



**TEXAS**  
Department of Family  
and Protective Services

# **Family Finding Collaboration Report**

**As Required by the  
2022-23 General Appropriations Act,  
Senate Bill 1, 87th Legislature,  
Regular Session, 2021  
(Article II, Department of Family and  
Protective Services, Rider 19)**

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# Table of Contents

Table of Contents..... i

Executive Summary..... 1

Introduction ..... 2

Background..... 3

Collaborative Family Engagement Pilot Project Evaluation ..... 4

Conclusion ..... 5

List of Acronyms ..... 6

Appendix A: Collaborative Family Engagement Evaluation..... 6

## Executive Summary

The 2022-23 General Appropriations Act, Senate Bill 1, 87th Legislature, Regular Session, 2021 (Article II, Department of Family and Protective Services [DFPS], Rider 19) requires DFPS to report to the Legislative Budget Board, the Governor, the Chair of the House Appropriations Committee, the Chair of the Senate Finance Committee, Speaker of the House, Lieutenant Governor, and the permanent standing committees in the House of Representatives and the Senate with jurisdiction over health and human services on the success of the Collaborative Family Engagement (CFE) program and its impact on improving permanency outcomes, increasing family involvement and support for children in state care, and improving child well-being.

To complete the requirements of this Rider, Texas Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) commissioned the University of Texas Child and Family Research Partnership (CFRP) to complete the evaluation of the CFE program and this evaluation is being submitted to help fulfill the reporting requirements for Rider 19. The evaluation completed by the University of Texas is included in Appendix A.

CFRP evaluated the first six years of CFE implementation. It was determined that CFE increased the collaboration between DFPS and CASA and improved family engagement, connections, and support for children and families. CFRP also examined CFE implementation and its impact on placement and permanency outcomes for children and youth by race and ethnicity to determine any differences in experiences when participating in the CFE approach. The CFE experiences included on CFE cases was found to be equitable regardless of race and ethnicity.

CFRP also found the CFE approach contributed to more kinship placements for children and youth in Temporary Managing Conservatorship (TMC) and Permanent Managing Conservatorship (PMC) cases. The CFE approach was associated with more reunifications between children and parents among TMC cases. CFE did not directly contribute to decreasing a child or youth's time spent in care or with higher rates of permanency overall.

## Introduction

The 87th Texas Legislature approved and continued funding for a family finding program to evaluate promising practices for a more comprehensive approach to engaging families in child protection cases in Texas. This funding covered personnel, curriculum development, training, and other necessary costs to support family finding efforts. Through this CFE program, Texas CASA and DFPS' Child Protective Services (CPS) have worked collaboratively to implement a structured approach for extensively searching for and engaging adults to support children in care.

For generations, extended families have played significant roles in rearing children when parents are having a difficult time. CPS refers to this as Kinship Care. Relatives and other people who the child or family have a significant relationship with can often provide children with stability when they cannot live with their birth parents. The benefits of Kinship Care are:

- Provides love and care in a familiar setting;
- Provides parents with a sense of hope that children will remain connected to their birth families;
- Enables children to live with people they know and trust;
- Reinforces a child's sense of cultural identity and positive self-esteem;
- Helps a child make and sustain extended family connections;
- Continues lifelong family traditions and memories;
- Supports the child in building healthy relationships within the family;
- Supports the child's need for safety and well-being; and
- Creates a sense of stability in the life of a child. <sup>1</sup>

DFPS recognizes that family-finding is not limited to relatives able to provide Kinship Care. CFE helps to coordinate family-engagement, family-finding, and bringing together a family group. This group can consist of kinship or fictive kin<sup>2</sup> and other connections to children, youths, and their parents. This can also include those who may not be currently connected to children and youth, such as absent parents or paternal relatives who are often excluded or unknown.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child\\_Protection/Kinship\\_Care/default.asp](https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Kinship_Care/default.asp)

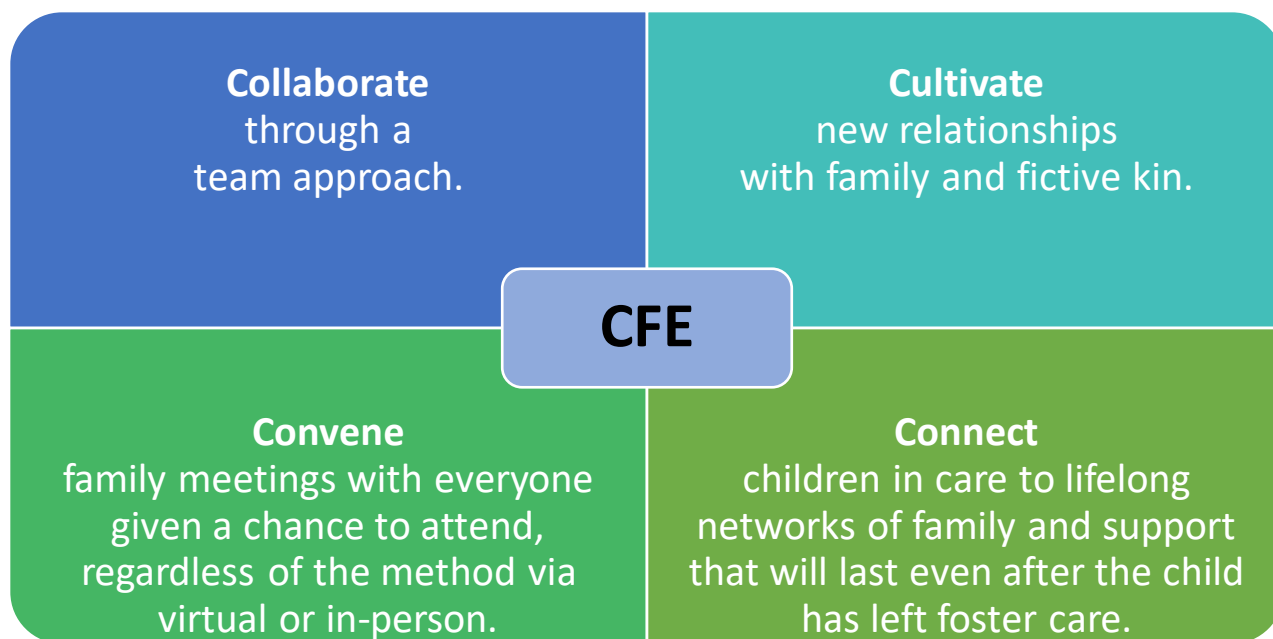
<sup>2</sup> This term refers to close family friends.

## Background

CFE is Texas' model for collaborative family finding work between Texas CASA and DFPS based on Kevin Campbell's Family Finding model. It began in fiscal year 2016 with only three of the local CASA programs and CPS conservatorship staff. Each fiscal year, CFE has rolled out and expanded to more program and DFPS regions. By the end of fiscal year 2023, 72 of the 73 local CASA programs and their affiliated DFPS regions and counties will be trained in this collaborative model. Travis County is the only county excluded, as it has a long-standing model of its own for family searching and engagement and has not been part of the CFE expansion. The CFE work of the 72 local CASA programs span 174 counties across Texas.

This model emphasizes the 4C's of CFE found in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. The 4C's of CFE**



The CFE approach and family finding/family engagement strategies are available in every case, and staff and CASA volunteers or supervisors will also have access to CFE engagement tools and have the resources and training to use them and implement family finding in their work.

In fiscal year 2022, a total of 4,410 children and 2,417 families were involved in CFE work, including those who were involved in CFE engagement activities, such as family finding tools. This was a 31 percent increase in children and 29 percent increase in families served, respectively, over fiscal year 2021. Last fiscal year, CFE involved 130 counties and trained 2,246 people across 46 CFE training sessions.

## Family Finding Collaboration Report

In the last two fiscal years, more resources have been developed for use in CFE, CFE cases specifically, and all cases. These include:

- A family meetings facilitator video series.
- Videos geared specifically toward children, youth, parents, and caregivers, available in both English and Spanish.
- Development of a CFE Tools phone app available to CASA volunteers and supervisors, Single Source Continuum Contractor providers, and DFPS staff.
- Providing physical copies or templates of CFE engagement tools, such as decks of playing cards (“Connect Cards”) and large Mobility Map posters.

In addition to conservatorship staff, CASA has also begun to expand its efforts in cases shortly after a child is removed, often called early engagement, and this includes using CFE to find and engage family soon after a child comes into DFPS conservatorship.

## **Collaborative Family Engagement Pilot Project Evaluation**

The University of Texas Child and Family Research Partnership examined the outcomes of CFE over the first six years of implementation. The most recent report, released at the end of fiscal year 2021, reviewed the association between CFE and placement and permanency outcomes, including by race and ethnicity. The research looked at 1,094 cases with a CASA volunteer from 18 CFE sites from 2018 to April 2020. Cases had a final outcome by April 29, 2020, for this sample. No difference was found in the use of CFE activities by race and ethnicity, so the application of CFE was equitable. The evaluation shows in both TMC and PMC cases, more CFE activities were correlated with increased kinship (relative and fictive kin) placements. The findings also showed more reunifications in TMC cases.

However, CFE was not correlated with higher overall rates of positive permanency or permanency rates with kin and did not decrease the time a child spends in a congregate care setting, such as a residential treatment center or other general residential operation type.

As CASA and caseworkers are empowered to do family finding and engagement work, this brings more family to convene in family meetings. CFE supports good casework – practices that honor the input and collaboration of family and professionals. When children are protected and connected to people who care and love them, these relationships can help keep children out of foster homes and in kinship placements, providing more normalcy. Cultivating these relationships builds better networks that support children as they grow into adulthood. CFE tools provide a multitude of methods to find and engage family and the children themselves in their case and planning for positive outcomes. The CFE approach reflects a broader perspective and greater team mentality between CASA and CPS that elevates the role and value of family.

## Conclusion

The CFE initiative is a partnership between CASA and DFPS. CFE aims at creating a family support network for children and youth in care and their families. This partnership works towards connecting children and youth with their familial ties and keep them connected to their communities, or to help them build these connections.

These connections can assist children and families as they navigate the child welfare system and provide a pathway for DFPS to improve their engagement with families. CFE focuses on building connections and allows family to have more participation in a DFPS case and creates more opportunities for children and youth to maintain their family connections.

Based on the University of Texas Child and Family Research Partnership's evaluation of CFE, they were able to demonstrate CFE is a valuable tool for CASA and DFPS to improve collaboration, family engagement, and increase the amount of family support for a case. CFE did not contribute to improved permanency outcomes or a decreased amount of time in care. However, CFE could increase kinship or fictive kin placements and assist DFPS in engaging potential placements. The family-centered approach of CFE creates a pro-family environment, which can also support reunification efforts.

## List of Acronyms

Acronym	Full Name
CPS	Child Protective Services
CASA	Court Appointed Specialist Advocates
CFE	Collaborative Family Engagement
DFPS	Department of Family and Protective Services
TMC	Temporary Managing Conservatorship
PMC	Permanent Managing Conservatorship

## Appendix A: Collaborative Family Engagement Evaluation

[Appendix A: Collaborative Family Engagement Evaluation](#)