Transforming Child Welfare: Safe Babies Court Teams

Matthew Melmed, Executive Director, ZERO TO THREE
Our mission is to ensure that ALL babies and toddlers have a strong start in life.
At ZERO TO THREE, we envision a society that has the knowledge and will to support all infants and toddlers in reaching their full potential.
Membership Turns 2!
Early Connections Last a Lifetime
We believe that \textbf{HOW} we do our work is as important as \textbf{WHAT} we do.
The Critical Need
Every 6 minutes in the U.S., an infant or toddler is removed from their parents’ care due to abuse or neglect and sent to live in a new home.

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, AFCARS, 2016
Infants and toddlers make up the largest group of children who have been maltreated.

- Under age 3: 28%
- Ages 3-5: 19%
- Ages 6-8: 18%
- Ages 9-11: 13%
- Ages 12-14: 12%
- Ages 15-17: 10%

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, *Child Maltreatment 2015*
Infants and toddlers are the largest group of children entering foster care.

- Under age 3: 32%
- Ages 3-5: 16%
- Ages 6-8: 14%
- Ages 9-11: 11%
- Ages 12-14: 12%
- Ages 15-17: 15%

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, AFCARS Report #23 (July 2016)
The Early Years
Why the early years matter: Key neural connections peak, laying critical foundations for later success in school and life.

First Two Years

- Sensory Pathways (Vision, Hearing)
- Language
- Higher Cognitive Functions
- Self-Regulation

Birth (Months) (Years)


Slide courtesy of Ross A. Thompson
Rapid Pace of Brain Development in Earliest Years: Proliferation of Neural Connections in the First 6 Months

1 million *new* connections every second

Newborn  1 month  3 months  6 months
Early Human Connections
Shape Brain Connections

Healthy Developing Brain
Significant brain activity, indicated by red areas.

Brain of a Young Orphan
Has experienced severe emotional neglect resulting in lack of connections in temporal lobe.
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE’s):

- Emotional, physical or sexual abuse
- Emotional or physical neglect
- Household Dysfunctions
  - Mother treated violently
  - Household substance abuse
  - Household mental illness
  - Parental separation or divorce
  - Incarcerated household member

Increase Risk as Adults of:

- Alcohol or substance abuse
- Depression/suicide attempts
- Heart disease
- Unhealthy behaviors
- Early death

Early Childhood Adversity Has Lifelong Health & Social Consequences
Healthy brain connections depend on healthy human connections and positive early learning experiences
Early Human Connections
Shape Brain Connections

The "Still Face" Experiment
Early Human Connections
Shape Brain Connections

**Secure attachment:**
Trusts that parents are consistently available

**Anxious-ambivalent attachment**
Can’t count on parents to respond

**Anxious-avoidant insecure attachment**
Learned that the parent is not there

**Disorganized attachment**
No strategy for dealing with parents’ failure to protect and nurture
Trauma and Executive Functioning: Meeting Parents Where They Are

- A set of thinking skills that allow us to control impulses (self-regulate), focus and plan

- **Not** innate; roots begin in infancy

- Children and adults who experience early adversity are more likely to have deficits in EF skills as a result
Safe Babies Court Teams
Safe Babies Court Teams

Transforming child welfare into the practice of child “well-being” by using the science of early childhood development to ensure maltreated infants and toddlers reach safe, loving, permanent homes as quickly as possible.
Family Risk Factors and Parental Substance Use

![Bar chart showing family risk factors and parental substance use.]

**Family**
- Domestic Violence: 52%
- Alcohol: 15%
- Poverty: 52%
- History of Drugs & Alcohol: 82%
- Drugs: 91%

**Child**
- Alcohol/Drugs Factor in Removal: 71%
- Exposure to Parental Substance Abuse: 58%
- Overall Parental Substance Abuse: 82%
The Safe Babies Court Team
Core Components

1. Judicial Leadership
2. Local Community Coordinator
3. Active Court Team focused on the Big Picture
4. Targeting Infants and Toddlers in Out-of-Home Care
5. Valuing Birth Parents
6. Placement and Concurrent Planning
7. The Foster Parent Intervention, Mentors and Extended Family
8. Post-Removal Conferences & Family Team Meetings
9. Parent-Child Contact (Visitation)
10. Continuum of Mental Health Services
11. Training and Technical Assistance
12. Understanding the Impact of Our Work
Goal: Timely and nurturing permanent placement of infants and toddlers in foster care

- Implement concurrent planning from the START of the case
- Use evidence-based and evidence informed programs and services
- Prevent multiple placements
- Ensure access to early intervention services
- Address mental health needs of infants and toddlers and their parents
- Ensure comprehensive and consistent health care (dental, vision and hearing exams) for children and their parents
- Ensure ongoing post-permanency services and supports
Target Group: Children Entering Foster Care Before Age 3

LOCAL ACTORS

Judge

Community Coordinator

Court Team
- DHS leaders & staff
- CASA
- Attorneys
- Service providers
- Public child serving agencies
- Colleges/universities
- Children’s advocates
- Foster parents
- Funders
- Civic organizations
- Interested community members
- And more

ACTIVITIES

Monthly Case Reviews
Referral to Child-focused Services
Child-Parent Psychotherapy
Frequent family contact
Concurrent Planning from Day 1
ZTT National Office Activities
- Training and TA
- Resource materials
- Evaluation

LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

Decrease in Time to Permanency
Reduction in Recurrence of Maltreatment
Improved Child Well-being
Babies are the most important population we deal with. They are at the heart of best practice and reasonable efforts.

– Honorable Paul T. Murakami
Court Team Community Stakeholders

- Child Welfare agency staff
- Local government leaders and agencies
- Primary health care providers
- Attorneys
- Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) and Guardian ad Litem (GALs)
- Court Improvement program staff
- Mental Health Professionals
- Foster Parents and Foster Parent Associations
- Law enforcement
- Substance abuse treatment providers
- Early intervention specialists
- Early Head Start and child care professionals
- Dentists
- Domestic violence service providers
- Representatives from colleges and universities
- Faith-based & volunteer groups
- Child and Family advocates
- Court Improvement program staff
Research and Evaluations
Access to Screenings & Early Intervention Services

Service Need Assessed (n=251)

- ASQ: Developmental Concerns: 71.4%
- Child Parent Psychotherapy: 51.1%
- Developmental Screening: 97.3%
- Early Intervention: 41.3%

Services Received

- Child Parent Psychotherapy: 93.9%
- Developmental Screening: 97.2%
- Early Intervention: 96.7%
Safety: Recurrence of Maltreatment within a 12-Month Period

Safe Babies Court Teams Approach: 0.7%

National Standard: 9.1%
Children with Two or Fewer Placements

- National Median
- Safe Babies Court Teams

- **Less than 12 Months**
  - National Median: 85.6%
  - Safe Babies Court Teams: 94.2%

- **12-23 Months**
  - National Median: 66.1%
  - Safe Babies Court Teams: 79.4%
Among 231 children with closed cases between April 2015 - May 2018, **83.7% reached permanency within 12 months.**

- **48.6%**: Reunified with parents
- **32.2%**: Adopted
- **14.0%**: Placed a fit and willing relative

No significant differences for permanency within 12 months by child’s race/ethnicity.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Exit from Foster Care</th>
<th>ZTT (n=298)</th>
<th>NSCAW (n=511)</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reunification</td>
<td>Median 309</td>
<td>547</td>
<td>8 months faster on average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean 340</td>
<td>587</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoption</td>
<td>Median 464</td>
<td>764</td>
<td>10 months faster on average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean 496</td>
<td>800</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative custodian</td>
<td>Median 351</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>3-4 months faster on average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean 363</td>
<td>487</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-relative guardian</td>
<td>Median 481</td>
<td>878</td>
<td>10-13 months faster on average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean 467</td>
<td>780</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Patterns hold using propensity scores in a competing risks analysis.
Parents’ Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) & Permanency Outcomes

ACE Score 0-3
ACE Score 4-6
ACE Score 7-10

Reunified w/ Parent
Adopted
Placed w/ Relative
Other (Guardianship)

Permanency Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>ACE Score 0-3</th>
<th>ACE Score 4-6</th>
<th>ACE Score 7-10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reunified w/ Parent</td>
<td>56.3</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>30.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adopted</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>42.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placed w/ Relative</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Guardianship)</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

80.2%
The Path Ahead
Our Efforts to Continue Moving Forward

✓ How is the project to be financed?

✓ What other state and local public agencies have commitments to advance this work?

✓ What federal grants are currently addressing this population?

✓ What private partners are seeking to invest or could be engaged to provide financial support?

✓ What state or local policies, regulations and legislation support the common vision?
Safe Babies Court Team Work in Action!

Key:
- Implementation
- Support
- QIC-ITCT
- Demonstration Sites
- SBCT Sites
- Graduated Sites

(5)
(7)
(5)
(2)
(3)
(2)
(2)
(2)
(18)
(2-CT)
(2)

(5)
(1)
(2)
(3)
(3)
(2)
(2)
(1)
(7)
(2)
(2)
(18)
(5)
Infant/Toddler Courts developed with the Safe Babies Court Team Approach

State Policy shaping continued growth of Infant/Toddler Courts

- 22 Infant/Toddler Court Team Sites
- 1 additional site in early stages

- 7 Infant/Toddler Court Team Sites developed 2017-2018
- 5 additional Infant/Toddler Court Team Sites added by 2019
How We Can Help

➢ Technical Assistance Strategy Assessments
➢ Customized 3-year Stand Up to Sustainability Implementation Support Plans
➢ Ongoing Training and Technical Assistance offered under a unique registry
➢ Consultations, focus groups and strategic planning to promote Continuous Quality Improvement
➢ Access to the National ZERO TO THREE database with support for evaluation and site management
Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has. – Margaret Mead