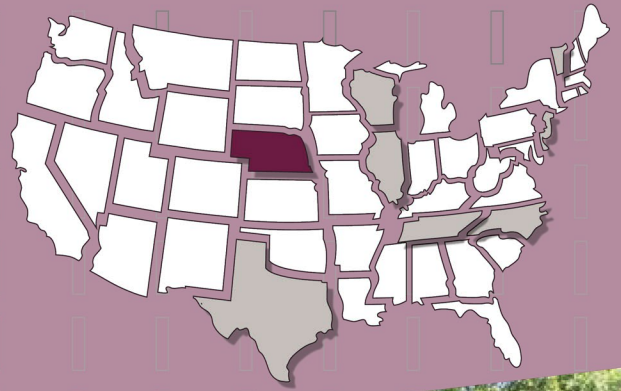


Evaluation Results from
Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska

Final Evaluation
Report



September 2019

QIC•AG

National Quality Improvement Center for
Adoption & Guardianship Support and Preservation

This report was designed by staff at the Texas Institute for Child & Family Wellbeing at The University of Texas at Austin, Steve Hicks School of Social Work. We thank them for their partnership and dedication to the work of translational research.



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The QIC-AG was funded through a five-year cooperative agreement between the Children's Bureau, Spaulding for Children, and its partners the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the University of Texas at Austin and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

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Acknowledgements

The QIC-AG evaluation team would like to extend our sincerest thanks to all of the adoptive and guardianship families who participated in the project.

We also thank the many stakeholders on the QIC-AG site specific Project Management Team (PMT), Stakeholder Advisory Team (SAT) and Implementation Team (IT) who were invaluable in providing the support and direction needed to implement the study. The participants on these three teams included community consumers and providers from adoption and guardianship services; adoptive and guardianship families; representatives from private, domestic, and international adoption; key leaders across multiple systems; and the numerous support agencies and system partners.

We would like to acknowledge Winnebago Children and Family Services, Tribal Elders, Tribal Council members and other Winnebago community leaders, site team leaders, and the Site Implementation Manager (SIM), who guided this work, in addition to their other roles within the agencies they work. Your partnership made this project a success.

The QIC-AG site consultants worked closely with the evaluation team to ensure the project work was implemented with integrity. Thank you for the collegial team work.

A special appreciation goes to the intervention purveyor, Kempe Center who supported the Winnebago site in adapting its model for this study.

Evaluation Results from Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska

PROJECT PARTNERS

QIC-AG partnered with **Winnebago Child and Family Services**.

CONTINUUM PHASE

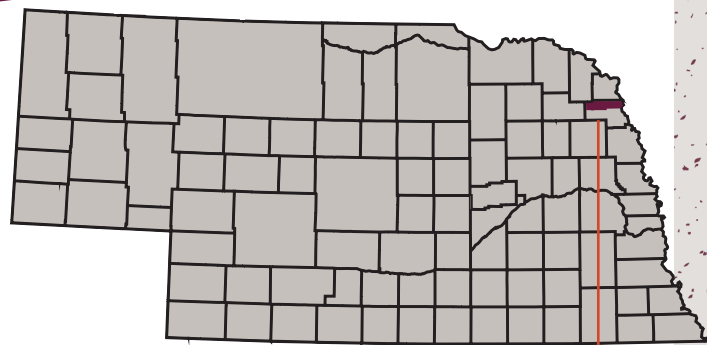
Focused Services

INTERVENTION

The Winnebago adapted **Family Group Decision Making (FGDM): Wažokj Wošga Gica Wo'upi**. This model ensures culturally viable decisions by involving the entire available family in a Family Group Conference or Stokj; which is when the family comes together to develop a family plan regarding the child's permanency goal.

STUDY DESIGN

Descriptive



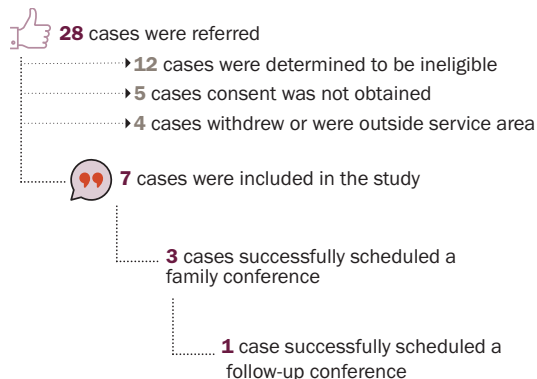
Target population were **Winnebago children and youth in foster care** who: 1) could not reunify with their biological parents and had a non-permanency reunification plan, and 2) did not have a permanency placement identified OR did have an identified placement.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Will Winnebago tribal children and youth, ages 5-18 years, who cannot reunify with their biological parents, have a non-permanency reunification plan, and have yet to identify a permanency placement or a permanency placement has been identified, experience increased placement stability, improved child and family wellbeing, improved behavioral and health, decreased time to finalization/time in care, and increased permanency outcomes if they are provided Family Group Decision Making?

Findings

RECRUITMENT



PARTICIPANT SATISFACTION

After attending a Family Conference:

PARTICIPANTS AGREED OR STRONGLY AGREED WITH:

98%

Family traditions were respected in the family plan

The child and family needs were clearly identified

PARTICIPANTS AGREED LESS WITH THE FOLLOWING:

58%

The right people were at the meeting

Family cultural needs were identified during meeting

OUTCOMES

Given that the sample size includes only seven families, a quantitative analysis was not possible. But here is what the core staff had to say about working with the families who did participate:

INCREASED KNOWLEDGE OF PERMANENCY OPTIONS

I feel our families understand more and better comprehend what the courts are asking for or what the options are.

INCREASED PROTECTIVE FACTORS

The project increased protective factors by involving the larger extended family and support network in the child welfare case.

INCREASED KNOWLEDGE OF WINNEBAGO SPECIFIC PATHWAYS

I think this project shed a light on our community's trauma and conflicted relationships with 'systems.' We have a long way to go to really engage and empower our families. It is going to take time and patience to get there.

INCREASED CONNECTEDNESS

The children who have had conferences have felt cared about and included. For some of them, it was the first time they felt listened to.

LESSONS LEARNED

A significant accomplishment stemming from this project was the changes to strengthen and clarify the Tribal Code. This change in Tribal Code strengthened customary adoption and guardianship as permanency plan options for Winnebago families in Nebraska. Engaging in a "By the Tribe, for the Tribe" process by actively including Tribe Elders and community members in the project is highly recommended.



The University of Texas at Austin

Texas Institute for Child & Family Wellbeing

Steve Hicks School of Social Work



JACK, JOSEPH AND MORTON MANDEL
SCHOOL OF APPLIED SOCIAL SCIENCES

CASE WESTERN RESERVE
UNIVERSITY

This research summary was designed by staff at the Texas Institute for Child & Family Wellbeing at The University of Texas at Austin, Steve Hicks School of Social Work, in conjunction with the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences at Case Western Reserve University.

Evaluation questions? Please contact Nancy Rolock at nancy.rolock@case.edu or Rowena Fong at rfong@austin.utexas.edu.



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Executive Summary

Overview

The National Quality Improvement Center for Adoption and Guardianship Support and Preservation (QIC-AG) site, working with the Winnebago Tribe, adapted the Family Group Decision Making model for use within their community.

The Winnebago site used both linear and circular Logic Models. The linear Logic Model reflects a European-centric approach to programs and change. Circular Logic Models take a more relational perspective and illustrate the inter-connectedness of the programming, including how the change impacts the community. The Winnebago site developed a circular Logic Model that is more reflective of the Tribe's practices and beliefs. Both logic models lead to the primary research question which guided the program evaluation.

The Theory of Change for the project was the Winnebago Tribe does not have a practice intervention supporting culturally competent family engagement to promote decision making regarding sustainable permanence. To address this gap, a culturally relevant child welfare practice intervention for the Winnebago Tribe based on indigenous practices is needed. This practices should ensure culturally viable decisions are made and that these decisions promote the timely achievement of permanence through customary adoption or guardianship. Finally, if a practice intervention is adapted to meet the needs of the Winnebago Tribe then the Winnebago people will be able to implement a culturally relevant child welfare practice, which will increase legal permanence for Winnebago children.

Intervention

Three teams of the QIC-AG project, the Project Management Team (PMT) and Stakeholder Advisory Team (SAT) and Implementation team, in conjunction with the Tribal Elders and Winnebago community members, designed the Winnebago adapted intervention of Family Group Decision Making (FGDM): Wažokį Wošga Gica Wo'ųpi (pronounced *Wha-zho-kee Wo-shga Gi-cha Wo-oo-pi*). The Tribe chose this intervention because there are tribal children and youth who need permanent family units, but the process of finding and engaging tribal families requires culturally competent social work practices that engage families to make decisions about their children.

The Winnebago Tribe program team adapted FGDM to reflect Ho-Chunk cultural values and practices, which are core to the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska. Interviews were set up with Elders from the Winnebago Tribe as recognized experts of cultural practices, values, and language. The six themes that emerged from those interviews guided the cultural adaptation of the FGDM intervention: family support, family functioning, informal supports, formal social support, important cultural values and children without caregivers. FGDM was in the **Replicate and Adapt** phase of the *Framework to Design, Test, Spread, and Sustain Effective Practice in Child Welfare*.

Primary Research Question

The research question was:

Will Winnebago tribal children and youth, ages 5-18 years, who cannot reunify with their biological parents, have a non-permanency reunification plan, and have yet to identify a permanency placement or a permanency placement has been identified, experience increased placement stability, improved child and family wellbeing, improved behavioral and health, decreased time to finalization/time in care, and increased permanency outcomes if they are provided FGDM?

The target population were Winnebago children and youth in foster care who: 1) could not reunify with their biological parents and had a non-permanency reunification plan, and 2) did not have a permanency placement identified OR did have an identified placement whose prospective caregivers would benefit from FGDM to prepare for finalization. Children ages 5-18 years could participate in the FGDM conference; however, youth 12 years and older were considered as the subjects of the intervention evaluation.

The original evaluation of the adapted FGDM model included a mixed-method outcome evaluation using a non-experimental pre-posttest design. However, based on the low sample size, the research study design shifted to a descriptive study with a greater focus on process evaluation. There was limited data collected from caregiver pre surveys, caregiver and child interviews, and core site staff surveys. Also, due to the concern about confidentiality issues in the Winnebago tribal community, composite case scenarios were created from characteristics of the individual cases rather than use a traditional qualitative case study approach.

Key Findings and Recommendations

The Winnebago site served seven youth. Qualitative information gathered through interviews with participants and staff, activities that occurred during implementation and insights from the case studies. Respondents reported that the intervention had a positive impact on families, as summarized in these examples:

FGDM Coordinators reported on their core site staff survey that their impression is that the families going through the FGDM process were gaining a better understanding and that this helped them work with the courts. One core site staff member said,

"I feel our families understand more and better comprehend what the courts are asking for or what the options are."

Winnebago core site staff noted that involving family in the child's life helped create a sense of community. For example, the staff noted that the Stokj was hard for family members who had been disconnected with the youth. Once that family member re-engaged with the youth, there was more connection where adults assumed responsibility for being involved in the child's life. One core site staff member noted,

"The project increased protective factors by involving the larger extended family and support network in the child welfare case."

Core site staff described the ongoing growth of their own knowledge, and how awareness of the program is growing in the community. Overall, the core site staff noted that this project highlighted historical issues the Tribe has had with the child welfare system. One core site staff member said,

“I think this project shed a light on our community’s trauma and conflicted relationships with ‘systems.’ We have a long way to go to really engage and empower our families. It is going to take time and patience to get there.”

The process of outreach and preparation, combined with broadening support networks, is helping to build greater trust in professionals and community partnerships. While the FGDM Coordinator faced distrust from some families in the process of doing their jobs, there was an increase in communication and trust as the program continued. One core site staff member noted,

“The children who have had conferences have felt cared about and included. For some of them, it was the first time they felt listened to.”

The Winnebago site has several lessons learned that can be applied to other programs working with Tribes. Central to these lessons is that work with Tribes needs to be grounded within and driven by the cultural values of the Tribe rather than the funding entities.

- While this program evaluation cannot provide evidence to support FGDM as a model to be adapted and used with Tribes, the response from participants and staff are positive in terms of the impact on families.
- A significant accomplishment stemming from this project was the changes to strengthen and clarify the Tribal Code that was supported by the site team as part of capacity building. This change in Tribal Code strengthened customary adoption and guardianship as permanency plan options for Winnebago families in Nebraska. In working with a tribe, it is important to ensure that the laws, codes, policies, and procedures support the planned intervention. One of the first challenges this site experienced was a cultural difference between tribal practice and the larger child welfare practices. It is common for parental rights to be terminated under standard (European) child welfare practices, but this goes against tribal beliefs. Customary adoption recognizes the extension of parental rights and adoption is more about placement stability. Native children permanently belong to the Tribe, as explained by the Elders.
- Engaging in a “By the Tribe, for the Tribe” process not only enhances and strengthens tribal sovereignty and existing relationships, but also supports new relationships built upon a common understanding of the project, resulting in establishing trust, respect, and buy-in. When adapting an intervention for a specific culture, it is important to build partnerships that are inclusive and transparent by fostering and developing an ongoing dialogue with stakeholders. The Winnebago Team engaged in ongoing communication with the Winnebago Tribal Elders, the community, service providers, Ho-Chunk Renaissance (language support and cultural etiquette service provider), legal counsel, the Winnebago Tribal Court, and the intervention purveyor.

Cross-Site Summary

The cross-site evaluation (Chapter 10 of the full report) summarizes overarching themes and analyses found across six QIC-AG sites that focused on addressing issues post permanence: Vermont, Illinois, New Jersey, Catawba County (North Carolina), Wisconsin, and Tennessee. Key findings from the cross-site are summarized below.

Key questions that can help sites identify families who are struggling post permanence. An important aspect of prevention work with adoptive and guardianship families is to be able to identify families who may be the most likely to experience post permanency discontinuity and diminished wellbeing. Through the QIC-AG we asked key questions to better understand issues related to post permanency discontinuity. Our findings show promise for using a set of questions related to familial issues to distinguish families who were struggling and those who seemed to be doing alright. These questions could be administered yearly to all adoptive and guardianship families, with targeted outreach directed at families whose responses suggest they may be at an elevated risk for post permanency discontinuity.

Child welfare jurisdictions interested in targeted outreach to adoptive or guardianship families may consider periodically checking in with families to assess their level of caregiver commitment and familial relationship (e.g., the parent or guardian's assessment of how well they can manage their child's behavior). Based on the responses received from this check-in, jurisdictions could consider targeting outreach to families based on responses to key familial relationship questions piloted with the QIC-AG project.

Maintain connections with families after adoption and guardianship. Connections to services, supports, and resources should begin prior to adoption or guardianship finalization and continue to be maintained after finalization.

Reduce barriers to post adoption service use and empower families to seek services and supports. This process may be made easier by maintaining connections through universal outreach, which includes providing information about availability and eligibility for services after adoption or guardianship finalization so that families know how and where to access supports and services.

Offer support through periodic, targeted outreach to families who exhibit characteristics that suggest they may be at an increased risk for post permanency discontinuity. This could be, for instance, annual check-ins with families to see how they are doing.

Support is important. Families reported that at times what is needed is a friendly voice on the other end of the phone who can listen to struggles regarding birth family contact or provide support for older caregivers. Other times it is helping to get intensive residential treatment services for their child without relinquishing custody. Participants reflected on the important social connections (informal social support) made by attending sessions. Survey respondents reported that they needed formal support from the child welfare and school systems, as well as support in accessing services for their child post-permanence. It is important to understand what *support* means to the family and to find a way to offer it in a timely manner.

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