

# Washington State Judicial Branch

## 2025-2027 Biennial Budget

### Parents for Parents Statewide Operations

**Agency:** Office of Public Defense

**Decision Package Code/Title:** 1P – Parents for Parents Statewide Ops.

**Agency Recommendation Summary Text:**

The Office of Public Defense (OPD) requests funding to maintain the legislatively created Parents for Parents (P4P) peer mentoring program and stabilize statewide operations. OPD contracts with nonprofit Akin to engage community host organizations and county coordinators, and to serve as the P4P statewide technical administrator. Hiring and retaining the P4P coordinator position in each county has become increasingly difficult as available funding significantly lags behind livable wages. The P4P program also faces challenges in locating and maintaining quality host organizations. This is the first phase of a four-year funding proposal.

**Fiscal Summary:** Funding is requested to contract for P4P services statewide.

|                               | FY 2026     | FY 2027     | Biennial    | FY 2028     | FY 2029     | Biennial    |
|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>Staffing</b>               |             |             |             |             |             |             |
| FTEs                          | 0.00        | 0.00        | 0.00        | 0.00        | 0.00        | 0.00        |
| <b>Operating Expenditures</b> |             |             |             |             |             |             |
| Fund 001-1                    | \$1,250,000 | \$1,250,000 | \$2,500,000 | \$2,250,000 | \$2,250,000 | \$4,500,000 |
| <b>Total Expenditures</b>     |             |             |             |             |             |             |
|                               | \$1,250,000 | \$1,250,000 | \$2,500,000 | \$2,250,000 | \$2,250,000 | \$4,500,000 |

**Package Description:**

**Background and current situation**

The 2015 Legislature passed and Governor Inslee signed SSB 5486 establishing the Parents for Parents (P4P) program. The legislation directed statewide implementation by the end of the 2019-2021 biennium. Current funding levels are inadequate to sustain stable statewide operations.

The P4P program is a peer mentor, education, professional training, and family reunification program that serves parents and their families involved in child dependency and termination of parental rights cases. P4P's primary components include: early engagement; education classes; and ongoing reunification support provided by parent allies who have successfully navigated the child welfare system. An independent evaluation found that 79 percent of parents who took P4P's Dependency 101 class and received additional mentoring reunified their families compared to 53 percent of non-participants. [Parents For Parents Outcome Evaluation Report](#), Trescher and Summers, (2020). Research also shows that P4P improves parent engagement in the dependency court process, increases the likelihood of family reunification, and decreases termination of parental rights for families. Despite inadequate funding causing 11 counties to be vacant of an active P4P program for more than six months in 2023, parents had meaningful interactions with the program 19,118 times that year.

**Problem**

Since the Legislature established P4P in statute 10 years ago, chronic underfunding has challenged the program's ability to sustain effective services in every county.

Hiring and retaining the P4P coordinator position in each county has become increasingly difficult as program funding significantly lags behind livable wages. According to the [National Low Income Housing Coalition's Out of Reach 2023 report](#), among the 21 host organizations providing P4P around the state, the gap between current coordinator pay and the livable wage with health benefits is nearly \$40,000 on average. In one county, this gap is as high as \$81,000. In addition, many host organizations are unable to hire the county P4P coordinators on a full-time basis to qualify them for employee benefits. The lack of a livable wage and benefits perpetuates the cycle of poverty that contributes to engagement in the child welfare system. Economic and material hardship (for example, having insufficient resources to meet basic needs, experiencing economic shocks, and experiencing housing instability) are some of the most consistent and significant predictors of child welfare involvement (Hunter & Flores, 2021; Kim & Drake, 2018, as cited in *Economic and concrete supports: An evidence-based service for child welfare prevention* (2023), Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.)

The P4P program also faces challenges in locating and maintaining quality host organizations, particularly nonprofit human service organizations, in counties across the state. According to data about the sector, one in eight human service organizations is insolvent and 30 percent have been losing money on operations for three years or more. (<https://bravecommitments.org/2021/03/14/example-post-2/>). For nonprofit human service organizations, 75 percent of revenue comes from government contracts, but these contracts only cover 70 percent of direct expenses and 33-44 percent of indirect expenses. (<https://www.social-current.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/A-National-Imperative-Joining-Forces-to-Strengthen-Human-Services-in-America-.pdf>).

Six P4P host organizations have ended or reduced their local contracts in the past three years, impacting service delivery to 17 counties, and they indicated that this is due to a lack of adequate funding. Courts hosting the P4P program have also indicated that current funding levels are a significant challenge. Host organizations have attempted to secure other public and private resources to supplement the lack of state funding, with limited success.

Current state funding also does not fully support the program's statewide technical administrator, Akin (formerly Children's Home Society of Washington), to advance systemic outcomes, quality improvement, and data and evaluation that would benefit all P4P sites and demonstrate and promote statewide impact for the program. Alongside the local P4P programs, the technical administrator is vital to achieving the overall outcomes of family reunification and a decrease in out-of-home placement; these outcomes achieve significant long-term foster care savings for the state of Washington. In addition, dedicated positions with specific expertise for quality improvement, data, and evaluation are needed for P4P to continue providing high-quality services based on the voices of parents and communities.

A significant increase in funding is needed to stabilize effective statewide operations for this pivotal program that has been shown to increase reunification rates for families.

### **Solution**

To provide a high-quality P4P program across the state, \$4.5 million in additional funding is needed over the next four years with \$2.25 million for the 2025-2027 biennium. This incremental funding approach is designed to achieve livable wages for local P4P coordinators, enhance administrative support for program host organizations, and support the technical assistance organization to drive systemic outcomes, quality improvement, and robust data evaluation across P4P sites. The ultimate goal is to elevate the program's statewide impact and ensure sustainable, equitable support for families involved in child welfare litigation in every county.

### **Fully describe and quantify expected impacts on state residents.**

If P4P was reliably available to all dependency-involved parents throughout Washington state, more families would reunify, which would reduce out-of-home placement, adoption expenses, and the long-term health and social implications of family separation. An independent evaluation found that 79 percent of parents who took P4P's Dependency 101 class and received additional mentoring reunified their families compared to 53 percent of non-

participants. [Parents For Parents Outcome Evaluation Report](#), Trescher and Summers, (2020). Research also shows that P4P improves parent engagement in the dependency court process and increases the likelihood of reunification and decreases termination of parental rights for families.

**Explain what alternatives were explored by the agency and why this was the best option.**

OPD consulted with the contracted statewide technical administrator Akin (formerly Children’s Home Society of Washington) regarding the best approach to address ongoing funding challenges for P4P. OPD agreed to present a decision package because the P4P program is authorized in OPD’s enabling statute at RCW 2.70.060-100.

A total of \$4.5 million is needed to address the multiple challenges of statewide implementation, and it was decided to take an incremental approach over the next four years with \$2.25 million being advanced for the 2025-27 biennium. This allows for the technical administrator to create a statewide data, evaluation, and quality improvement structure to support all host organizations and increase capacity and stability in targeted counties with the highest dependency cases in the state.

**What are the consequences of not funding this request?**

Not funding this decision package jeopardizes the ability of P4P to stabilize effective operations statewide. Not funding this decision package likely will result in further reductions in the number of local host organizations and P4P coordinators.

**Is this an expansion or alteration of a current program or service?**

This decision package provides maintenance-level funding to support an existing underfunded program established in statute.

**Decision Package expenditure, FTE and revenue assumptions:**

**Staffing Assumptions**

| Job Title<br>Classification | #s of FTE<br>Round to Nearest Tenth |       |       |       | Workload Assumptions/Description |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|----------------------------------|
|                             | FY 26                               | FY 27 | FY 28 | FY 29 |                                  |
| No OPD FTEs                 |                                     |       |       |       |                                  |

**Use Standard Costs?**

No.

| If No, Explain<br>Additional Costs | Round to Nearest \$1,000 |             |             |             | Description/Assumptions                                                                                                |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                    | FY 26                    | FY 27       | FY 28       | FY 29       |                                                                                                                        |
| Contracts                          | \$1,250,000              | \$1,250,000 | \$2,250,000 | \$2,250,000 | Contract with nonprofit Akin to administer the Parents for Parents program statewide, as provided in RCW 2.70.060-100. |

| PRP Projections |                    |                    |                    |                    |                    |                    |                   |
|-----------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
|                 |                    |                    |                    |                    |                    |                    |                   |
|                 |                    |                    |                    |                    |                    |                    |                   |
|                 |                    |                    |                    |                    |                    |                    |                   |
|                 | <b>FY26</b>        | <b>FY27</b>        | <b>25-27</b>       | <b>FY28</b>        | <b>FY29</b>        | <b>27-29</b>       | <b>Note</b>       |
| SGF             | \$1,250,000        | \$1,250,000        | \$2,500,000        | \$1,250,000        | \$1,250,000        | \$2,500,000        | 25-27 Request     |
|                 |                    |                    |                    |                    |                    |                    |                   |
| SGF             | \$0                | \$0                | \$0                | \$1,000,000        | \$1,000,000        | \$2,000,000        | 27-29 Request     |
|                 |                    |                    |                    |                    |                    |                    |                   |
| <b>TOTAL</b>    | <b>\$1,250,000</b> | <b>\$1,250,000</b> | <b>\$2,500,000</b> | <b>\$2,250,000</b> | <b>\$2,250,000</b> | <b>\$4,500,000</b> | Increase by 27-29 |

## How does the package relate to the Judicial Branch principal policy objectives?

### Fair and Effective Administration of Justice

This decision package supports parent engagement in the dependency court process. P4P increases parental engagement in child welfare services and participation in the dependency court process, according to evaluations conducted in 2011 and 2020. By educating parents on court structure, professional roles, child welfare policies, services, and expectations, parents are provided with key information to inform and encourage their participation. Evaluation of Parent to Parent Program, King County, WA, National Council on Juvenile and Family Court Judges, (2011), [Parents For Parents Outcome Evaluation Report](#), Trescher and Summers, (2020).

### Accessibility

This decision package ensures that P4P services are available statewide to all dependency-involved families throughout their court case. The program engages parents at their discretion and offers multiple methods for meaningful participation. Materials are designed by parent allies intentionally simplifying complex information.

### Access to Necessary Representation

This decision package supports a meaningful client-attorney relationship. The P4P Dependency 101 class includes a learning objective on the roles of court professionals. This ensures parents understand how to collaborate and communicate effectively with their attorneys and other court professionals, empowering them to have meaningful access and working relationships.

### Commitment to Effective Court Management

Parents often face hidden barriers that hinder their full participation in the dependency court process. This decision package adequately funds parent ally activities to help promote parent engagement in court proceedings. An early P4P evaluation states that the program may help parents understand the juvenile dependency process to increase active participation, reduce case continuances or contested hearings, educate parents on the role of Child Protective Services (CPS) in protecting the safety of the child, and increase parents' sense of support. Evaluation of Parent to Parent Program, King County, WA, National Council on Juvenile and Family Court Judges, (2011).

## How does the package impact equity in the state?

### Address any target populations or communities that will benefit from this proposal.

As shown by child welfare data in Washington state and nationally, out-of-home placements disproportionately impact Native America/Alaska Native, Black and Hispanic families compared to White families (<https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/practice/oiaa/agency-performance/racial-equity>). In addition, P4P coordinators and parent allies have lived experience with the child welfare system and come from marginalized backgrounds, and will greatly benefit from this livable wage proposal. Additional funding will particularly support:

- Minority communities by reducing financial disparities and creating economic opportunities.
- Low-income families, potentially allowing them to consolidate multiple jobs and improve personal and family development.

- Formerly incarcerated individuals, offering them a second chance and decreasing recidivism.
- People with disabilities, providing skills and leadership growth toward stability and economic opportunities.
- Survivors of domestic violence, offering crucial financial stability during recovery and fresh starts.

Supporting individuals who have personally experienced the child welfare system benefits stigmatized parents by offering empathy and understanding that only lived experience can provide. This peer support can significantly enhance the confidence and resilience of parents navigating the system. Additionally, this approach benefits both the parents receiving support and the lived experts offering it, by promoting economic mobility and breaking the cycle of poverty and harm.

Moreover, feedback from partners indicates that P4P has been beneficial to courts, attorneys, and community agencies.

**Describe how the agency conducted community outreach and engagement.**

OPD partners with P4P to support parents in the dependency system. P4P coordinators and client participants in the P4P program regularly share their experience about the dependency court process and the funding challenges related to the program. OPD also works closely with the technical administrator that hires those with lived experience to manage and implement the P4P program and coordinates with host organizations to address ongoing challenges related to P4P.

**Consider which target populations or communities would be disproportionately impacted by this proposal.**

**Explain why and how these equity impacts will be mitigated.**

OPD contractor Akin proposes to prioritize funding to counties with the highest dependency case rates, meaning rural counties may not be fully funded for a full-time P4P coordinator in the 2025-27 biennium. However, all host organizations throughout the state will benefit from more administrative support from Akin

**Are there impacts to other governmental entities?**

No.

**Stakeholder response:**

Courts have expressed the need for full-time P4P staffing to support court dockets and elevate parent voices in cross-system collaboration. P4P host organizations report that they are no longer able to absorb unpaid administrative costs. This effect is particularly pronounced in rural and Eastern Washington areas, which already suffer from resource deficiencies. One former P4P host organization stated, “We need to be able to pay fair and equitable wages to the P4P coordinators and the parent volunteers and the current funding does not allow for that standard to be met.”

**Are there legal or administrative mandates that require this package to be funded?**

The 2015 Legislature passed and Governor Inslee signed SSB 5486 establishing the Parents for Parents (P4P) program. The legislation directed statewide replication of the program by the end of the 2019-2021 biennium.

**Does current law need to be changed to successfully implement this package?**

No

**Are there impacts to state facilities?**

No.

**Are there other supporting materials that strengthen the case for this request?**

- [Parents for Parents Outcome Evaluation Report \(2020\)](#)

Office of Public Defense

Policy Level – 1P – Parents for Parents Statewide Ops.

- [National Low Income Housing Coalition's Out of Reach 2023 report](#)
- Evaluation of Parent to Parent Program, King County, WA, National Council of Juvenile & Family Court Judges (2011)  
See Attachment A: 1P – Parents for Parents Statewide Ops – 2011 Process Evaluation
- P4P Flyer  
See Attachment B: 1P – Parents for Parents Statewide Ops – P4P Information Sheet

**Are there information technology impacts?**

No.

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# 2011

## PPCD RESEARCH REPORT

Evaluation of the Parent to Parent Program  
King County, Washington



Permanency Planning for Children  
Department  
National Council of Juvenile and Family  
Court Judges  
September 2011



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF  
JUVENILE AND FAMILY COURT JUDGES

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## **Executive Summary**

### **Introduction**

This evaluation of the King County Parent to Parent Program (P2PP) examines the program's efficacy and suggests areas for continued improvement. The goal of the P2PP is to engage and support parents who have become involved in the juvenile dependency system. The P2PP utilizes veteran parents (i.e., parents who had been previously involved in the dependency process) to provide educational and peer support to those parents currently traversing the dependency system. This evaluation has been conducted in partnership with the Washington Administrative Office of the Courts as part of an ongoing judicial workload assessment in Washington State. The King County Superior Court in Washington State manages and supports the P2PP.

### **Evaluation Objectives**

This evaluation has five objectives:

- Describe the components of the P2PP
- Describe the participants in the P2PP
- Examine parental perceptions of the overall dependency process before and after Dependency 101
- Consider potential areas of improvement for the P2PP
- Make recommendations for future implementations of the P2PP

### **Outcomes**

The findings from the current evaluation indicate that the P2PP is beneficial in:

- Educating parents on the dependency system
- Reducing anxiety about the dependency process
- Improving perceptions of CPS
- Reassuring parents that they are not alone

This evaluation relies, in part, on parent perceptions of the P2PP, including strengths and weaknesses of Dependency 101. Many of the findings are qualitative or descriptive in nature, with some use of basic statistics. An evaluation of the P2PP with more statistically rigorous findings concerning case outcomes is forthcoming.

## Parent to Parent Program Evaluation

### Background

As of September 30, 2009, 10,894 children in the State of Washington were in foster care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). Many researchers and policymakers have made it a priority to discover factors and programs that might assist efforts to reunify these children with their families. Within this context, King County and Washington State continue to assess programs that might improve the efficiency of case processing and increase the quality of case outcomes.

The Parent to Parent Program (P2PP) offers a catalyst for parental engagement and fits within the goals of Washington State because prior research (e.g., Leathers, 2002; Wood & Russell, 2011) indicates that increasing parental engagement helps to increase rates and timeliness of reunification. In addition, the P2PP may help parents understand the juvenile dependency process to increase active participation, reduce case continuances or contested hearings, educate parents on the role of Child Protective Services (CPS) in protecting the safety of the child, and increase parents' sense of support. This study allows for an examination of these hypotheses and explores how the P2PP changes parents' perceptions of the juvenile dependency system. An examination of whether the program might lead to different outcomes is forthcoming.

### Program Overview

The P2PP attempts to engage parents early in the dependency process through education and peer support from "veteran" parents (VPs) who have successfully navigated the child welfare system. The P2PP had its ideological beginnings in 2004 at the Region 5 Reasonable Efforts Symposium. Pierce County implemented the first P2PP in 2005. As part of the implementation process, Pierce County used funding to develop and maintain P2PP's components: veteran parent support at 72-hour shelter care hearings, Dependency 101 and 201 classes, and peer-to-peer mentorship. Based on the Pierce County model, King County has now implemented a P2PP at both the King County Courthouse (Seattle) and the Maleng Regional Justice Center (MRJC; Kent).

Funding in King County has allowed for only two of the four program components in the Pierce County model: veteran parent support at 72-hour shelter care and Dependency 101 classes

Prior to the 72-hour shelter care hearing, a P2PP coordinator or a VP meets with the parents to help alleviate any apprehensions or fears about the dependency system. The VP also talks with the parents about the Dependency 101 class and the benefits of attending, signs the parents up for the Dependency 101 class, and sits with the parents through the hearing. If the parents do not attend the first hearing, the P2PP coordinator or a VP tries to make contact with him or her at a subsequent hearing.

### **Dependency 101**

Dependency 101 is a two-hour, informational session that educates parents about the dependency system, facilitates collaboration between parents and Child Protective Services, and provides necessary tools and resources to empower parents in engaging in the dependency process. Dependency 101 is team taught by VPs and stakeholders, and is offered twice a month at the King County Courthouse in Seattle and once a month at the MRJC in Kent. During Dependency 101, parents typically do the following:

- Complete “Pre” and “Post” surveys to provide feedback on the class
- Receive a packet of information, including the P2PP Handbook (containing information about the dependency process, a calendar to document appointments, a phone list for phone numbers pertinent to their dependency, an “attitude” sheet, and other tools to assist parents), a Family Treatment Court (FTC) pamphlet, a list of current community resources, and a certificate recognizing participation in the session
- Watch an educational video about the dependency process
- Listen to two or three VPs share their experiences in the dependency system
- Hear from a Court Appointed Special Advocate, an assistant attorney general, a social worker, a Family Treatment Court representative, and a parent’s attorney about their roles and responsibilities and how they interact with parents, children, and the court

### **Evaluation Procedure and Materials**

Four hundred-eighty parents (362 from Seattle and 118 from Kent) who participated in the P2PP between July 2009 and May 2011 provided feedback on their experiences with the program. Prior to beginning Dependency 101, participants were given a survey containing demographic

questions (e.g., gender, race, and age). In addition, parents rated nine statements relating to their trust in Child Protective Services (CPS), awareness of their dependency case issues, understanding of the roles of professionals in the dependency system, and their perceptions of control and feeling alone on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 – *Disagree Strongly* to 5 – *Strongly Agree*.

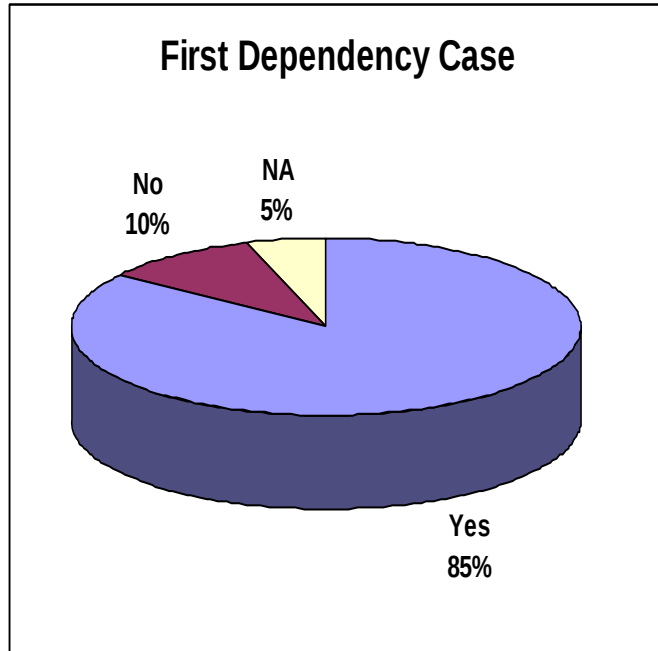
At the conclusion of Dependency 101, parents 1) rated the same nine statements; 2) rated four components of Dependency 101: video presentation, explanation of professionals' roles in the dependency process, VP's stories, and the written materials on a 3-point scale ranging from 1 – *Not at all helpful* to 3 – *Very helpful*; and 3) answered three open-ended questions.

## Evaluation Results

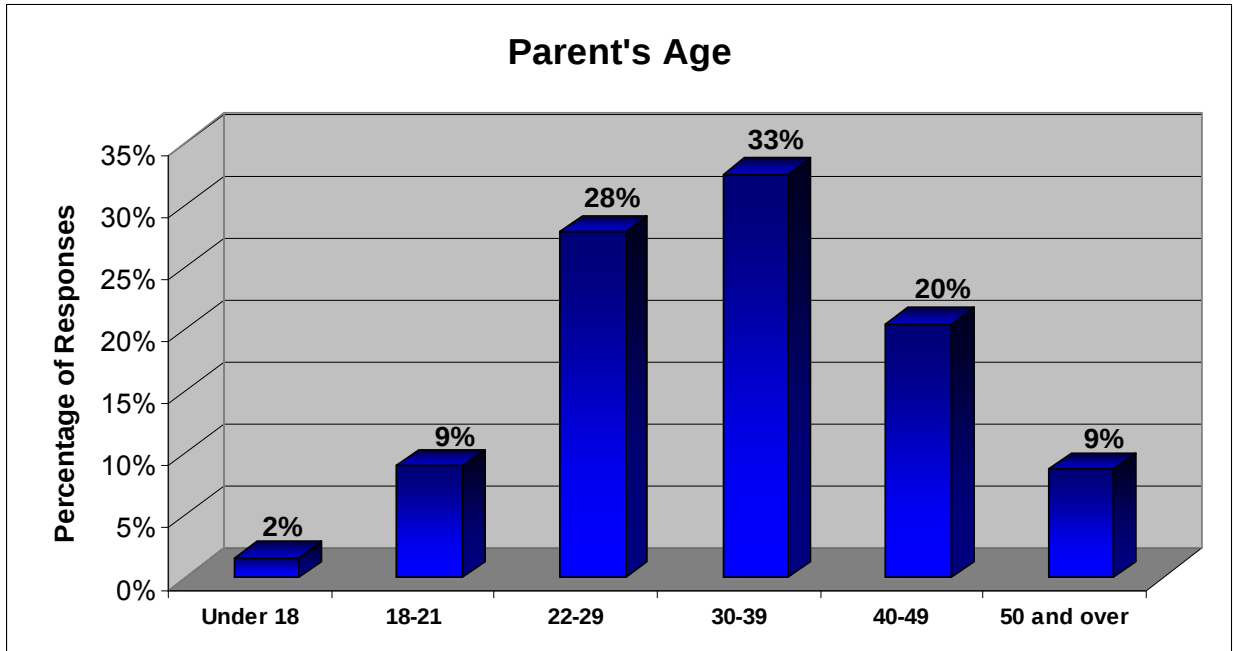
The following sections present the results from the demographic questionnaire, the nine pre and post-Dependency 101 statements, the Dependency 101 components, and the three open-ended questions.

### Parent Demographics

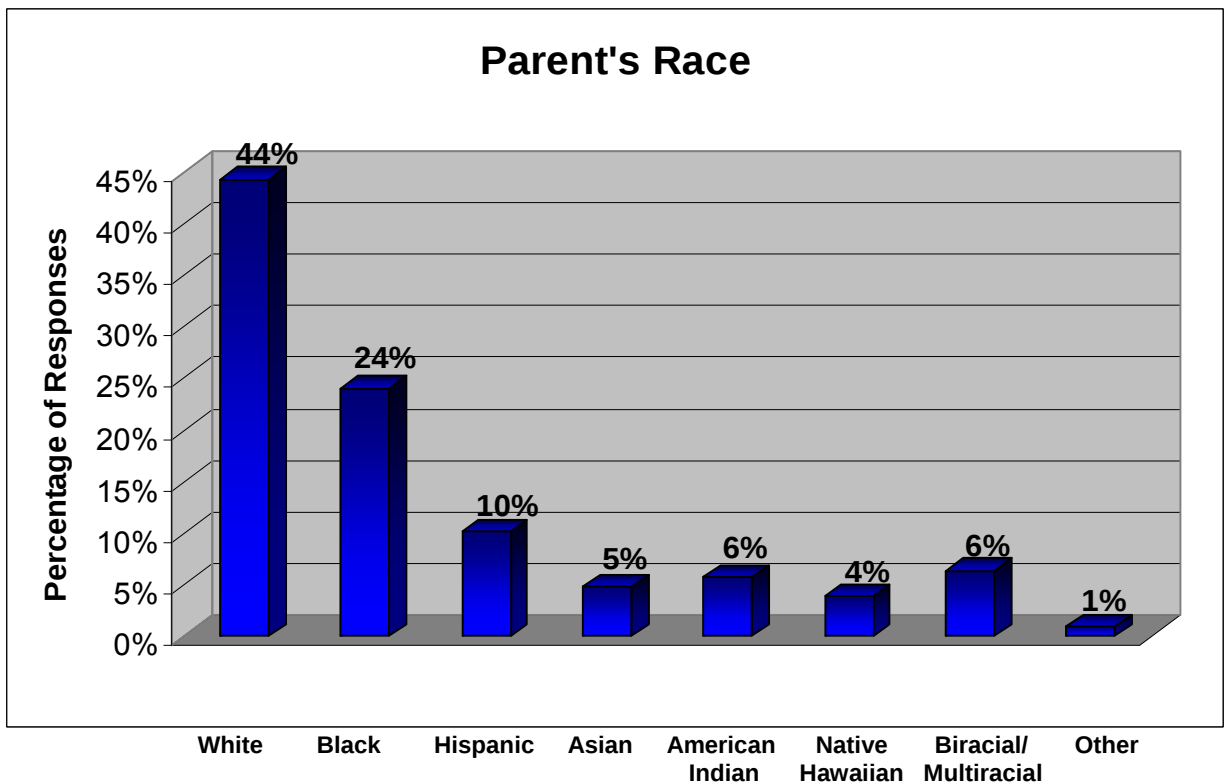
Parents indicated whether this was their first dependency case. Eighty-five percent of participants indicated that this was indeed their first dependency case, while 10 percent indicated that they had been previously involved in the dependency system. An additional 5 percent of participants were attending the program in a support role and were not parties to a current dependency case. These individuals are not included in the subsequent demographic information.



Gender and age information was collected from each parent. For the entire sample, 64 percent of parents were female and 36 percent were male.



The age of the participating parents ranged from under 18 to more than 50, with 2 percent under 18 years of age, 9 percent 18-21 years, 28 percent 22-29 years, 33 percent 30-39 years, 20 percent 40-49 years, and 9 percent indicating they were 50 years of age or older.



The self-identified race of parents was similar to the racial make-up of dependency cases in King County. Forty-four percent of parents indicated that they were White or Caucasian, 24 percent indicated they were Black or African American, 10 percent identified that they were Hispanic or Latino, 6 percent indicated they were Biracial/Multiracial, 6 percent identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native, 5 percent identified as Asian or Asian American, 4 percent indicated they were Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and 1 percent indicated that they were some other race or ethnicity.

### **Parent Perceptions**

Overwhelmingly, parents' perceptions of CPS and the juvenile dependency system shifted significantly from pre to post-Dependency 101. On average, significant changes in perceptions occurred for eight of the nine statements. See Table 1 for the average response value for each attitude statement. Increasing values from pre to post-Dependency 101 indicate more agreement with the statement, while decreasing values indicate less agreement—suggesting that participants thought much more positively about the juvenile dependency system after participating in Dependency 101. Note that for one question, “I feel like I am the only one that is involved with CPS,” the change is negative, but it is actually in the preferred direction (i.e., the goal of P2PP is to reduce feelings of being alone).

| TABLE 1: Average Pre and Post-Dependency 101 Responses                               |                                       |                                            |                           |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| <i>Question</i>                                                                      | <i>Pre-Dependency 101<br/>Average</i> | <i>Post-Dependency<br/>101<br/>Average</i> | <i>Average<br/>Change</i> |
| <b>Trust in CPS</b>                                                                  |                                       |                                            |                           |
| I believe my family will get help we really need from CPS.                           | 3.08                                  | 3.44                                       | 0.36*                     |
| I feel like I can trust CPS to be fair and see my side of things.                    | 2.74                                  | 3.19                                       | 0.45*                     |
| I think things will get better for my child(ren) because CPS is involved.            | 2.91                                  | 3.30                                       | 0.39*                     |
| CPS is not out to get me.                                                            | 3.24                                  | 3.48                                       | 0.24*                     |
| <b>Awareness of Issues</b>                                                           |                                       |                                            |                           |
| I realize I need some help to make sure my kids have what they need.                 | 3.79                                  | 3.96                                       | 0.17*                     |
| There were definitely some problems in my family that CPS saw.                       | 3.30                                  | 3.45                                       | 0.15*                     |
| <b>Understanding Roles</b>                                                           |                                       |                                            |                           |
| I understand the roles of the professionals involved in the child welfare system.    | 3.59                                  | 3.99                                       | 0.40*                     |
| <b>Process Control</b>                                                               |                                       |                                            |                           |
| I believe there are things I can do so that the Court will return my children to me. | 4.47                                  | 4.56                                       | 0.09                      |
| <b>Feeling Alone</b>                                                                 |                                       |                                            |                           |
| I feel like I am the only one that is involved with CPS.                             | 2.17                                  | 2.02                                       | -0.15*                    |

\* =  $p \leq .05$ <sup>1</sup>

Despite P2PP's success in significantly changing the perceptions of eight of the nine statements, Dependency 101 did not significantly change parents' responses to the statement, "I believe there are things I can do so that the Court will return my children to me." The pre to post-Dependency 101 change was in the preferred direction however (i.e., increase).

<sup>1</sup> Researchers typically consider findings statistically significant if the differences between the mediated and non-mediated groups were unlikely to have occurred due to chance alone. For this assessment, results are considered significant when  $p \leq .05$ .

### **Perceptions and Gender**

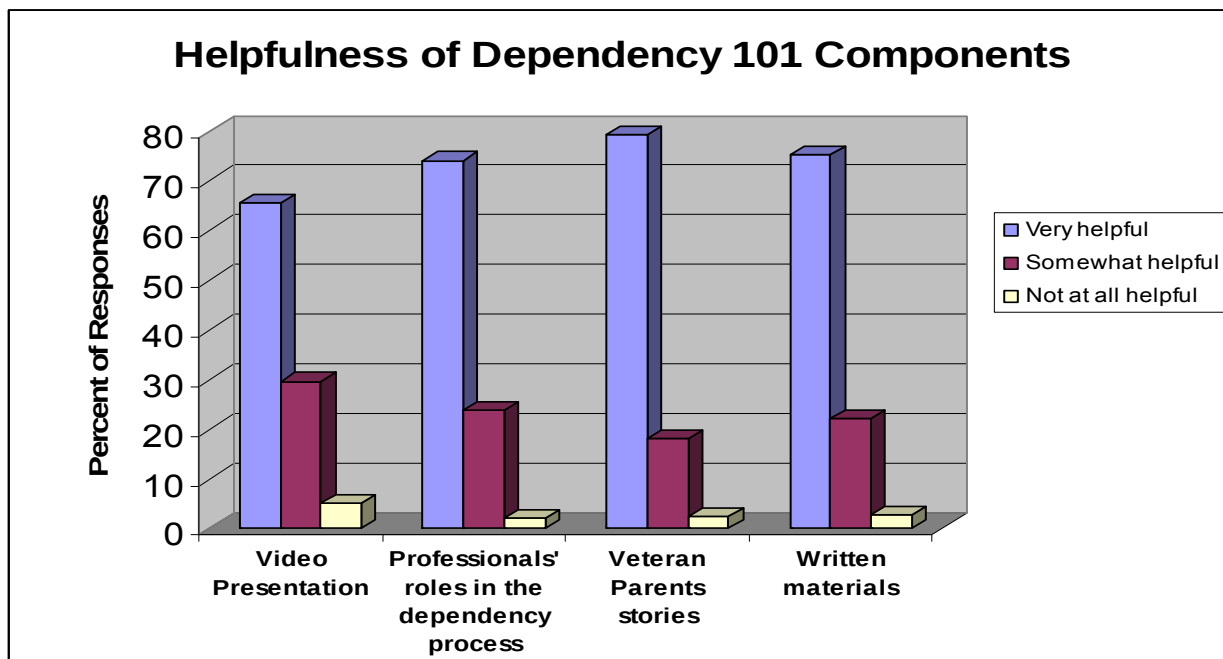
Parent perceptions of the nine statements were further analyzed to examine whether pre to post-Dependency 101 changes varied across gender. For the most part, the increases were consistent for males and females—with the exception of one statement. Females significantly decreased their post-Dependency 101 perceptions of the statement, “I feel like I am the only one that is involved with CPS.” Males, on the other hand, did not exhibit the same decrease. This finding suggests that, following Dependency 101, men are more likely than women to perceive themselves as alone in their involvement with the juvenile dependency system.

### **Perceptions and Race**

Parent perceptions of the nine statements were also analyzed for differences across race. When examining race alone, Black parents’ and non-Black parents’ perceptions did not differ in the amount of increase from pre to post-Dependency 101; however, differences emerged when examining gender and race together. In particular, Black females did not significantly change their perceptions of the statement, “I think things will get better for my child(ren) because CPS is involved” after attending Dependency 101. Also, non-Black males and Black females did not significantly change their perception of the statement, “There were definitely some problems in my family that CPS saw.” This finding suggests that different groups can approach and engage with Dependency 101 in different ways.

### **Perceptions of Dependency 101 Components**

For each of the Dependency 101 components, 95 percent of parents indicated they were either somewhat or very helpful. As indicated in the graph below, parents found the VPs’ stories as the most helpful component and the video presentation the least helpful.



### Open-Ended Responses

Parents answered three open-ended questions regarding what they liked about Dependency 101, what more they might have wanted to know about the dependency process, and what they thought might have needed improvement. Several re-occurring themes mentioned by parents are highlighted below. Each question and the corresponding themes are listed below.

#### What are one or two things you learned from attending Dependency 101?

All parents indicated that they learned at least one thing from Dependency 101. The most common responses included:

- Being proactive and resilient (16 percent)
- Awareness that they are not alone (11 percent)
- Keeping documentation (8 percent)
- Understanding roles of professionals (8 percent)
- Communicating with involved parties (6 percent)
- Having a positive attitude (6 percent)
- Understanding CPS is not out to get them (5 percent)
- Understanding dependency process (5 percent)
- Importance of participation in and compliance with services (4 percent)
- Taking personal responsibility (3 percent)

**What else would you like to know about the dependency process?**

Nineteen percent of parents indicated that Dependency 101 had answered all of their questions. Other parents indicated that there are several areas of the dependency process they would like to learn more about. Specifically, parents wanted to know more about:

- How the dependency process works (6 percent)
- Additional services that may be helpful (6 percent)
- Timeliness issues (i.e., how long until getting children back & closing case) (4 percent)
- Anything that will help get their children back (4 percent)

**In what ways, if any, could the Dependency 101 class be improved?**

Thirty percent of parents believed that Dependency 101 did not need any improvement. The remaining parents made several suggestions for areas of improvement:

- More time to cover materials and ask/answer questions (10 percent)
- Allow parents to discuss their own cases (with an understanding of confidentiality) (2 percent)
- More VPs (2 percent)
- Discuss other topics besides drugs and alcohol (1 percent)
- More explanation of the system and roles within system (1 percent)

### **Recommendations for the Parent to Parent Program**

In addition to its successes, Dependency 101 has areas for potential improvement. Using the pre and post-Dependency 101 statements, as well as the open-ended responses, several recommendations can be offered. Specifically, the P2PP should consider the following:

#### **Increase focus on instilling a sense of control**

Reassuring parents that they have control over their dependency cases may encourage them to be proactive toward reaching case plan goals. In addition, some parents may feel a sense of powerlessness in the juvenile dependency system. More focus on parental empowerment may lead to a more positive relationship between a parent and CPS.

#### **Provide additional time for questions and answers**

Overall, parents would have liked Dependency 101 to be longer. Increasing the length of Dependency 101 would allow for more dependency process and VP discussion, as well as more time for parents to ask questions and have them answered.

#### **Broaden the scope of services discussed**

Some parents attending Dependency 101 indicated that they would like to know about more services other than those reviewed in class. The discussion of services should go beyond drug and alcohol services to more broadly address the range of barriers parents may face in reunifying with their children. The Adoption and Foster Care Reporting System data tracks the removal reason for children in care. In Washington in 2009, only ten percent of children were removed due to parental alcohol abuse, while twenty-seven percent of children were removed for parental drug abuse. The majority of cases had other allegations such as general neglect (sixty-four percent), caretaker inability to cope (eleven percent), parent incarceration (seven percent), or physical abuse (fifteen percent). Discussing other issues (i.e., domestic violence, mental health, etc.) may help parents feel more engaged in the process because they find the information relevant to their case.

#### **Create an outline or flow chart of the juvenile dependency case process**

Providing an outline or flow chart listing key hearings, when these hearings are likely to occur, and what will be addressed at these hearings may help parents better understand case progression. Further, providing an explanation to the parents as to typical hearing progress may be necessary. For example, explaining that judges will be reviewing their case plan compliance

and progress toward goals at review hearings may help parents to set their own goals for success.

### **Increase father engagement**

Engaging fathers in juvenile dependency cases leads to increases in reunifications (Malm, Zielewski, & Chen, 2008; Wood & Russell, 2011) and decreases in time to reunification (e.g., Coakley, 2008; Malm et al.). Some dependency decision-makers view fathers as afterthoughts, potential threats to the safety of the children (O'Donnell, Johnson, D'Aunno, & Thorton, 2005), and impediments to case progression (Malm et al.). Given the potential for these pre-dispositions and the evidence that father engagement can help achieve reunification, it is important that the P2PP continue to focus on father engagement as a goal.

## **Recommendations for Broader Systems Change**

### **Enhance Discussion of Key Issues**

One of the issues identified by parents in the P2PP process evaluation was that parents would like more information about the dependency process, including when they could get their children back. Enhancing discussion at early court hearings could provide parents with much of this information. There are resources available to help ensure thorough discussion at the hearings.<sup>2</sup> The Model Court Liaison can assist the court in determining what tools are available.

### **Make Referrals to Dependency 101**

It is unclear at this time if professional stakeholders are recommending Dependency 101 to parents. While not wishing to overburden parents with additional “required” services, it may be helpful for stakeholders (e.g., social workers, judges) to refer parents to Dependency 101.

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<sup>2</sup> For example, the Courts Catalyzing Change Preliminary Protective Hearing Benchcard provides a tool for judicial officers which elaborates on questions at discussion points that should be addressed (NCJFCJ, 2010).

## **Conclusion**

Overwhelmingly, the P2PP program was well received by its participants. Parents expressed that the components of Dependency 101 (i.e., video presentation, explanation of professionals' roles in dependency process, VP stories, and written materials) were helpful. Additionally, after attending Dependency 101, parents indicated that they felt more educated about the juvenile dependency system, were less anxious about the dependency process, had a new, more positive perception of CPS, and were reassured that a support network exists. This program appears to be a useful tool in changing attitudes of participants involved in the child welfare system. It may also be helpful in improving case outcomes. Research on this is forthcoming.

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## Washington State Parents for Parents Program

### Findings of P4P Evaluations:

- Increased compliance in the court-ordered case plan
- Significantly increased compliance with court-ordered visitation
- Increased likelihood of reunification by 26%
- Decreased likelihood of termination of parental rights by 20%
- Positive changes in parent's attitudes
- Increased trust in CPS and awareness of case issues
- Parent's increased perceived control over case outcomes
- 79% of parents who received full P4P reunified

### Stakeholder Impressions of Parents for Parents

Parents for Parents is a critical element of our dependency process. Contact with Parent Allies helps people faced with a dependency understand the value of working collaboratively to achieve reunification. Without Parent Allies, the system is too adversarial to promote this goal. ~

#### Dependency Judge

Parents for Parents provides my clients the tools, information, and insight to successfully and quickly engage in their case.

#### ~ Parent Attorney

Parents for Parents is an absolutely necessary program that is truly invaluable in the efforts to keep families together. ~

**Child Welfare Worker**

Parents for Parents is an essential component of early engagement of parents in resolving the issues that resulted in a dependency filing.

#### ~ Child Welfare Manager

### What is the Parents for Parents Program?

Parents for Parents (P4P) provides peer mentoring for families in the dependency court system. P4P provides early outreach and education that helps shift parental attitudes from anger and resentment to acknowledgment and acceptance and enhances parents' engagement in their court-ordered plans. Mentoring is provided by Parent Allies (PA)s – parents who have successfully navigated the child welfare system, demonstrate professionalism, accept responsibility for the factors involved in their child's dependency, and are eager to help other parents succeed. PAs receive extensive training and supervision. P4P is a Promising Practice per the University of Washington's Evidence Based Practice Institute based upon the findings of Washington State's King County model.

### Why is Parents for Parents Important?

Parents for Parents increases the well-being of children in foster care as their parents receive peer mentoring that\*:

- Encourages their positive engagement with child welfare stakeholders
- Increases their compliance with court ordered services
- Increases their engagement in the juvenile dependency court process

*\*Reference ~ National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges: Parents for Parents Outcome Evaluation; Reno, NV, 2011 and 2013)*

Trauma to children is reduced as parents overcome the issues leading to their child's dependency, establish stable homes, and safely reunify with their children.

### Parents for Parents Program Components

**I) Shelter Care Hearing Outreach** – PAs meet with parents in the courthouse at their first hearing after the filing of a petition by child protection services. Parents are terrified, confused, angry and alone. The PA introduces him/herself as someone who was once in the parents' shoes and got their kids back. This gives parents someone they can relate to and offers them hope that reunification is possible. This, in turn, helps diffuse negative attitudes, and encourages parents to be open-minded and engage in the process. PAs also share information about available resources and invite parents to a Dependency 101 class.

**II) Dependency 101** - This one-time, two-hour, PA-led class educates parents about the dependency system they must navigate to have their children returned. It provides tools and resources that empower parents to be successful and to understand and support the needs of their children. Several PA's share their success stories, and child welfare system stakeholders provide information about their roles and what parents can do to succeed. All speakers reinforce the message that return of the child is everyone's top priority.

**III) On-going Support** - PAs support parents attending additional dependency hearings, providing them with follow-up support and encouragement. Telephone support is given to assist and encourage parents to overcome barriers to success in their case.

### More information

- P4P Homepage: <http://www.childrenshomesociety.org/reunification>
- P4P Research: <http://www.uwcita.org/parents-for-parents-education-and-engagement-for-parents-in-dependency/>
- For more information, please contact Ambrosia Eberhardt, Statewide Family Impact Manager, Children's Home Society of Washington  
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