Child Welfare Case Outcomes of ORPC Representation

Study Leverages Linked Data from Child Welfare and the ORPC; Focus is on the ORPC's Interdisciplinary Representation Model

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

This report presents initial findings from the **first linkage of administrative data from the Office of Respondent Parents' Counsel (ORPC)** and **Child Welfare** via the Linked Information Network of Colorado.

The work was conducted by an **independent, neutral evaluator**, the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab.

Interdisciplinary team representation was compared to attorney-only representation to identify trends in:

- Case characteristics of each representation model
- Family preservation outcomes
- Permanency and reunification outcomes
- Re-entry outcomes
- Case timelines

Results can support the ORPC in communicating the value of the interdisciplinary model and taking a **data-informed approach to model improvement.**

Data challenges and opportunities for improving cross-system outcomes reporting are also described.

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Executive Summary

Background

To continuously strengthen their work to protect the fundamental right to parent, the Office of Respondent Parents' Counsel (ORPC) partnered with the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab (Colorado Lab) to build evidence for the interdisciplinary team (IDT) model of parent representation. In this report, we examine outcomes of child welfare cases with parent representation by the ORPC.

Methods

The Linked Information Network of Colorado (LINC) was used to connect legal representation data from the ORPC to Colorado Department of Human Services child welfare case information over a two-year period (case closures in 2021 and 2022). Each child welfare case was attributed to either the ORPC interdisciplinary model of representation (n=1,567) or the attorney-only model of representation (n=2,152). Interdisciplinary representation means pairing an attorney with a social worker and/or parent advocate.

Prior research on the interdisciplinary model identified a variety of social/legal factors that can make a case more complex and act as barriers to family strengthening.[1] Such complex case needs require wraparound support, which an IDT team may be best suited to deliver. Latent class analysis was used to understand how complex case needs group together; this created "groups" of cases that share common characteristics. We used t-tests and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to determine if case complexity or outcomes differ between representation models and among the groups.

Key Insights: Value of Interdisciplinary Representation for Keeping Kids Safely at Home

Family preservation, permanency, and re-entry outcomes illustrate that **IDT teams serve as a leveling-up factor for parents with more complex cases.** Removal rates, kinship care, and re-entry were similar between attorney-only and interdisciplinary representation models. However, interdisciplinary teams represent parents with **greater case complexities**, including families with greater child welfare involvement and substance use issues. Interdisciplinary teams are also serving more parents of color and more parents with disabilities, who can face systemic oppression and are disproportionately represented in child welfare.[2]

Thus, the on-par outcomes show how IDT teams are closing the gap for parents with complex case needs. Prior research suggests this is because there are aspects of complex cases that are beyond the scope of the attorney and where tailored support is a critical ingredient to success. For example, parent advocates provide invaluable emotional support and motivation that parents need to stay engaged with their case, as well as buffer the effects of trauma from previous systems involvement. Social workers bring expertise and tools in helping clients navigate mental health and substance use issues, as well as connect them with concrete resources (such as transportation) to be successful in their treatment plan. This enables the attorney to focus on the legal aspects of the case while ensuring the family is holistically cared for by other members of the team.

Notably, achieving permanency with parents or kin was significantly higher for children whose parents had IDT representation, providing compelling insight into the value of the IDT model for sustained outcomes and further evidence on IDT teams as a leveling-up factor for parents with more complex cases.

Key outcome findings include:

- **Keeping family networks together during the case:** Over half (51%) of all cases with ORPC representation successfully kept family networks together (i.e., *all* children remained at home or *all* children placed with kin). Cases with IDT representation had a <u>significantly higher</u> rate of placing *at least one* child with kin (74.5% IDT vs. 70.9% attorney-only).

- **Promoting sustained family strengthening:** The majority of children (81.3%) whose parents had IDT representation were reunified with their parents or living with a member of their family at case close. Achieving permanency with parents or kin was <u>significantly higher</u> for children whose parents had IDT representation (81.3% IDT vs. 73.3% attorney-only).

- **Keeping kids safely with their parents, from case start to end:** Sixty percent of children whose parents had IDT representation either stayed with their parents for the life of the case (i.e., never removed) or were reunified with their parents after a removal. Reunification with parents was <u>significantly higher</u> for children whose parents had IDT representation (24.99% IDT vs. 22.56% attorney-only).

- **Preventing future risk of harm:** Both ORPC representation models achieved relatively low rates of re-entry (i.e., re-involvement within one year of case closure). Cases with IDT representation had a lower observed rate (2.84%) compared to attorney-only staffing (3.77%).

Navigating Different Combinations of Case Complexities

Indigent families involved in child welfare experience **multiple case complexities that commonly group together (i.e., results of the latent class analysis)**. ORPC parent defense teams work to navigate these interconnected complexities to combat root cause drivers of child welfare involvement. In activating their unique strengths, IDT teams tend to take on more of these complex cases. Complex case groups that are typical in ORPC representation include:

- Families with older youth that are **beyond the control of the parent (n=741)**. Within this group, IDT teams took on more cases that involved physical abuse and served more parents with a disability.

- Families with multiple-aged children and issues in the **family ecology (n=2,054)**. Within this group, IDT teams took on more cases with expedited permanency planning and issues of homelessness.

- Families with children under age five and **less caregiver & case complexity (n=215)**. Within this group, IDT teams took on more cases with parents facing a concurrent criminal case.

- Families with children under age five and **greater caregiver & case complexity (n=709).** Within this group, there were no significant differences between representation models.

Looking at outcomes for each of the complex case groups helps to further inform how IDT teams act as a leveling-up factor for families with multiple needs and can strengthen precision staffing:

- **Youth Beyond Control of Parent**: This group had significantly lower rates of kinship placement during a case, but the highest rate of reunification with parents, compared to all other groups.
  - IDT teams successfully placed at least one child in kinship care in 64.5% of cases; this is a 5.9% observed increase compared to attorney-only.
  - 89.1% of children whose parents had IDT representation achieved permanency with parents or kin; this is a 12.8% observed increase compared to attorney-only.

- **Family Ecology**: This group had the second highest rates of keeping children with family or kin, as well as the second highest reunification rate.

  - 83.7% of children whose parents had IDT representation achieved permanency with parents or kin; this is an 8% <u>statistically significant increase</u> compared to attorney-only.

  - IDT teams achieved a 2.2% re-entry rate for this group; this is a 1.4% observed decrease compared to attorney-only.

- **Less Caregiver & Case Complexity:** This group had significantly less prior child welfare involvement than all other groups and a significantly higher rate of all children remaining at home during the life of the case.

  - The attorney-only model achieved a <u>significantly higher</u> rate of keeping all children at home or placed with kin. However, IDT teams served significantly more case complexities within this group. The small number of children removed may have had safety issues beyond the control of ORPC representation.

  - 75.9% of children whose parents had IDT representation achieved permanency with parents or kin; this is a 6.3% observed increase compared to attorney-only.

- **Greater Caregiver & Case Complexity**: This group had significantly more prior child welfare cases, a significantly lower rate of keeping all children at home during a case, and were more likely to experience re-entry, compared to all other groups.

  - 69.1% of children whose parents had IDT representation achieved permanency with parents or kin; this is a 3.7% observed increase compared to attorney-only.

  - IDT teams achieved a 4.3% re-entry rate for this group; this is a 2.5% observed decrease compared to attorney-only.

Actionability

Taken collectively, results illustrate concrete ways IDT teams are making a difference in the lives of children and families involved in child welfare. Actionable insights include:

Sustaining Outcomes

The interdisciplinary representation model can effectively achieve sustained family strengthening outcomes, where children can grow with their parents and kin.

- For older youth experiencing behavioral issues (i.e., beyond control of parent group), IDT teams can help reset youth trajectories while supporting parents in regaining control in the home and in parenting.

- For families experiencing larger issues in their environment, such as domestic violence, concurrent criminal cases, and substance use (i.e., family ecology group), IDT teams can effectively work across these family ecology issues to best match supports to the needs of caregivers and children alike.

- **Case length**: Cases with interdisciplinary representation are, on average, about two months longer than cases with attorney-only representation. Further, the greater the case complexity, the longer the case length. As prior research on the interdisciplinary model illustrates, these time investments are necessary for the IDT team to: 1) activate their unique strengths in building a client-centered team, 2) advocate for the client in and out of court, and 3) support the client in addressing their

needs—the three major activities that underpin the interdisciplinary representation model and help drive positive outcomes.

Informing Staffing Precision

IDT teams are well-positioned to support families with more complex case needs that, if left unaddressed, act as barriers to sustained family strengthening and increase risk of future child welfare involvement. If an attorney decides to activate an IDT team, it may be beneficial to:

- Request a social worker for families presenting with less caregiver & case complexities and low rates of previous child welfare involvement. This group is likely to have less barriers to engagement that parent advocates are best adept at addressing, while still having other issues (e.g., substance use) that social workers are well-suited to support.

- Request a parent advocate *and* a social worker for families presenting with greater caregiver & case complexities and high rates of previous child welfare involvement. These families need the highest level of wraparound support to address root causes of involvement and sustain any progress made during the case.

Investing in Interdisciplinary Teams

Across the board, investing in interdisciplinary representation for families with complex cases is a promising strategy to improve outcomes for families involved in child welfare and reduce systems re-involvement. Activating IDT teams early and ensuring their involvement can be sustained throughout the life of the case is critical to moving upstream in improving outcomes and closing the gap on disparities in child welfare.

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Acknowledgements

Data Sources

This study uses data from two sources that were connected through the Linked Information Network of Colorado (LINC):

1. The Office of Respondent Parents' Counsel, Respondent Parent Payment System
2. The Colorado Department of Human Services, Trails system

LINC is a collaborative effort of the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab and the Colorado Governor's Office of Information Technology that safely and securely connects and anonymizes data across state agencies and systems to fully inform solutions to specific societal challenges. The data used for this report came from a LINC project approved by participating data partners. The findings do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Colorado Governor's Office of Information Technology, the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab, or the organizations contributing data.

Suggested Citation

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Project Background

- Introduction

- Methods

Introduction

- **The Linked Information Network of Colorado (LINC) was used to connect legal representation data from the Office of Respondent Parents' Counsel (ORPC) to Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) child welfare case information.**

- **The linked dataset provides a first-ever opportunity to examine outcomes of child welfare cases with parent representation by the ORPC.**

- **Findings can be used by the ORPC to inform continuous quality improvement and assess value of interdisciplinary representation.**

To continuously strengthen their work to protect the fundamental right to parent, the ORPC partnered with the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab (Colorado Lab) to build evidence for the interdisciplinary (IDT) team model of parent representation. Together, the ORPC and the Colorado Lab are moving the model through the Steps to Building Evidence. We began by using ORPC administrative data and contractor narratives to explore model foundations. In this report, we examine outcomes of child welfare cases with parent representation by the ORPC.

Achieving a holistic picture of parent experiences and outcomes requires linking child welfare data with parent representation data. Together, these data facilitate rigorous evidence-building on systems-level priorities for families involved in child welfare.

Methods

Below, we describe the data sources, matched sample, and the analytic approach. More details can be found in Appendix A.

Data Sources and Matching

- Legal representation data from the ORPC's Respondent Parent Payment System (RPPS).

- Child welfare outcome data and client characteristics from CDHS's Trails system.

The ORPC are stewards of RPPS, which is the administrative data system used in the delivery of parent representation. CDHS are the stewards of Trails, which is the administrative data system used in the delivery of child welfare. Linking these data allowed the Colorado Lab to leverage legal representation data from RPPS in combination with child welfare case outcomes in Trails.

Data linkage between Trails and RPPS was achieved using LINC. LINC is a collaborative effort of the Colorado Lab and the Colorado Governor's Office of Information Technology that safely and securely connects and anonymizes data across state agencies and systems to fully inform solutions to specific societal challenges. The request to connect data was approved by both partners and a matching report provides details on the methodology for connecting the data, limitations and challenges encountered, and the matching rates.

Defining the Sample

The goal of this study was to understand the effects of interdisciplinary representation on child welfare outcomes. As such, the analytic approach was to attribute a child welfare case to either the interdisciplinary representation group or the attorney-only representation group. Key decisions were made to construct an analytic sample aligned with and informed by previous qualitative and quantitative research on the IDT model.[1] Decisions and measurement of constructs are captured in business rules, summarized below (see Appendix A for a full description).

Time frame for the study: ORPC representation that started on or after January 1, 2019 for child welfare cases that closed in calendar years 2021 and 2022.

- Outcomes analysis was anchored to a **unique child welfare case.**

- A unique child welfare case was assigned to the **attorney-only group** if:

  o the case had one respondent parent and they received attorney-only representation; or

  o the case had two or more respondent parents, and all had attorney-only representation.

- A unique child welfare case was assigned to the **interdisciplinary group** if:

  o the case had one respondent parent and they received IDT representation; or

  o the case had two or more respondent parents, and at least one had IDT representation.

IDT representation was defined as a social worker or parent advocate being added to the parent defense team at any time in the life of the case.

Promoting Reliability in Outcomes Reporting: How Each Linked Data Source Was Used

Trails was used for outcomes reporting because: a) it is the most comprehensive source of child welfare case outcomes in Colorado; b) Trails is Colorado's certified Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System that meets federal guidance and has a 13 year history of system improvements; and c) documentation needed for Title IV-E payment comes from Trails; when tied to payment processes, the data trend towards greater accuracy and completeness. Trails was also used for the majority of case characteristics and client demographics.

RPPS was used to determine whether or not the respondent parent(s) on the child welfare case received representation from the ORPC and, if yes, what model was used (IDT or attorney-only). RPPS was chosen as the data source to determine representation because: a) it is the most comprehensive source for ORPC representation data; b) the system is designed specifically to capture representation activity; and c) documentation needed for contractors to receive payment comes from RPPS; when tied to payment processes, the data trend towards greater accuracy and completeness. RPPS was also used to fill in gaps in Trails data related to case characteristics and client demographics.

Analytic Approach

Step 3 of Evidence-Building – Exploring Outcomes

The analytic approach in this study allowed us to:

- Describe case complexities and how they group together (e.g., families with older youth who are beyond control of parent).
- Compare case complexity among those cases with attorney-only and IDT representation.
- Learn that cases with IDT representation tend to be more complex.
- Compare child welfare outcomes for IDT representation and attorney-only representation.

Because IDT cases tend to be more complex, we applied the interpretative lens of when IDT cases have similar or better outcomes to attorney-only representation, this is a positive finding.

Note: This is a descriptive, not causal study design and guidance is provided throughout this document on appropriate use of this information. See "Actionable Goals" within gold boxes in this report.

The analytic approach was informed by previous research conducted on the interdisciplinary model, which focused on IDT team functions and the conceptual logic behind why IDT representation is expected to drive outcomes.[1] This prior research identified a variety of social/legal factors that can make a case more complex and act as barriers to the shared goal of strengthening the family and keeping kids safely in the home. Such complex case needs require wraparound support, which an IDT team may be best suited to deliver.

Previous research on the interdisciplinary model focused on Steps 1 and 2 of evidence building—program design and outputs. Key tools and findings include:

- Executive Summary of Findings
- Top Line Summary of the Interdisciplinary Representation Model
- Roadmap for Precision Staffing
- Detailed Findings and Methods

Describing case complexity: To understand how these complex case needs grouped together, we conducted a latent class analysis (LCA). An LCA is a statistical procedure used to identify qualitatively different groups within the population of parents receiving ORPC representation. To construct the groups, we used a suite of case and respondent parent characteristics (Table 1). Each characteristic is binary, meaning it can take either a 'yes' or a 'no' value.

Attorney-only and IDT comparisons: Within-group, two-tailed t-tests were used to determine if case complexity or outcomes differed between representation model (IDT versus attorney-only). We used an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to determine differences between outcomes for each of the groups identified in the LCA.

Table 1. Characteristics Used in the Latent Class Analysis to Construct the Groups, by type and source

Variable	Parent or Case Characteristic	Database
Expedited Permanency Planning (EPP)	Case	RPPS (ORPC)
Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)		
Concurrent criminal case		
Intervenor assigned		
Person of color	Parent	
Any disability		
Multiple children on case	Case	Trails (CDHS)
Any prior child welfare case		
Issue: Neglect		
Issue: Abuse		
Issue: Substance use		
Issue: Homelessness		
Lack of supervision		
Issue: Domestic violence		
Issue: Beyond control of parent		
Issue: Substance exposed newborn		
Placement during case		

Notes: The case characteristic variables beginning with "issue" refer to issues cited on a child abuse and neglect referral to the CDHS Division of Child Welfare.

Final Analytic Sample

The final sample size available for analysis was **3,719 unique child welfare cases.** Of the 3,719 unique child welfare cases, **2,152 received attorney-only representation** and **1,567 received IDT representation**. Some child welfare cases were associated with multiple respondent parents; in this sample, there were **5,854 unique respondent parents.**

Key Findings

- Who receives ORPC representation?

- Family Preservation Outcomes

- Permanency Outcomes

- Re-entry Outcomes

- Case Length

Key Findings

Research Question 1: Who Receives ORPC Representation?

Actionable Goal

To paint a picture of who receives ORPC representation and deepen understanding of what cases would most benefit from the IDT model. Results help to expand the **precision staffing approach (roadmap)** introduced in previous research on the interdisciplinary model, as part of the ORPC's commitment to continuous quality improvement.

To build further evidence for the value of interdisciplinary representation for complex cases, the first research question centered on case characteristics associated with IDT versus attorney-only staffing. Leading legal and social complexities (such as active substance use, homelessness, and domestic violence) identified in previous research on the interdisciplinary model[1] were used as the jumping off point for these analyses.

Insight 1: Parents of color comprise almost half of ORPC representation. Interdisciplinary and attorney-only teams serve parents of color at similar rates.

Both representation models serve parents of color at similar rates (Figure 1). Notably, ORPC representation, on the whole, is reaching a high percentage of non-white respondent parents (45.7% parents of color). Equipping families of color with client-centered parent defense teams is a strategic lever to redress systemic racism in the child welfare system and combat root cause drivers of involvement.

Figure 1. Race and Ethnicity of Respondent Parents Served by the ORPC
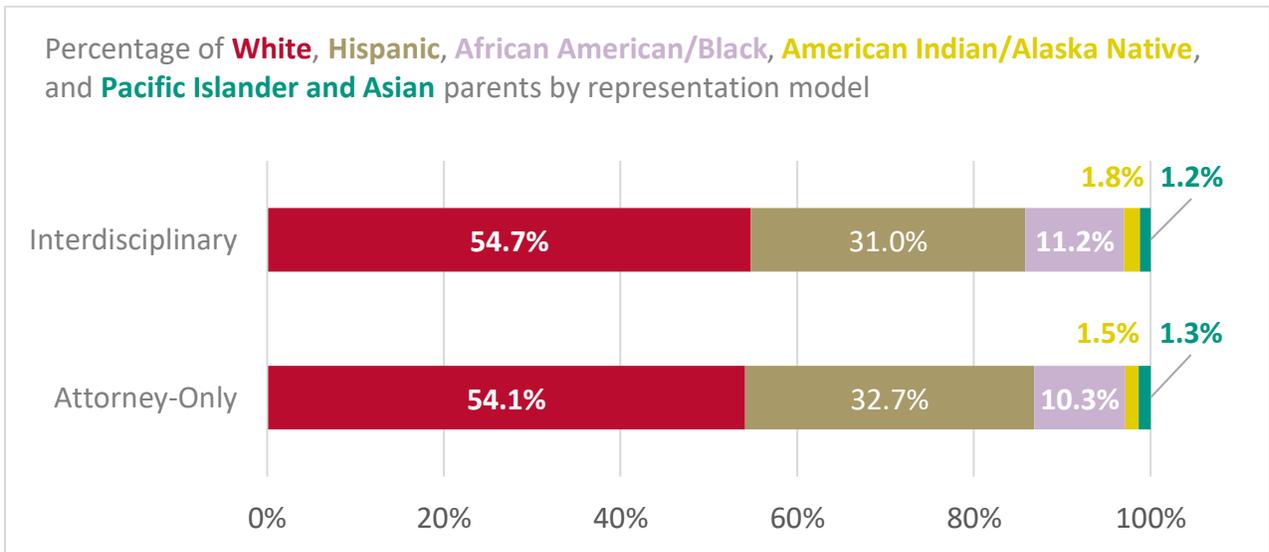
Data Source: Trails, demographic information (excludes 1,297 parents with missing demographics). *Reporting Notes:* n=4,659; Pacific Islander and Asian were combined to meet cell suppression policies for reporting.

Insight 2: Interdisciplinary teams are representing parents with greater case complexities.

When looking at **individual complexities** (Figure 2), IDT teams are serving cases with significantly higher rates of many case complexities (e.g., higher rates of substance use); asterisks in the figure below illustrate these. IDT teams also serve families with significantly more prior child welfare involvement, more parents of color, and more parents with disabilities. These findings align with previous results[1] and add evidence to the finding that a team-based approach can best meet the unique needs of families with complex cases.

Figure 2. Complex Case Characteristics, by representation model
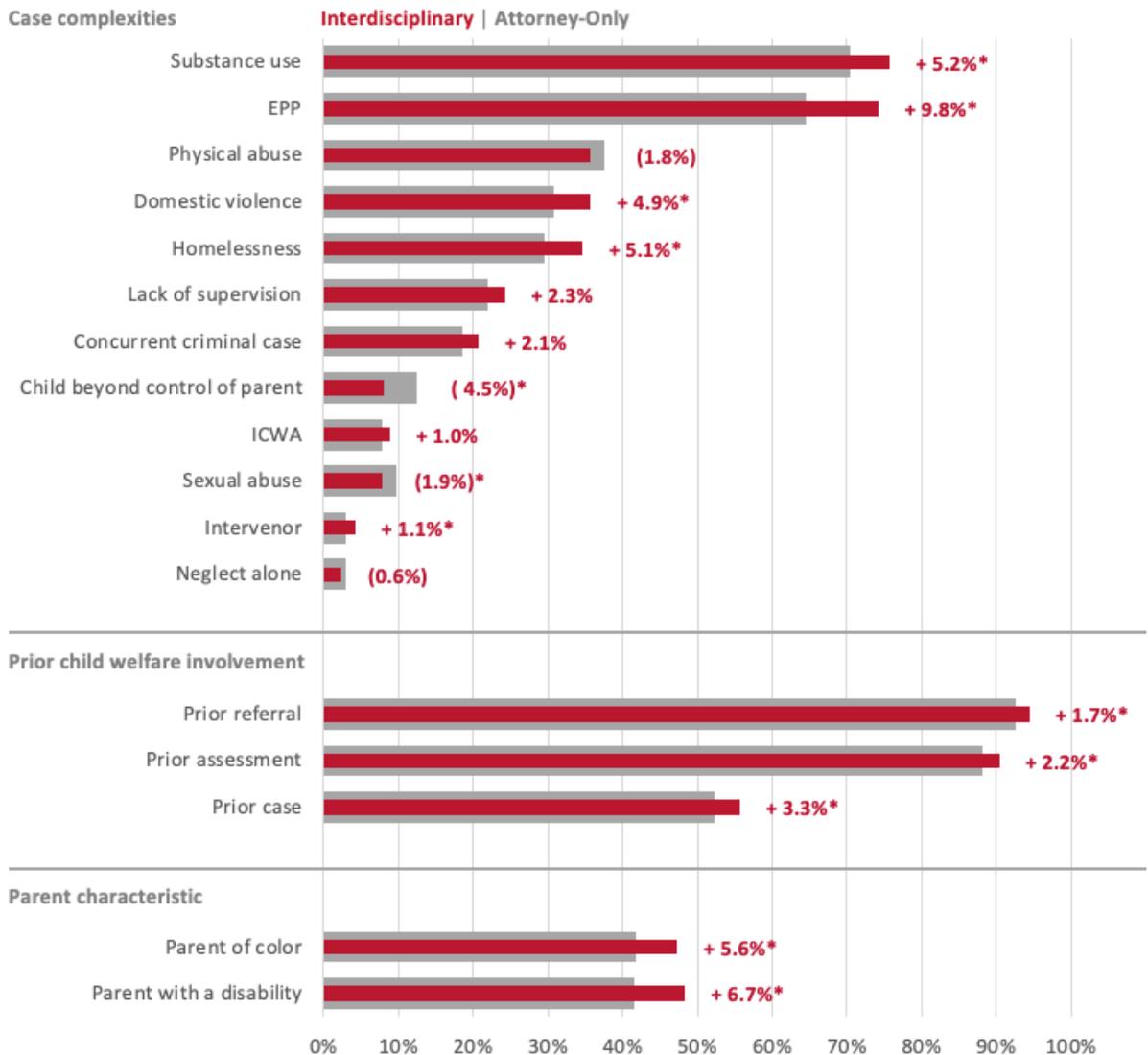
Data Sources: Trails, reason for referral and prior child welfare involvement; RPPS, representation model and parent with a disability. *Reporting Notes*: n=3,719. Child disability was not reported because there were not enough observations for analysis. This remains a complex case factor that ORPC representation can help address, as illustrated by previous research on the interdisciplinary model. *Difference is significant at p=<.10.

Child "Beyond control of parent" was one referral reason examined; beyond control of parent showed a significantly higher rate for the attorney-only group. This makes logical sense, as beyond control of parent is an issue with the youth and services best matched to need may be youth-oriented (such as multisystemic therapy), in contrast to wraparound services being needed for the parent (as provided by the IDT team).

Similarly, a referral reason of sexual abuse showed a significantly higher rate for the attorney-only group, which may indicate need for specialized services beyond the scope of the IDT team.

Insight 3: There are four groups of case complexities that are common in ORPC representation.

Because families experience multiple case complexities, it is necessary to examine how complexities group together. Results of the LCA showed four complex case groups that are present during ORPC representation (Figure 3). Given these multiple case complexities, high-quality legal representation of parents is a critical strategy for sustained family strengthening.

Group 1: Families with older youth who are beyond control of the parent.

Group 1 had the highest rate of older youth who are beyond control of the parent. This group also had the highest rates of physical and sexual abuse, as well as high rates of previous child welfare involvement.

This group is called "Beyond Control of Parent" in all result visuals. (n=741, 19.9%)

Group 2: Families with multiple-aged kids and issues in the family ecology.

Group 2 had the highest rates of family ecology issues, including domestic violence, concurrent criminal case, lack of supervision, as well as high rates of substance use and previous child welfare involvement.

This group is called "Family Ecology" in all result visuals. (n=2,054, 55.2%)

Group 3: Families with children under age five and less caregiver & case complexity.

Group 3 had high rates of EPP and substance use. This group also had some additional caregiver and case complexity, such as homelessness and previous child welfare involvement. However, compared to Group 4, complexities were, on the whole, less.

This group is called "Less Caregiver & Case Complexity" in all result visuals. (n=215, 5.8%)

Group 4: Families with children under age five and greater caregiver & case complexity.

Group 4 had high rates of EPP and substance use, as well as the highest rate of parents of color, parents with a disability, homelessness, and a previous child welfare case. Compared to Group 3, complexities were, on the whole, greater.

This group is called "Greater Caregiver & Case Complexity" in all result visuals. (n=709, 19.1%)

Across all groups: Across all four groups, removal of at least one child occurred for about two-thirds of all cases, and neglect as a referral reason was present in at least half of all cases. (Appendix B includes detailed results on case complexities, by group and representation model).

Figure 3. Complex Case Characteristics, by group (significantly higher rates among IDT teams are noted with an asterisk)
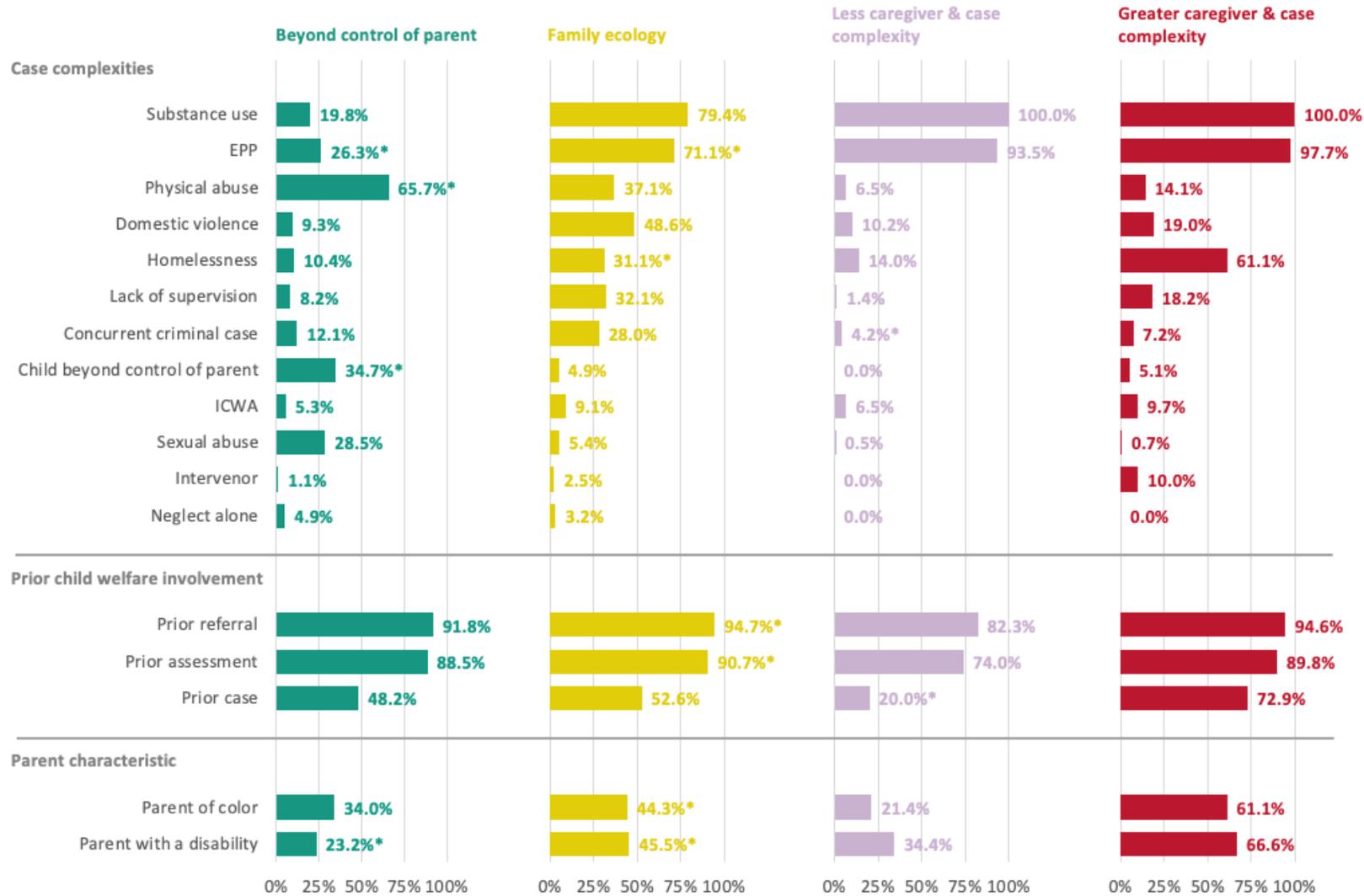
Reporting Notes: n=3,719 cases. *Statistically significantly higher for cases with **interdisciplinary representation** within this group. p<.10.

Insight 4: Within groups, interdisciplinary teams tend to take on more cases with certain complexities than attorney-only.

Figure 3 (above) identifies those complex case factors that IDT teams help families and family defense teams navigate at higher rates (denoted with an asterisk in the figure).

Within groups, IDT teams tend to take on more cases with certain case complexities, including:

- Within the *Beyond Control of Parent* group, IDT teams took on more of the cases that involved physical abuse and served more parents with a disability. While a smaller presence within this group, IDT teams also took on more EPP cases.

- Within the *Family Ecology* group, IDT teams took on more EPP cases and cases with issues of homelessness. They also served more parents of color, parents with a disability, and parents with prior child welfare referrals and assessments.

- Within the *Less Caregiver & Case Complexity* group, IDT teams took on more cases with parents facing a concurrent criminal case and parents with a prior child welfare case.

- Within the *Greater Caregiver & Case Complexity* group, there were no significant differences in cases complexities between IDT teams and attorney-only.

Insight 5: Parents receiving interdisciplinary representation have significantly higher rates of previous child welfare involvement.

On the whole, previous child welfare involvement is significantly higher for cases with interdisciplinary representation (Figure 4). Past child welfare experiences can create distrust of the system, low confidence in achieving a successful outcome, and trauma, which in turn can fuel low engagement of parents in their child welfare case.[1] IDT teams, especially parent advocates, are well-suited to help address trauma from previous child welfare involvement and barriers to engagement.

Figure 4. Average Number of Previous Child Welfare Involvements, by representation model
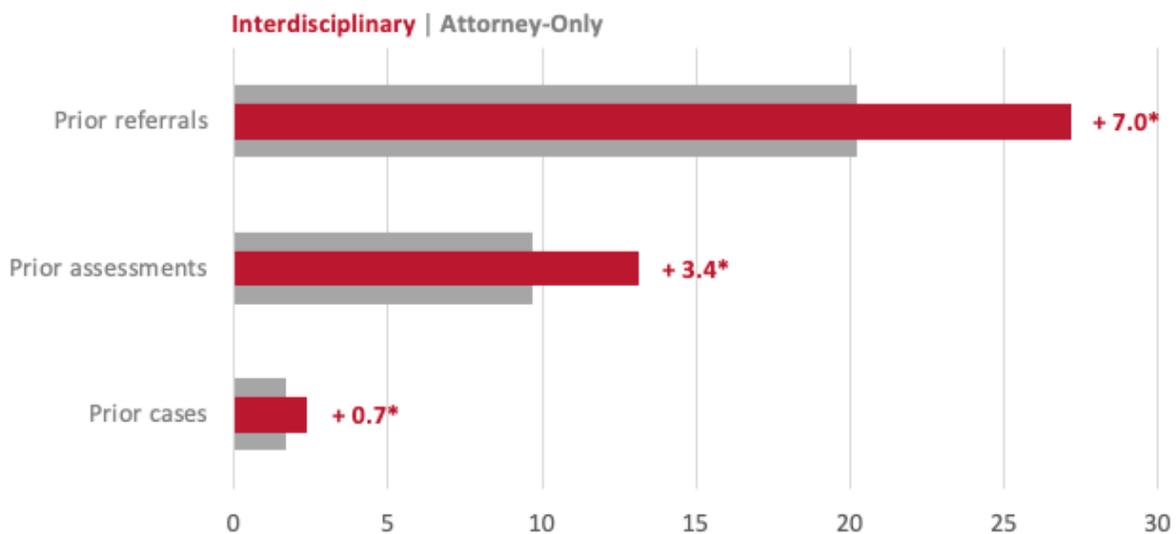
Data Sources: Trails, prior child welfare involvement; RPPS, representation model. *Reporting Notes*: n=3,719 cases. *Difference is significant at p=<.10.

Insight 6: Within the <u>family ecology</u> and <u>greater caregiver & case complexity</u> groups, interdisciplinary teams served parents with significantly higher rates of previous child welfare involvement.

When looking at previous child welfare involvement in relationship to case staffing, the insight that IDT teams serve families with more systems trauma continues to hold true for two of the four groups: family ecology and greater caregiver & case complexity (Figure 5). When making meaning out of outcomes, this provides further evidence that IDT representation may act as a leveling-up factor.

Figure 5. Average Number of Previous Child Welfare Involvements, by group and representation model
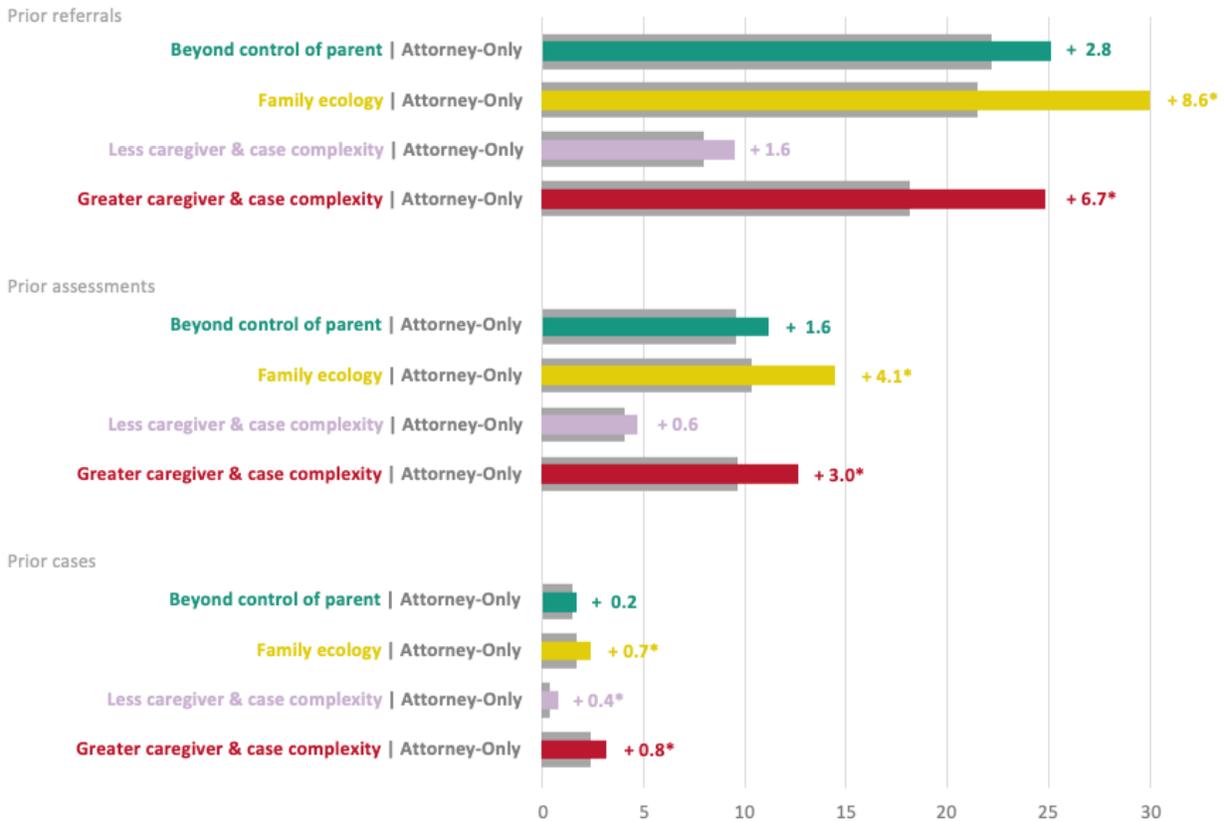
Data Sources: Trails, prior child welfare involvement; RPPS, representation model. *Reporting Notes:* n=3,719 cases.
*Difference is significant at p=<.10.

Making Meaning Out of Findings

IDT teams tend to take on more complex cases than attorney-only staffing. As such, a finding where outcomes are similar between attorney-only and IDT representation is interpreted as a "positive finding" because IDT teams are serving as a leveling-up factor for parents with more complex cases.

Across all groups: The group with less caregiver & case complexity had significantly less prior child welfare involvement than all other groups. If an attorney decides to activate an IDT team, requesting a social worker may make the most sense, as this group is likely to have less barriers to engagement, while still having other issues (e.g., substance use) that social workers are well-positioned to support. Conversely, the group with greater caregiver & case complexity had significantly more prior child welfare cases. A parent advocate may

be best positioned to support parent engagement and address trauma from systems involvement. (Appendix B includes detailed results on previous child welfare involvement, by group).

Research Question 2: What is the Value of Interdisciplinary Representation on Keeping Kids Safely at Home?

Actionable Goal
To understand how ORPC representation models influence key child welfare outcomes. Results help to communicate the value of interdisciplinary representation and can help the ORPC further right-size resourcing to staffing approaches positioned to drive outcomes among different case complexities.

Families involved in child welfare face critical milestones that shape their experiences of involvement and their opportunity for long-term family strengthening. These milestones include when a family first becomes known to child welfare (referral, assessment); when evidence of abuse or neglect is found and a court case is opened; when a treatment plan is developed and must be complied with as part of court proceedings; when children are placed in out-of-home care; and when the case is closed and permanency of children is decided on (Figure 6; for a more detailed description, see Appendix C). In addition to impact on families, these milestones are regularly measured by child welfare as part of ongoing state performance monitoring and federally required regulations in child welfare. Outcomes of focus are tied to these key milestones.

Figure 6. Key Milestones During Child Welfare Involvement
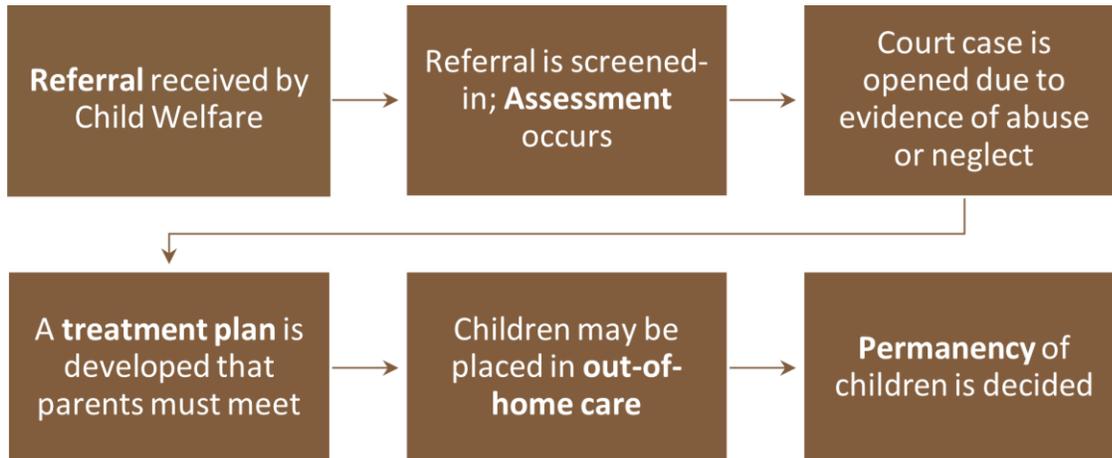
Family Preservation

Keeping kids safely in the home is the first opportunity to prevent deeper involvement in child welfare and stabilize the family together. This can promote sustained parent-child bonding and prevent trauma, which are key benefits of the IDT model identified in previous research.[1] When removal does occur due to safety concerns, kinship placement is widely considered a best practice to strengthen the parents' network and provide greater continuity to children. For family preservation outcomes, we examined a) cases where children were not removed; and b) for those who were removed, cases that used kinship care.

Insight 7: Over half of all cases with ORPC representation successfully kept family networks together (all children remained at home or all children placed with kin).

To paint a more complete picture, we looked at family preservation as a combination of keeping children at home (i.e., no removals) with use of kinship care (for when removals do occur). This is because ORPC representation models aim to stabilize the full family network where both risk and protective factors live.[1, 3, 4] This combined rate shows that over half of all cases with ORPC representation kept family networks together, with no significant differences by staffing approach (Figure 7). In light of IDT teams serving parents with more complex case needs, achieving family preservation outcomes at the same rate is a positive finding and indicates that the wraparound support provided by the team acts as a leveling-up factor to keep families together.

Figure 7. Family Preservation and Use of Kinship Care, by representation model
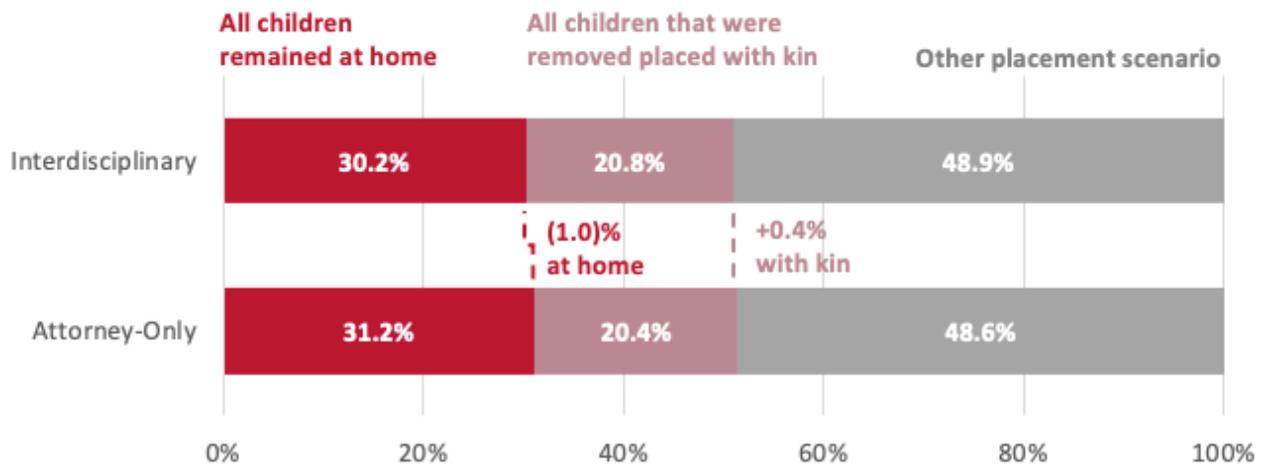
Data Source: Trails, removals and placement data tables; RPPS, representation model. *Reporting Notes*: Attorney-only: n=1,480 cases where child(ren) were removed; IDT: n=1,093 cases where child(ren) were removed. *Difference is significant at p=<.10.

Within the combined family preservation rate, about 30% of *all children* on the cases successfully remained at home with parents, while about 20% of *all children* were placed with kin.

Insight 8: The highest rates of keeping children with family or kin were seen for the family ecology and less caregiver & case complexity groups, across both representation models.

When examining family preservation for each group and by representation model, cases in the less caregiver & case complexity group and the family ecology group achieved the highest rates of keeping all children at home or with kin (Figure 8).

For the groups with older youth beyond control of the parent, family ecology issues, and greater caregiver & case complexity, there were no significant differences in family preservation outcomes by staffing approach. Given IDT teams are serving cases with more complexity, these are positive findings that further illustrate the value of IDT representation in helping families navigate multiple needs to achieve positive end results.

Figure 8. Family Preservation and Use of Kinship Care, by group and representation model

	All children remained at home	All children that were removed placed with kin	Other placement scenario
Beyond control of parent			
Interdisciplinary	39.8%	9.5%	50.6%
Attorney-Only	37.8%	10.2%	52.0%

Annotation: 1.4% (between the two "Beyond control of parent" rows)

Family ecology			
Interdisciplinary	33.3%	21.9%	44.8%
Attorney-Only	34.3%	21.3%	44.3%

Annotation: (0.5%)

Less caregiver & case complexity			
Interdisciplinary	46.5%	16.3%	37.2%
Attorney-Only	49.6%	25.6%	24.8%

Annotation: (12.4%)*

Greater caregiver & case complexity			
Interdisciplinary	12.7%	27.7%	59.6%
Attorney-Only	12.4%	28.6%	59.0%

Annotation: (0.7%)

Data Sources: Trails, placements & removals; RPPS, representation model. *Reporting Notes:* n=3,719 cases. Annotated differences are for the percentage of cases where all children remained at home or all children removed were placed with kin. *Difference is significant at p=<.10.

A notable exception: For the group with less caregiver & case complexity, the attorney-only model achieved a significantly higher rate of keeping all children at home or placed with kin. This is opposite of what might make intuitive sense, as caregivers with less complexity and more wraparound support might be expected to achieve higher rates of family preservation. However, IDT teams served cases with significantly more case complexities within this group, compared to attorney-only staffing. Additionally, this is the smallest group with very few cases even resulting in a placement. As such, it is possible that the cases where children were removed simply had safety issues beyond control of ORPC representation, even if IDT supports were provided.

Across all groups: The group with greater caregiver & case complexity had a significantly lower rate of all children remaining at home compared to all other groups. This indicates the need to staff cases with greater caregiver & case complexity using the IDT model, so that these families can increase the supports they need to achieve family togetherness. In addition, while the ORPC approach to IDT staffing has been to pair attorneys with *either* a social worker or a parent advocate, the group with greater caregiver & case complexity may well benefit from a three-person team approach (attorney, social worker, parent advocate). (Appendix B includes detailed results on family preservation, by group).

A Deeper Dive into Use of Kinship Care

> The use of kinship care can be looked at in a variety of ways and may be appropriate at different points in the case journey and for different children, depending on their safety needs. As such, in addition to looking at all children placed with kin, we examined kinship placement for at least one child during the case as well as kinship placement as first placement for at least one child.

Insight 9: Cases with interdisciplinary representation had a significantly higher rate of placing at least one child with kin.

In cases in which one or more children were removed, those with IDT representation achieved kinship placement for at least one child in 74.5% of cases, compared to 70.9% of cases with attorney-only representation; this difference is significant. Given the greater level of case complexities navigated by IDT teams, this finding is striking and further illustrates the value of IDT representation.

When looking at staffing approach, cases with IDT representation had an **observed higher** rate of placing at least one child with kin for the groups beyond control of parent, family ecology, and greater caregiver & case complexity. Similar to removal and placement rates, the less caregiver & case complexity group had a higher rate of kinship care in cases with attorney-only staffing.

Figure 9. Kinship Care for *At Least One Child,* by group and representation model
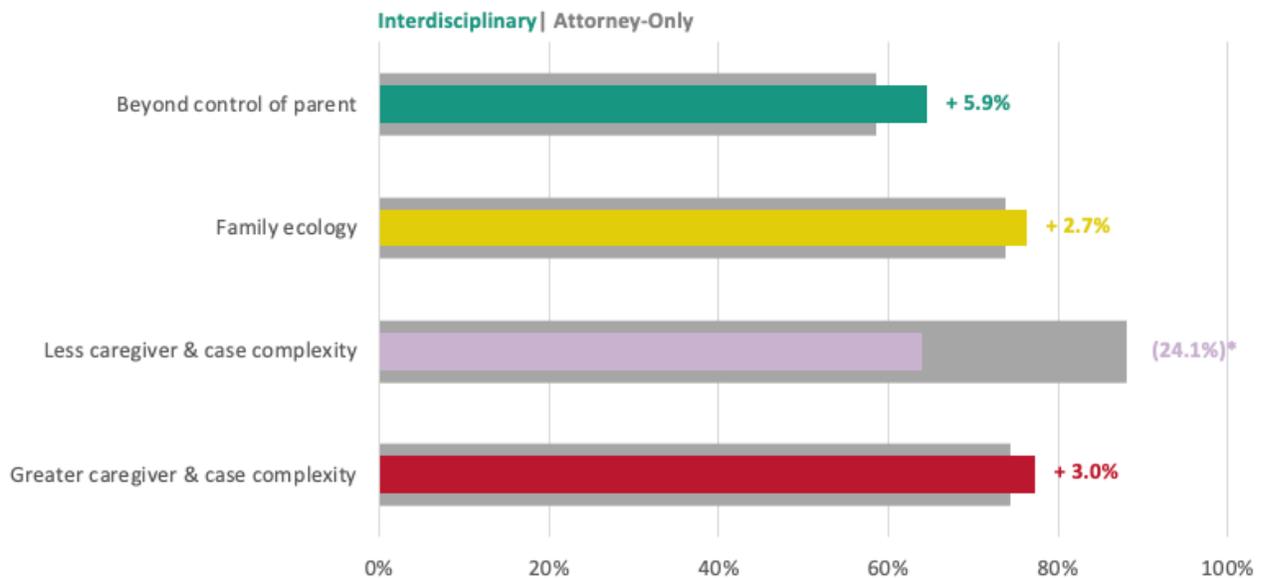
Data Sources: Trails, placements; RPPS, representation model. *Reporting Notes*: n=2,072 cases in which at least one child was removed (Beyond control of parent = 402, Family ecology = 1,115, Less caregiver & case complexity = 86, Greater caregiver & case complexity = 469). Annotated differences are for the percentage of cases where all children that were removed were placed with kin. *Difference is significant at p=<.10.

What is an Observed Rate?

An observed rate is the percent difference between the two groups. Given that the complexity of cases is not the same between the groups—like what you would expect in a randomized controlled trial or other study with a matched comparison group—the evaluation team calls out observed findings when we determine they may be of practical significance and important for understanding the value of IDT.

Insight 10: Cases with interdisciplinary representation had a slightly higher observed rate of first placement being with kin for any child on the case.

While not statistically significant, cases with IDT representation had a slightly higher **observed rate** of first placement with kin, for at least one child removed (61.1% IDT teams, 58.3% attorney-only). This is of practical significance and noteworthy given the higher case complexities that IDT teams navigate.

When examining this outcome for each group, IDT teams achieved an observed higher rate of first placement with kin for the groups beyond control of parent, family ecology, and greater caregiver & case complexity. For the beyond control of parent group, this is particularly noteworthy given kin placements were lowest in this group, illustrating a concrete way IDT teams make a positive difference in child welfare cases. Consistent with other findings, for the less caregiver & case complexity group, cases with attorney-only representation had a significantly higher rate of first placement being with kin.

Figure 10. Kinship Care as *First Placement* for Any Child Removed from the Home, by group and representation model
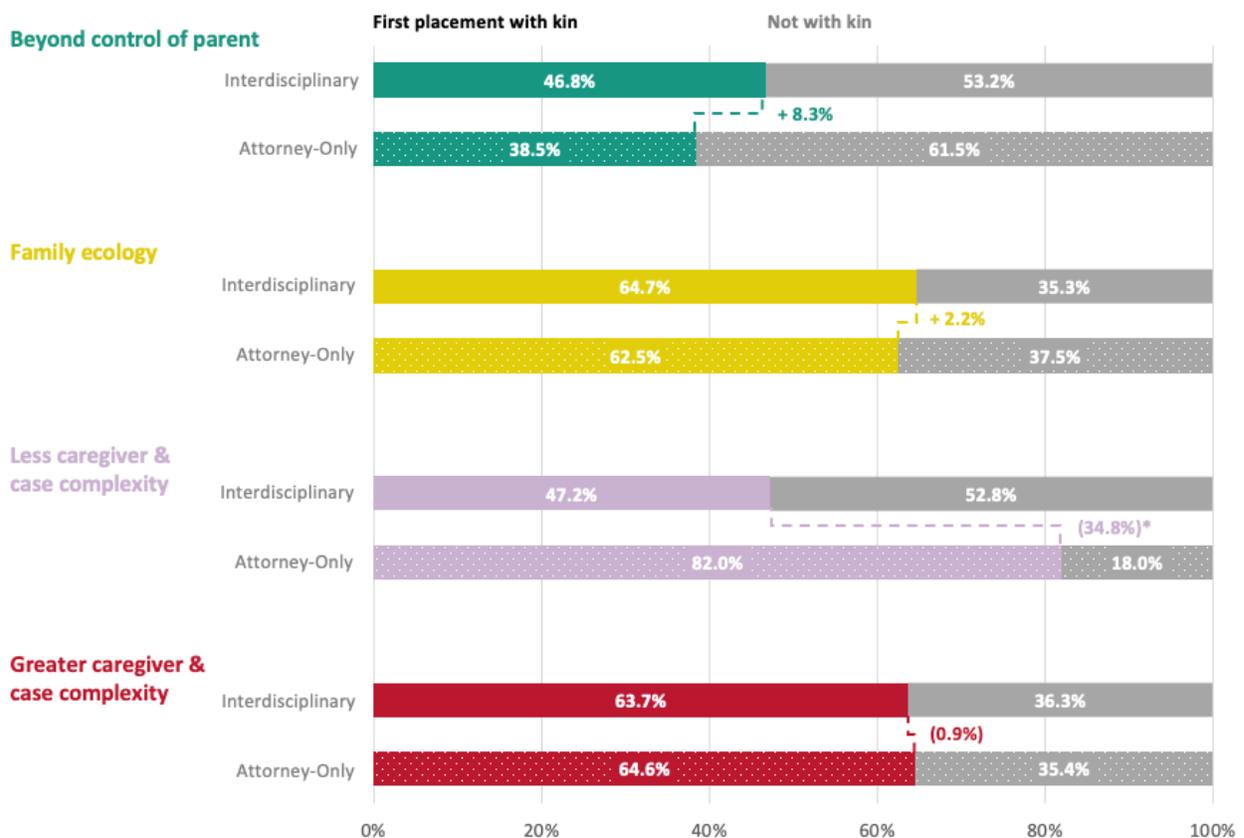
Data Sources: Trails, placements; RPPS, representation model. *Reporting Notes*: n=2,072 cases in which at least one child was removed (Beyond control of parent = 402, Family ecology = 1,115, Less caregiver & case complexity = 86, Greater caregiver & case complexity = 469). Annotated differences are for the percentage of cases where first placement was with kin for any child removed. *Difference is significant at p=<.10.

Across all groups: The group with older youth beyond control of parent had a significantly lower rate of kinship placement than all other groups. This may reflect youth with such acute issues that kin are not appropriate to address their needs and higher-level care (e.g., residential treatment center; intensive youth therapy with parent involvement, such as multisystemic therapy) is needed. (Appendix B includes detailed results on use of kinship care, by group).

Permanency and Reunification

The ultimate goal of any child welfare case is to identify safe, permanent living conditions for children involved. As illustrated by previous research[1] on the interdisciplinary model, parent defense teams advocate for client-directed goals, including reunification and use of kin when that is desired and appropriate. Reunification and kinship supports are considered two of the most desired end goals to promote sustained family well-being and reduce intergenerational systems involvement. For permanency, we examined a) cases where children were reunified with their parents, b) cases where children were living with other family at case closure, and c) cases where parent rights were reinstated.

Insight 11: The majority of children (81.3%) whose parents had interdisciplinary representation were reunified with their parents or living with a member of their family at case close.

Similar to family preservation, we examined permanency as a combination of children who were reunified with their parents and children who were living with a member of their family at case close. This approach emphasizes the importance of investing in whole family networks to facilitate healthy child/youth development and reduce trauma experienced from child welfare involvement.[2, 3, 5] The majority of children (81.3%) achieved permanency with parents or kin, meaning they were either reunified with their parents or were living with other relatives. In a small percentage of these cases, parental rights were terminated and then reinstated before or concurrent with reunification (2.4 % for IDT and 1.3% for attorney-only).

Insight 12: Achieving permanency with parents or kin was significantly higher for children whose parents had interdisciplinary representation.

Achieving permanency with parents or kin was significantly higher (8% difference) for children whose parents had IDT representation (Figure 11). This significant finding provides compelling insight into the value of the IDT model for sustained family strengthening outcomes.

Figure 11. Permanency with Parents or Kin, by representation model

Data Source: Trails, removals and placement tables; RPPS, representation model. *Reporting Notes*: n=3,711 children (Attorney-only: n=1,999 children IDT: n=1,712 children). *Difference is significant at p=<.10. "With parents" includes parental rights reinstatement, accounting for 2.4% for IDT and 1.3% for attorney-only (significant difference).

> **Spotlight on Keeping Kids Safely with their Parents, from case start to case end**
>
> Through high-quality legal representation, the ORPC works to protect the fundamental right to parent. To promote child and family well-being, ORPC parent defenders aim to reduce the number of removals from the home and, when removals do occur, the goal is to achieve reunification whenever feasible.
>
> **60% of children whose parents had IDT representation either stayed with their parents (i.e., never removed) or were reunified with their parents after a removal.**

Reunification with parents is a top priority for permanency outcomes. However, reunification with parents alone does not tell the story of how many children stayed unified with their parents from the start (i.e., never removed). As such, for the full sample we examined: a) number of children who stayed at home plus number of children removed and reunified with parents, compared to children removed and other permanency outcome (e.g., adoption). For both representation models, over half of all children stayed unified or were reunified with parents (60% IDT vs. 59% attorney-only). Within this combined rate, IDT teams achieved a 2.4% higher reunification rate among children involved and this difference was significant (Figure 12).

Figure 12. Children Remained Home or Reunified, by representation model
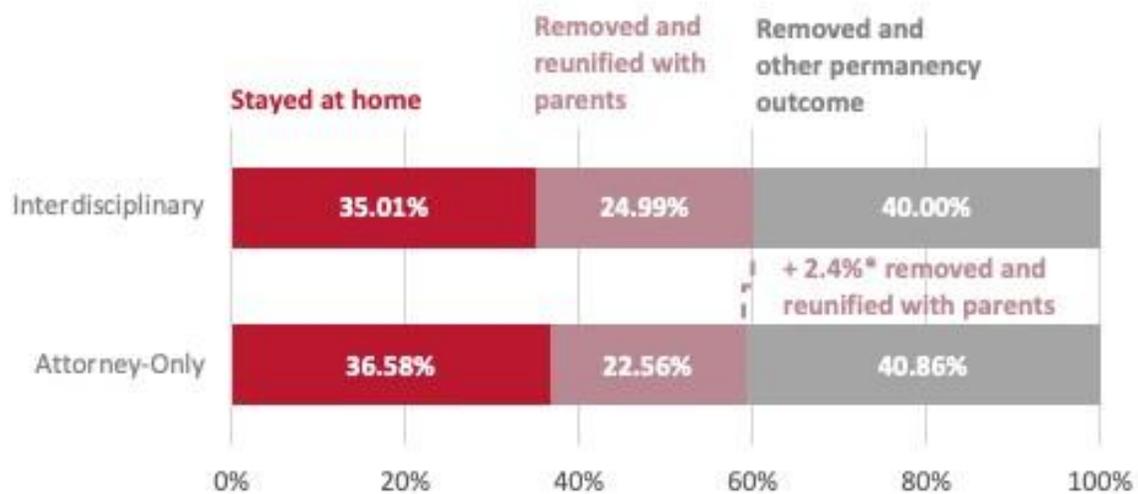
Data Source: Trails, removals, placements, and client tables; RPPS, representation model. *Reporting Notes*: n=5,988 children (Attorney-only: n=3,223 children, IDT: n=2,765 children). *Difference is significant at p=<.10. "Removed and reunified with parents" includes parental rights reinstatement, accounting for 1.3% for IDT and 0.7% for attorney-only (significant difference).

Insight 13: For children/youth in the family ecology group, permanency with parents or kin was significantly higher among interdisciplinary teams.

When examining permanency outcomes by group (Figure 13), children whose parents had IDT representation achieved higher observed rates of being reunited with their parents or member of their family at case close, for all groups. Permanency with parents/kin was significantly higher among IDT teams in the in the family ecology group. This illustrates how IDT teams can effectively work across family ecology issues to achieve sustained outcomes that best match the needs of caregivers and children alike.

Figure 13. Permanency with Parents or Kin, by group and representation model

Beyond control of parent

With parents — Other relatives — Other

	With parents	Other relatives	Other
Interdisciplinary	63.4%	25.7%	10.9%
			+ 12.8% with parents or kin
Attorney-Only	52.0%	24.3%	23.7%

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

Family ecology

	With parents	Other relatives	Other
Interdisciplinary	44.7%	38.9%	16.4%
			+ 8.0%* with parents or kin
Attorney-Only	43.3%	32.3%	24.4%

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

Less caregiver & case complexity

	With parents	Other relatives	Other
Interdisciplinary	31.5%	44.4%	24.1%
			+ 6.3% with parents or kin
Attorney-Only	31.6%	38.0%	30.4%

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

Greater caregiver & case complexity

	With parents	Other relatives	Other
Interdisciplinary	30.0%	39.1%	30.9%
			+ 3.7% with parents or kin
Attorney-Only	28.6%	35.4%	36.0%

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

Data Source: Trails, removals and placement data tables; RPPS, representation model. *Reporting Notes:* n=3,711 children (Beyond control of parent = 523, Family ecology = 2,351, Less caregiver & case complexity = 704, Greater caregiver & case complexity = 133). *Difference is significant at p=<.10.

Across all groups: The group with youth beyond control of parents had the highest rate of reunification, illustrating how IDT representation can help reset youth trajectories and keep families united. (Appendix B includes detailed results on permanency outcomes by group).

Re-entry

Re-entry refers to re-involvement in child welfare due to allegations of abuse or neglect after a child welfare case is closed. Re-entry is a marker that there are ongoing (or new) concerns that were not fully addressed during delivery of child welfare services, including the developed treatment plan. "Cookie cutter" treatment plans are common in child welfare cases and are unlikely to address the root causes of systems involvement.[1] IDT teams are well-positioned to help unpack what a family truly needs and then advocate for tailored, appropriate, and accessible treatment plans. This is one key way that long-term family strengthening is promoted and may help to reduce re-entry. Re-entry is also a key outcome of concern because of the costs of long-term systems involvement. For re-entry, we examined cases where there was a subsequent open child welfare case within one year.

Insight 14: Cases with interdisciplinary representation had a lower observed rate of re-entry in child welfare.

Both ORPC representation models achieved relatively low rates of re-entry. As seen in Table 2, cases with IDT representation had a slightly lower observed rate of subsequent case openings within one-year post-case closure. While this difference was not statistically significant, any decrease in re-entry is of practical significance to the families affected. The comprehensive investment of the IDT team can help meet complex case needs and facilitate keeping kids with their families safely, without escalation of substantial child welfare involvement.

Table 2. Re-entry, by representation model

Attorney-Only Representation	IDT Representation
3.77%	2.84%

Data Source: Trails, re-entry flags; RPPS, representation model. *Reporting Notes:* n=2,040. Limited to cases that closed in calendar year 2021 to allow for one full year lapse.

Insight 15: Within the family ecology and greater caregiver & case complexity groups, lower rates of re-entry were observed for cases with interdisciplinary representation.

When exploring re-entry rates by group, more nuance is observed. For the family ecology and greater caregiver & case complexity groups, the lower observed rate of re-entry among IDT teams held true, which signals how IDT teams are addressing root causes of family instability and reaching whole networks. However, for the beyond control of parent and less caregiver & case complexity groups, the reverse is true— cases with IDT representation had a higher observed rate of re-entry than attorney-only. This likely reflects the more complex cases within both of these groups that IDT teams take on, including case factors such as physical abuse and concurrent criminal cases—both factors where the visibility and potential severity of harm increases the chances of repeated child welfare involvement.

Table 3. Re-entry, by group and representation model

	Attorney-Only Representation	IDT Representation
Beyond control of parent	1.7%	2.7%
Family ecology	3.6%	2.2%
Less caregiver & case complexity	2.9%	4.8%
Greater caregiver & case complexity	6.8%	4.3%

Data Source: Trails, re-entry flags; RPPS, representation model. *Reporting Notes*: n=2,040. Limited to cases that closed in calendar year 2021 to allow one full year lapse. (Beyond control of parent = 397, Family ecology = 1,144, Less caregiver & case complexity = 111, Greater caregiver & case complexity = 388).

Across all groups: The group with greater caregiver & case complexity is more likely than any other group to experience re-entry. This finding is anticipated given that this group experienced multiple intersecting complexities (e.g., homelessness, substance use, domestic violence) that if left unaddressed, can leave a family vulnerable to repeat involvement. Notably, cases with IDT representation had a lower observed re-entry rate within this group. While not statistically significant, this finding signals the potential of IDT teams to address multiple complexities and, when coupled with findings on family preservation, provides further evidence that these cases may benefit from a three-person team approach (attorney, social worker, parent advocate). (Appendix B includes detailed results on re-entry, by group).

Case Timelines

Meeting complex case needs, addressing root causes of child welfare involvement, and promoting long-term family strengthening cannot be done on a hurried timeline. While shorter involvement in child welfare is desirable to reduce trauma to children and parents, what the "right case length" is must be tailored to unique case needs and what it will take to drive sustained outcomes. A case that closes earlier, but without outcomes matched to parent goals and needs, or where outcomes cannot be sustained over time, is not beneficial to families or systems. Reducing the costs of ongoing (and intergenerational) systems involvement and moving families from a state of surviving to thriving will require adequate case length for families to receive the benefits of high-quality legal advocacy.

Insight 16: Cases with interdisciplinary representation are, on average, longer than cases with attorney-only representation.

As Figure 14 illustrates, cases with IDT representation are typically open for 17 months (median), which is two months longer than cases with attorney-only representation (15 months median). This is an expected outcome, based on prior research,[1] that illustrates the time investments necessary for the IDT team to: 1) activate their unique strengths in building a client-centered team, 2) advocate for the client in and out of courts, and 3) support the client in addressing their needs—the three major activities that underpin the IDT representation model and help drive positive outcomes.

Figure 14. Case Length, by representation model
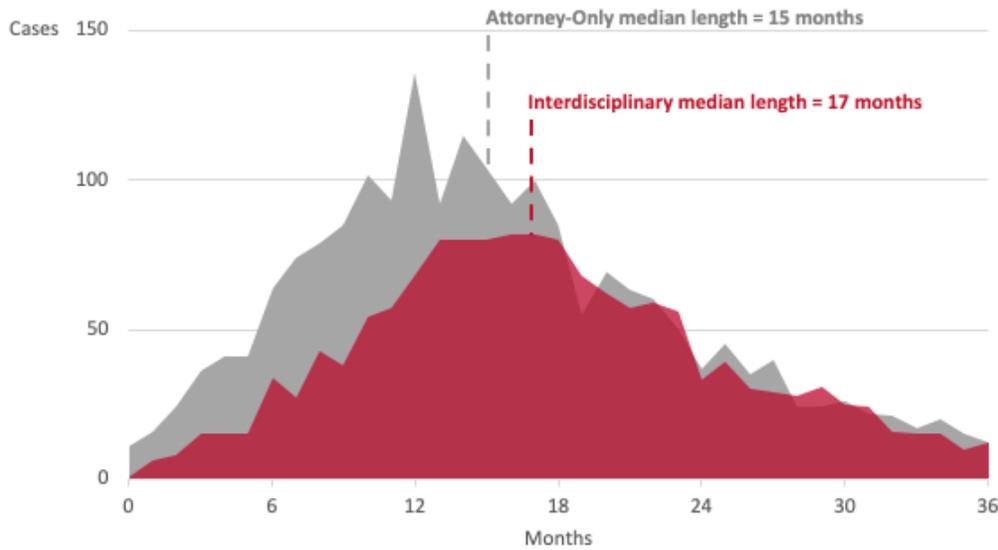
Data Sources: RPPS, representation model. *Reporting Notes*: n=3,719 cases (Attorney-only = 2,152; IDT = 1,567).

Insight 17: Among interdisciplinary teams, cases with greater complexities are, on average, longer. This may be needed to address root causes of child welfare involvement and multiple family needs.

When examining case length by group for cases with interdisciplinary representation (Figure 15), the groups fall in a predictable pattern, with the less caregiver & case complexity group having the shortest case length, followed in the middle by the family ecology and beyond control of parent groups, and the greater caregiver & case complexity group having the longest case length. These timelines illustrate the importance of allotting adequate case length to achieve positive findings in family preservation and permanency, as documented in the sections above.

Figure 15. Child Welfare Case Lengths by Group, for cases with interdisciplinary representation
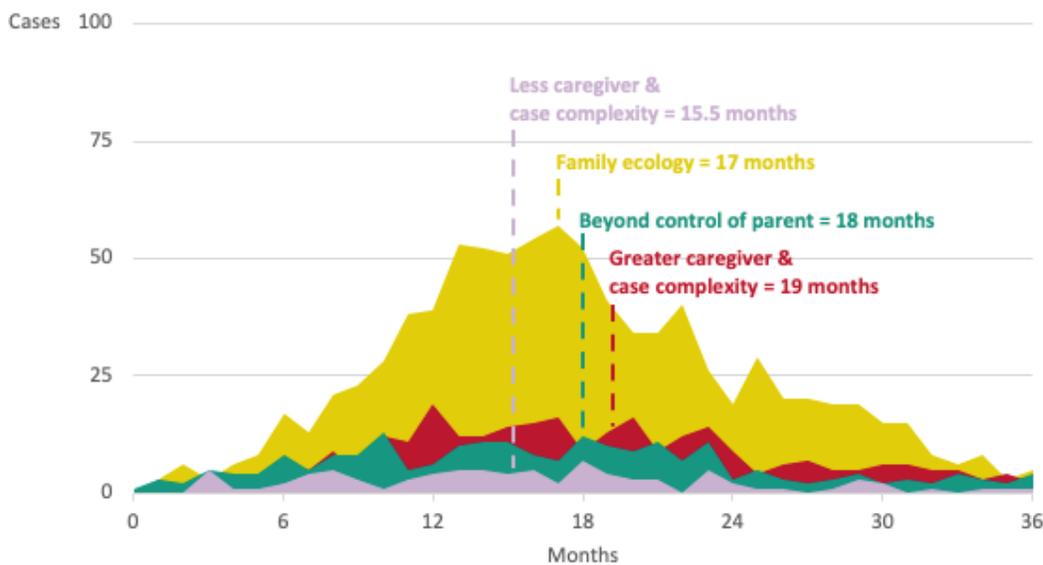
Data Sources: RPPS, representation model. *Reporting Notes*: n=3,719 cases (Beyond control of parent = 741, Family ecology = 2,054, Less caregiver & case complexity = 215, Greater caregiver & case complexity = 709).

Case lengths may also be influenced by when the attorney is appointed to a case (for all representation models) and when social workers and/or parent advocates are first activated (for the IDT model). Appointment times of attorneys clustered around a median of one month, regardless of representation model, while activation of the IDT team was highly variable. Of practical significance, on average, cases are not truly interdisciplinary until three months after case opening.

When looking at time to interdisciplinary representation by group, attorneys activated social workers or parent advocates fastest in the beyond control of parent group (one month), followed equally by family ecology, less caregiver & case complexity, and greater caregiver & case complexity (two months). Early activation of the interdisciplinary team, especially for the family ecology and greater caregiver & case complexity groups, is anticipated to strengthen outcomes for these families.

Making Data Actionable

Initial study findings can be shared with both internal and external audiences to support the ORPC in communicating the value of interdisciplinary representation and taking a data-informed approach to model improvement. Actionable opportunities include:

1. **Share with contractors for continuous quality improvement and precision staffing**. Findings provide clear evidence for strengthening the IDT model and getting at precision staffing when activating IDT teams.

2. **Share with legislators to inform additional IDT investments.** Given IDT teams tend to take on more complex cases, while achieving positive outcomes at the same or higher rate than attorney-only staffing, additional resources for contracting with social workers and parent advocates are needed.

3. **Share with other stakeholders (e.g., judicial, child welfare) to achieve common understanding of the value of ORPC representation.** Findings can help create common mental models among child welfare caseworkers, treatment providers, and the courts around how high-quality parent representation can drive at the shared goal of keeping kids safely with their families.

As these data are used to spark conversation and shift the dialogue, new cases will continue to take place that can be added into the linked dataset, improving power of future analyses.

Lessons Learned from Linking ORPC and Trails Data

Lessons learned from the first analysis of linked ORPC and Trails data also led to several identified opportunities for strengthening the RPPS data system. In light of the imminent RPPS re-build that the ORPC is investing in, these opportunities are outlined in the *Building Capacity for Data-Driven Decision-Making in the Office of Respondent Parents' Counsel: Data Systems Recommendations* report.

Appendices

Appendix A: Analytic Decisions and Measurement of Constructs

The goal of this study was to understand the effects of an interdisciplinary team (IDT) model of parent representation on child welfare outcomes at the systems level. As such, the analytic approach was to attribute a child welfare case to either the interdisciplinary representation group or the attorney-only representation group.

Measurement of Constructs for Outcomes of Interest

Attorney-Only Representation: Representation model where the attorney is the primary contractor on the parent defense team. The attorney may use experts and investigators.

Interdisciplinary Representation: Representation model where a social worker and/or a parent advocate with lived experience is paired with the attorney, at any point in the life of the case. The team may use experts and investigators.

Office of Respondent Parents' Counsel (ORPC) Representation: Legal advocacy services provided by the ORPC; inclusive of all representation models.

Permanency: Final placement of child at case closure. Permanency is considered not achieved if at discharge, the child/youth experienced any of the following: emancipation, runaway, entered Division of Youth Services or jail, disrupted pre-legal adoption, or death of the child. For this linked analysis, the variables of interest were:

- **Living with family:** Children who were living with other family members (not parents) at case close.

- **Parental rights reinstated**: A termination of parental rights occurred and the court reinstated those rights.

- **Reunification:** Children in an out-of-home placement that were reunified with their parents at case close.

Placement: The type of placement that is used when a child is removed from the home. This most commonly includes: staying with parents through the case, reunified with parents, living with relatives or kin, adoption, guardianship, transferred to another agency, or discharge from the Division of Youth Services.

- **Kinship Care:** A child is placed in out-of-home care and the placement is with relatives/kin.

Re-entry: A respondent parent on the case becomes re-involved in child welfare within one year of case closure, due to a new case opening.

Removal: Child was removed from the home and placed in out-of-home care.

Unique Child Welfare Case: A unique child welfare case was identified as those cases with a unique Trails ID, a unique case involvement ID, and a valid case close date.

Study Time Frame

ORPC representation that started on or after January 1, 2019 for child welfare cases that closed in calendar years 2021 and 2022.

Business Rules for Outcomes Reporting

A dependency and neglect case may have one or more caregivers named in the filing. Each caregiver named on the child welfare case may have no ORPC representation, attorney-only representation, or interdisciplinary representation. In order to report outcomes at the case level and avoid duplicate reporting of the same outcomes in both representation groups, the following business rules were applied:

- Outcomes analysis was anchored to a **unique child welfare case.**

  - While still anchored to the child welfare case and representation model, when appropriate, outcomes were reported at the **child level because some cases have multiple children.**

- A unique child welfare case was assigned to the **attorney-only group** if:

  - The case had one respondent parent and they received attorney-only representation; or

  - The case had two or more respondent parents, and all had attorney-only representation.

- A unique child welfare case was assigned to the **interdisciplinary group** if:

  - The case had one respondent parent and they received IDT representation, or

  - The case had two or more respondent parents and at least one had IDT representation.

Insights from previous research on the interdisciplinary model were used to develop the above business rules, with the conceptual logic being:

- The ORPC allows an attorney to request a social worker or parent advocate at any point during representation in a child welfare case. As such, any case with IDT representation was assigned to the IDT group regardless of when the IDT team was first activated.

- The IDT parent defense team focuses on holistic family strengthening; benefits of the IDT model can extend to the whole family unit. As such, when both IDT and attorney-only representation were present in a unique child welfare case, the case was assigned to the IDT group.

- While social workers have been members of the IDT team since 2017, parent advocates only recently became part of the team, with most advocates joining cases in January 2021. As such, to achieve a more balanced sample, representation had to begin in January 2019 or after.

Latent Class Analysis

Latent Class Analysis is a statistical technique that leverages an algorithm to assign observations in a dataset to unobserved groups, "latent classes," based on a combination of existing variables.[6] The mathematical model is refined by adding or removing variables and changing the number of output groups until the evaluation team is satisfied with its overall "fit"—which refers to statistical measures as well as practical implications of the resulting groups. Once a model has been specified, each observation in a dataset is given a probability of assignment to each group in the model. For instance, in this four-class model, a single observation receives four probabilities, one for each class. The evaluation team then assigns individuals to a class based on the maximum probability. These classes can be used to further disaggregate the results of an analysis to see if subgroups of a population respond differently to a treatment or intervention. In this

analysis, the observations to which group assignments are tied are child welfare cases (n=3,723). We utilized a suite of case and respondent parent characteristics, from the Trails and Respondent Parent Payment System (RPPS), and an iterative approach, weighing both the statistical measures and practical implications of resulting classes. The final model yielded four groups.

Limitations Identified During Data Linkage

Trails Data

There were limitations in the Trails data that required additional business rules be applied to maintain integrity of the outcomes analysis. These are as follows:

- Instances where there was the **same Trails ID but different case involvement IDs** (n=65). After consulting with the Research, Analysis, and Data Unit Manager at the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS), there was no clear, practice-based reason why this would be happening and, thus, these child welfare cases (and all associated ORPC representation rows) were dropped from analysis. *Rationale*: unknown data entry error in Trails.

- Instances where there was the **same Trails ID and the same case involvement IDs** (n=26). After consulting with the Research, Analysis, and Data Unit Manager at CDHS, the decision was made to collapse these into a single child welfare case (and keep for analysis) when involvement ID dates were within 60 days of each other. *Rationale:* in practice, the most common reason this happens is that a caseworker accidentally closes a case too soon and additional services or other involvement is still needed.

- Instances where there were **removal episodes on a case without any corresponding placements** (n=4). These cases were removed from the final sample, as details regarding placement during the life of the case were missing. *Rationale:* missing data.

- Instances where there were **placements made during a case without any corresponding removal episodes** (n=28). These cases were included in the final sample for family preservation outcomes, as a removal was implied for each relevant case. However, because these cases lacked information in the removals table, these children were excluded in the permanency outcomes report. *Rationale:* conceptual logic.

Respondent Parent Payment System Data

There were limitations in the RPPS data that required additional business rules to be applied to maintain the integrity of the outcomes analysis. These are as follows:

- Because appointment date is necessary to assign child welfare cases to either IDT representation or attorney-only representation, any appointment date that was before 2019 was dropped. *Rationale:* align timeframes with previous research on the interdisciplinary model and ensure a more balanced sample that includes social workers (part of the IDT team since 2017) and parent advocates (most joining in January 2021). (n=53 dropped).

- Instances of a unique child welfare case with one respondent parent, but multiple representation types for that parent. If the same respondent parent had ORPC representation more than once (showing up in the dataset as more than one representation row) and there was only one child welfare case that the respondent parent was linked to in Trails, then dates were examined to match the correct RPPS representation type to the unique child welfare case.

- o If the earliest appointment date of the contractor for that representation row was *before* the child welfare case open date, then representation did not match, and this representation row was dropped from analysis. (n=148). *Rationale:* ORPC representation can only occur for open child welfare case cases.

- o If the earliest appointment date of a contractor for that representation row was *after* the child welfare case close date, then representation did not match, and this representation was dropped from analysis. (n=149). *Rationale:* ORPC representation can only occur for an open child welfare case.

Appendix B: Supplemental Findings

In this section, we report Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) results for the *by complex group* comparisons. An ANOVA is a statistical test used to determine differences between outcomes for each of the groups identified in the latent class analysis. All ANOVA results reported are statistically significant.

Research Question 1: Who Receives Interdisciplinary Representation?

Figure B-1. Complex Case Characteristics, by group and representation model
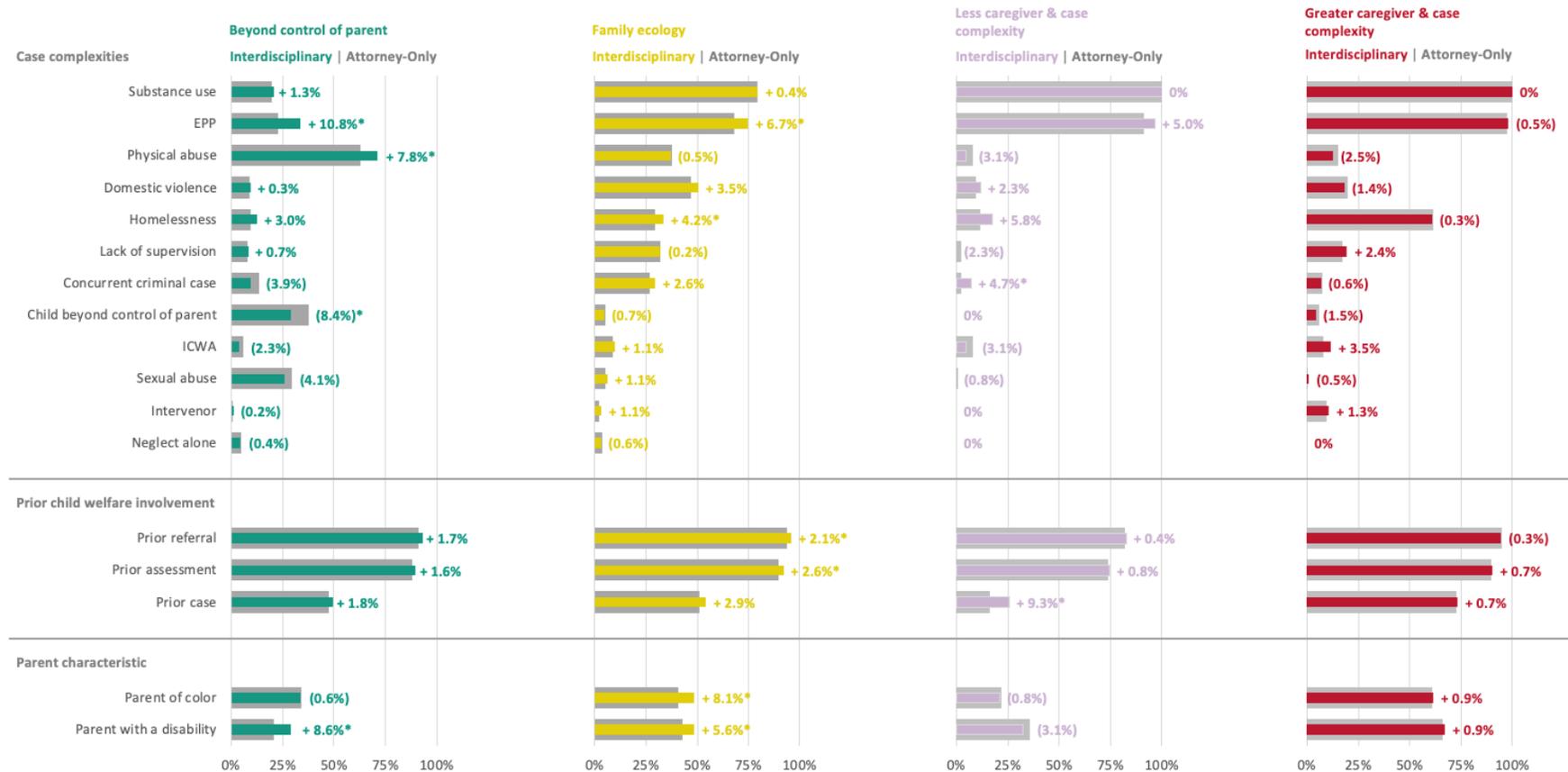
Reporting Notes: n=3,719. *Statistically significantly higher for cases with IDT representation within this group at p = <.10. EPP: Expedited Permanency Planning; ICWA: Indian Child Welfare Act

Table B-1. Complex Cases, by group

	Beyond Control of Parent	Family Ecology	Less Caregiver & Case Complexity	Greater Caregiver & Case Complexity
Case Complexities				
Substance use	19.8%	79.4%	100.0%	100.0%
Expedited Permanency Planning	26.3%	71.1%	93.5%	97.7%
Physical abuse	65.7%	37.1%	6.5%	14.1%
Domestic violence	9.3%	48.6%	10.2%	19.0%
Homelessness	10.4%	31.1%	14.0%	61.1%
Lack of supervision	8.2%	32.1%	1.4%	18.2%
Concurrent criminal case	12.1%	28.0%	4.2%	7.2%
Child beyond control of parent	34.7%	4.9%	0.0%	5.1%
Indian Child Welfare Act	5.3%	9.1%	6.5%	9.7%
Sexual abuse	28.5%	5.4%	0.5%	0.7%
Intervenor	1.1%	2.5%	0.0%	10.0%
Neglect	53.0%	99.4%	100.0%	99.3%
Neglect alone	4.9%	3.2%	0.0%	0.0%
Removal of a child	61.8%	67.0%	51.6%	88.6%
Prior Child Welfare Involvement				
Prior referral	91.8%	94.7%	82.3%	94.6%
Prior assessment	88.5%	90.7%	74.0%	89.8%
Prior case	48.2%	52.6%	20.0%	72.9%
Parent Characteristics				
Parent of color	34.0%	44.3%	21.4%	61.1%
Parent with a disability	23.2%	45.5%	34.4%	66.6%

Data Sources: Trails, parent demographics and child welfare involvement history; RPPS, representation model.
Reporting Notes: n=3,719 cases (Beyond control of parent = 741, Family ecology = 2,054, Less caregiver & case complexity = 215, Greater caregiver & case complexity = 709).

ANOVA Results

- Substance use
  - Less caregiver & case complexity and greater caregiver & case complexity most likely
  - Family ecology more likely than beyond control of parent
- Expedited Permanency Planning
  - Less caregiver & case complexity and greater caregiver & case complexity more likely than all other groups
  - Family ecology more likely than beyond control of parent group
- Physical abuse
  - Beyond control of parent most likely
  - Family ecology second most likely
  - Less caregiver & case complexity and greater caregiver & case complexity least likely

- Domestic violence
  - Family ecology most likely
  - Greater caregiver & case complexity second most likely
  - Beyond control of parent and less caregiver & case complexity least likely
- Homelessness
  - Greater caregiver & case complexity most likely
  - Family ecology second most likely
  - Beyond control of parent and less caregiver & case complexity least likely
- Lack of supervision
  - Family ecology most likely
  - Greater caregiver & case complexity more likely than beyond control of parent
  - Beyond control of parent more likely than less caregiver & case complexity
  - Less caregiver & case complexity least likely
- Concurrent criminal case
  - Family ecology most likely to have a concurrent criminal case
  - Less caregiver & case complexity and greater caregiver & case complexity more likely than beyond control of parent
- Child beyond control of parent
  - Beyond control of parent most likely
  - Family ecology more likely than less caregiver & case complexity
- Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)
  - Family ecology and greater caregiver & case complexity more likely than beyond control of parent
- Sexual abuse
  - Beyond control of parent most likely
  - Family ecology second most likely
  - Less caregiver & case complexity and greater caregiver & case complexity least likely
- Intervenor
  - Greater caregiver & case complexity more likely than all groups
- Neglect
  - Beyond control of parent least likely to have neglect cited on a referral
- Neglect alone
  - Beyond control of parent most likely to have neglect cited as only issue on referral
  - Family ecology second most likely
  - Less caregiver & case complexity and greater caregiver & case complexity least likely
- Removal of a child
  - Less caregiver & case complexity least likely to have a removal
  - Beyond control of parent less likely than family ecology and greater caregiver & case complexity
  - Family ecology less likely than greater caregiver & case complexity

- Prior referral
  - Family ecology more likely than beyond control of parent and less caregiver & case complexity
  - Beyond control of parent more likely than less caregiver & case complexity
  - Greater caregiver & case complexity more likely than less caregiver & case complexity
- Prior assessment
  - Beyond control of parent, family ecology, and greater caregiver & case complexity more likely than less caregiver & case complexity
- Prior case
  - Greater caregiver & case complexity most likely
  - Family ecology more likely than less caregiver & case complexity
  - Beyond control of parent more likely than less caregiver & case complexity
- Parent of color
  - Greater caregiver & case complexity most likely to have a parent of color
  - Family ecology more than less caregiver & case complexity and beyond control of parent
  - Beyond control of parent more than less caregiver & case complexity
- Parent with a disability
  - Greater caregiver & case complexity most likely
  - Family ecology more likely than less caregiver & case complexity and beyond control of parent
  - Less caregiver & case complexity more likely than beyond control of parent

Table B-2. Average Number of Previous Child Welfare Involvements, by group

	Beyond Control of Parent	Family Ecology	Less Caregiver & Case Complexity	Greater Caregiver & Case Complexity
Average number of prior referrals	23.16	25.39	8.60	21.11
Average number of prior assessments	10.12	12.27	4.30	11.01
Average number of prior child welfare cases	1.53	2.04	0.58	2.71

Data Sources: Trails, prior child welfare involvement; RPPS, representation model. *Reporting Notes*: n=3,719 cases (Beyond control of parent = 741, Family ecology = 2,054, Less caregiver & case complexity = 215, Greater caregiver & case complexity = 709).

ANOVA Results

Prior referrals:

- Beyond control of parent has more than less caregiver & case complexity
- Family ecology has more than less caregiver & case complexity and greater caregiver & case complexity
- Greater caregiver & case complexity has more than less caregiver & case complexity

Prior assessments:

- Beyond control of parent has more than less caregiver & case complexity

- Family ecology has more than less caregiver & case complexity and beyond control of parent

- Greater caregiver & case complexity has more than less caregiver & case complexity

Prior child welfare cases:

- Beyond control of parent has more than less caregiver & case complexity

- Family ecology has more than beyond control of parent

- Family ecology has more than less caregiver & case complexity

- Greater caregiver & case complexity has more than all other groups

Research Question 2: What is the Value of Interdisciplinary Representation on Keeping Kids Safely at Home?

Table B-3. All Children Remained at Home or were Placed with Kin, by group

	Beyond Control of Parent	Family Ecology	Less Caregiver & Case Complexity	Greater Caregiver & Case Complexity
All children remained in the home	38.19%	33.01%	48.37%	11.42%
All children placed with kin	9.99%	21.57%	21.86%	28.21%
Other placement scenario	51.82%	45.42%	29.77%	60.37%

Data Sources: Trails, prior child welfare involvement; RPPS, representation model. *Reporting Notes*: 3,719 cases (Beyond control of parent = 741, Family ecology = 2,054, Less caregiver & case complexity = 215, Greater caregiver & case complexity = 709).

ANOVA Results

All children remained in the home:

- More children remained in the home in less caregiver & case complexity than in any other group

- More children remained in the home in beyond control of parent than in family ecology and greater caregiver & case complexity

- More children remained in the home in family ecology than greater caregiver & case complexity

All children that were removed were placed with kin:

- More children placed with kin in less caregiver & case complexity than family ecology

- More children placed with kin in family ecology than beyond control of parent

- More children placed with kin in less caregiver & case complexity than beyond control of parent

- More children placed with kin in greater caregiver & case complexity than beyond control of parent

Table B-4. Use of Kinship Care for at Least One Kid on the Case, by group

	Beyond Control of Parent	Family Ecology	Less Caregiver & Case Complexity	Greater Caregiver & Case Complexity
Kinship placement occurred for at least one child removed on the case	60.4%	75.0%	77.9%	75.7%
Kinship placement was the first placement type for at least one child removed on the case	41.0%	63.5%	67.4%	64.2%

Data Sources: Trails, placements; RPPS, representation model. *Reporting Notes*: n=2,072 cases in which at least one child was removed (Beyond control of parent = 402, Family ecology = 1,115, Less caregiver & case complexity = 86, Greater caregiver & case complexity = 469).

ANOVA Results

At least one kinship placement:

- All groups have a higher rate of at least one kinship placement than beyond control of parent

Kinship placement first:

- All groups have a higher rate of first placement with kin than beyond control of parent

Table B-5: Permanency and Reunification Outcomes

	Beyond Control of Parent	Family Ecology	Less Caregiver & Case Complexity	Greater Caregiver & Case Complexity
Reunification with parents	54.3%	42.2%	30.8%	27.7%
Parental rights reinstatement	2.1%	1.8%	0.8%	1.6%
Living with other relatives	24.9%	35.5%	40.6%	37.1%
Other permanency outcome	18.7%	20.5%	27.8%	33.7%

Data Source: Trails, removals and placement data tables; RPPS, representation model. Reporting Notes: n=3,711 children (Beyond control of parent = 523, Family ecology = 2,351, Less caregiver & case complexity = 133, Greater caregiver & case complexity = 704).

ANOVA Results

- All groups are more likely than beyond control of parent to achieve permanency with other relatives
- All groups are less likely than beyond control of parent to achieve reunification with parents
- Less caregiver & case complexity and greater caregiver & case complexity are less likely to achieve reunification with parents than family ecology
- Greater caregiver & case complexity is more likely to achieve permanency with any kin (other relatives or reunification with parents) than beyond control of parent and family ecology

Table B-6: Re-entry Outcomes, by group

Beyond Control of Parent	Family Ecology	Less Caregiver & Case Complexity	Greater Caregiver & Case Complexity
2.01%	3.05%	3.60%	5.91%

Data Source: Trails, Re-entry flags; RPPS, representation model. *Reporting Notes*: n=2,040. Limited to cases that closed in calendar year 2021 to allow one full year lapse. (Beyond control of parent =397, Family ecology = 1,144, Less caregiver & case complexity = 111, Greater caregiver & case complexity = 388).

ANOVA Results

- Greater caregiver & case complexity more likely than beyond control of parent and family ecology to have a re-entry episode (ANOVA)

Appendix C: Child Welfare Involvement Process

call to 1-844-CO-4-KIDS

Review Evaluate Direct (RED) team

Reports screened in
to determine the potential severity of the case

Referral screened out
Does not meet criteria for abuse/neglect

(Caller may be referred elsewhere.)

⚠️ **SIGNIFICANT**
Safety concerns exist
Risk is significant
🕐 Immediate

MODERATE
Safety concerns and risk are moderate
🕐 3 Days

LOW
No safety concerns
Risk is low
🕐 5 Working Days

Meets with everyone at once

Meets with child victim

Meets with siblings, parents, collaterals, and others

🔍 **CPS conducts an assessment**

Child welfare or community-based services may be offered to address family needs

No services are required

(Family may be offered prevention services.)

⚠️ **Evidence of abuse or neglect:**
"Substantiated" or "Founded"

Insufficient evidence of abuse or neglect:
"Unsubstantiated" or "Unfounded"

Low or no risk of future abuse/neglect found

⚠️ **Child has been harmed and a risk of future abuse/neglect or ongoing safety concerns are present**

Assessment closed

Family may be referred for non court involved services

Case closed
Risk minimized

🏛️ **Open court case**
through Dependency & Neglect Petition

🏠 **Child is placed in out-of-home care**
and services are provided to the child and family

Child stays with family
Services are provided to the child and family

Dependency & Neglect court process

🕐 48–72 hours
Temporary Custody Hearing—
must be held within 48-72 hours of the date of placement.

Dependency and Neglect petition filed
by county department of human/social services (usually filed at the Temporary Custody Hearing).

🕐 60–90 days
Adjudication Hearing—
must be held within 60-90 days of the date of placement depending on the child/youth's age.

🕐 45 days
Dispositional Hearing—
must be held within 45 days of Adjudication (may be held at the same time as Adjudication).

🕐 90 days–every 6 months
Review Hearing—
must be held within 90 days of Disposition and every 6 months thereafter.

🕐 12 months
Permanency Hearing—
must be held within 12 months of date of placement.

Reunification with family

Custody to a relative

❗ **Termination of parental rights**
and adoption or permanent legal guardianship

Independent living
with permanent family connections

CDHS / CO
COLORADO
Department of Human Services

Endnotes

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[5] Casey Family Programs. (2020). *Why should child protection agencies adopt a kin-first approach?* https://www.casey.org/kin-first-approach/

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