

Supporting and Engaging Families in Early Support for Infants and Toddlers Services and Out-of-Home Care in King County

Findings from a landscape analysis



Project partners



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[Cardea](#) is a national, women of color-led organization with 50 years of experience in social impact evaluation, policy advancement, capacity development, and professional learning. Cardea envisions a world in which optimal health and well-being, equity, and justice are realities for all communities.

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Background

Landscape analysis purpose

With support from Best Starts for Kids, Cardea, the King County Developmental Disabilities and Early Childhood Supports Division (KCDDECS), and Performance Measurement and Evaluation Unit (PME) conducted a landscape analysis, assessing outcomes of current models for providing ESIT services to children in out-of-home care and/or involved in the state child welfare system. The landscape analysis centered the experiences of American Indian/Alaska Native and Black/African American children and families because of their overrepresentation in out-of-home care and the state child welfare system.

The **purpose** of this landscape analysis was to:

- Assess outcomes of current models for providing ESIT services to children in out-of-home care and/or involved in the state child welfare system
- Explore the intersection of ESIT and the child welfare system and how service models do or do not promote equitable outcomes for children and families engaged in ESIT services
- Identify what the King County system could do to better support and engage families and caregivers and improve these systems to function efficiently and promote equity



Key terms

This landscape analysis explored experiences at the intersection of two State-run systems: 1) Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) and 2) child welfare. Key terms used throughout this report include:

- **Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT)** – a range of specialized services designed to help children birth to age 3 who have a developmental delay or specific health condition associated with delays. ESIT is sometimes referred to as “Birth-to-Three Services” or “Early Intervention.”
- **Child welfare** – a continuum of services focused on ensuring that children are safe and that families have the necessary support to care for their children successfully
- **Child Protective Services (CPS)** – a state agency that investigates reports of child abuse and neglect
- **Out-of-home care** –placements and services provided to children and families when children are removed from their home due to concerns of abuse and/or neglect. Examples of potential out-of-home care arrangements include foster and kinship care.

Source: Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.; Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2020; Washington State Department of Children, Youth & Families, n.d. -a; Washington State Department of Children, Youth & Families, n.d.-b



Cardea and a Community Expert Council co-designed and guided this landscape analysis

In early 2021, Cardea worked with KCDDECSD and PME staff to form a Community Expert Council (CEC) that included families and caregivers with experiences in the child welfare system, with a focus on inequities in ESIT access, connection to services, and outcomes. By spring 2021, Cardea formed a **six-person CEC** that met monthly to co-design and guide this effort. In alignment with the focus of the landscape analysis, CEC members were families and caregivers of color, particularly American Indian/Alaska Native and Black families and caregivers in King County who had received ESIT services and been involved in out-of-home care and/or the child welfare system within the last five years.

Simultaneously, Cardea conducted a **literature review** and **secondary analysis** of available data from the 2019 [Prenatal to Five Developmental Screening, Referral, and Connection to Services in King County](#) landscape analysis. The CEC reviewed key findings from this review and analysis and honed guiding evaluation questions for the rest of the landscape analysis in mid-2021.

Cardea then partnered with the CEC and KCDDECSD to develop a data collection and analysis plan, including draft discussion group instruments for **three family and four provider discussion groups** in winter 2021/2022. Raw data from these discussions were shared with the CEC and KCDDECSD in early 2022, and this report includes **collective interpretation of emergent themes**.

Guiding questions:

1. How can King County strengthen the experience of families at the intersection of ESIT and child welfare?
2. What is unique about the experience at the intersection of ESIT & child welfare?



Considerations and limitations

COVID-19 impacted the breadth and depth of this landscape analysis. Recruiting families and service providers to participate in discussion groups as everyone continued to navigate impacts of COVID-19 on personal, programmatic, and organizational levels was a challenge. As a result, Cardea did not have the opportunity to learn from as many people with experience from both a family and provider perspective of the ESIT and state child welfare system as would have been helpful. Yet, project partners were successful in talking with families and providers at the intersection of ESIT and the state child welfare systems.

Project partners were not successful in directly engaging providers who work directly in the state child welfare system. Similarly, the project partners were not able to gain access to quantitative data that described the experiences and outcomes of families receiving ESIT services who are involved in the state child welfare system. Future work should focus on engaging providers in the state child welfare system and continuing to explore the possibility of merging datasets to better understand this intersection.





Current Landscape

Early Support for Infants and Toddlers in King County

Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) ESIT program provides services to children birth to age three who have developmental delays or disabilities. Research shows that early supports are best for babies and toddlers with developmental delays and disabilities. King County's ESIT programming is family centered, culturally competent, and community based, and reaches a diverse group of children.

DCYF's ESIT program provides services to children birth to age three who have developmental delays or disabilities

The mission of the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) program is to build upon family strength by providing coordination, supports, resources, and services to enhance the development of children with developmental delays and disabilities through everyday learning opportunities.

ESIT Guiding Principles

Families are at the center

- Families are equal partners who bring skills, experience, and knowledge about their child. Families make the final decision.
- Infants and toddlers learn best through everyday experiences and interactions with familiar people in familiar settings.
- All families with the necessary supports and resources can enhance their children's learning and development.
- The goal of ESIT is to enable families to know their rights under the ESIT program, effectively communicate their child's needs, and help their children develop and learn.

ESIT services are designed to best meet the families' needs

- The ESIT process, from initial contact to transition, must be responsive, flexible, and individualized to reflect the child's and family's priorities, learning styles, and cultural beliefs.
- The role of the service provider is to work in a team to support individualized family service plans and functional outcomes, based on child and family needs and priorities.
- ESIT practices must be based on the best available current evidence and research.

ESIT will help children develop positive social skills and relationships, acquire language and communication skills, and learn appropriate behaviors to meet their needs.

For babies and toddlers with developmental delays and disabilities, early supports are best

Researchers at the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center compiled evidence related to the importance of ESIT. Key findings include:

- Neural circuits in the brain create the foundation for learning, behavior, and health and are most flexible during the first three years of life
- Persistent “toxic” stress can damage the developing brain, often leading to lifelong challenges with learning, behavior, physical well-being, and mental health
- Positive early experiences strengthen the brain, especially stable relationships with caring and responsive adults, safe and supportive environments, and appropriate nutrition
- Early social and emotional development and physical health are critical to cognitive and language skill development
- High quality ESIT services can change a child’s developmental trajectory and improve outcomes for children, families, and communities
- ESIT services are likely to be more effective and less costly when they are provided earlier rather than later in life

Source: Goode et al., 2011



King County structures ESIT services to be family centered, culturally competent, and community based

In King County, KCDDECSD is the county lead agency for ESIT. ESIT services are free for families with an adjusted annual income below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level. For all other families, ESIT providers take insurance which results in co-pays and sometimes other fees for families. Families connect with ESIT services through referral or self-referral to Help Me Grow Washington.

The King County Interagency Coordinating Council (KCICC) provides oversight of Birth-to-Three (ESIT) services at the local level. The mission of the KCICC is to create collaborations that work towards providing comprehensive, culturally competent, family centered, and community-based services for families and all children birth to three years of age with special needs in King County. The KCICC invites all community members to participate in any of the meetings, including families, Birth-to-Three providers, and community representatives from early learning and public education, health and mental health, higher education, government, and community-based infant, toddler, or family programs.

Source: Department of Community and Human Services Public Health Seattle & King County, 2019

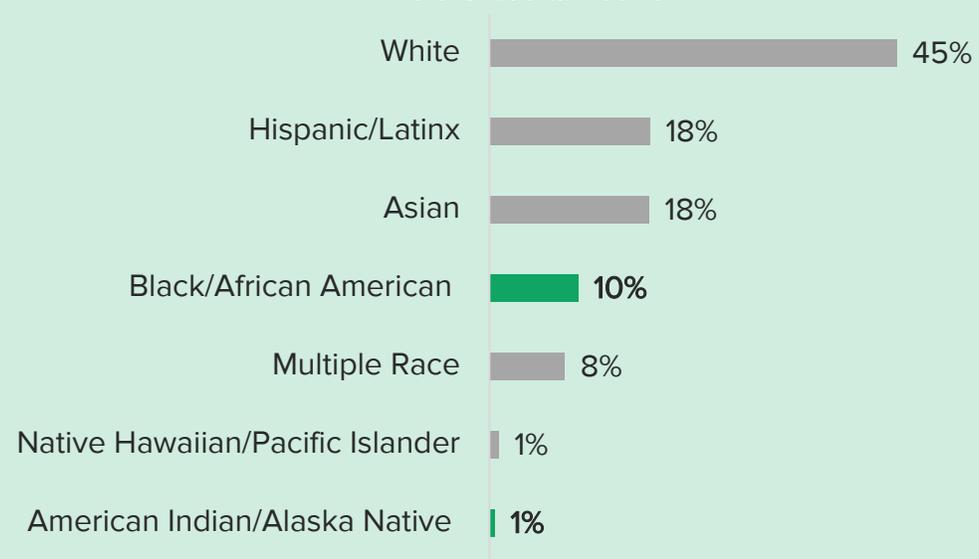


∞ A small proportion of ESIT services in King County reached Black/African American and American Indian/Alaska Native children

In total, ESIT services reached **5,262 King County children** in 2020. This includes **515 Black/African American children** and **31 American Indian/Alaska Native children**. ESIT reached proportions of children by race/ethnicity similar to the makeup of King County's population, with 8% of children birth to two years old being Black/African American and 1% being American Indian/Alaska Native.

Source: Best Starts for Kids, 2021; Washington State Office of Financial Management, Forecasting and Research Division, 2022

In 2020, 10% of children served by ESIT in King County were Black/African American and 1% were American Indian/Alaska Native



Child Welfare in Washington and King County

DCYF's child welfare system and Child Protective Services investigate reports of suspected child abuse and neglect. Families become involved with the child welfare system during the investigation. Families and children of color are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system in King County. Racial inequities are rooted in historically, systemically, and structurally racist practices that result in higher rates of poverty and involvement in the criminal justice system, health inequities, toxic stress, and other factors that negatively impact families and children of color.

∞ DCYF's child welfare system and Child Protective Services investigate reports of child abuse and neglect

The child welfare system is a group of services designed to promote the well-being of children. Just as with ESIT, the child welfare system sits within DCYF. The system develops and delivers programs that prevent child abuse and neglect by strengthening families, protecting children, reuniting children with their families, and finding permanent families for children who cannot return home.

Child Protective Services (CPS) is a state agency that investigates reports of child abuse and neglect. Children may be removed from their home due to concerns about safety, such as violence in the home, abandonment, neglect, or a parent with substance use issues.

Source: Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2020;
Department of Health and Human Services, 2014



Families typically become involved with the child welfare system after a report of suspected child abuse or neglect, or parental incarceration

Most families become involved with the child welfare system after a report of suspected child abuse or neglect by a parent or primary caregiver, or parental incarceration. Child welfare systems typically take the following actions:

1. Child Protective Services (CPS) workers screen reports of potential abuse or neglect. A report is screened when there is sufficient information to suggest an investigation is warranted.
2. If CPS screens a report, workers investigate, which can take days to months. Children believed to be in immediate danger are removed from the home and put in the care of family members (kinship care) or foster care.
3. If the investigation results in a founded case of child abuse or neglect, CPS may initiate a child protection or dependency proceeding at juvenile court. Later, at an adjudicatory hearing, the court hears evidence and decides whether maltreatment occurred and whether the child should be under the continuing jurisdiction of the court. Alternatively, some families receive in-home services that are recommended or court-ordered. In-home services are designed to prevent a child from being removed from the home by strengthening, supporting, and stabilizing families.

Source: Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2020;
Department of Health and Human Services, 2014



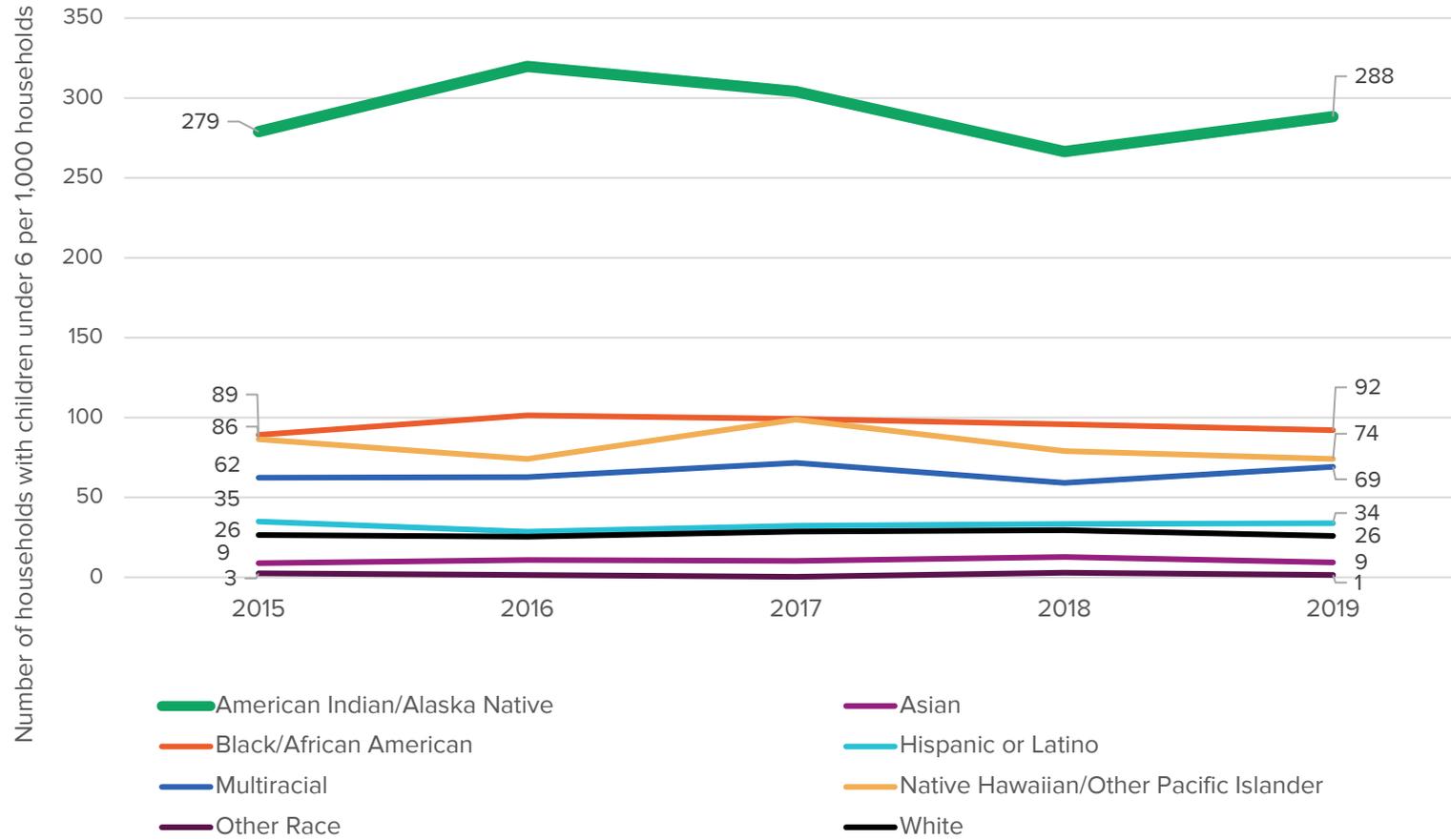
Families and children of color are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system

Families and children of color are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system nationally and in King County. Racial inequities in the child welfare system are rooted in historically, systemically, and structurally racist practices that result in higher rates of poverty and involvement in the criminal justice system, health inequities, toxic stress, and other factors that negatively impact families and children of color. Families and children of color are more likely to be investigated for child abuse and neglect and are more likely to enter and be placed in out-of-home care. **In 2017, African American/Black children were more than two times as likely and American Indian/Alaska Native children were nearly three times as likely to be placed in out-of-home care than white children in King County.**

Source: Center for Social Sector Analytics & Technology, 2021; Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2021; Ellis, 2019; Haight et al, 2018



American Indian/Alaska Native households with children under 6 years old have the highest rate of investigations and assessments of child abuse and/or neglect in King County

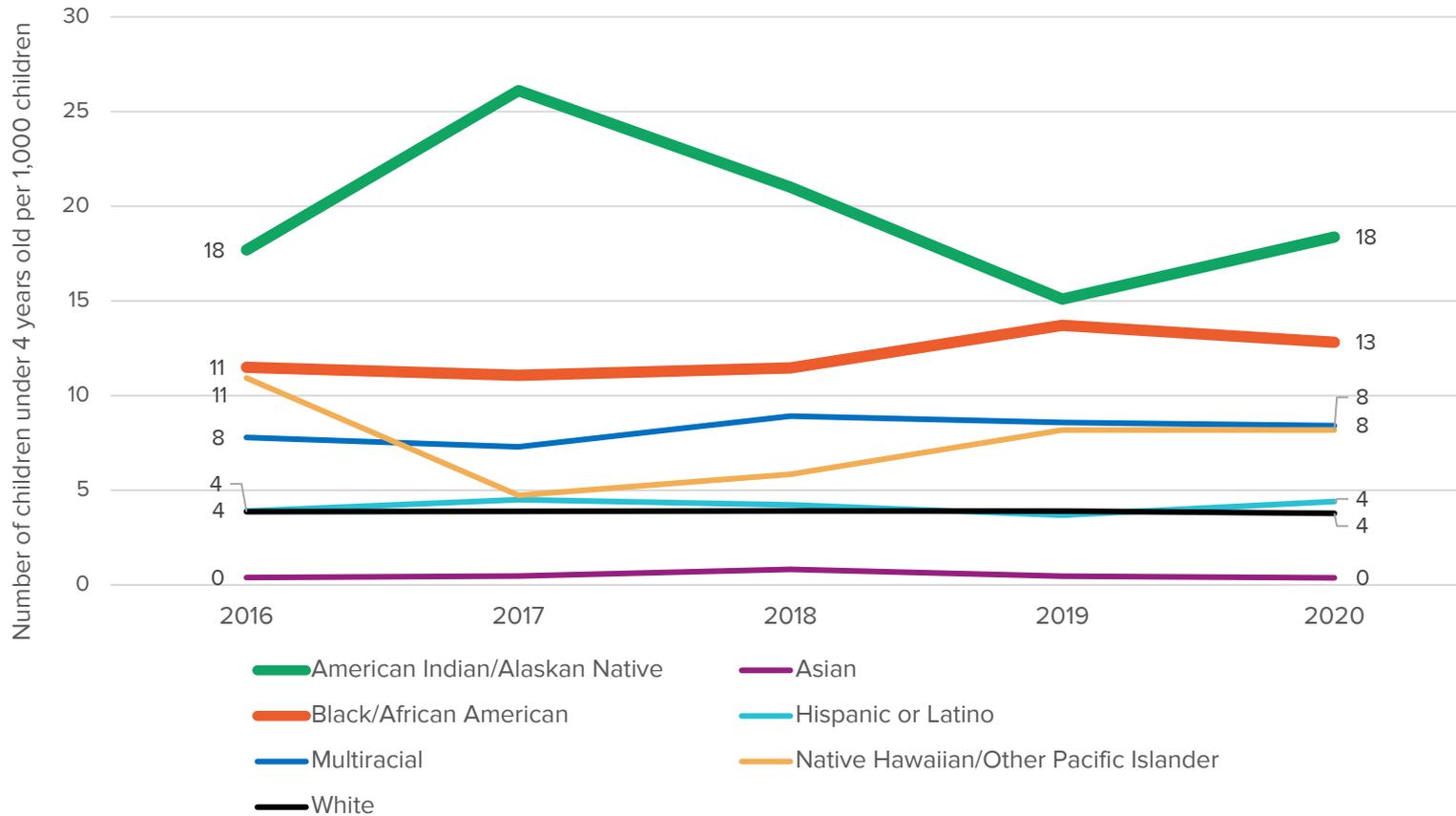


Authors of a scoping study suggested that American Indian/Alaska Native families have high rates of engagement in the child welfare system because of the influence of historical trauma and systemic racism on rates of poverty and substance use disorder among American Indian/Alaska Native families. Additionally, American Indian/Alaska Native families experiencing racism when accessing child welfare services undermines their ability to trust that the child welfare system has the best intentions of families in mind.

In 2019, American Indian/Alaska Native households with children under 6 years old had the most child welfare investigations of abuse and neglect, compared to other racial groups in King County. In fact, American Indian/Alaska Native households had **11 times** more child abuse and neglect investigations than white households. In 2019, **288 per 1,000 American Indian/Alaska Native households** had investigations, compared to the 26 per 1,000 white households that had investigations.

Source: Center for Social Sector Analytics & Technology, 2021; Haight et al, 2018

American Indian/Alaska Native and Black/African American children birth to 4 years old have the highest rate of not reuniting with their families in King County



Black/African American and American Indian/Alaska Native children are less likely to be reunited with their families and caregivers who are involved in the child welfare system, due to historical, systemic, structural, and institutional racism that leads to a cycle of higher poverty rates, limited access to social services, and higher levels of toxic stress. Further, child welfare professionals may knowingly or unknowingly let their biases impact actions or decisions about reunification.

American Indian/Alaska Native and Black/African American children under 4 years were the least likely to be reunited with their family compared to other racial groups in King County. In 2020, about **18 American Indian/Alaska Native** and **13 Black/African American** children per 1,000 did not reunite with their families, compared to 4 white children per 1,000 children.

The rates of American Indian/Alaska Native and Black/African American children in out-of-home care decreased from 2007 to 2020. However, on average, these two groups still had the highest rates over the 13-year period.

Source: Center for Social Sector Analytics & Technology, 2021; Ellis, 2019

Intersection of ESIT and Child Welfare

Systems and programs at the local and national level work to integrate ESIT and child welfare, so children in the child welfare system have access to services.

∞ Systems and programs exist to support families at the intersection of ESIT and child welfare

Intersection at the systems level

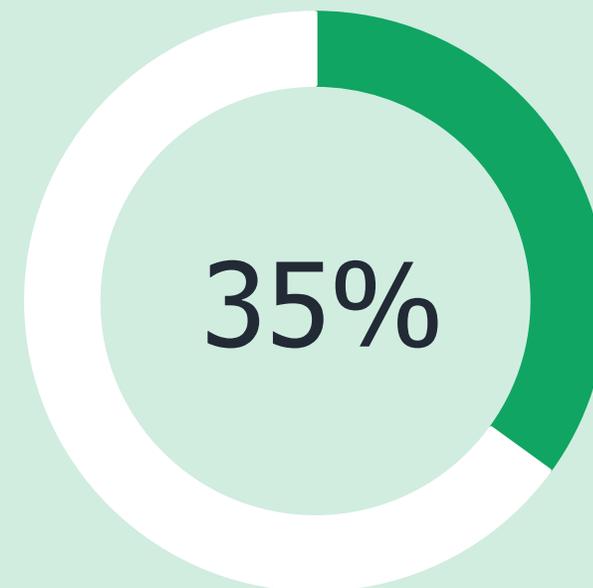
In Washington State, when a CPS worker suspects that a child up to three years of age may be subject to abuse or neglect and has a developmental delay, the CPS worker must make a referral to ESIT within two working days after identifying the concern.

Intersection at the program level

Two examples of programs that link ESIT services and child welfare are CHERISH and Project PLAY. CHERISH builds relationships between all important people in a child's life (e.g., specialists, caregivers, parents) and provides specialized infant mental health services, such as supporting young children and families experiencing separation and trauma. Activities for each child-caregiver are individualized and include; listening to concerns, exploring possible solutions, and in-the-moment play and other regulating activities. Project PLAY promotes the positive social and emotional development of children in the foster care system through building the skills of child care providers and families to support the social and emotional behaviors of young children in early care and education settings. For example, they educate child care providers about what to expect when working with children who have experienced trauma.

Source: Arkansas Division of Children and Family Services, n.d.; CHERISH, 2021; United States Office of Child Care, 2011; Washington State Department of Early Learning, 2015

In 2016, over a third of children who entered out-of-home care in Washington State were birth to three years.



Source: Center for Social Sector Analytics & Technology, 2021



Family Voices

Voices from Family Discussion Group Sessions

Cardea held three discussion sessions with families at the intersection of ESIT and child welfare from King County. The goals of the sessions were to gain an understanding of current experiences within these systems and identify ways to improve future services.

Families report positive experiences with ESIT staff and struggles working with child welfare staff

Families report that experiences with ESIT staff were generally positive, noting that they felt heard and supported by ESIT staff and did not experience stigma. Families find ESIT staff to be generally friendly in nature. Families also report ease in communicating with ESIT staff, find ESIT staff easy to talk to, and feel that staff were advocates for their children and families.

While some families report positive experiences with child welfare staff, families more often report difficulties working with child welfare staff. Several families describe situations where their needs are not acknowledged by child welfare staff, while others share experiences of feeling judged by staff. Families also describe experiences with stigma, such as being dismissed for past experiences, including substance use issues.

“[ESIT staff] have always been very good advocates for what [kids] actually need and for transitions, and [ESIT staff] have always gone, I feel, above and beyond, to connect with the parents.”

Parent/Caregiver

“You know, we had nothing. And, so, the whole [child welfare] system just completely fell apart for her and for our kiddo and for us, because we could have been getting support all along. Through this whole process and for her transition, like, we've had to...continue therapy.”

Parent/Caregiver



“I was just **judged all the time**. I was talk[ed] down to all.....And you know when people get treated like that, **it's hard for you to trust.**”

– *Parent/caregiver*

Families express a need for systemic changes within ESIT and child welfare

ESIT and child welfare services should be culturally and linguistically responsive to ensure access for all families.



Families highlight the importance of culture in all aspects of life and note that ESIT and child welfare systems should consider family culture in providing services. Families note that staff in both systems do not reflect the communities they serve and indicate that they would appreciate a shift towards a workforce that reflects the communities served.



Families express a need for informational materials and services in multiple languages. Some families note that they would prefer to receive services in their primary language instead of through an interpreter to increase understanding and engagement.



Families encourage greater diversity among foster families, so children can be placed in culturally and linguistically similar households. They recommend prioritizing cultural and linguistic match between foster families and children to help children feel comfortable in their foster environment and to promote more seamless reunification with families and caregivers.

ESIT and child welfare systems should provide information and increase awareness of supportive services to families.



Families involved in child welfare and foster families share that they value involvement in ESIT services provided to their children. Families express interest in being invited to participate in services, receiving information about what services are being provided to their children, and getting regular updates about their children's progress. Families and caregivers involved in the child welfare system indicate that involvement in ESIT services helps them connect with their children and be more informed about their needs when reunification occurs.

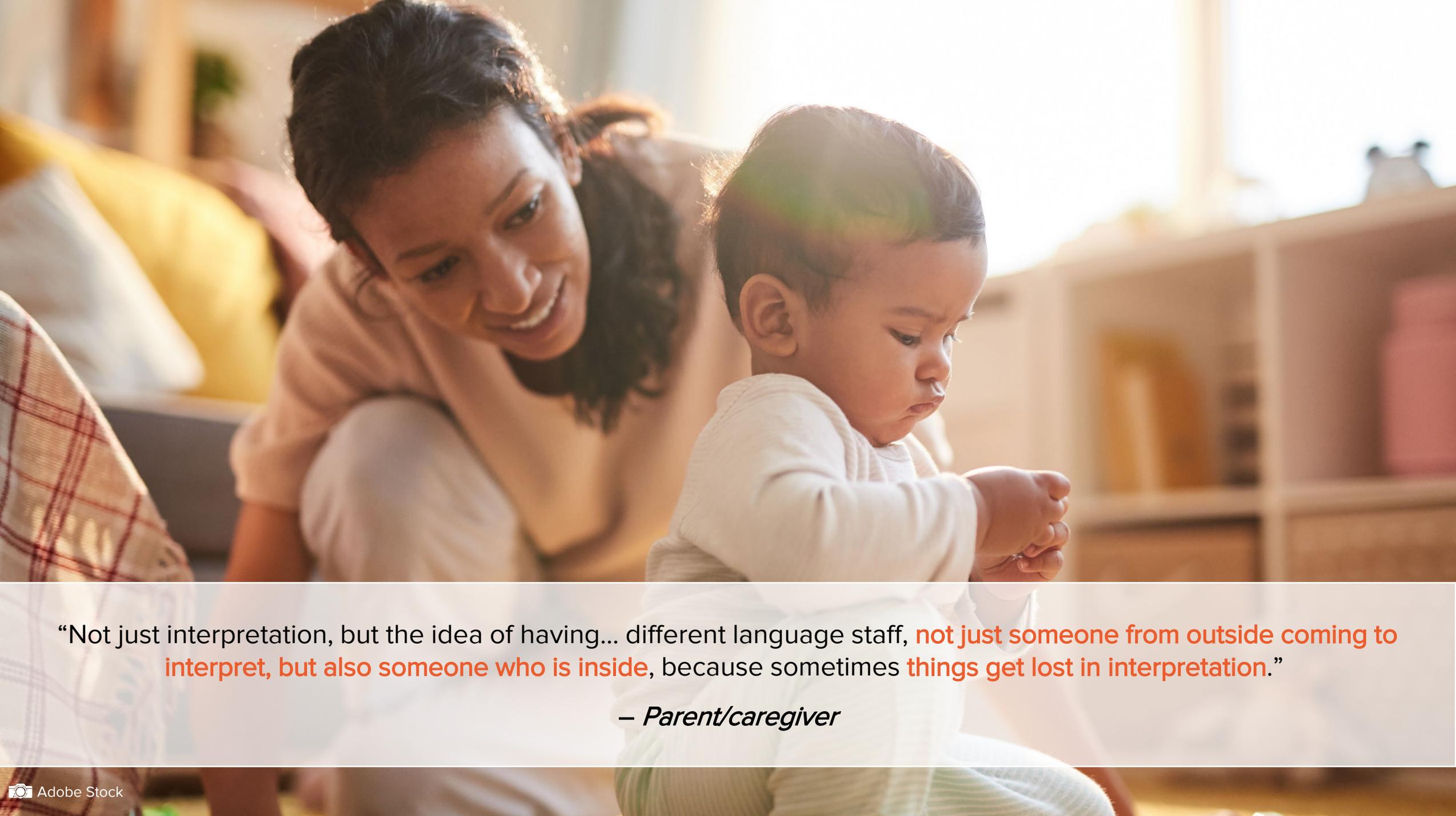


Families note that they would benefit from a more robust orientation to ESIT and child welfare services to ensure that they are comfortable with the services and understand the process and timeline for receiving services.



“Every culture is different, so **you have to acknowledge [a person's] culture first...** sometimes we come from the same country, with other people, and we still have different cultures... **everyone is different...**you have to acknowledge how they think...to try to **support them with it.**”

– Parent/caregiver



“Not just interpretation, but the idea of having... different language staff, **not just someone from outside coming to interpret, but also someone who is inside**, because sometimes **things get lost in interpretation.**”

– *Parent/caregiver*



Provider Voices

Voices from Provider Discussion Group Sessions

Cardea held four discussion sessions with 25 ESIT and family support providers from King County. Discussions centered on providers' experiences working with families at the intersection of ESIT and child welfare.

Providers identify a need to provide culturally responsive services

Providers explain that they would like to see ESIT and child welfare systems offer more culturally and linguistically responsive, and community-centered services for families. In a specific instance, a provider highlights the need to provide services in the birth language of the family to provide more linguistically accessible services. Many providers note that these systems are often rooted in a white and Western lens, which can result in families' needs not being met.

Providers indicate that consideration of family culture is particularly important to families and caregivers who are involved in the child welfare system when thinking about the home where their child is placed for foster care. Providers also stress the importance of language match between families and caregivers who are involved in the child welfare system and foster families, suggesting there is a need for more foster families who reflect the linguistic diversity of families and caregivers who are involved in the child welfare system.

Providers say it is distressing for families and caregivers when their child is placed in a home that is not culturally/linguistically matched. Providers particularly express concern about language match for young children who transition between homes at an age when they do not have a clear understanding of why their home environment is changing.

“We need to have a system where it accommodates all culture[s], all people.

And, we all should come from a background of understanding what's going on with these children, what's happening with them, and how [we can] support them.”

Provider

“I wish that the **ESIT system could provide more diversity and language support** around children who have these kinds of experiences or might have visits in one language but live in a home that speaks a different language...**language being just one kind of form of cultural dominance.**”

- Provider



Providers observe and acknowledge stigma present within ESIT and child welfare systems

Providers report observing stigma and racism within ESIT and child welfare systems impacting how services are provided to families. When staff stigmatize families and caregivers involved in the child welfare system, providers see impacts to the relationships between the families and the child's relationship with both families.

Providers note that families who are involved in the child welfare system and foster families fear that children will be stigmatized for receiving ESIT services. They note that families are sometimes hesitant to tell school districts about past ESIT services or any diagnosis because they fear their child will be isolated from other children.

Providers also underscore the prevalence of racism within ESIT and child welfare systems. One provider notes that they see babies and toddlers from communities of color labeled with behavioral challenges more often than white-presenting babies and toddlers. Providers explain that white and white-presenting children in the child welfare system also may be more likely to return home than those from communities of color, which providers attributed to potential discrimination within the child welfare system.

Observations

- Racism
- Stigma about receiving ESIT services
- Stigma associated with parental substance use
- Stigma associated with families and caregivers who are involved in the child welfare system

“It is a real disservicewhen the DCYF, says to a foster family, in particular, like ‘Oh, parents have already lost a couple kids, like there's no hope.’ This doesn't help.... because, in my experience, then a couple years down the road, then the child does return home and then there's lots of barriers of communications between foster parents and parents”

Provider



“ESIT services are sometimes so disturbing to people...like, oh my baby’s not screwed up.....**All that kind of defensiveness and fear of labeling.**”

– Provider

Providers express a need for more cohesive systems



Providers report a need for more effective communication between ESIT and child welfare systems to ensure access to both systems and continuity of ESIT services for children moving through the child welfare system. Providers also say there is a need for county-level provider networks across Washington State to facilitate communication and seamless support when a child moves out of King County.



Providers indicate that it would be helpful for social workers within the child welfare system to be more knowledgeable about ESIT services and promote these services to families. They indicate that families within the child welfare system may be unaware of services available to them and note that social workers have an opportunity to educate families about these services.



Providers note that the lack of cohesive systems results in some families not receiving continuous ESIT services. For example, when a child moves to a new foster home, they may be connected to a new ESIT agency and provider. This change in providers further disrupts the child's environment. Providers also explain that high rates of staff turnover in ESIT and child welfare systems contribute to disruption.





Promising Practices

Promising Practices

The literature provides examples of ways forward with ESIT and child welfare systems that supports children and their families.



“Sometimes, we **assume that caregivers won't appreciate something or understand something** or whatever the case, and **so we aren't as transparent** as we could be with them. And, I feel like that further divides us, and **makes it hard for caregivers of color to feel heard and seen and understood**. I think it's a very anti-racist practice to be transparent and to be open and honest... with how ESIT [and child welfare] services work, how our processes are, what we're doing, why we're doing it... I think that that really gets at the core of some of these racist principles which are like, let me make these decisions for you, I know what's in your best interest as the provider...I'm the expert you're not. You know those are kind of the old ways that I think **racism is like in the system and can be insidious**. **I think that if we are really open and upfront and transparent with people, then, then those things can't kind of continue on.**”

– Provider

Organizations and advocates have documented strategies to strengthen the intersection of ESIT and child welfare

	Facilitate partnerships, linkages, and formal agreements between ESIT organizations and child welfare systems around shared goals of promoting optimal development and improving family functioning
	Educate and engage child welfare professionals on the benefits of ESIT programs and ESIT professionals on the unique needs of children in the child welfare system
	Incorporate and maintain a focus on early childhood development, trauma-informed care, young children's mental health, and the importance of secure relationships in child welfare services, programs, and policies

	Provide opportunity for all young children in out-of-home care to enroll in quality early care and education programs
	Include an ESIT professional in Family Group Conferencing* every time a child under age 3 is in child welfare
	Ensure continuity of early care and education when a child is reunited with their birth family
	Evaluate programs and strategies and communicate results to increase the number of evidence-informed and evidence-based programs for jurisdictions to draw upon to effectively work with families and caregivers

Source: Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d. b; Fischer et al. 2020; Kindering, 2017; United States Office of Child Care, 2011

*Family Group Conferencing is a process in which family members make decisions with service providers about how to care for their children and develop a plan for services.

States are implementing seven key approaches to reduce racial inequities in the child welfare system

The Alliance for Racial Equity in Child Welfare surveyed child welfare administrators nationally to identify strategies to promote racial equity among children and families in the child welfare system. The following improvement strategies were identified to achieve racial equity in the child welfare system. Many strategies included systems cohesion, including cohesion with early learning systems. Many of these strategies can also be applied in parallel within the ESIT system.

1. Use legislative directives and executive mandates to initiate or monitor ongoing work to identify racial disparities and take actions to reduce them
2. Create operational structures within the child welfare agency and key child- and family-serving systems (such as the ESIT system) with responsibility to advance a racial equity action agenda
3. Collect and analyze data to better understand the extent and nature of racially disparate outcomes
4. Provide professional development focused on how race and racism impact the lives of children, families, and communities, as well as institutions
5. Structure new partnerships with other public and private agencies (including ESIT), communities, and families to assist with and support disparity-reduction efforts
6. Engage tribal governments around compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act and reduction of poor outcomes among tribal communities
7. Engage communities to enhance understanding between the public child welfare agency, early learning systems, community-based institutions, and families most impacted by the child welfare system



Source: Miller and Esenstad, 2015

Family and caregiver engagement at the program level supports positive outcomes

Engaging families as partners through casework and ESIT services promotes the well-being of children and families. Strategies for engagement include:

- Host meetings between foster caregivers and families
- Ensure a cultural and linguistic match between families and providers
- Support families with basic needs and other everyday life problems
- Include family in all discussions and decision-making processes
- Find additional family members and important people to the child to support and be aware of the process
- Help families document and celebrate success

Source: Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016



An Oregon case study demonstrates family navigators prevent or reduce time in foster care

The *Strengthening, Preserving, and Reunifying Families Program* in Oregon works to prevent the need for foster care and reduce the length of stay in foster care by employing parent and caregiver navigators to assist families in navigating multiple systems. Family navigators regularly engage with families and caregivers and support them with resources including:

- Parenting specialists to support families and reinforce positive parenting behaviors
- Relief nurseries to provide child care and parenting support services
- Substance use disorder inpatient services focusing on multi-dimensional issues such as parenting in conjunction with recovery
- Front-end supports such as mental health and domestic violence specialists responding with CPS workers
- Short-term, long-term, and emergency housing
- Trauma and therapeutic services

To work at the intersection of ESIT and child welfare, family navigators can support family engagement with ESIT services, including navigating ESIT supports and addressing potential stigma.

Source: Mclellan, 2019



Family resource centers provide caregiver supports and prevent child welfare system involvement

Family resource centers are community-based resource hubs where families can access formal and informal support to promote their health and well-being.

Services typically include caregiver skill training, job training, prevention of substance use disorder, mental health services, housing support, crisis intervention services, literacy programs, and basic needs support like food or clothing banks.

Resource centers are each unique and driven by family needs. The model seeks to provide multiple services to families, start ESIT early, and reduce the likelihood of formal involvement with the child welfare system.

Source: Casey Family Programs, 2019





Recommendations

Recommendations

Recommendations to improve experiences of children and families at the intersection of ESIT and child welfare focus on promoting equity, facilitating cross-systems partnerships, transforming the workforces, and making ESIT services more accessible to all families.

Promote equity by enhancing services that meet families where they are

- Strengthen prevention programs that connect families to ESIT and support families before engaging with child welfare by expanding the reach of family resource centers
- Ensure that families and caregivers are equal partners in decision making about what ESIT services and supports are needed
- Prioritize equity within the child welfare system by identifying and working towards approaches to increase the diversity of foster family placements
- Honor all family structures by asking about pronouns and updating ESIT and child welfare paperwork to use more inclusive terms (e.g., parents instead of mother and father)
- Ensure that services are available when families need them by expanding the schedule of ESIT and child welfare services beyond traditional business hours (e.g., Monday-Friday between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m.)
- Facilitate expanded social support for families by creating affinity groups for families and caregivers



∞ Facilitate cross-systems partnerships that efficiently respond to families' needs

- Engage stakeholders in both ESIT and child welfare systems to share knowledge, co-create processes, and streamline services
- Engage the court system as a partner in promoting ESIT services and regularly engage Parent Allies* as partners
- Build partnerships with agencies in neighboring counties to facilitate smooth transitions when a child moves between homes
- Include brief child/family biographies in ESIT and child welfare case files that are co-written by the family and staff to ensure shared information and seamless transitions between providers and case workers

*Parent Allies are parents who have successfully resolved issues that led to their child being placed in the child welfare system, resulting in family reunification or another permanency outcome, and who have an interest in working collaboratively to improve the lives of children and families.

Source: W.A. Legis. Assemb., 2020



Strengthen and transform the ESIT and child welfare workforces through training and capacity development

- Develop the capacity of all ESIT and child welfare staff by providing ongoing training on ESIT, early childhood development, equity, healing-centered care, and cultural responsiveness
- Create opportunities for and recruit community members with relevant life experience to join the workforce and become leaders in ESIT and child welfare
- Train child welfare providers on the importance of ESIT services and how to connect families to ESIT services
- Offer opportunities for ESIT and child welfare providers to connect and to debrief, learn, and build a greater sense of community to improve staff retention
- Institute regular reflective practice sessions among ESIT providers to strengthen the delivery of culturally responsive and anti-racist services



∞ Make ESIT services available and accessible to all families

- Ensure ESIT services are offered to kinship and other informal out-of-home placement families and children
- Employ trained peer navigators for community outreach to serve as a bridge between providers and families and offer culturally responsive, family-centered wraparound support
- Normalize ESIT services by creating promotional materials that describe the breadth of supports and reflect the diversity of all families and family structures, including those involved in child welfare
- Promote resiliency for all families by integrating healing-centered approaches that elevate families' strengths
- Support families in understanding processes and timelines for accessing ESIT services
- Incorporate information about ESIT into every step of the CPS process from initial report to claim investigation to out-of-home care placement



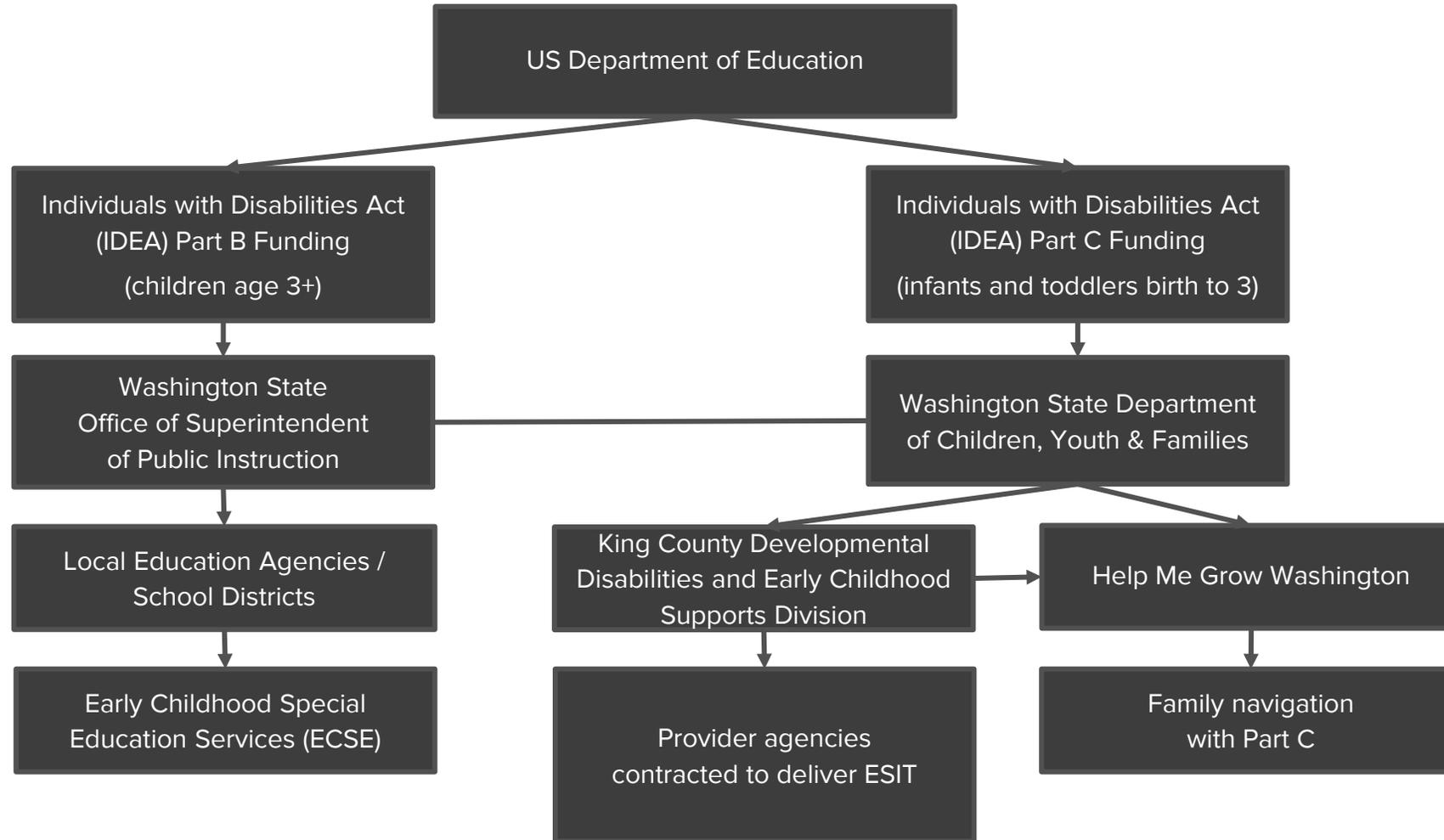


Appendix & References

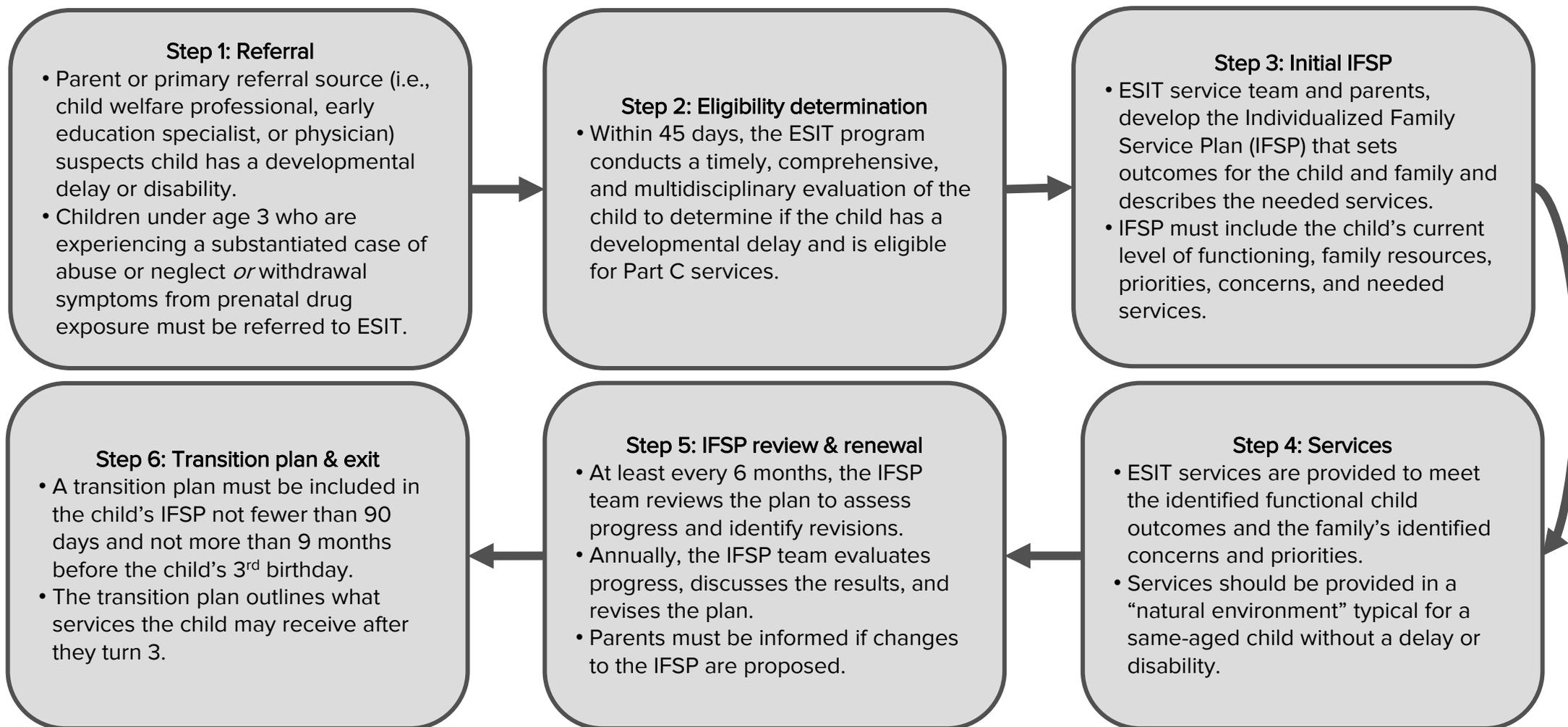
Appendix

Expanded findings, literature review, and instruments available upon request by contacting BSK.data@kingcounty.gov

∞ Flow of funding for supportive services

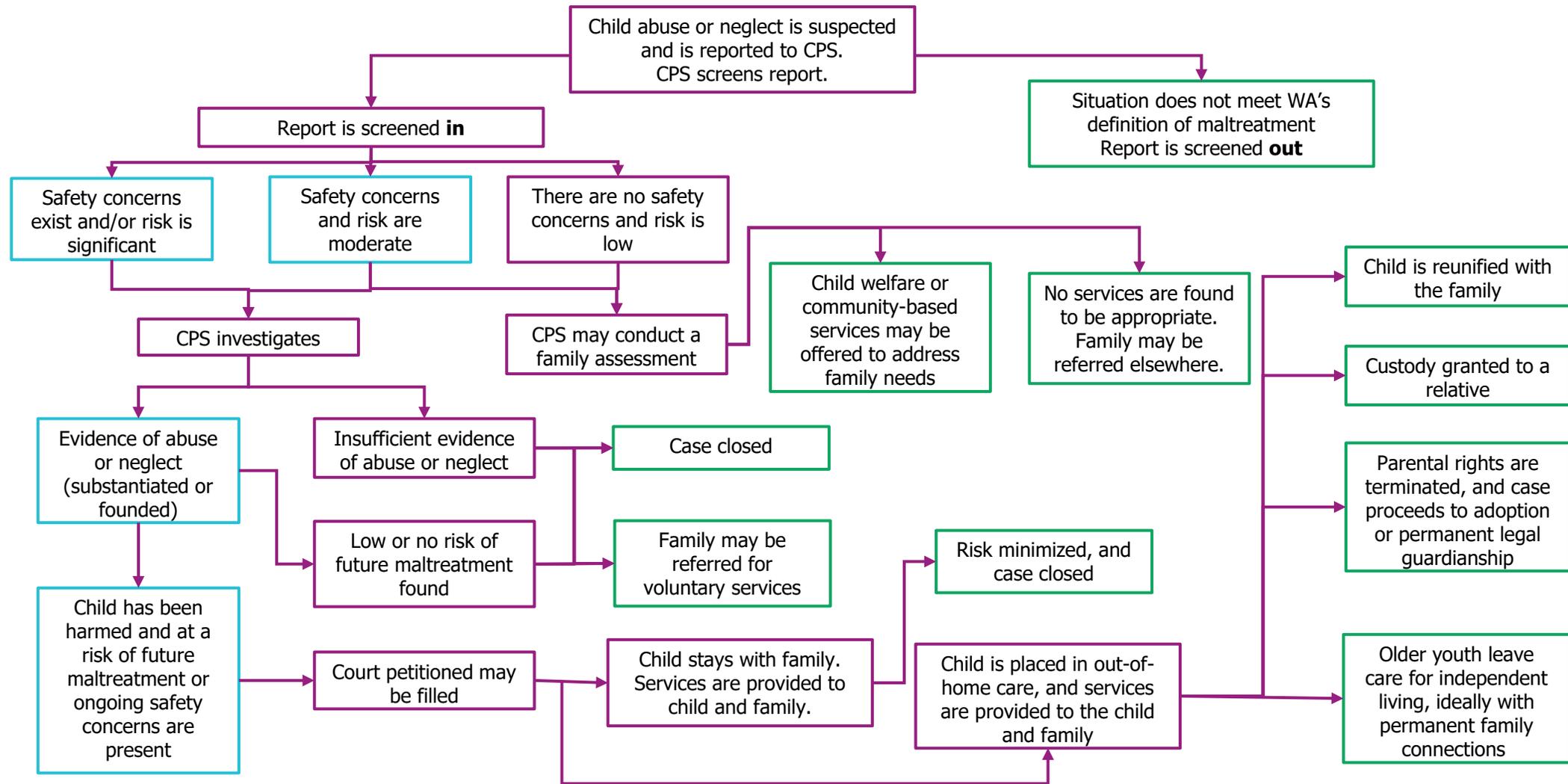


∞ Common steps in the ESIT process



Source: Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2018

Child welfare services overview



Source: Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2020

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