



What's Next: How to Deal with Less Than Stellar Findings

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Presentation overview

- 1 Overview of the Family Finding model
- 2 Review of evaluations of Family Finding (focusing on experimental and process studies)
- 3 Description of “Family Finding Forum”
- 4 Description of themes emerging from the Forum
- 5 Summary and tie-in to conference themes

About Child Trends

Child Trends is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research center that improves the lives and prospects of children and youth by conducting high-quality research and sharing the resulting knowledge with practitioners and policymakers.

We . . .

1. take a whole child approach
2. study children in the real world
3. want children to flourish
4. value objectivity and rigor
5. pursue knowledge development *and* knowledge transfer

Family Finding Model



Six Steps:

- Discovery
- Engagement
- Planning
- Decision-making
- Evaluation
- Follow-up Supports

Review of Evaluation Findings

Evaluations of Family Finding

	WI	FL	IA	MD	HI	SF	NC	RI	WA	CA	ME	OK	SC
<u>Funding</u> : Family Connection Discretionary Grant	●	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●	●	●
<u>Target population</u>													
New to care	●	●	●		●	●		●	●	●		●	
Already in care	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●		●
<u>Model</u>													
Kevin Campbell	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●			●
<u>Staffing structure</u>													
Specialized worker	●		●	●	●	●	●		●	●		●	
<u>Evaluation Design</u>													
RCT	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●					
Comparison group												●	●
Pre/post										●			●
Outcomes for served									●		●		

Experimental Impacts: Youth new to care and in care

	WI	RI	IA	FL1	FL2
Relational permanency	--	--	↑	--	--
Exit to reunification	--	0	↑	--	--
Exit to permanency	0	--	--	0	0
Exit to relatives (regardless of arrangement)	--	--	--	0	0
Goal related to legal permanency	↓	--	--	0	0
Living with relatives @ follow-up	--	0	--	--	--
Placement setting: w/ kin @ last placement	0	0	↑	0	0
Placement setting: w/ siblings @ last placement	--	--	--	0	0
Time in care	↑	--	↓	--	--
Foster care placement stability	0	↑	0	--	--
Re-allegation of maltreatment	--	--	0	0	0
Placement with relatives considered at case closure	--	--	--	0	↑
# of connections identified	--	--	--	↑	↑
# of connections engaged	--	--	↑	--	--
# of family team meetings	--	--	↑	--	--

Experimental Impacts: Youth new to care

	SF	HI	WI
Exit to reunification	0	↑?	--
Exit to permanency	--	--	0
Exit to relatives (regardless of arrangement)	--	--	--
Exited foster care	↑	--	↑
Goal related to legal permanency	↑	--	0
Placement setting: w/ kin @ last placement/follow-up	0	?	--
Placement setting: w/ non-relative @ follow-up	--	?	--
Time in care	--	--	0
Foster care placement stability	↑	--	↑

Experimental Impacts: Youth already in care

	WI	NC	MD	HI
Exit to reunification	--	0	--	0?
Exit to permanency	0	0	--	--
Exit to adoption	--	--	--	↑?
Exit to relatives (regardless of arrangement)	--	0	--	--
Exited foster care	↑	--	0	↑?
Placement step down	--	0	--	--
Goal related to legal permanency	↑	0	↓	--
Living with relatives @ follow-up	--	↑	--	--
Living with kin or biological parents @follow-up	--	↑	--	--
Placement setting: w/ kin @ last placement	0	0	0	--
Time in care	0	--	0	--
Foster care placement stability	↓	0	0	--
Re-allegation of maltreatment	--	0	--	--
# of connections identified, # engaged	--	--	--	↑?
Youth internalizing behavior problems	↓	--	--	--

↑: favorable impact, ↓: unfavorable impact, 0: no impact,
 --: not assessed, ?: Stat. sig. not available

Process study findings:

Factors affecting program success

- Presence of traumatic family history
- Stakeholder buy-in and related factors
 - Confusion about Family Finding (family, public agency)
 - Agency/worker bias against birth family
 - Agency culture favoring placement stability over placement with relatives or permanency
- Cross-organization relationship (public and Family Finding agency)
- Capacity issues
- Organizational/jurisdictional policies and procedures



Possible explanations for lack of consistently positive findings

1. Model not fully implemented?
2. Study parameters inadequate to detect impacts?
 - Sample sizes too small?
 - Follow-up time too short?
 - Key outcomes not measured?
 - Key subgroups not examined?
 - Note: Differences in study parameters across Family Finding sites makes it difficult to synthesize findings across studies.

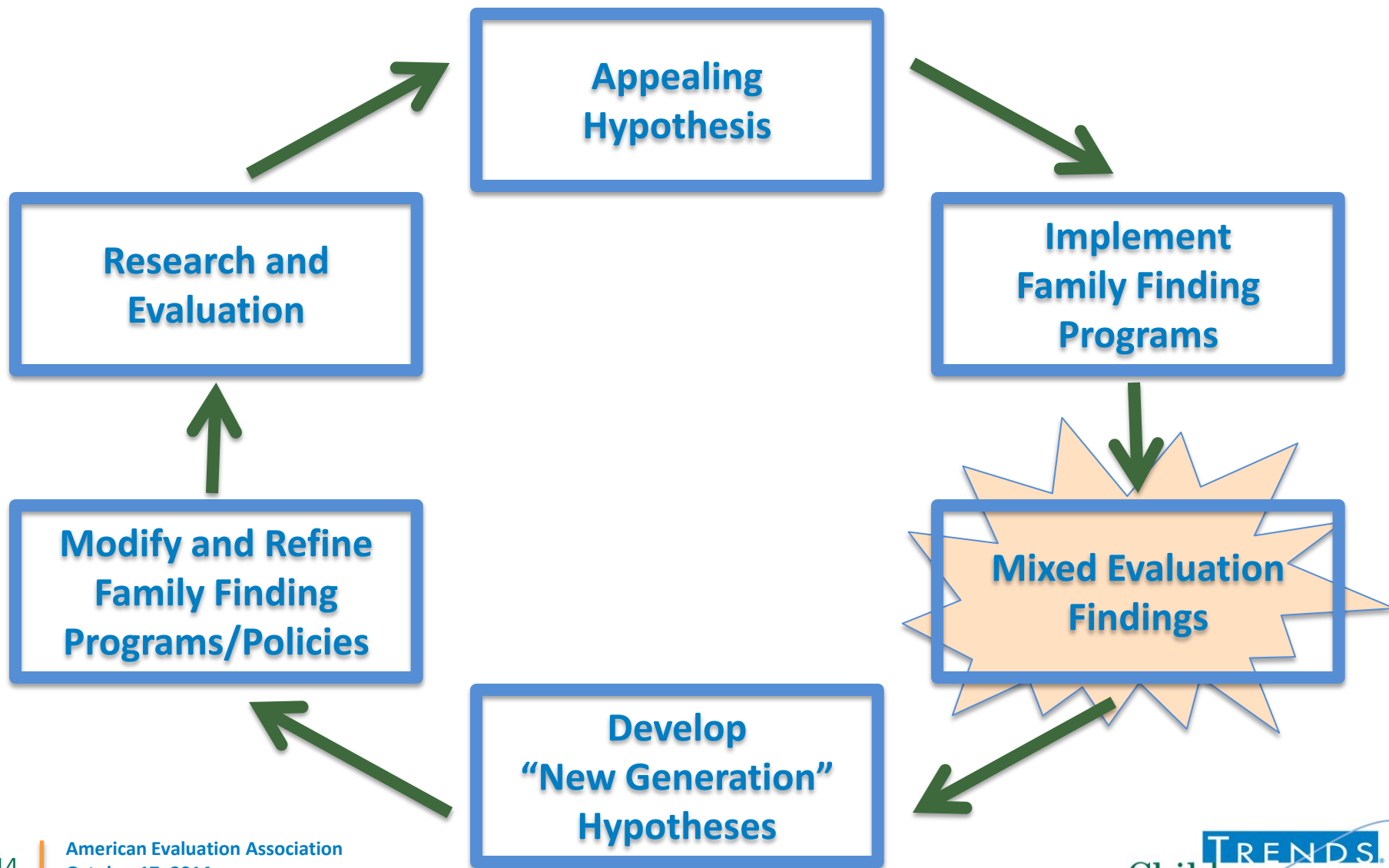


Possible explanations for lack of consistently positive findings (cont.)

3. Flawed assumptions guide the logic model?
 - It is possible to improve outcomes over services as usual?
 - Identifying ≥ 40 connections and engaging ≥ 6 will increase the chances of permanency for youth
 - Casework prior to Family Finding referral has not exhausted the search and engagement for connections
 - Family Finding works for older youth
 - Successful planning for the permanency and support for children with trauma histories relies on respectful, collaborative engagement with family members
 - Family Finding can be implemented as a discrete intervention

The Family Finding “Forum”

Where we are...where are we going?



Family Finding Forum

February 2014

Practitioners

+

Researchers

+

Funders

- **Goals:**

- Identify how research can help change and improve practice
- Identify next steps for research and evaluation
- Consider what the field should do in light of findings

Family Finding Forum Activities



- Presentation of evaluation findings
- Discussion of findings
- Breakout sessions
- Takeaways

Points of discussion

PRACTICE

- Do the mixed evaluation findings make you question your belief that FF can impact legal permanency for foster youth?
- If you were told to refine the FF model or the way in which it is implemented in any way, what would you be your first area of refinement (e.g., staffing structure, caseload, length of service, target population, etc.)?

RESEARCH

- What would be your suggestions in terms of refinements to the model or to the implementation of the model?
- What would be your suggestion to funders of Family Finding programs?
- What additional outcomes of relative search and engagement would you most like to see measured?


POLICY/FUNDING

- What would you like to see program developers focus on in terms of model development and implementation?
- What other outcomes would be important to measure?
- What will it take to replicate, expand the model to other sites with no current funding?

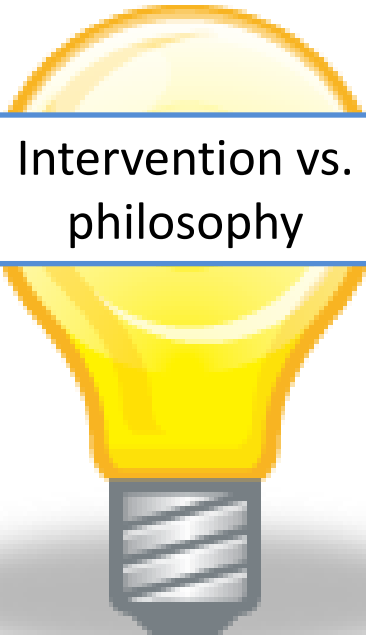
Emergent Themes



Implementation of
model



Refinement of
program design



Intervention vs.
philosophy



Implementation of model

- Was it fully implemented?
 - Does this explain absence of program impacts?
 - Lack of fidelity measures in the current evaluations
- Can it be fully implemented?



Refinement of program design

- How can subgroup analysis inform program refinements?



Intervention vs. Philosophy

- Is this a stand-alone program/intervention provided in addition to traditional ongoing casework?
- Is this a philosophy of how social work should ideally be done?
- A philosophy is hard to evaluate experimentally.
- Is adding a specialized worker whose responsibility is to administer Family Finding effective?
- If no other key player “buys in,” the actions of a specialized caseworker may be negated.
- Can caseworkers implement the steps given heavy caseloads and many responsibilities?

Ideas for what's next...

Continued research/evaluation

- Difficulty of evaluating the “philosophy” of FF
- Model was not fully implemented – don’t know true impact

Evaluation refinements

- Measure caliber of relational permanency
- Address different populations served
- Include family and youth voices
- Need for larger sample
- Need for more consistent outcomes across studies and definitions of subgroup samples
- Need for more implementation evaluation work before RCT

Development of Family Finding network

- Builds trust among stakeholders
- Facilitates transparency and accountability
- Supports continued flow of information, idea, and capital



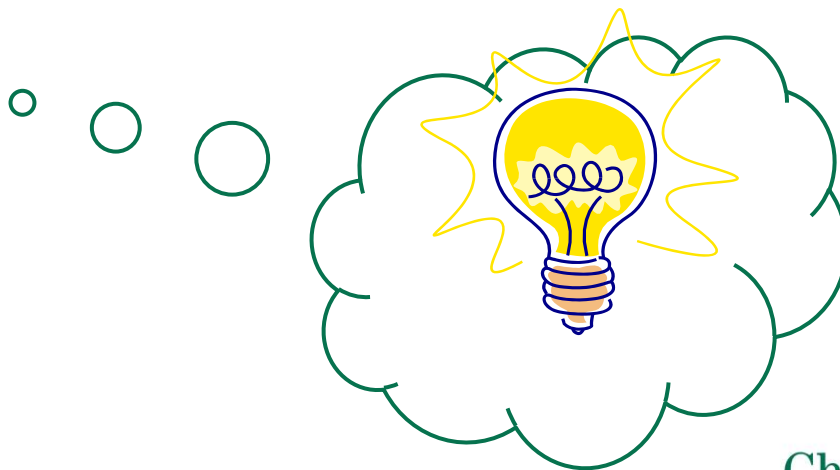
Summary and Discussion

Summary

- **Understanding sustainable and equitable living**
 - Family Finding goal: Long-term, sustainable well-being for youth in foster care, to mitigate effects of trauma.
 - Forum goal: Identify ways to sustain research and development in light of mixed impact findings.
- **Building relationships**
 - Family Finding: Search and engagement of relatives for youth in foster care.
 - Organizational relationships critical for program success
 - Building trust among researchers, practitioners, and funders → willingness to share what works, what doesn't work → move the field forward

Summary

- **Integrating systems thinking**
 - Family Finding as a philosophy underlying social work versus a discrete intervention
 - Effectiveness of adding a “specialized” worker to administer an intervention
 - Importance of “buy-in” across stakeholders
 - Value of convening Forum members with various perspectives



Discussion

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