

WHY DID IT TAKE SO LONG TO FIND US?

Exploring the strengths & struggles to successfully implement a
KINSHIP SEARCH PROGRAM in a child welfare agency

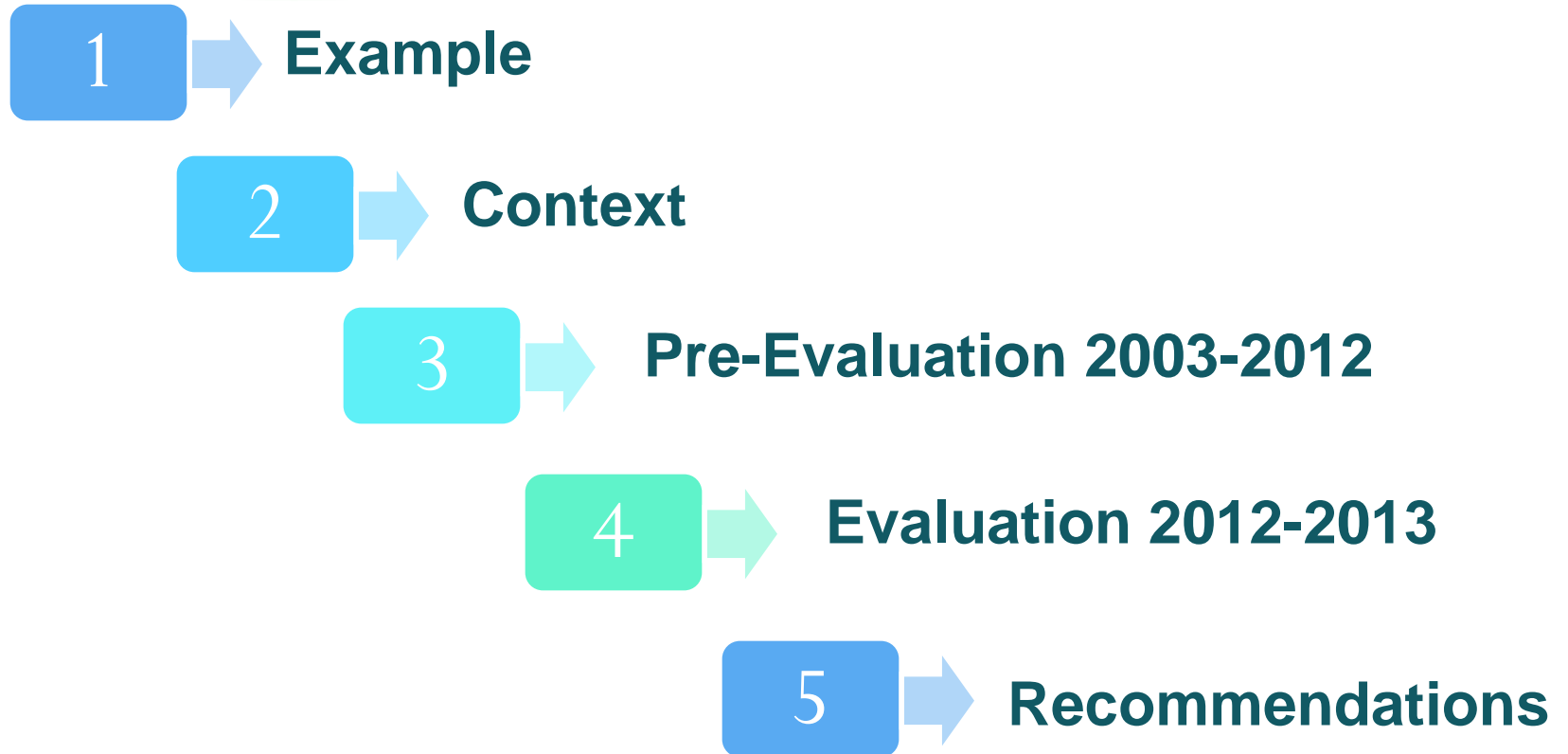
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FOR: 2014 National Kinship Care Conference, *New Orleans, Louisiana*

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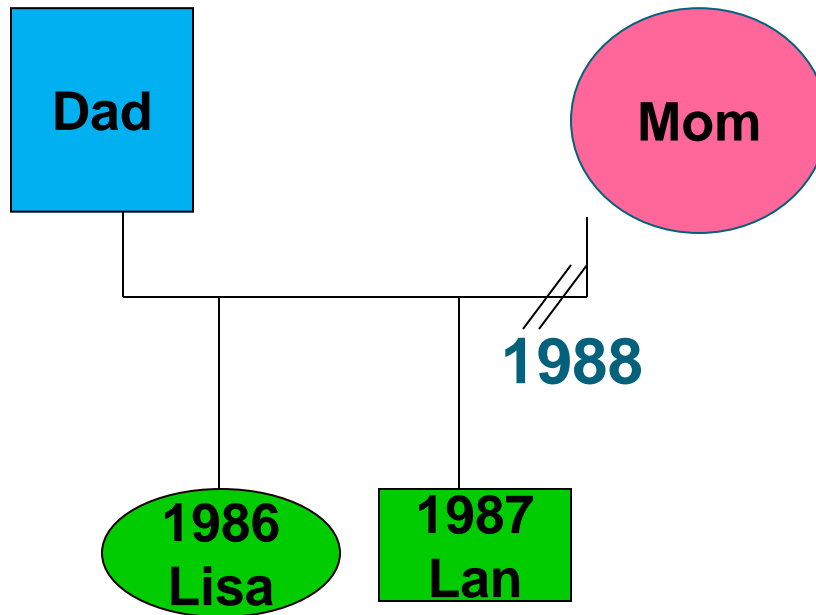


Presentation



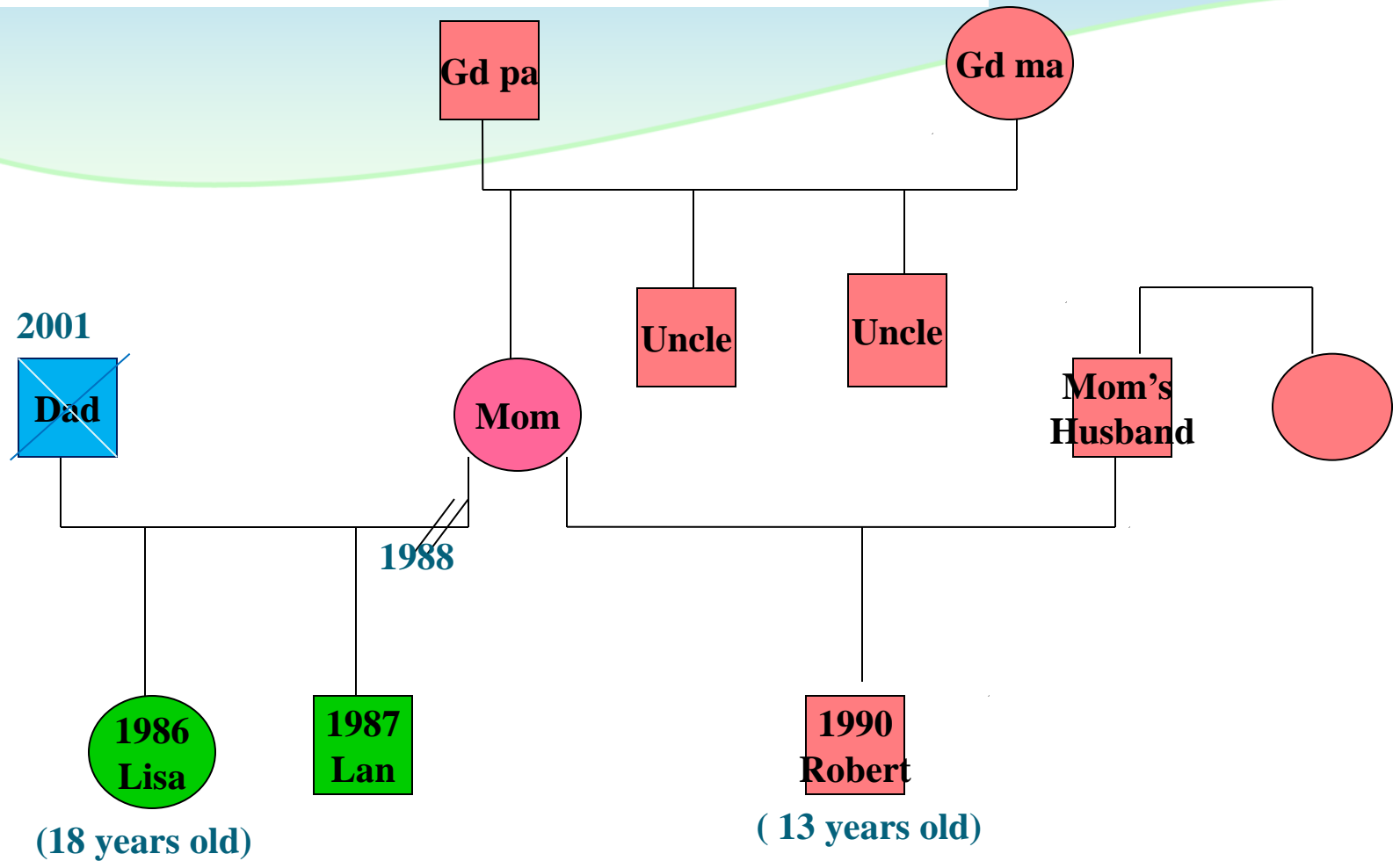
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EXAMPLE ~ Lisa & Lan

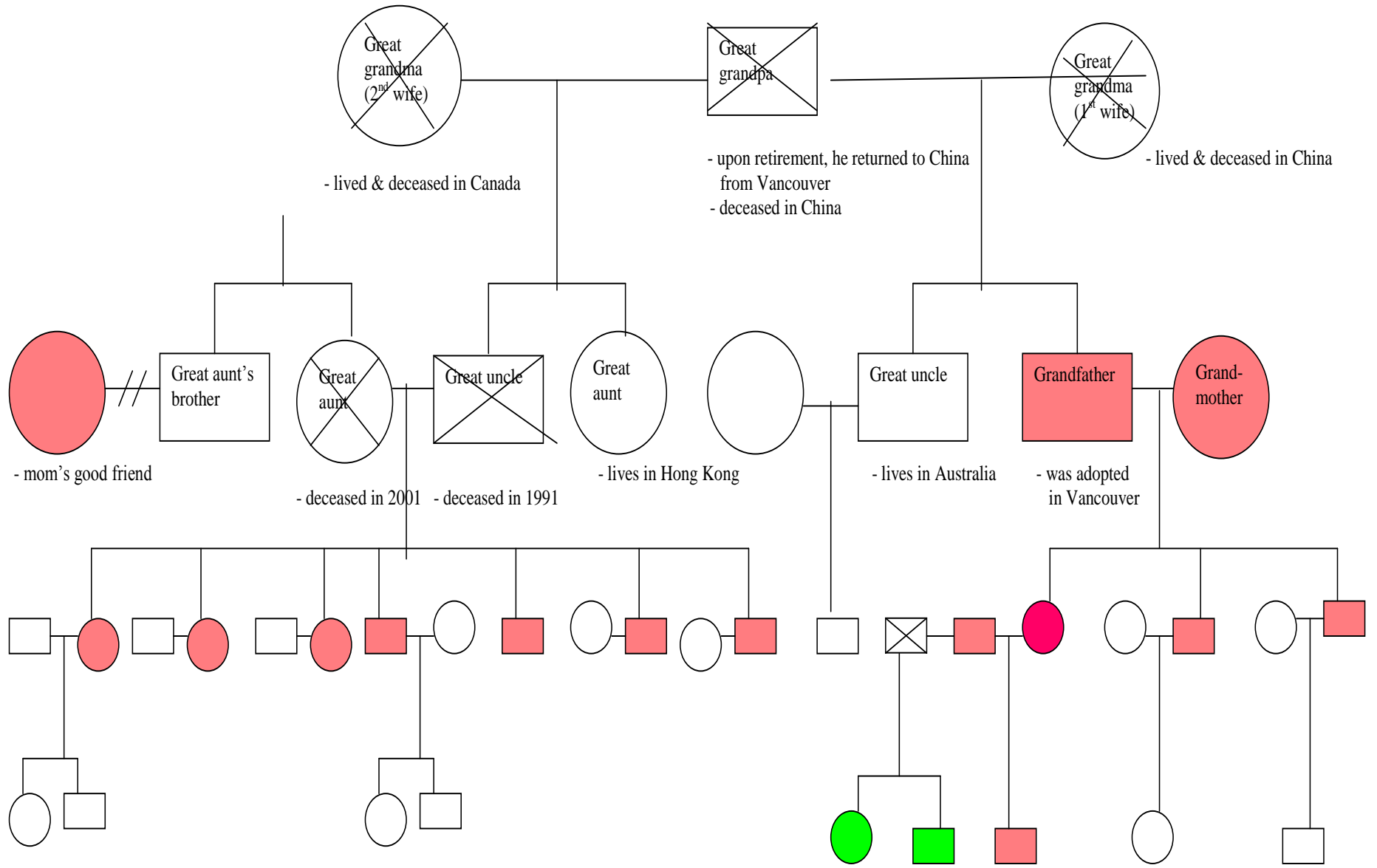


Lan was 3 months old
when parents separated

Search to locate kin ~ Part 2



Lisa & Lan's Maternal Family



2

CONTEXT ~ Children's Aid Society of Toronto (CAS Toronto)

- ❑ Province of Ontario - 13 million
- ❑ City of Toronto - 2.7 million
- ❑ Children's Aid Society of Toronto
 - ❖ 24,000 children served annually
 - ❖ 2,100 children in care
 - ❖ \$150 million budget



Children in Care

- ❖ 2,155 children in care over a 1yr period
As of March 31, 2014
- ❖ 861 in family based care
- ❖ 201 group care
- ❖ 382 independent living (ages 18-21)



Kinship

- ❖ 26 kinship foster homes
- ❖ 180 children in kinship service homes



History of Kinship & Kinship Search at CAST

- ❖ 2003 ~ CAS Toronto pilots Kinship Service Team
- ❖ Incorporated Kinship Team into core service: includes search, assessment & support services
- ❖ Visit to Philadelphia to meet Dr. Joseph Crumbley and Mattie Sattersfield
- ❖ Kinship Pilot becomes Kinship Program, staffing of team increases over time
- ❖ Kinship Search Model developed over time

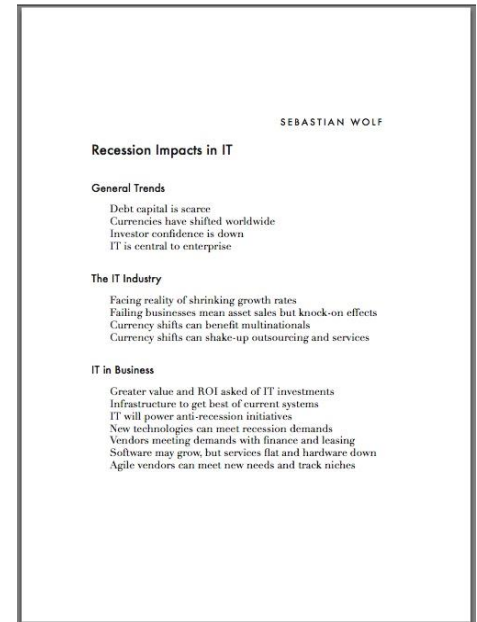
Kinship Service Standards ~ Definitions

❖ RELATIVE

please see handout

❖ EXTENDED FAMILY

❖ COMMUNITY



PRE-EVALUATION ~ Kinship Search Program (KSP) (2003-2012)

- ❖ **2003 Pilot of Kinship Program**
- ❖ **2004 Kinship Program formalized**
- ❖ **Pre-Evaluation ~ 2004-2012**
 - ✓ Benefits of Kinship Search Program process articulated for children/youth and parents
 - ✓ Use of the genogram is part of Search Program process;
 - ✓ Identified challenges and need for a cultural shift in how we practice search, engagement, service;
 - ✓ Need to balance optimal service with limited resources;
 - ✓ Training received: 1) 30 Days to Family, 2) Extreme Recruitment, 3) Kevin Campbell Family Finding Model
- ❖ *Evaluation ~ 2012-2013 Evaluation*

Kinship Search Program ~ Goals



- **Encourage** families to consider and rely on their own family members as resources
- **Enhance** children/ youth's opportunity to stay connected to their own communities
- **Promote** community responsibility for children and families
- **Strengthen** the ability of families to give children/ youth the support they need
- **Enable** children/ youth to live with persons they know and trust
- **Reduce** the trauma children' youth experience when they are separated from their family
- **Reinforce** child/ youth's sense of identify and self-esteem which flows from knowing their family history and culture



Kinship Search Program ~ Benefits

For Children & Youth

- ✓ Reduces stress of coming into care;
- ✓ Children have less disruptions in family and community relationships;
- ✓ Child maintains, cultural, ethnic, religious ties;
- ✓ Child experiences family traditions/personal history.

For Families

- Encourages and empowers families involvement in decision making and planning for the child;
- Encourages families to consider and rely on their own family members as resources and as a result;
- Potential for family reunification increases.

For CAS Staff

- Genogram Use:
 - * Assists workers who are new to the case get familiar with child's kin network quickly
 - * Pictorial format helps child better understand family roots

Challenges and Myths

“Family members do not come forward”

“Service has been dispensed with on father”

“The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree”

“The plan is to return the child to the parents?!”

“There are complex family dynamics”

“The relatives won’t be able to protect the child”

CAS Toronto ~ 6 Steps in Kinship Search

Step 1: Identify

Step 2: Locate

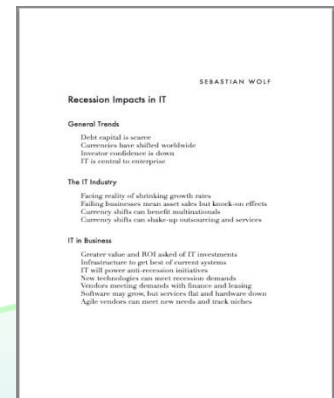
Step 3: Contact

Step 4: Engage

Step 5: Educate

Step 6: Support

please see handout



EVALUATION (2012-2013)

Length of Evaluation: 2012-2013 (9-month period)

Areas of Inquiry: 1) Types of cases referred; 2) Activities involved in search; 3) Perceptions of engagement with kinship families; 4) Perceptions of satisfaction with the Kinship Search Program; 5) Case outcomes; 6) Recommendations regarding improvement; and 7) Outcome of case 3-months after closing

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Methodology

Data types used to evaluate the Kinship Search Program



Key informant interviews (N=23)

- 4 Kinship applicants
- 5 Non-kinship applicants
- 12 Referring CAS workers
- 2 Kinship Researchers

Kinship Family Finder Referral Forms (N=15)

Search Log Forms (N=15)

Closing Summary (N=13)

3-Month Follow-Up File Reviews (N=13)

Findings: *Inquiry #1: Type of cases referred*

I1.A – Children's Information

Early Service cases (N=13; 20 children):

- ❖ Referred children were mostly male
- ❖ Mean age = 6 years
- ❖ Placed in internal foster home or outside paid resource

Crown Ward cases (N=2; 6 youth):

- Referred youth were male & female
- Mean age = 17 years
- Placed in outside paid resource, internal foster home, or private boarding

I1.B – Records/ Documents

- Info was not available

I1.C – Parent/ Kin Info

Early Service cases (N=13; 42 kin)

- ❖ Average= 3.23 individuals identified per case
- ❖ Most individuals were parents

Crown Ward cases (N=2; 7 kin)

- Average=3.5 individuals identified per case
- Most individuals were parents or siblings

I1.D – Details of the request

- Range of cases referred to KSP
- All forms indicated a significant parent/ kin/ kith relationship to the identified child/ youth

I1.E – Frequency of cases referred

- 10 of 13 Early Service cases (77%) = same day versus .
- 'waitlist' cases = 0 - 229 days (mean of 24.5 days).



Findings: *Inquiry #2: Activities involved in the search*

12.A – Amount of communication with KIN

Early Service Cases:

- ❖ **30% of the Kinship Researchers' time was with kin** (or 37.94/127hrs for 13 cases)
- ❖ Communication with kin ranged from 0-13hrs per month (average of 4.74hrs per month)

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Crown Ward Cases:

- **39% of the Kinship Researchers' time was with kin** (or 13.4/34hrs for 2 cases)
- Communication with kin ranged from 0-6hrs per month (average of 1.67hrs per month).



12.B – Amount of communication with CAS WORKERS/SUPERVISORS

Early Service cases:

- ❖ **68% of the Kinship Researchers' time was with CAS workers/ supervisors** (or 85.58/127hrs for 13 cases). Of which,
- ❖ 43% is in-person, phone, email (n=38.17hrs)
- ❖ 41% is by correspondence (n=36.38hrs)
- ❖ 17% is in meetings (n=15.17hrs).

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Crown Ward cases:

- **49% of the Kinship Researchers' time was with CAS workers/ supervisors** (or 16.93/34hrs for 2 cases). Of which,
- 47% is in-person, phone, email with workers (n=7.95hrs)
- 33% is through correspondence (n=5.62hrs)
- 20% is in meetings (n=3.33hrs).

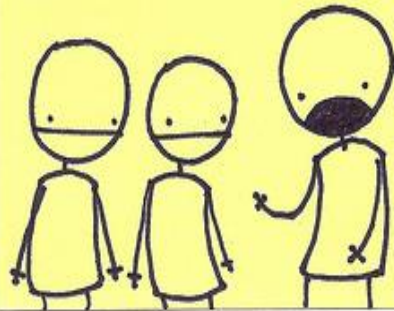
Findings: Inquiry #3: Perceptions of engagement with kinship families

13.A – Kinship Researchers Approach

The kinship researchers' approaches were seen as **respectful, helpful, beneficial, enjoyable, valuable, individualized,** and **neutral**. Kin were approached with **an understanding attitude** for the most part. Due to these approaches, the kinship researchers' roles/ responsibilities were perceived by the kinship applicants, the non-kinship applicants, and the referring CAS workers (Early Service & Crown Ward) as having a valuable role.

PROJECT
SUCCESS

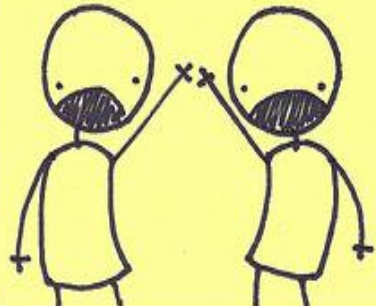
COMMUNICATION



TEAMWORK



ACHIEVEMENT



“She [Kinship Worker] was very thorough, very good, and very aware of the fact that sometimes she was opening into a web of conflict and she had to be careful with that because of the family history.”

~ CAS Referring Worker

Findings: Inquiry #4: Perceptions of satisfaction of the program services

"Everyone else I had to deal with didn't care about me. Their first priority was the child and I completely understand that. But when they are looking at me taking (the child), I felt that me and my family should be treated a little differently. When I spoke to her [Kinship Researcher] it was a world of possibility and she talked to me like a normal human being."

~ Kinship Applicant

Key informants had positive perceptions about the Kinship Search Program due to:

- ✓ Inclusion of kin/kith in the process;
- ✓ Clarity on why kin/kith were being contacted;
- ✓ Service was *helpful, resourceful, and successful* at locating kin primary due to *effective, efficient, diligent, and detailed* communication between all stakeholders;
- ✓ Kinship Researchers were easily accessible and had time to focus on searching for kin.

Satisfaction was less positive when:

- X Once kin were located, no additional kin were sought and the case was closed (ES & CW)
- X Long waitlists (ES & CW);
- X The goals of the referral to kin search differed between the kinship researcher and the referring CAS worker (CW);
- X The referring CAS worker was not prepared for increased workload that came with finding kin of children in care (e.g., meetings) (CW).



Findings: *Inquiry #5: Perceptions of case outcomes*

I5.A – Search efforts/ methods used

- ✓ Internet searches
- ✓ File mining
- ✓ Communication with various CAS-Toronto workers and non-CAS Toronto workers
- ✓ Communication with the parents and children
- ✓ Letters

I5.B – Family found in:

Early Service Cases:

- ❖ **3-30+ kin successfully located**

Crown Ward Cases:

- ❖ **27-151+ kin successfully located**

I5.C – Outcomes

- ✓ Kin presented plans for a variety of reasons (e.g., kin's desire for reunification)
- ✓ Certain plans by kin were not accepted (e.g., kin already caring for ill relative)
- ✓ Kinship Researchers closed files when potential kin plan was identified and in the process of assessment

I5.C – Outcomes due to Kinship Search Program

- ✓ Kin appreciative to be a part of the process
- ✓ Referring CAS workers indicated that kin were successfully located resulting in kin placement, (re)connecting child with kin or expanding the family support system
- ✓ Referring CAS workers & Kinship Researchers perceived the genogram as a powerful tool

“[The genogram] is helpful in understanding complex families”

~ Kinship Researcher

Findings: *Inquiry #6: 3-month follow-up*



16.A – Status of identified child 3-months after the Kinship Search Program closed their file

- Findings suggest that the identified child / youth remained within their current placement, 3-months after the kin search case closed.
- Suggests the 3-month period is too short a time period to review placement change

Findings: *Inquiry #7: Recommendations*

Recommendations:

Informed by study findings, the recommendations for CAS Toronto are:

1. To increase awareness of the effectiveness of the Kinship Search Program both within our Society and with our community partners as it is a key component in strengthening Family-Based Care;
2. To enhance a quicker turnaround time with the Early Service cases;
3. To build into service expectations that the Crown Ward cases may have longer timelines for service;
4. To ensure successful outcomes with the Crown Ward cases may not just be placement but success is also making of family (re)connections for the child/youth;
5. To continue to evaluate the program regarding its ability to meet stated goals and objectives.



RECOMMENDATIONS: Smith Family ~ Early Service Case

- Kinship Search referral from Early Service January-2009
- Mother: homeless, drug addict, no prenatal care
- Father: homeless, addiction & said "no family"
- Baby James apprehended from hospital

KINSHIP SEARCH PROGRAM

- ✓ Found maternal aunt on *Facebook*;
- ✓ Set up access visits;
- ✓ Completed kinship assessment on aunt;
- ✓ James placed with aunt.



Challenges and Myths

“Family members do not come forward”

“Service has been dispensed with on father”

“The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree”

“The plan is to return the child to the parents?!”

“There are complex family dynamics”

“The relatives won’t be able to protect the child”

Meet James...



James growing up...



James at 4 years....



Jones Family ~ Crown Ward Case

- 4 siblings ~ 3 sibs are in care (1 with developmental challenges; 1 lives independently with assistance from agency)
- Children in care for 9 years
- 2 younger sisters adopted (no connections other 2 sibs)
- At time of referral to Kinship Search Program the parents whereabouts unknown

Jones Family ~ Results of Kinship Search

- ❖ Mom and dad resurfaced plus a paternal uncle
- ❖ Connected with adoptive parents of 2 younger sibs
- ❖ Paternal side ~family found (previously unknown)
- ❖ Maternal side ~birth grandfather had Native status
- ❖ Great aunt (previous foster mom), her son (a pastor) & her daughter (a kinship foster mom) contacted CAS and planned to visit
- ❖ Number of “new” family members found

Results of Kinship Search

Jones Siblings:

- ❖ "Where were you nine years ago?"
- ❖ **"What took you so long?"**

Family Members found via Kinship search:

- ❖ **"What took you so long to contact us?"**



Key Lessons Learned...

- ❖ **Unique role of Kinship Researchers to engage families /children/ youth** ...since they are not a case manager, they can engage family members in the search process, often obtaining family information that the case worker couldn't.
- ❖ **Kinship Researchers have unique skills** in family engagement
- ❖ **Response to search positive by kinship applicants and non applicants** ...in some cases the experience changed their perceptions of CAST
- ❖ **"Engagement" is essential skill, add it other key search tools** (e.g., as file mining, internet searches) and important in Early Search cases.
- ❖ **Good case outcomes = More kinship referrals**
Workers are more likely to refer other cases and promote the benefits with their colleagues=change in culture of thinking

Key Lessons Learned...

- ❖ **Different approach** needed for searches for children/youth in long-term care
- ❖ **Prepare & support children/youth in** learning about/connecting with family members
- ❖ **Teamwork is essential-**
“Team” includes Kinship Researcher, child welfare case workers, caregivers (foster families) who work together to support the youth in the journey



Key Lessons Learned...

- ❖ **Search leads to Placement leads to Permanency...**Search for family members for placement and as a permanency option is key.
- ❖ **Search leads to finding Family members to Support the family of origin leads to Reunification.**
- ❖ **Search leads to Life Long Connections**
 - Search for family can result in life long connections for children/youth and is essential for youth leaving care-
 - Connections can include, emails, phone contact, access, social network interactions, sharing of photos and gifts
 - Social Media has changed child welfare practice-children and youth are reaching out to family through internet, e.g. face book, whether we want them to or not, why not support them in reaching out

WHY DID IT TAKE YOU SO LONG?

- ❖ Kinship Search is a culture shift of importance with the potential for great impact for our children/youth
- ❖ To integrate Kinship Search into practice, policy & research requires time

THANK YOU!

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Kinship Program

Child Welfare Institute

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so we can be more effective tomorrow**

