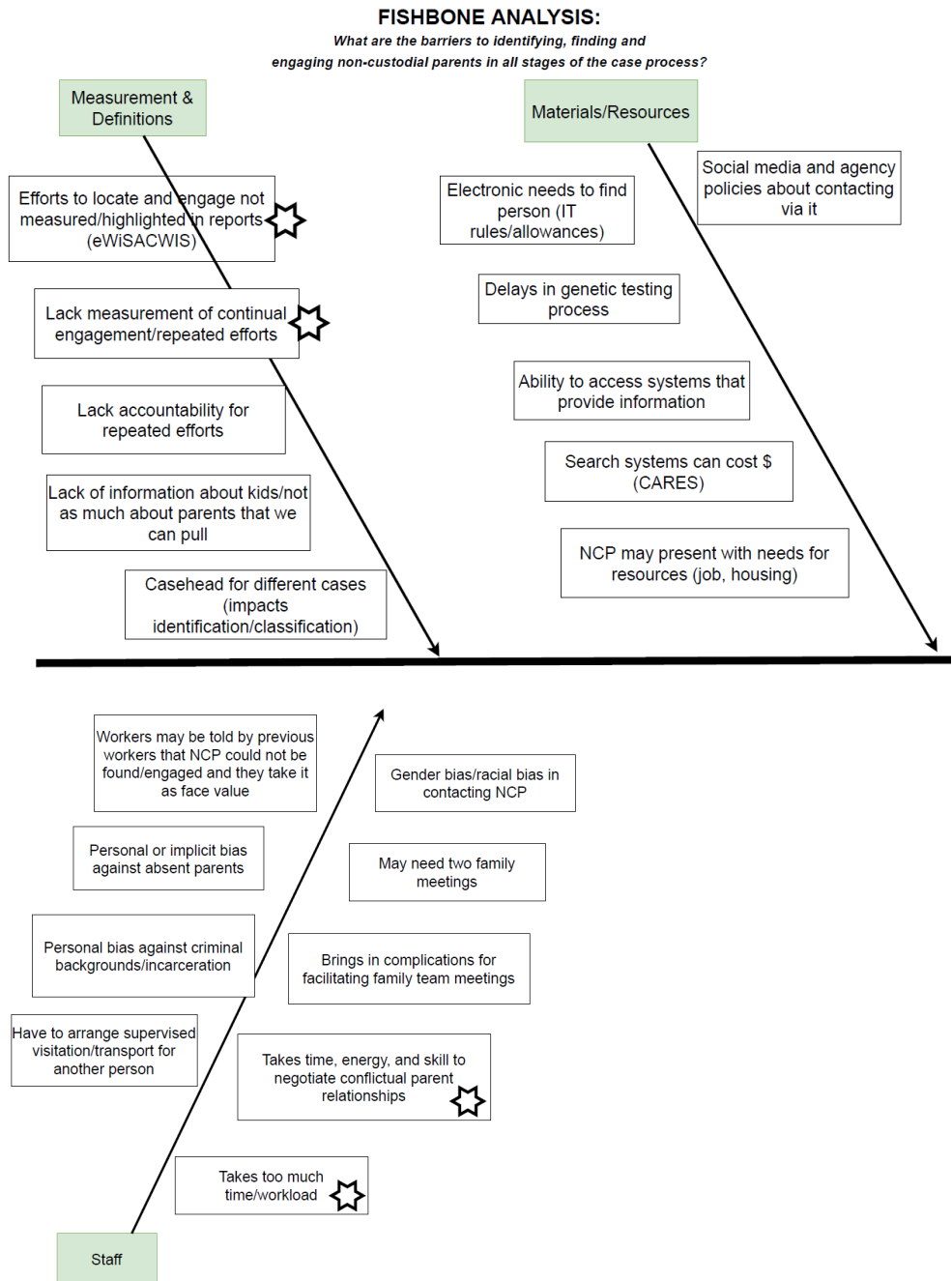
This memo states that its purpose is to, "address barriers to identifying and involving non-custodial parents, alleged fathers, and relatives as resources for children." The memo goes on to site the trauma children experience when separated from their families, and states that when they can stay connected to their families and have natural support systems, child welfare outcomes are better (pg. 1).

The information in the Policy Memo reiterates much of what is covered in Standards. The Policy does include language regarding how to support relative caretakers who are caring for the child, and addresses identifying, locating, and involving fathers. The Policy states that fathers are often overlooked if they do not have formal paternity established, and it is 'critical' to involve them early on as they have the right to be involved with their children, they have financial responsibilities, important history, and to avoid disruption if the child is initially placed with a foster family (pg. 8).

The policy also provides the specific documentation requirements for the Permanency Plan as required by s. 48.38(4)(bm) Wis. Stats. (pg. 12). A list of Statutes providing guidance on engagement of parents and relatives is also given (pg. 15).

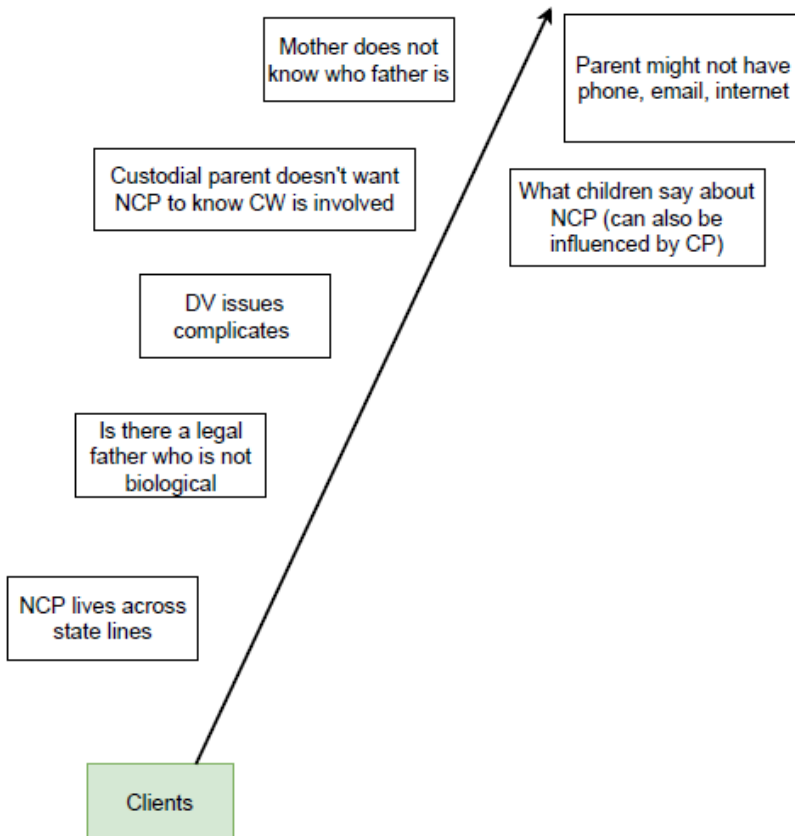
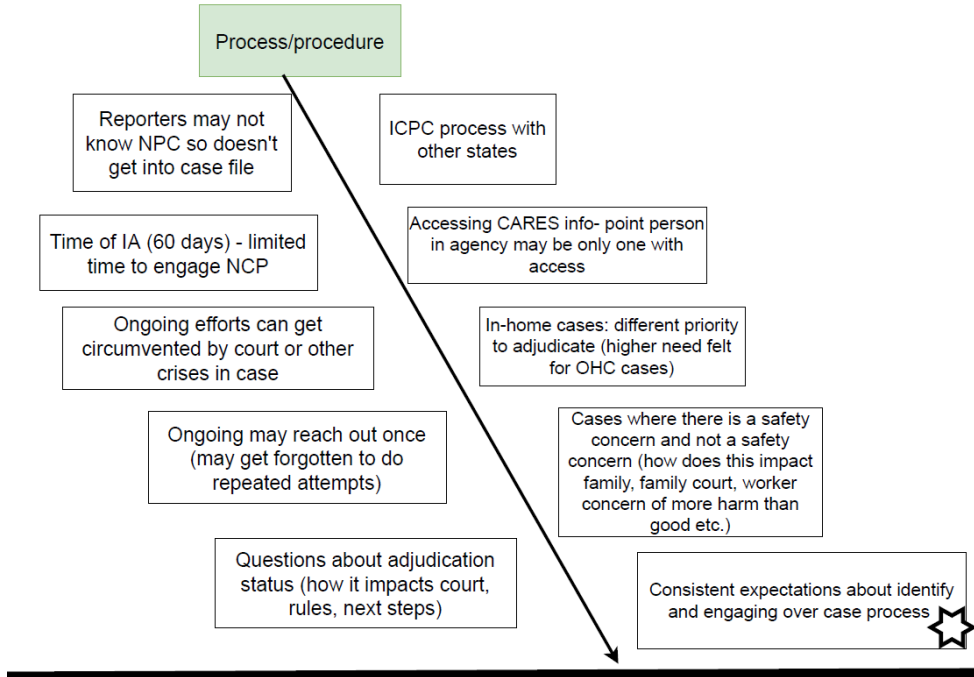
APPENDIX B: CONTRIBUTING FACTORS ANALYSIS: FISHBONE DIAGRAM

Background: A fishbone diagram was completed with the Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Advisory Committee on December 6, 2021, to analyze the factors contributing to difficulties in identifying, finding, and engaging non-custodial parents in all stages of the child welfare case process in Wisconsin’s county child welfare agencies. The CQI Advisory committee were then asked to identify which barriers, if addressed, would most contribute to improved practice (starred). The starred factors were used to develop the collaborative goals in this charter.



FISHBONE ANALYSIS:

What are the barriers to identifying, finding and engaging non-custodial parents in all stages of the case process?



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