

The Critical Role of Parent Partner Programs in Helping Parents Navigate the Child Welfare System

September 6, 2024

Infant-Toddler Court Program
National Resource Center



Safe Babies
A Program of ZERO TO THREE



Today's Objectives

1. Share highlights and key findings from our new report on parent partner programs
2. Hear from Parent Partner Programs about key lessons learned from starting and implementing a parent partner program





Safe Babies

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The National Infant-Toddler Court Program was made possible through the support of the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of an award totaling \$8,820,368 with 0 percent financed from non-governmental sources.

The contents are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement by, HRSA, HHS, or the U.S. Government. For more information, please visit [HRSA.gov](https://www.hrsa.gov).

ZERO TO THREE deeply appreciates Ballmer Group for its generous support of our work to scale the Safe Babies approach. Ballmer Group is committed to improving economic mobility for children and families in the United States, funding leaders and organizations that have demonstrated the ability to reshape opportunity and reduce systemic inequities.



Speakers



Kimberly Nabarro,
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Epic 'Ohana, Hawaii



Lea Jackson, Parent
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David Shuster, Mentor Parent
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New Report From the Safe Babies Program



The Critical Role of
Parent Partner Programs:
Policy and Practice Considerations



What We Did

1. Reviewed research on the effectiveness of parent partner programs
2. Reviewed state and federal policy and guidance related to parent partners
3. Interviewed programs operating in states and cities across the country.

What are Parent Partners

Parent partners (also known as parent mentors, parent support partners, and parent allies) are individuals who have lived experience navigating the child welfare system as a parent, understand how the child welfare system works and can help other parents who are currently involved.

What Do Parent Partners Do



Mentoring – Peers can provide support and encouragement.

Resource Navigation – Peers can often provide improved and more trusted help to parents to identify and access resources.

Support Groups – Peers can lead groups in providing reflection and connection to resources and to each other.

Training – Peers can provide training for individuals experiencing the system or for stakeholders providing services within the system.

1:1 Coaching on Navigating Systems and Processes –

Peers can provide one-on-one coaching to individuals experiencing the system, specifically on how to successfully navigate bureaucracy, processes, procedures, and complex systems.

Advocacy – Peers can serve as advocates for individuals who are currently involved in the child welfare system.

Outreach – Peers may be able to connect individuals experiencing the system with resources, services, and opportunities to become peer leaders themselves.⁴

Children's Trust Fund Alliance, Generations United, Foster Club, ZERO TO THREE. (2023). *Promoting Peer Support in Child Welfare*. <https://www.gu.org/app/uploads/2024/02/Peer-Support-in-Child-Welfare-Resource.pdf>

Key Challenges Facing the Expansion of Parent Partner Programs in States

- **Identification of funding:** Because there is no dedicated federal funding source for this program, Parent Partner Programs must utilize an array of federal, state, or private funding sources.
- **Increasing support and buy in for Parent Partners as members of the workforce:** There is still a lack of understanding that a parent with lived expertise can be a valuable member of the early childhood or child welfare workforce and meaningfully improve the outcomes of children and their parents.
- **Barriers to hiring and sustaining the parent partner workforce:** Rules and regulations governing some federal grants and state funding sources may require background checks that could exclude many parent mentors due to prior substance use or criminal records.

Key considerations *before* bringing parents with lived experience into a Parent Partner Program

- Establish parents in leadership roles within the Parent Partner Program: If lived experience is valued, it should be reflected in leadership
- Put a plan in place up front for fair compensation of parent partners
- Training for potential parent partners should be in place for before and during the parent partner's time with the program
- Potential parent partners should be actively in recovery from substance use (for at least one year)
- Potential parent partners' values should align with the state's mission
- Ensure parent partners reflect the diversity of the communities they serve
- The program should conduct integration and team-building of all members before jumping into the work
- Identify partners within the judicial system to align with the program before starting the work
- Figure out funding to establish a sustainable program

Based on responses from ZERO TO THREE convening of over 25 parent leaders in December 2023

Policies and Practices Needed to Finance, Implement, and Sustain Parent Partner Programs

-  Early Engagement Between Parent Partners and Parents
-  Connection with a Wide Range of Resources and Service Providers
-  Intentionality in Onboarding and Ongoing Training
-  Funding for Compensation of a Livable Wage for Parent Partners
-  Cultural Competency
-  Clinical Support and Reflective Space for Parent Partners
-  Support for and Inclusion of Fathers
-  Partnership with Judicial Leadership and Attorneys
-  Partnership with Child Welfare
-  Continued Support for Parents After Case Closure

Appendix: Parent Partner Program Summaries

[Mentor Parents Program, Dependency Advocacy Center, Santa Clara County, Calif.](#)

The Mentor Parents Program run by the Dependency Advocacy Center (DAC) exists to identify barriers to reunification, to provide role models for a clean and sober lifestyle, and to reach out to dependency court parents with a message of hope and recovery. Mentor parents work directly with DAC attorneys to encourage early engagement in rehabilitative services and provide guidance to parents as they navigate the child welfare system. The mentor parents have assisted hundreds of dependency court parents and play a significant role in Santa Clara County's specialized drug treatment court, the Dependency Wellness Court. Further, through their participation on systems-level committees and as guest speakers at a wide variety of trainings and conferences, DAC's mentor parents are able to bring parents' perspective into critical planning and implementation discussions that impact the larger dependency system.

[Parents for Parents Program, NAMI of Sarasota and Manatee Counties, Fla.](#)

Parents for Parents (P4P) is a new program within the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) of Sarasota and Manatee Counties, funded by the Gulf Coast Community Foundation. P4P offers peer mentoring for families in the dependency court system, connecting parents who have successfully navigated the child welfare system to parents who have recently become engaged with child protective services. The goal of P4P is to provide early outreach, education, and support to parents who have entered the dependency system so they can be reconnected to their children. P4P also provides parent partners with leadership and gateway employment opportunities as they provide support, knowledge, and mentoring to parents new to the system.

[Parent Partner and Makua Allies Programs, Family WRAP Department, EPIC 'Ohana, Hawaii](#)

Parent Partners is a program of EPIC 'Ohana that works to strengthen families and enhance the welfare of children and youth through transformative processes that are respectful, collaborative, and solution-oriented. Parent partners work as part of EPIC 'Ohana's Family WRAP Hawaii program team, which supports families involved with child welfare services. The parent partners provide support to families throughout the wellness recovery action plan (WRAP) process, with a focus on moving things forward and working together to make families' hopes and dreams become a reality. The Makua Allies program provides peer support to pregnant women or women who have given birth in the past 90 days that are suffering from substance use. The program helps prevent family separation and increase parents sense of hope and self-efficacy by engaging them with community supports and services.

[Parent Partners Program, Iowa Department of Health and Human Services](#)

In Iowa, Parent Partners promotes an innovative change in social work practice that is unique because it not only celebrates individuals who have overcome obstacles through change, recovery, and accountability, but also uses their skills to mentor families who are currently navigating through the state's Department of Health and Human Services as their children are in foster or kinship care. Parent partners demonstrate advocacy and effective communication while holding families accountable in meeting their case plan goals. The parent partner is a key strategy to improving practice with families, but it cannot stand alone. Parent partners network within communities and collaborate with social workers and providers to meet the needs of families, assist in policy and program development, change perceptions in communities, and facilitate training and learning opportunities. As of 2020, Iowa's Parent Partners Program operates in all 99 counties in the state. The Iowa Parent Partner Approach is included in the [Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse](#).

[Parent Mentor Program, Minnesota One-Stop for Communities](#)

Operating in Hennepin, Ramsey, and St. Louis Counties, the Minnesota One-Stop for Communities Parent Mentor Program provides support for parents involved in the child protection system by helping them navigate their way through what can be an overwhelming and challenging process. A parent mentor will work

Panel Discussion



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For Additional Information

Thank You!

Please reach out with any questions or for additional information



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ITCP Policy Tools: **Where To Find Our Resources**



Transforming policy for babies, toddlers, and their families

Positive experiences and emotionally nourishing relationships with parents and caregivers in the first three years of life are critical to ensuring children thrive. We all have a shared responsibility to nurture and protect each child and to support communities and families in creating the safe, stable, nurturing environment children need.

It's never too soon to think about sustainability.

Successful sustainability planning begins with a common vision of the work and the desired outcomes that agencies, communities and states are collectively trying to accomplish and embed in the policy and practice landscape.

www.zerotothree.org/resources/policy-and-sustainability