

Regular Meeting 12/13/01

TO: Juvenile Welfare Board Members

FROM: James E. Mills, Executive Director 
Cindy Bell, Quality Management and Evaluation 

University of South Florida's Collaborative for Children, Families and Communities Faculty Grant Program – Final Reports 2000-2001

The Juvenile Welfare Board has been a member of the USF Collaborative for Children, Families and Communities Board of Advisors since it was formed in 1997, and has provided funds for research to the USF Collaborative for Children, Families and Communities Faculty Grant Program. Two funded research projects directly impacting families in Pinellas County were completed at the end of the 2000-2001 fiscal year. An overview of these research projects follows.

Analysis of Characteristics and Service Patterns of Children in the Florida Child Protection System

The study investigates factors associated with children's initial entry and re-entry into foster care in the State of Florida. Data for state fiscal years 1995-96 through 1999-00 were included and appropriate statistical analyses were applied. Building on these findings, the study then compares foster care service utilization patterns among children in Pinellas County, the Suncoast Region of Florida, and the State of Florida. The study found that Pinellas County was equal to or lower than the State and the Suncoast Region in the incidence rates for entry into foster care, length of stay in foster care, and proportion of children exiting foster care. Foster care reentry rates for Pinellas County increased from 7.2% in fiscal year 1995-96 to 10.4% in fiscal year 1999-00; of the children reentering foster care within 12 months, 15.5% had been returned to parents, 13.5% to relatives and 8.4 % were transferred to adoptions.

Pre-Literacy Skills in Spanish-Speaking Children: Development of a Test of Spanish Phonological Awareness – Final Report October 2001

This project developed and piloted a Spanish phonological awareness test – the Test of Phonological Sensitivity in Spanish (TOPSS). Many Spanish-speaking children experience problems learning to read and write in English. Phonological awareness is correlated with the development of reading skills in young children, and is a crucial step toward learning to read because it helps children sound words out. TOPSS will be used to investigate whether Spanish phonological sensitivity is related to English literacy. Five elementary schools in Pinellas County, in addition to several Hillsborough and Pasco County schools, participated in the study and development of the TOPSS. This research is significant because no other instrument that assesses phonological sensitivity in Spanish exists. Also, the Pinellas County School District will be provided free copies of the TOPSS after it is refined based on research findings. Finally, research using the TOPSS will contribute to our understanding of the interdependencies of Spanish and English in sequential bilingual children over time as well as to theories of language loss and language interference.

Report to the Juvenile Welfare Board of Pinellas County

Analysis of Characteristics and Service Patterns of Children in the Florida Child Protection System

Eric C. Brown and Svetlana Yampolskaya

Executive Summary

This project consists of three interrelated studies that examine the characteristics and service patterns of children in the Florida child protection system. Specifically, Study 1 relies on a multilevel analysis of risk factors for initial entry into foster care and subsequent reentry after discharge. Study 2 examines the flow of children throughout the foster care system, including longitudinal patterns of entry, length of stay, and discharge from foster care. In Study 3, the pattern of reentering the foster care system after discharge from an initial episode is examined. Although data on all children in the State's foster care system are used in these studies, a special focus is given to children in the newly created Suncoast Region and Pinellas County, in particular.

Findings from this project include:

Incidence rates of entry into foster care for Pinellas County increased from 1.4 per 1,000 children in the general population in fiscal year 1995-96 to a high of 2.6 per 1,000 in fiscal year 1999-00, an increase of 91%. By comparison, the incidence of entry into foster care for the entire State increased from 1.6 per 1,000 children in fiscal year 1995-96 to 2.6 per 1,000 in 1999-00, an increase of 63%.

In Pinellas County, males were 17% more likely to enter foster care than females. Nonwhite children were approximately 28% more likely to enter foster care than White children. Children under 5 years of age were 2.2 times more likely to enter foster care than children who were 5 years or older.

For the State, children who were physically drug dependent newborns or exposed to substances were approximately 6 1/2 times more likely to enter foster care than children without this type of maltreatment.

The risk of placement into foster care was reduced 1% for every 1% increase in the number of mothers in a county who received prenatal care during the first trimester of their pregnancy. Median income was found to be inversely associated with entry into foster care with the likelihood of a foster care placement going down 20% per \$1,000 increase in counties' median incomes.

In Pinellas County, median length of stay in foster care increased from 15.4 months in fiscal year 1995-96 to a high of 19.6 months in 1997-98, and decreased slightly to 18.4 months in 1999-00. Of the six counties that comprise the Suncoast Region, Pinellas County had the longest median length of stay (18.4 months) and Sarasota County had the shortest median length of stay (6.4 months). For the State, median length of stay in foster care has decreased from a peak of 19.6 months in fiscal year 1997-98 to a low of 11.2 months in fiscal year 2000-01.

Males in Pinellas County had significantly longer durations in foster care, averaging 4 months longer in foster care than females. Older children also had significantly longer durations in foster care than younger children.

For fiscal years 1999-00 and 2000-01, Pinellas County had the lowest proportion of children exiting foster care in the Suncoast Region with 30.8%. By comparison, Manatee county had the highest proportion of children exiting care with 47.7%.

From fiscal year 1995-96 to 2000-01, the proportion of Pinellas County children who were returned to a parent or legal guardian after exiting foster care almost doubled, from 27.4% to 51.2%.

The proportion of Pinellas County children who reentered foster care after within 12 months of discharge from an initial episode of care increased from 7.2% in 1995-96 to 10.4% in 1999-00. However, this rate was consistently lower than reentry rates for the Suncoast Region or State.

Pre-Literacy Skills in Spanish-Speaking Children: Development of a Test of Spanish Phonological Awareness

Final Report to the Juvenile Welfare Board of Pinellas County

**Judith Becker Bryant, Ph.D.
in collaboration with
Ruth Huntley Bahr, Ph.D., and Elaine Silliman, Ph.D.**

Executive Summary

Many Spanish-speaking children experience problems learning to read and write in English. There are several explanations for such difficulties. One explanation that is well supported by research involves children's lack of "phonological sensitivity". When children achieve phonological sensitivity, they are able to think about how words sound, apart from what words mean. Children who have a greater degree of phonological sensitivity when they enter school are better equipped to learn to read than are other children. Although the significance of phonological sensitivity for literacy has been well documented, virtually no research has addressed whether Spanish phonological sensitivity is related to English literacy. To further complicate this issue, there is no standardized test of Spanish phonological sensitivity. The purpose of our work was to develop and begin to assess such a test. The Test of Phonological Sensitivity in Spanish (TOPSS) has 5 sub-tests: Elision, Phonological Memory, Non-Word Repetition, Letter Naming, and Letter-Sound Naming. Long-term aims of our work include assessment of the test's reliability and validity and its use for screening and research purposes.