

# Transforming the Context of Child Welfare Practice: An Evaluation of Family to Family

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# Family to Family is a System Reform Initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation

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- Guiding philosophy of AECF, 1992 – 2009:

System reform is a signature Casey investment area and a major emphasis of our work. We demonstrate, replicate, and advocate for changes to public human services and systems that can help them do a better job of providing effective, efficient assistance to the children and families they were designed to support. Casey's investments are driven by our belief that systems change is critical to bringing effective programs to scale and sustaining them over time.
- Assumes that underlying values and operating principles must be transformed to lay the groundwork for changes in policy and practice
- Initial status of the large urban systems that became engaged indicated that this perspective was appropriate



# Implications for Evaluation

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- ❑ As a system reform initiative, the Foundation expects to see changes in policy and practice taken to scale so that intended changes in outcomes should become apparent
- ❑ Anchor sites did not begin at the same point
- ❑ Variations in maturity and implementation of core strategies made site-level impact ambiguous
- ❑ Required pooling of child-level data across sites to assess how outcomes varied according to each child's exposure to F2F values, principles, and practices



# Four phases of the initiative

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- 1992 – 1997: values, principles, outcomes



# Values

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- Every child deserves a family
- Every family needs the support of their community
- Public child welfare agencies need community partners



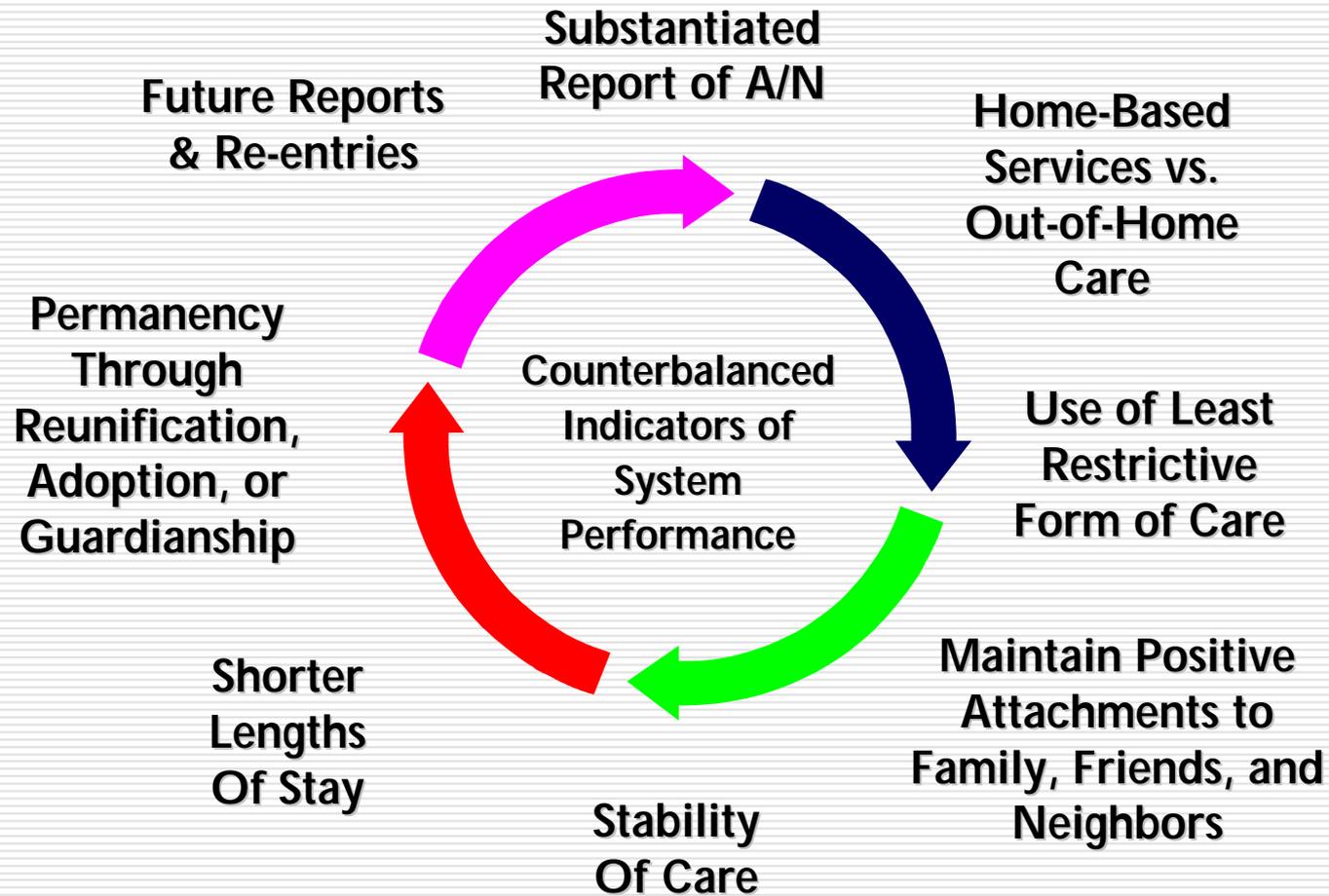
# Principles and Outcomes

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1. Reduce the number of children served in institutional and congregate settings.
2. Shift resources from congregate and institutional care to family foster care and family-centered services across all child and family-serving systems.
3. Decrease the length of stay in out-of-home placements.
4. Increase the number of planned reunifications.
5. Decrease the number of unplanned re-entries into care.
6. Decrease the number of placement disruptions.
7. Reduce the number of children served away from their own families.
8. Eliminate disparities in outcomes associated with race, gender, and age



# The Cycle of Experiences in the Child Welfare System



# Four phases of the initiative

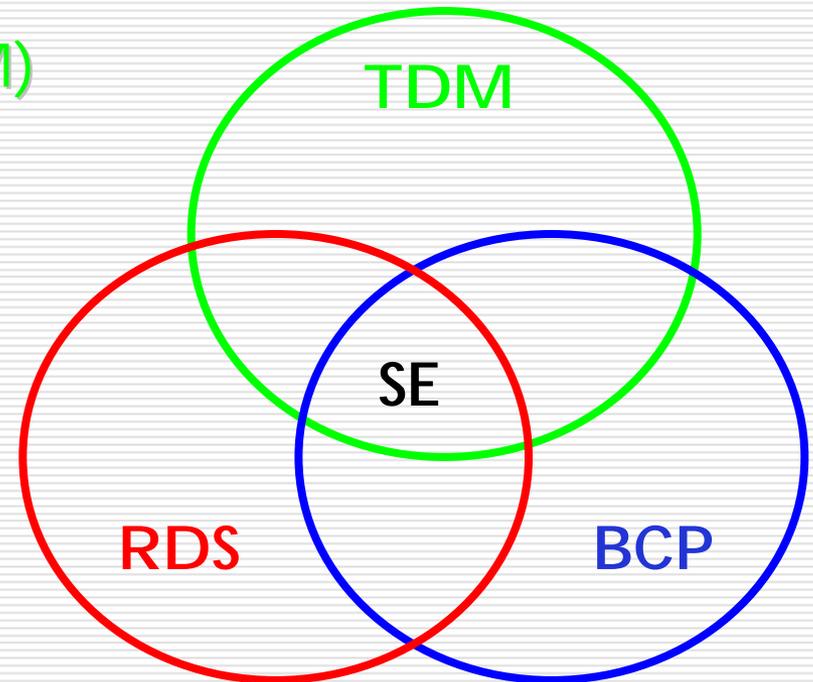
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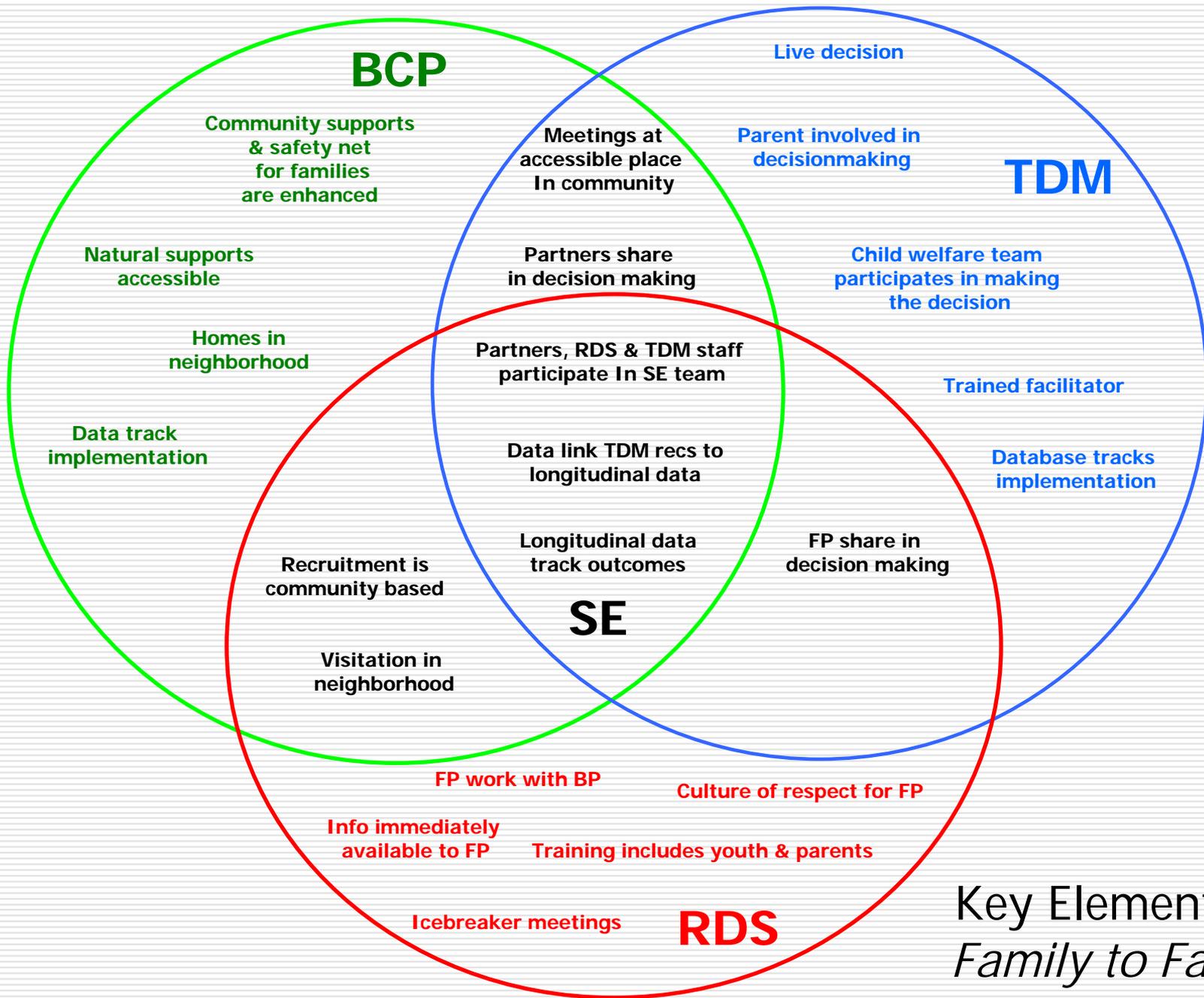
- 1992 – 1997: values, principles, outcomes
- 1997 – 2000: strategies and tools



# Integration of Core Strategies Identified Following First Phase

- Team Decision-Making (TDM)
- Building Community Partnerships (BCP)
- Resource Family Recruitment, Development and Support (RDS)
- Self-Evaluation (SE)





Key Elements of  
*Family to Family*

# Integrity of practice strategies

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- Explicit key elements for each strategy reinforced by “tools,” training, and regular visits by TA
- TDM practice strategy is built on rigorous standards of a manualized intervention—
  - Detailed written guidelines
  - Required initial training and continuing education
  - TA for each site, supervised by lead strategy consultant
  - Database collects data about each meeting and child
  - Firewalls to promote conformance



# Four phases of the initiative

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- 1992 – 1997: values, principles, outcomes
- 1997 – 2000: strategies and tools
- 2000 – 2005: geographic expansion



# Geographic Expansion

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# Four phases of the initiative

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- 1992 – 1997: values, principles, outcomes
- 1997 – 2000: strategies and tools
- 2000 – 2005: geographic expansion
- 2005 – 2009: self-assessment, designation of anchor sites



# Anchor-Site Phase

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- 2005: Self-assessment and implementation analysis
- 2006: Designation of anchor sites to “take Family to Family to the next level”

Begin enhanced TA to anchor sites, focusing on integration of work across strategies as well as strategy-specific TA

- 2009: Final year of anchor-site grants

2005 Evaluation analysis and reporting based on baseline and activities and results 2006 - 2008



# Final Anchor Sites Vary in Maturity

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- Sites represent each of the preceding phases of F2F
- Some sites were selected more for their potential than their actual track record
- Some sites with more experience had undergone changes in state or local leadership and other circumstances that led to reconsideration of commitment, including the withdrawal of 3 sites
- Variation in maturity and implementation of practice strategies produced challenges for the evaluation with regard to the premise of testing the theory of change



# Data Required for the Evaluation

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Case-level data provided to UNC or compiled by UC-B

- NCANDS maltreatment reports
- Placement events and other data pertaining to individual children and their families
- Data collected during TDM meetings about the meeting itself and the participation of family members, friends, community reps, service providers, and caregivers in placement decisions
- Data pertaining to prospective and licensed resource families



# Outcome Evaluation

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- ❑ Longitudinal database used to track every child through the system and compare the experiences of successive cohorts
- ❑ Safety and permanency outcomes are defined longitudinally rather than relying on exit cohorts or cross-sectional indicators that are the basis for most CFSR measures
- ❑ Each child's exposure to F2F is based on an index of key elements



# EBP and Family to Family

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- The designation of evidence-based practices occurs within formal processes established by specific bodies such as the Campbell Collaboration and the CA Clearinghouse, each of which emphasizes experimental or quasi-experimental testing of narrowly defined interventions or intervention components
- The F2F evaluation involves an intervention that entailed a “saturation” approach to implementation that precluded group or individual randomized approaches —

F2F seeks to transform systems to create a policy and program *context* that is conducive to the delivery of a synergistic *bundle* of new practices that are intended to enhance outcomes for families and children

- Within the EBP framework, findings from this evaluation may be considered promising, but not definitive

