

CWELN Project

Linking CPS-Involved Families to Early Learning and Family Support Programs

One of DCYF's critical tasks is to strengthen the linkages between our state's child welfare and early learning systems. Evidence suggests that early learning and family support programs can help families prevent maltreatment, reduce entry into foster care, and improve wellbeing, but fewer than half of Washington's eligible families involved with Child Protective Services (CPS) were reaching these programs.



The goal is to promote long-term positive outcomes for children, and decrease subsequent reports of abuse or neglect and out-of-home placements for families with active child welfare cases. DCYF collected and analyzed data to identify opportunities to better serve families and children through child welfare, early learning, and family support connections. Those connections are made by DCYF Child Welfare Early Learning Navigators, or CWELNs, who collaborate with CPS caseworkers to support and connect families with young children to high-quality early learning and family support experiences.

Currently, this work is being carried out across three regions of the state, including South King, Grays Harbor, Mason, Pacific, and Yakima counties. A new position was added in December 2021 for a Tribal Child Welfare-Early Learning Navigator who will serve tribal communities. For an online regional map, go to www.dcyf.wa.gov/safety/report-abuse.



Washington State Department of
CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

The CWELN team is trying new ways to more consistently track when child welfare staff and navigators refer families to community early learning resources such as: child care, Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), Head Start, home visiting, Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT), and Early Childhood Intervention and Prevention Services (ECLIPSE). We hope this information can help to achieve three things:

- Determine what strategies for making referrals are most effective in getting families enrolled in early learning services—including the creation of the publication *Conversation Guide - Early Learning and Family Support Programs (EL_0032)* available online at www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pubs/EL_0032B.pdf.
- Identify and address “missed connections”—when a family wants to be connected to an early learning resource but gets lost in the process.
- Develop systems that allow us to identify gaps in needed services, pinpoint bottlenecks in real time, and regularly adjust practice as needed.

The CWELN Project is currently funded by the Federal Preschool Development Grant Birth Through Five (PDG B-5), which was renewed in 2019 to carry out approved activities over three years ending December 2022. For more information online, go to www.dcyf.wa.gov/about/government-affairs/pdg.



As the CWELN team prepares for its third year, they are excited to take the lessons learned from the project to inform ongoing practice and policy change across the state. This project is likely just one of many toward achieving our ambitious goal of connecting all families, especially those with active child welfare cases, to early learning resources. The team is capturing data and learnings from the project about necessary changes, as well as actively evaluating the impact of the navigators’ referrals, to make sure this critical effort is as effective as possible.

To learn more about the CWELN project, contact:

Navigator’s Name: _____

E-mail: _____

Phone: _____

Other resources include the following publications:

- *Child Protective Services (CPS) Investigation Brochure (CWP_0083)*
www.dcyf.wa.gov/publications-library/CWP_0083
- *Family Assessment Response (FAR) Brochure (CWP_0023)*
www.dcyf.wa.gov/publications-library/CWP_0023

For more information about the impact of the CWELN project, visit https://govlab.hks.harvard.edu/files/govlabs/files/wa_dcyf_project_feature.pdf.

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