

## RESEARCH BRIEF SERIES

Initial Findings:

Parenting Experiences & Parenting Education

### Interview Overview

- 21 interviews (15 female, 6 male)
- Average interview length = 110 minutes
- Questions included general questions about their Family Treatment Court experience, as well as specific questions regarding the Strengthening Families Program
- Interviews were transcribed and coded by five researchers to look for common themes regarding general parenting experiences and parenting education, with a specific focus on SFP

### General Parenting Experiences

#### Child as Motivator

- Most parents viewed their child as motivation for completing FTC
- Some parents felt removal was a disincentive; without their children, there was no reason to be sober

#### Trauma of Child's Removal

- Trauma to parent(s) and child
- Parents felt deep guilt and shame about losing custody
- No differences by child age; overall agreement about the trauma of removal

#### Co-Parenting

- When parents had concerns about how their children were parented by resource family, they often felt those concerns were not taken seriously
- Most parents experienced challenges in rebuilding relationships with family members and (ex)-partners throughout the FTC process

#### Post-Reunification Challenges

- Parents felt their authority had been undermined
- Parents struggled to reestablish routines and find the right balance of structure and giving the child everything they want, possibly due to feeling guilty
- Resuming full custody/ family reunification challenges are not met by any current programs in FTC

#### Change over Time

- Parents recognized they were doing the minimum for their child before FTC
- FTC helped them understand that parenting is about meeting kids' social and emotional needs, not just basic needs
- Parents expressed being more present and patient after FTC

## Parenting Education: Emerging Results

### General Feedback

*"Why do I need to know these things if I already know them? For certain people, I think it's awesome."*

- Classes weren't a good match for all participants
- Classes could be better tailored for teens
- SFP was more well-received than SafeCare

### Peer Learning

*"It gets us out. It gets us with other parents... It's nice to learn about other people's way of parenting"*

- Overall reluctance to view FTC peers as source of support, but liked connecting with alumni
- Appreciated connecting with and learning from other families during SFP

### Program Benefits

*"It was just nice to be able to hang out with [my son] and learn some things of how children are behaved, how to discipline your children, what works for children, just the parenting tools that are available out there. So that was really definitely helpful."*

- Family mealtime and seeing their child were favorite components of SFP
- Parents reported a variety of concrete strategies they learned from SFP:
  - Giving kids choices
  - Family meetings
  - Understanding where child was coming from and having realistic expectations

### Curriculum Feedback

*"They talk to the kids about drugs... The only thing I liked about that part, which I really was very uneasy about in the beginning, was that it opened up mine and my youngest daughter's relationship more, because she was more understanding of what was going on."*

- Some parents were uncomfortable, at least initially, with the idea of SFP talking to kids about drugs
- Practicing skills was difficult or impossible when child(ren) lived away from parents
- Different standards across households made it challenging for consistency with new skills being learned

### Service Delivery

*"We started [SFP], but that was super, super hard... We would get done at 8:00, and the taxi wouldn't get there until 9:00, and we wouldn't get home till 9:30. So we told Mindy, 'If they have an earlier one we'll go. But if not, we just can't do it.'"*

- SFP is not well-branded; parents couldn't always distinguish it from other programs they took
- Time of night and transportation for SFP were challenging for families
- It was hard for parents to feel like service providers reporting back to the court were truly "on their side"