



## THE STORY OF CAPP: Building Partnerships. Strengthening Practice.

### THE BEGINNING:

In August of 2010 the Permanency Innovations Initiative (PII) request for proposals (RFP) generated much interest from a variety of state and county agencies and organizations in California. Many realized that the \$100 million federal project to reduce long-term foster care could bring substantial resources to build on the ongoing permanency efforts taking place around the state. Competition was substantial with only 6 grantees being chosen nationwide from applicants throughout the nation. After some discussion there was agreement that a collaborative proposal among the counties, courts and philanthropy with California Department of Social Services (CDSS) as the lead partner, was the best approach for receiving funding and for impacting systems change that would improve outcomes for children and families statewide.

A small group of state, county, courts and philanthropic partners set out to draft a comprehensive and cohesive proposal that identified our target population, the intervention, our theory of change and the planning and implementation process. Unfortunately, the 30-day deadline required swift work and a streamlined process that left little room to engage and include community and tribal partners in a meaningful way at that phase of the effort.

However, prior to responding to the RFP, the four participating counties: Fresno, Humboldt, Los Angeles and Santa Clara had been actively engaging community and tribal representatives at the local level with various taskforces and advisory bodies aimed at building relationships and forging partnerships to improve child welfare services.

California Partners for Permanency (CAPP) was born and the planning phase of our effort began when we received notification of the award in the Fall of 2010. At that time key community and tribal partners were invited to join the CAPP Cross-Site Planning Teams along with a variety of state and local stakeholders as well as the four participating counties. An Advisory Committee was also created consisting of youth, family, community and tribal representatives as a forum for receiving input and guidance for the planning teams.

### LEARNING.

The lessons in CAPP came from many avenues, beginning with our system reviews. All CAPP sites conducted local

reviews of their child welfare systems. The process included dozens of interviews and focus groups with various stakeholders most importantly families, community and tribal representatives. Key findings from these reviews and the experiences shared by community and tribal partners furthered the understanding of what is missing in the child welfare system and how it impacts interactions with families and poses barriers to permanency and improved outcomes.

*“Being invited to the table as a Partner; to pose the problem and create the solutions, is an important step forward”*

— Youth, Families, African American  
 & Tribal Community Representatives

### Critical issues identified in system reviews included:

- Gap between the systems intent and actual outcomes for families
- Unique strengths and problems faced by African American and American Indian Families are not understood by the child welfare system
- Interventions with families are through universal, rather than individualized and culturally relevant assessments and supports
- Services and supports that are sensitive to current and historical trauma are not always available to families

Some of the most important lessons came from the honest, generous and forthright contributions of community and tribal representatives. They informed the work of CAPP moving forward and changed the way we approached the development and content of the Child and Family Practice Model. Along the way we learned:

- **We Are About Business UN-usual**
  - o We need to do away with processes that do not serve children, families, communities and tribes.

- o We must change the way we do business by allowing system professionals and community members to work together to identify problems and develop solutions that address the unique needs of individual families.
- **Knowledge Speaks But Wisdom Listens**
  - o We learned true engagement means listening, respecting culture and including families, communities and tribes in meaningful conversations.
  - o We learned acknowledging limited knowledge and exposure to different aspects of culture and community allows deeper understanding and cultural humility to occur.
- **Explore, Empower, Enlighten**
  - o We learned we must explore cultural differences, empower families to identify their needs and allow ourselves to be enlightened by new approaches.
  - o We learned genuine exploration and humble inquiry with families, communities and tribes moves away from creating system-led solutions and moves toward true partnership and engagement and results in empowerment.

Ultimately, we learned that community and tribal involvement and guidance at every level of practice and policy development is the key to success. Real system change is only possible if we remain humble, truly collaborate and build on the strengths of the children, families, communities and tribes we seek to serve.

#### **EVOLVING.**

The lessons learned impacted how we approached our work and the work itself. This evolution included changes in our process, structure and products.

Recognizing the importance of supporting community and tribal engagement and involvement at state and cross site levels, our process evolved from one where we dictated agendas and meeting outcomes to one where we listened with appreciation and used the input we received to inform the work.

In order to deepen our partner relationships, we transformed the structure of the planning and implementation teams. The original Advisory Committee that consisted of youth, family, community and tribal representatives was incorporated into the Cross Site Team and CAPP counties brought their local

community and tribal representatives to participate at the Cross Site meetings bringing learning and local perspectives to inform the statewide work.

Our work together began by setting aside our proposed intervention and working with communities, tribes, CAPP counties and key stakeholders to develop the elements of the Child and Family Practice Model. Together we:

- Created core values
- Built the front line practice approach and core elements of the practice model
- Developed and refined the practice behavior

Today we are testing the Child and Family Practice Model with the participation of community and tribal partners at the local level. We continue to work to utilize their expertise and unique perspectives to further the evolution of our effort.

#### **IMPROVING.**

CAPP is a work in progress. We constantly work to improve our approach and process for accessing and using community and tribal guidance effectively and respectfully. In addition, we seek to improve our efforts to ensure there is equitable representation and opportunities for meaningful feedback from community and tribal representatives.

While our process, structure and approach have evolved, our goals remain constant. At the end of this 5-year effort we hope we have developed and successfully implemented a Child and Family Practice Model that:

- Exemplifies honest engagement and mutual respect between families, communities and tribes and social workers, local agencies and state administration
- Addresses the layers of trauma experienced by children and families
- Prioritizes informal supports and more effectively partners with communities and tribes to better serve children and families
- Results in a reduction of long-term foster care for African American and American Indian children and youth

With the help of our community and tribal partners, we will continue to learn, evolve and improve knowing that: coming together is a beginning, keeping together is progress and working together is success.



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CAPP is a five-year federally funded project to reduce long-term foster care. To learn more, visit [www.reducefostercarenow.org](http://www.reducefostercarenow.org) or contact Karen Gunderson, CAPP Project Director, at the California Department of Social Services, (916) 651.7395 or [karen.gunderson@dss.ca.gov](mailto:karen.gunderson@dss.ca.gov).

