

FAMILY RECOVERY AND REUNIFICATION PROGRAM



Intensive Case Management for Substance-Involved Parents with Children in Foster Care

Under the leadership of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), the Family Recovery and Reunification Program (also known as the “Recovery Coach Program”) helps families in which children have been removed from the custody of one or both parents and placed into foster care because of substance use–related abuse or neglect.

The goal of the program is to reunify families when parents can provide a safe and drug-free home for their children. Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities (TASC) case managers engage parents in treatment and other services needed to achieve recovery and family unity, including parenting classes, individual and family counseling, and assistance in finding housing and employment. Through TASC’s intensive outreach and case management, the program helps achieve family reunification more often and more quickly.

Operating in Cook (encompassing Chicago), Madison, and St. Clair counties in Illinois, the program is funded through a federal Title IV-E waiver granted to DCFS.

How the Family Recovery and Reunification Program Works

Parents with open foster care cases who screen positive for parental substance use disorders may be referred to the program. Case managers provide intensive outreach, engagement, and case management services to facilitate access to substance use treatment and other supports throughout the duration of the case. These services help remove barriers to treatment, and engage, retain, and re-engage (when necessary) parents in substance use treatment services. Case managers also partner with DCFS and other service providers to monitor and ensure client progress.

In Cook County, case managers work with the Juvenile Court Assessment Program (JCAP), which provides substance use assessments and initial referrals to treatment for families identified as being substance-involved at the time of their temporary custody hearing or within 180 days of the hearing, as well as with child

“With the rise in heroin use and opioid addiction across the country, more children are being removed from their homes and placed in foster care. By working with systems to address complex issues around addiction, initiatives such as the Family Recovery and Reunification Program make it possible to heal families and safely return children to their homes.”

Pamela F. Rodriguez, TASC President

welfare case workers and substance use treatment providers. In St. Clair and Madison counties, the TASC Court Assessment Project (TCAP) conducts substance use assessments and makes treatment recommendations for parents referred by judges, attorneys, and caseworkers.

Building the Family Recovery and Reunification Program

In 1999, Illinois DCFS applied to the federal government for a “Title IV-E” waiver with a goal of improving reunification and other family permanency and safety outcomes for foster children from drug-involved families. Child welfare waivers provide states flexibility in how they spend federal dollars to test innovative approaches to child welfare and service delivery financing. This allows them to design and demonstrate approaches to reforming child welfare and improving outcomes in the areas of safety, permanency, and well-being.

The approved waiver gave DCFS authority to redirect federal dollars to fund case managers who would help parents access substance use treatment and navigate the requirements of the public systems and treatment programs in which they are involved. With approval of the waiver, the program was launched in Chicago and suburban Cook County in 2000, and expanded to Madison and St. Clair counties in 2007.

The Focus on Innovation series highlights programs across the country that contribute to a comprehensive strategy to address addiction.

Eligibility Criteria

Families with foster care cases open in the three participating Illinois counties, and who have been screened and identified as having a substance use disorder, are eligible to participate in the Family Recovery and Reunification Program.

Demonstrating Success

Independent evaluations have found the following program results:

- **Permanency**—Families in the program were significantly more likely than those in a control group to achieve permanency (reunification or adoption).
- **Reunification**—Program families were also significantly more likely to achieve reunification, and to do so in shorter periods of time—on average, 4.1 months sooner, reducing time spent in foster care by an average of 12 percent.
- **Stable reunification**—Families in the program were nearly twice as likely as control group families to achieve a stable reunification (of at least 12 months).
- **Safety**—Parents in the program were no more likely to face subsequent allegations of maltreatment than control group parents.
- **Treatment access**—Parents in the program were more likely to access substance use treatment than parents in the control group (49 percent vs. 29 percent), and to do so more quickly.

- **Juvenile justice system involvement**—Children in the demonstration group were significantly less likely than their peers in the control group to experience a subsequent arrest.
- **Cost savings**—The program has generated more than \$11 million in savings from higher rates of reunification, quicker reunification, and lower rates of reentry into foster care.

Stakeholders & Partners

TASC provides the intensive case management services offered in the program, and collaborates with DCFS child welfare case workers, JCAP assessors, juvenile court judges and personnel, more than 40 treatment providers with over 70 treatment programs, and the participating parents and children.

The Future of the Family Recovery and Reunification Program

As the opioid crisis continues to unfold across the U.S., and given increasing cases of children with parents who have opioid use disorders losing custody because of it, the program offers a timely and important model of evidence-based services to support recovery and reunification.

Resources & References

Illinois Department of Children & Family Services. (2016). Annual Progress & Services Report (APSR) FY17, https://www.illinois.gov/dcf/aboutus/newsandreports/Documents/APSR_FY17.pdf.

Joseph P. Ryan, Bryan G. Victor, Andrew Moore, Orion Mowbray, and Brian E. Perron. (2016). Recovery Coaches and the Stability of Reunification for Substance Abusing Families in Child Welfare. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 70 (pp. 357-363).

Joseph P. Ryan and Hui Huang, Illinois AODA IV-E Waiver Demonstration Final Evaluation Report (July 2012), http://cfrc.illinois.edu/pubs/rp_20120701_IllinoisAODAIV-EWaiverDemonstrationFinalEvaluationReport.pdf.

Child Welfare Waivers, Children's Bureau, Office of the Administration for Children & Families, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/programs/child-welfare-waivers>.

Parental Addiction Treatment Improves Child Welfare Outcomes: TASC President Pam Rodriguez at Capitol Hill Briefing, TASC Blog (December 7, 2015), <https://iltasc.wordpress.com/tag/recovery-coach-program/>.

Family Recovery and Reunification Program, TASC, <http://www2.tasc-il.org/program/family-recovery-and-reunification-program>.