

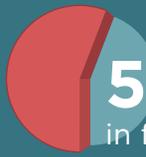
## Improving Systems & Implementing Interventions to Support Lasting Reunification of Families

### ABOUT

The National Quality Improvement Center on Family-Centered Reunification (QIC-R), in collaboration with the Children's Bureau (CB), invites eligible applicants to participate in this project. Applications are limited to **state governments, county governments, and federally recognized American Indian/ Alaska Native (AI/AN) tribal governments**. The purpose of this grant is to support the timely, stable, and lasting reunification of families by preserving, nurturing, and strengthening parent-child relationships and supportive community connections and resources, including through meaningful engagement of birth parents, foster families, youth, alumni of foster care, and other stakeholders. The primary applicants need both the access and the authority to assess and make changes in child welfare (CW) agencies and workforce practices.

The QIC-R will build a body of knowledge on effective engagement, services, and interventions to support family-centered reunification for and with youth in foster care and their families. The QIC-R is led by the Institute for Innovation & Implementation at the University of Maryland School of Social Work along with participating core partners: Center for the Study of Social Policy, Children and Family Futures, Tribal Law and Policy Institute, and Youth MOVE National

**437,000**  
children experienced  
a **foster care episode**  
in FY 2018<sup>1</sup>



**56%** of all children  
in foster care in FY2018  
had a **primary case plan**  
**goal of reunification**<sup>1</sup>

### CURRENT LANDSCAPE

Children with previous experience with foster care are at greater risk for further re-entry after reunification. Factors such as child behavioral challenges, siblings in foster care at the same time, and instances of court-ordered return home against agency recommendation all increased the likelihood of re-entry after reunification.<sup>2</sup>

There are few, if any, models that comprehensively and intentionally address best practices and related challenges associated with reunification, particularly regarding birth parent engagement and shared parenting approaches. After exploring what is known about interventions that have been found to improve reunification outcomes, the QIC-R has developed **Family-Centered Reunification in Child Welfare: A Review of Best Practices**. This is a resource guide for Local Implementation Sites (LIS) to use in considering which interventions to select. LIS are not required to select interventions highlighted in the document but will need to describe why their selected intervention(s) were chosen and be able to adequately respond to the related application questions.

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. (2019, October 24). Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) FY2018 data. Retrieved from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/afcarsreport26.pdf>



## OPPORTUNITY TO ADVANCE THE FIELD

The disproportionality of families of color involved with the CW system is a key barrier to both engaging and serving families and to meeting the needs of children experiencing foster care. Black/African American families are over-represented in Child Protection Services by 1.6 times and in foster care by 1.8 times compared to their proportion in the general population.<sup>2</sup> AI/AN children are overrepresented in state foster care at a rate that is 2.6 times greater than their proportion in the general population.<sup>3</sup> In addition to other poor outcomes, Youth of Color experience longer stays in foster care than their White peers, more restrictive foster care placements, and lack of access to responsive and relevant services.<sup>4</sup>

## THE QIC-R IS WORKING TO IMPROVE...



## AIMS

The QIC-R will identify and fund 5-7 LIS. Each LIS implements evidence-based, evidence-informed, or promising approaches or practices that are inclusive of comprehensive, culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and individualized services for youth in foster care and their families. Sites implement practices that address a minimum of four of the seven focus areas outlined by the CB:

1. CW systems' philosophies and cultures related to working with birth families and parents with children in foster care.
2. Comprehensive assessment of family needs with meaningful input by parents, relatives, significant family supports, and children and youth.
3. Provision of timely and tailored in-home and out-of-home biological family/family of origin services through collaborative practice with other service providers that intentionally support reunification and ensure the service array.
4. Preparation of foster families that promotes and demonstrates parental support and engagement, shared parenting, and development of meaningful connections.
5. Development of reunification-centered resources and services in the neighborhoods and communities of origin and where reunified families will live.
6. Maintenance of children's important connections by providing foster care services in their neighborhoods, keeping them in their communities and schools of origin, and facilitating participation in activities of interest that children in foster care can enjoy.
7. Comprehensively addressing both child and parental well-being, including trauma related to removal and temporary placement in foster care.

<sup>2</sup>Shipe, S., Shaw, T., Betsinger, S. & Farrell, J. (2017). Expanding the conceptualization of re-entry: The inter-play between child welfare and juvenile services. *Children and Youth Services Review*. 79. [www.doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.06.001](http://www.doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.06.001).

<sup>3</sup>National Indian Child Welfare Association. (2019, October). Disproportionality in Child Welfare Fact Sheet. Retrieved from <https://www.nicwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/2019-AIAN-Disproportionality-in-Child-Welfare-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>4</sup>Martha L. Raimon, M.L., Weber, K. and Esenstad, A. (2015). Better Outcomes for Older Youth of Color in Foster Care. Retrieved from <https://www.americanbar.org/groups/litigation/committees/childrens-rights/articles/2015/better-outcomes-older-youth-color-foster-care/>



Each LIS, in partnership with the QIC-R and the CB, strives to identify, implement, test, and sustain interventions and approaches to support families to care for their children in their own communities by:

- Creating systemic change to promote comprehensive, holistic, and family-centered reunification services and supports.
- Ensuring that foster care programs and families serve as a support to, not a substitute for, parents and biological family and families of origin.
- Achieving measurable improvements in timely and lasting permanency, placement stability, and family well-being.
- Ensuring that the needs of children and parents are comprehensively assessed and addressed, and that communities develop a comprehensive array of services and localized family supports to build protective factors and thrive within communities of origin.



## QUALITY LEARNING COLLABORATIVE

LIS are required to participate in the QIC-R National Quality Learning Collaborative (QLC) process. Throughout the QLC process, LIS are supported through an implementation science framework using data to adapt and refine interventions over time. The ultimate goal is to produce manuals for replication in other child welfare agencies. Each LIS will select an implementation team to participate in the QLC of 6-8 participants representing key roles and functions necessary to advance the identified intervention(s) and supports successfully.

These individuals must include executive leaders with decision-making ability; youth leaders who are currently involved in or recent alumni of the foster care system; parent leaders with lived experience; and a data manager/evaluator. Additional team members may include child welfare staff who provide services and supports; partner organizations; community providers; court professionals, foster parents, intervention purveyors, interventionists; and elders, healers, and other community stakeholders who support tribal sovereignty and cultural responsiveness from a holistic lens.

During these four+ years, LIS are supported by the QIC-R through responsive technical assistance, monthly tailored webinars and learning opportunities, monthly implementation team meetings, centralized data analysis, quarterly reports for all interventions, and bi-annual, two-day collaborative learning sessions (one in-person when travel safely resumes and one virtual annually).

## EVALUATION

The QIC-R evaluates each site independently while incorporating multiple cross-site evaluation components to assess the best practices implemented throughout the sites. The evaluation includes site-specific and cross-site process and outcome evaluation activities, tailored to cultural and community factors as appropriate. Utilizing a Formative Evaluation process, the QIC-R evaluation team serves as the centralized, coordinating entity for the evaluation of each LIS and provides expertise in implementation, evaluation, and child welfare research. The QIC-R

evaluation team works with each LIS to design and implement the most rigorous and feasible evaluation plan and logic model and collaborates with each LIS to support implementation and evaluation of evidence-based, evidence-informed, or promising practices, programs, and interventions to help build evidence of effective family-centered reunification practices.

The LIS are required to identify and fund a local data manager to support the evaluation process at a minimum .20 FTE. The Data Manager is the primary point of contact for all activities related to the site's data and evaluation. They are trained by the QIC-R Evaluation Team on how to collect, enter, and submit all data from their site (including administrative data, process data, surveys, and fidelity data as appropriate). The Data Manager is also responsible for coordinating all logistics associated with data collection, data management, data de-identification, and data sharing with the QIC-R Evaluation Team.



## SUPPORT AND FUNDING

The QIC-R provides technical assistance (TA) to LIS by internal experts through our partner organizations and our consulting pool comprised of national experts, including those with experience working with culturally diverse communities (e.g., the Tribal Law and Policy Institute and the National Indian Child Welfare Association provide TA to American Indian and Alaska Native LIS). Throughout the process, the QICR works with LIS to assess TA needs and ensure the provision of TA, including virtual and onsite TA, as well as in-person learning sessions.

Additionally, the QIC-R provides funding to accepted LIS to support the implementation

of proposed interventions and systemic shifts. Funding amounts vary depending on the number of LIS selected. LIS receive five years of funding with the funding for year one to serve as startup support for implementing proposed strategies. In their proposed budgets, LIS may include between \$70,000 and \$100,000 for year one and between \$140,000 and \$200,000 in years two through five. LIS are responsible for using funding allocations to support project personnel, purveyors, interventionists, project supplies, stipends, etc. The QIC-R covers the cost of travel to QLC learning sessions and the costs of consultation from experts as needed.

Contact us with questions by emailing [qicreunification@ssw.umaryland.edu](mailto:qicreunification@ssw.umaryland.edu)



Funded through the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau, Grant #90CZ0029-01-00. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the view or policies of the funder, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products or organizations imply endorsement by the US Department of Health and Human Services.