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**Social workers' perception of the effectiveness of the parent partner program of San Bernardino County**

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SOCIAL WORKERS' PERCEPTION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS
OF THE PARENT PARTNER PROGRAM OF
SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Maisha LaShawn Albert-Alexander
Marion Estelle Wheeler

June 2013
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to examine the social workers' perception of the effectiveness of the Parent Partner program for the San Bernardino County Children and Family Services. This study employed a quantitative study design using an online survey questionnaire. The sample size consisted of 50 Social Service Practitioners and Social Worker II's throughout San Bernardino County Children and Family Services. The study found that social workers supported the Parent Partner program and would utilize a Parent Partner for other cases in future. Social workers in the study agreed that families who utilized a Parent Partner engaged in services quicker than families who did not utilize a Parent Partner. Families who utilized Parent Partners had better communication with their social workers. One recommendation for the Parent Partner program was the need for more in-depth professional trainings to increase Parent Partners knowledge of community resources available for families. Another recommendation suggests the importance of implementing an effective database to improve communication between the social workers and Parent Partners. Further studies are needed to assist the
county in determining the effectiveness of the Parent Partner program and whether the implementation of Parent Partners has impacted the family reunification process.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family, friends, research partner MaiSHA, my babe, my Queen & King Bees, my friend and mentor Joyce Coleman, and everyone else who provided support, love, word of encouragement, and fun through this process. I know you all are so very proud of me!! Thank you so much for everything!! GET UR LIFE!!

Marion Wheeler

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family and friends. Thank you all for your support throughout this process. Without your kind words of encouragement this process would have been a lot harder. To my thesis partner, I would like to say thank you for pushing me and allowing me to push you. This was a tough journey for the both of us but in the end I couldn’t have asked for a better partner, so for that I thank you. To my beautiful children I would like to say never give up on your dreams and always shoot for the stars. Mommy loves you!

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learn more and become more, so for that I will forever
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Maisha Albert-Alexander
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

Within the child welfare system, children are being removed from their homes and placed in foster care. When circumstances permit, family reunification becomes the primary goal. The family reunification process focuses on returning children in an out-of-home placement to their families by providing a variety of supportive services (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011). Removing children from their biological families has proven to be a devastating process for all parties involved. Children who have been placed in foster homes away from their siblings and other family members are at risk of emotional and behavioral problems. In attempts to minimize the adverse devastating effects of out-of-home placement, child welfare strongly encourages family reunification as the most common goal for successful family outcomes (Williams-Mbenque, 2008).

According to Pine, Krieger, and Maluccio (1990) While researchers suggest that family reunification has become the primary goal within child welfare, “the
process has not been all together successful" (as cited in Lewis & Callaghan, 1993, p. 44) For numerous reasons, parents often fail to fully understand the importance of the federally mandated timelines in which they should have completed the requirements their case plan. The vast majority of parents involved with child welfare are involuntary clients. It is oftentimes problematic to engage the parents in the court ordered process. Often parents are recovering from substance abuse and coping with mental illnesses. In addition, parents who lack parenting skills have limited resources and support systems (Luis & Callaghan 1993).

Although the family reunification process has proven to be difficult, a majority of the children placed in out-of-home placements are returned to their family of origin (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011). Throughout the family reunification process, families work with the social workers to develop an individualized case plan. Parental compliance with services is one of the most important factors of reunification. However, due to lack of supportive services families may find themselves re-entering the child welfare system multiple times. The process of
family reunification encompasses strategies that are intended to provide families with learned skills and resources that will enhance their overall family dynamics (Smith, cited in, Marcenko, Brown, Devoy, & Conway, 2010. The goal of Children and Family Services (CFS) is to place children in stable homes. Within this process early engagement strategies are developed to ensure success of reunification efforts. Unfortunately, there are inconsistencies concerning the overall success of family reunification within the child welfare system. Therefore, additional permanency strategies have been implemented to address the lack of family reunification efforts. Although other counties have implemented the Parent Partner program as an early engagement strategy for family reunification, this program is fairly new to San Bernardino County. Therefore, no data has been gathered concerning the effectiveness of this program in San Bernardino County. Thus, this study is intended to fill the gap in the area of evaluating social workers’ perception of the effectiveness of the Parent Partner program.

The State of California Department of Social Services has been diligent in its efforts to incorporate significant early engagement strategies to improve
children and family outcomes. Stout (2010), reports “California’s 2009 Program Improvement Plan (PIP) is a program within child welfare designed to incorporate significant actions to ensure outcomes for children and families continue to improve” (p. 1). One major strategy designed through PIP to enhance permanency efforts is the Parent Partner program. The Parent Partners program is a strategy used in several counties throughout California to address parents’ inability to successfully complete county requirements for family reunification. According to Berrick, Cohen, and Anthony (2011), the Parent Partner program draws upon the family’s strengths in an effort to engage families and community members in the program planning process. The primary goal of Parent Partner program “is to help birth parents gain awareness of their rights and responsibilities and to assist parents with reunification with their children” (Berrick, Cohen, & Anthony, 2011, p. 2). Trained paraprofessional mentors who have themselves successfully navigated the child welfare system and regained custody of their children serve as navigators to help with family reunification (Strout, 2010).
San Bernardino County Department of Children and Family Services (CFS) Parent Partners program is continuing to grow by assigning one Parent Partner in each office throughout the county. Currently, San Bernardino County’s Departmental Supervisor of the Family Advocacy Resource Service unit (FARS) has six Parent Partners collaborating with the Department. According to the Department Supervisor of San Bernardino County Children and Family Services, 2012...

Parent Partners are currently servicing between 30-50 participants each and are responsible for making monthly contacts with all active participants on their caseload. Parent Partners play an important role in guiding and coaching participants early in their cases. Parent Partners have the ability to reach clients on a level that someone who has not experienced these situations may not have the skills or knowledge to do so. Parent Partners provide social support for clients and work closely with Children and Family Service (CFS) social workers. Parent Partners may not stay with clients through the entirety of their case plan; they may only serve as coaches to increase clients’ motivation in the
beginning of their case plan in an effort to assist parents with getting started. Parent Partners are able to terminate services with parents as they meet the goals of their case plans. However, Parent Partners have the ability to re-open cases as long as there is an active CFS case. Their primary focus is working closely with social workers to assist clients with working on their case plans sooner while diffusing the hostility directed towards social workers, CFS or foster parents. Lastly, Parent Partners provide one-on-one services such as teaching parents how to ride the bus, determining appropriate items to bring to their visits, time management, prioritizing, and communicating effectively with social workers and staff. Most importantly they are there to motivate and encourage honesty (L. Sotile, personal communication, June 2012).

Throughout the United States child welfare agencies have implemented various permanency planning strategies. Each state has incorporated permanency strategies as an attempt to provide supportive services to families as they navigate through the family reunification process. According to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services,
2011 child welfare receives approximately three million suspected child abuse reports per year, of those reports over one million children are removed from their homes and receive foster care services. In addition, legislations such as Adoption and Safe Family Act have attempted to minimize the time children receive foster care services. On average, a child spends 29 months in the child welfare system and 36% of those children enter into long term foster care without the possibility of reunification with their biological parents. As a result, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2012), "reunification was the case plan for nearly half (49%) of all children in foster care during 2009...more than half (51%) of the children who exited foster care during 2009 returned to a parent or principal caregiver" (p. 2). Furthermore, the Federal Child and Family Services Review Board has attempted to improve the family reunification process by building on the current state incentive early engagement programs through the implementation of Parent Partner program (Stout, 2010).

California's 2009 Program Improvement Plan (PIP) was designed to improve children and family outcomes. Specifically PIP enhances the counties efforts to sustain
permanency throughout the life of each case filtered through the child welfare system (Stout, 2010). According to the Human Social Services Annual report (2010) there was 1,927 children who left placement during the fiscal year of 08/09, of those 991 (51.9%) children left placement due to family reunification. This is an indication of child welfare’s efforts to reunify families when appropriate.

Reunification has become the primary goal of child welfare in response to the provisions made to The Adoptions and Safe Family Act 1997. This legislation mandates that social workers make reasonable efforts to reunify children in out-of-home placements with their families. The Department of Children and Family Services policies and procedures on family reunification are based on the premises of this legislation. Reunifying families has become critical to social work practice in efforts to address the permanency planning issue within child welfare. This is also an attempt to minimize number of children placed in foster care (D’Andrade & Berrick, 2006).
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to examine social workers' perception of the effectiveness of the Parent Partner program and is intended to provide a more detailed understanding of the program. San Bernardino County, CFS intends to examine its newly introduced program to determine how well social workers and parents are responding to the use of this early engagement strategy as an effective method for faster family reunification. The Parent Partners program is comprised of individuals who have themselves experienced the loss of their child/children and have successfully regained custody.

Parent Partners serve as paraprofessionals who are hired with CFS because of their life experiences. They provide clients with information and supportive services as they navigate through the child welfare system to regain custody of their children (Parent Partner Brochure, 2012). The Parent Partners program is used as a permanency strategy for clients currently involved in the child welfare systems to help address the need for peer support. Clients often see social workers as an authority figure which may cause some resistance within their relationship, whereas Parent Partners are able to build
better rapport with clients based on their shared experiences (Cohen & Canen, 2006). Once a case has been opened, child welfare workers inherit power and authority over clients that cannot be reversed. Therefore, a child welfare workers’ effort to establish trusting relationships with clients may be hindered due to their responsibility to enforce policy (Marcenko, Brown, Devoy, & Conway, 2010). This program is an attempt to bridge the relationship between the Parent Partner, county worker, and the client. Through this collaborative relationship the goal is to improve children and family outcomes, by providing clients with necessary information needed to navigate through the child welfare system. Overall, this program is designed to help ensure that parents successfully complete their case plan goals and regain custody of their children.

When attempting to measure the effectiveness of any program, evaluations are imperative. The use of evaluations allows auditors to determine the overall success of a program; evaluations also aid in determining whether the program has met its intended goal. In addition, each fiscal year county programs are responsible for providing data reflecting the level of services
provided. Therefore, it has become necessary for agencies to produce empirical data justifying the need for each program (Matthews & Hudson, 2001). Furthermore, the ethical responsibility of an agency is to ensure that the services provided are done so with respect to the intended client (Matthews & Hudson, 2001).

Other counties within the United States have conducted studies evaluating the effectiveness of Parent Partner program. However, very few were conducted to assess the social workers’ views of the Parent Partner program; therefore, it is unknown whether social workers perceive this program as effective throughout the reunification process. In an attempt to gather this information, a quantitative approach was used to evaluate this study. This method is intended to gather necessary data for San Bernardino County to determine the program’s overall effectiveness. Using a quantitative approach will allow social workers to rate their reaction to the implementation of this program. This study employed survey design by using self-administered questionnaires. Through this questionnaire information was gathered to identify child welfare workers perception of the Parent Partner program.
Significance of the Project for Social Work

The Department of Children and Family Services has become increasingly invested in family reunification. The primary goal of child welfare concerning children who have been removed from their home is developing a permanency plan in the shortest amount of time. Therefore, the process of educating parents to make better choices has become critical at the start of each case. These efforts are the agencies attempt to help parents reunify with their children faster. San Bernardino County has implemented the use of Parent Partner program as an extended support for clients who struggle throughout the reunification process. Over the last few years, social workers have been encouraged to refer clients to the program as an extended service. Therefore, an evaluation of its effectiveness is necessary.

Through this evaluation social workers were asked to complete a survey providing CFS with feedback from their perception of the program. This is intended to provide CFS with a better understanding of the overall program; in addition, it will allow CFS to make any necessary changes. The goal is that the Parent Partner program will influence faster family reunification through providing families
with the skills necessary for navigating through the child welfare system.

This study focuses on the evaluating stage of the generalist intervention process with emphasis on the effectiveness of the Parent Partner program. It is intended to enhance the services that are currently being provided to clients through the use of this program. The research should provide the Department of Children and Family Services with a clear understanding of social workers' perception of the effects of this program. The goal is for CFS to find the information from the research useful and be able to use the information provided to make any necessary adjustments towards the improvement of the program. Through this research, the effectiveness of the Parent Partner program will be examined to determine whether child welfare workers are utilizing the program as intended, as well as to determine whether they find the clients services beneficial throughout the reunification process.

The findings of this research study is intended to contribute to the decision-making process on the continuum of the Parent Partner program as an early engagement strategy for the family reunification process. In
addition, the findings should help Children and Family Services determine whether additional funding should be allocated towards the expansion of this program. This exploratory study examines the effectiveness of this Parent Partner program. This study is relevant to child welfare because it will increase involvement between clients and Social Workers and Parent Partners in a collaborative effort to reunify families which is the primary goal of child welfare.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Chapter Two will review professional literature related to the Parent Partners program as an engagement strategy for family reunification within the child welfare system. This chapter will address the following sections that are important to the Parent Partner program such as quantitative and qualitative studies that have been previously completed to evaluate the effectiveness of Parent Partners. In addition, the chapter will conclude with theoretical perspectives which discuss the guiding conceptualization of the Parent Partner studies.

Background of Parent Partner Studies

Prior studies have focused on the efficacy of Parent Partner programs. These studies found that the programs provided extended support to children and families by assisting them through the reunification process (Anthony, Berrick, Cohen, & Wilder, 2009; Berrick, Cohen, & Anthony, 2011; Berrick, Young, Cohen, & Anthony, 2011; Bryan, Flaherty, & Saunders, 2010; Frame, Conley, & Berrick, 2006; Greeson, Usher, & Grinstein-Weiss, 2010;
Lewis & Callaghan, 1993; Marcenko, Brown, DeVoy, & Conway, 2010; Rhodes, Haight, & Briggs, 1999; Wisdom, Olin, Shorter, Burton, & Hoagwood, 2011; Zajicek-Farber, 2010). Parent Partner programs are being implemented and termed differently (e.g. Peer Mentor, Parent Advocate, and Peer Parent) across various states and counties. While the findings of these studies were similar, diverse methods and techniques were used to determine mentoring styles effectiveness.

Qualitative Studies Related to Parent Partner Programs

Parent Partner programs are modern engagement strategies which were implemented to increase the success of family reunification. According to Berrick et al. (2011), the proximal goals of peer mentors (Parent Partners) are to increase birth parents’ motivation to engage in services and make needed changes in their parenting practices. Berrick, Cohen, et al. (2011) conducted a qualitative study to observe the perception and experience of parent clients who received mentoring services from peer mentors. The study included seven 90 minute focus groups and six-in-person interviews with peer mentors who were employed full or part time by their
residing county. The study found three general themes had emerged from the peer mentoring experience including shared experience, communication, and support. In addition, the study found the peer mentors also benefited from the Parent Partner experience by learning new parenting strategies and growing in confidence through the reunification process. Although the study found positive results from the data, statistics of the reunification process within the participating families were not identified.

Further studies observed the peer-to-peer format through the process, content, and context of family-to-family support. For example, Wisdom et al. (2011) conducted a study using professional peer advocates as a family peer advocate with a standardized parent (Wisdom et al., 2011). The study created scenarios that portrayed a typical parent or family receiving services from a peer advocate. The standardized parent conducted "walk-throughs" with four peer advocates from four programs in New York State. The study found important strengths of utilizing peer advocates. Advocates provided emotional support, linked participants to community resources, provided information on parent's
rights, and connected parents to other parents and youth. The study also found additional available services (group therapy, information on treatment programs, tutoring services. Additionally challenges were identified that included concerns in the areas advocacy roles, addressing crisis, and parents' concerns about their children's safety. The researchers were able to identify the importance and challenges of implementing peer advocates, but their method of using scenarios seemed unrealistic which could affect participants' behavior.

Additionally, the use of peer mentors was examined through the perception of adoptive families who participated in a peer mentoring and support program for Adoption Support for Kentucky (ASK) (Bryan et al., 2010). The study conducted focus groups at six sites consisting of the 32 locations in Kentucky with 42 participants by asking eight guiding questions regarding adoption, post-adoption, and support group experience. The findings indicated that parents who participated in adoptive support groups were motivated to attend because of the social support and information they received about adoption. The study also found the following: parents adopted because of the attachment to their foster
children, participants attended meetings for support, and participants received emotional support and exchanged information with other families. Lastly, there was a high satisfaction with ASK because of the primary support participants received; families also liked the parent leaders. The families who participated in Adoption Support for Kentucky (ASK) had an overall great experience; however, their perceptions of the support groups were likely to be different from those who were unable to participate due to stressful obstacles which families frequently experience while going through an adoption or reunification process.

Borkowski and Weaver (2006) noted the necessity of strong mentoring that supports unique family needs and promotes sensitive resilient parenting...facilitates positive and developmental outcomes for children (as cited in Zajieck-Farber, 2010, p. 46). Zajieck-Farber (2010) conducted a study that examined the effectiveness of parent mentors with mothers of children in early childhood for increasing parenting skills, increasing adequacy of resources, and enhancing age-appropriate nurturing. The study included two waves of families that were monitored by a parent mentor for two years each. The
first year focused on recruiting families, while the additional year focused on service and evaluation. The study found through compared designs that the parent mentors significantly improved family resources, parenting knowledge, practices, and resilience. Furthermore, the study found that children in early childhood had a significant increase in early language and immunizations. Additional significant finding included improved the child’s outcomes, but there could have been internal validity in the form of maturation as the parent became more educated about parenting.

Recently, Parent Partner programs have become an innovative strategies used within child welfare to draw out the strengths of families (Anthony et al., 2009). Anthony et al. (2009) examined the main components of the Parent Partner programs. The study showed the relationship between the Parent Partner interventions and reunification outcomes by conducting six focus groups, 20 telephone interviews, five-in-person interviews, and 96 client satisfaction surveys. The findings indicate that the Parent Partner clients, also known as birth parents, felt supported from their experience with the Parent Partner. Three main areas of importance from this study
included shared experience, communication, and support. The study also found that approximately 60% of families with a Parent Partners reunified with their children within 12 months of removal, compared to 26% of families who were not served by a Parent Partner. Although 60% of children were reunified with their families, the study did not observe or mention the children’s experience during the reunification which is an important factor in child welfare.

Furthermore, Frame et al. (2006) stated that support, either from peers or professionals, can help parents navigate the reunification process and inspire lifestyle change. With this said, Frame et al. (2006) closely examined a peer support model that had been implemented through Mendocino County Family Service Center (MCFSC). The study focused on the birth parents experiences and the services that they received in the Peer Support intervention process. The study conducted focus groups and telephone interviews by 14 staff and facilitators to discuss the participants’ views of the Parent Partner program philosophy and approach, the client’s needs, outcomes for the families, the lessons they learned about the program, and what personal changes
the parents experienced. The study found that the birth parents made a variety of changes in their lives directly related to the child welfare goals which included fulfillment of child's basic needs, increased child safety, improved relationships between child and parent, greater family stability, greater knowledge and sensitivity to children's needs, enhanced parenting skills, and increased visitations. Furthermore, the study found that the birth parents experienced greater self-esteem and successfully navigated the child welfare system due to support and encouragement from peers and professionals. Although, this study was able to identify the birth parents' successes and personal changes related to their child welfare goals, the study did not examine the outcomes of the families reunifying with their children.

Lastly, Lewis et al. (1993) examined a pilot foster child reunification project for Utah Division of Family Services that conducted 18 in-depth interviews that involved natural parents (birth parents), foster parents, and social workers. The foster parents received extra reimbursements to work directly with the natural parents for 10 hours a week by providing support and promoting
reunification. The study found that Peer Parenting had a positive evaluation from natural parents, increased cooperation, improved parental functioning, and a greater chance of natural parents having their children returned. The study also found that peer parents had increased satisfaction with their foster parent role, and there was an improved peer parent/natural parent relationships. Although the peer parents and natural parents had significant results from the program, the agency did not provide any formal training for the peer parent other than the training when they became a foster parent.

Quantitative Studies Related to Parent Partner Programs

Historically, mentoring has generally had positive outcomes amongst the various sectors such as in education, mental health, and in foster care. According to Berrick et al. (2011), Parent Partners serve as mentors, guides, and advocates for birth parents by being flexible in their roles as they support the parents' needs. Berrick et al. (2011) conducted a study that examined the outcomes of Parent Partner programs in a Western State by utilizing a quasi-experimental design. The data for this study was drawn from the Child Welfare
System/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) while merged with the county development database association. The study observed the Parent Partner programs for children removed from their families and placed in foster care through 2005-2008. The study found the children and parents involved in the Parent Partner program were four times more likely to reunify in 12 months compared to the children whose parents were uninvolved. Specifically, the study found that 58.9% of children were reunified with their families compared to 25.5% who were not reunified. While the study had impressive findings and statistics, the inadequacy with the study was the parents who decided to work with a Parent Partners may be the same parents who were most likely to reunify had they received conventional services alone.

Another study that focused on the importance and benefits of peer mentoring was Greeson, Usher, and Grinstein-Weiss (2010) who conducted a study to determine how mentoring relationships increased the outcomes among young adults with or without foster care experience. While this study did not examine a Parent Partner program, this study was related to peer mentors as the researchers examined how social contexts (families,
friends, peers, schools, neighborhood, and committees) would influence adolescents risk behavior. The study employed a nonequivalent comparison group designed to assess the association between natural mentoring relationship characteristics and assets and material hardship. The study also measured the similarity in association between former foster youth and normative youth. The participants were provided with an open-ended survey and included questions related to the relationships with a mentor. The questions used a Likert scale of closeness ranging from zero (not close at all) to four (very close). The results indicated an increase in positive relationships among former foster youth into their adulthood, therefore, decreasing the likelihood of adolescent risk behaviors. Peer mentoring had very little effects on non-foster youth's adolescent behaviors. In addition, few non-foster youth maintained closeness with their mentors into their adulthood. Although this study focused on adolescent behaviors and their relationships with their mentors, it shows the effectiveness of providing at risk population with mentors as a strategy intended to decrease poor outcomes.
Additionally, Marcenko et al. (2010) examined a Parent Mentoring program that began in the Washington Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). The program conducted a quasi-experimental evaluation by comparing families with similar situations and persons who were not participating in the program. The evaluation looked at the agencies Parent Mentoring Program Logic Model with four components which included program inputs (mentoring curriculum), activities (mentors teach skills and meet with families), outputs (families comply with plans), and outcomes (frequent family reunification). The study found that parents who participated in the Parent Mentoring program were more likely to reunify with their children than parents who did not participate in the program. The study also found that children of the parents who participated in the program spent less days in foster care than children of parents not in the program. The program from Washington D.C.F.S. revealed remarkable positive findings from the study, but the previous listed components in the model should be further evaluated to confirm the program efficiency.

While this study does not examine a Parent Partner program, it is related to peer mentoring as Rhodes et al.
(1999) examined the Big Brothers-Big Sisters of America mentoring program on peer relationships for foster youth in relative and non-relative care. The primary goal was to determine how the mentoring program influenced foster youth relationships with their peers. A national study was conducted that consisted of 959 adolescents from ages 10-16 year old. The adolescents were randomly assigned to a treatment group; parents were divided into three parenting groups (non foster, relative foster, non relative foster) for treatment and control groups. The findings for this study were both relative and non-relative; foster parents were more likely than non-foster parents to report their children showed improvements in social skills such as greater trust and comfort with peers as a result of participating in Big Brothers-Big Sisters of America. The study also found that improvements in the participants’ peer relationships varied depending on whether the foster youth was in relative care opposed to non-relative care. Although this study monitored the effect of mentorship for the children in foster care depending on relative or non-relative care, it can be generalized to adult mentors. This suggests providing parents in the family reunification
process with Parent Partners would ultimately have the same results as the foster youth.

The previous studies suggest that the main goal of Parent Partner programs is to help families successfully navigate through the child welfare system to reunify with their children. With the support and resources provided by Parent Partners, families have become motivated and are able to build on their strengths to complete the tasks within their case plan for family reunification. Due to the recent implementation of the Parent Partner program, further research is necessary to evaluate the influence of this program. However, there continues to be very limited research on social workers' perceptions of the Parent Partner programs. Therefore, the researchers of this study intend to gather data evaluating social workers' perception of the effectiveness of the Parent Partner program.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Studies have shown that the Parent Partner program provide additional support to the families who have entered the child welfare system for family reunification. Families in previous studies showed
positive outcomes as they navigated through the family reunification process, as well reunified with their children. Parent Partners are capable of identifying families' strengths, giving families hope, and empowering them to make better lifestyle changes.

Theories that are applicable in guiding the study for Parent Partner are strengths perspective and empowerment perspective. Strengths perspective is the "way of understanding families...focuses on identifying how families have coped creatively with adversity...helping members use strengths to build toward needed strengths" (Hutchison, 2008, p. 617). This applies to how Parent Partners work with the families and focus on the family's strengths. Through this perspective, Parent Partners encourage families to work through obstacles and to build upon their skills to ensure reunification. Parent Partners have faced many adversities in their own lives which make them influential individuals to work the families who are working toward reunification. Furthermore, Parent Partners provide a shared experience; the experience with family which makes the relationship much more unique. Ultimately, if the reunification process is successful,
the family eventually becomes empowered by the Parent Partner.

Given that Parent Partner programs are empowering to families within the reunification process, another theory that applies to Parent Partners is empowerment perspective. Empowerment perspective "focuses on changing the distribution of power...seeks to increase the ability of vulnerable individuals to be self-directing, make choices, and act effectively to advance their own interests" (Lesser & Pope, 2011, p. 28). Having Parent Partners available for families who are experiencing vulnerable times in their lives such as losing their children, need to be empowered, so they can make better choices for a successful reunification. The feeling of being empowered can create an enormous amount of motivation. This motivation then leads to families following through with their reunification case plans and becoming successful individuals within the child welfare system.

Summary

This chapter discusses literature related to incorporating engagement strategies within the child welfare system.
welfare system. Qualitative and quantitative literature relevant to the Parent Partner program has been discussed. The literature has shown that further research is necessary to determine the effectiveness of utilizing the Parent Partner program as an engagement strategy to influence faster family reunification as this is the primary goal of Children and Family Services.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This section examines in detail the methods used in conducting this study. Specifically, this section focuses on the study design, sampling methods used, data collection and survey instruments. In addition, this section addresses procedures, methods for data analysis, and the protection of human subjects during this study.

Study Design

In response to the lack of empirical data supporting the effectiveness of the Parent Partner program, this study gathered data for program evaluation. The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of the Parent Partner program by assessing the perceptions of social workers' with San Bernardino County, Children and Family Services (CFS). The data collected from this study provides the county with a clear understanding of the social workers' perception on the effectiveness of the Parent Partner program, as well as any areas of needed improvement.
This study employed a quantitative survey research design, using self-administered questionnaires. Social workers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the Parent Partners program were gathered through online self-administered questionnaires. The rationale for using this online survey method was that it allowed researchers to gather pertinent information, given the time constraints of conflicting schedules of the social workers. In addition, this technique allowed participants to complete the survey at their convenience, without pressure of feeling rushed by the researcher, as well as the privacy to provide honest responses. Additionally, the use of online survey questionnaires is more appealing when attempting to collect data from a larger number of participants.

However, despite the benefits of using this method to collect data, there were some limitations. One limitation was due to the Parent Partner program being fairly new, which limited the number of social workers familiar with the program, who could participate in the study. In addition, based on the participants' high case loads, there were fewer responses than expected. In spite of these limitations, through this study, researchers
have gained insight into the social workers' perceptions on the effectiveness of the Parent Partner program within the Children and Family Services of San Bernardino County.

Sampling

In conducting this study, the researchers distributed 134 survey questionnaires via e-mail to Social Worker II's (SW IIs) and Social Service Practitioners (SSPs) who had any form of client involvement with the Parent Partner program within the last 12 months and work directly with clients during the family reunification process. As a result, the researchers were able to determine social workers' perception of whether families benefited from having a Parent Partner as an additional source of support through the reunification process. Given the sample size of 134 participants, researchers received a 42 percent response rate, totaling 64 completed surveys, with 14 returned surveys of those who did not meet the 12 month criteria.

This study utilized convenience sampling to explore social workers' perception of the effectiveness of the Parent Partners program. The participants for this study
were recruited from the seven San Bernardino County, CFS offices that currently have Parent Partners. Parent Partners are currently placed in the following locations: Barstow/Needles, Yucca Valley Victorville, Rancho Cucamonga, Fontana, Gifford Street in San Bernardino, and Carousel Mall in San Bernardino. Within these regions, the sampling criteria was exclusive to SW IIs and SSPs who have had direct contact with Parent Partners, therefore excluding all management, support staff, and interns from participating in this survey. In addition, the sampling criterion consisted of demographic questioning regarding ethnicity, level of education, current years of experience, regional office, and job title.

Data Collection and Instruments

The data for this study was gathered using an online self-administered survey questionnaire. The survey consisted of eight questions relevant to social worker's perceptions of the effectiveness of the Parent Partner program in addition to five demographic questions including ethnicity, years of experience, region of office, current job title and level of education. This
survey took no longer than 10 minutes to complete. Using a Likert scale, participants were asked to complete a combination of multiple choice questions with an option to elaborate on several questions.

In efforts to determine the effectiveness the Parent Partner program, the researchers of this study collaborated with the Departmental Supervisor FARS Unit, Loretta Sotile and Statistical Analyst, Sandra Wakcher, to develop the data collection instrument for this study. Through collaboration with San Bernardino County professionals who have a vested interest in the Parent Partner program, the researchers identified questions relevant to determining the social workers’ perception of the Parent Partner program.

The Parent Partner program is a newly innovated permanency strategy for family reunification. Therefore, it was important to conduct a study as a means to determine the program efficacy. However, there is no existing instrument to measure social workers’ perception of the effectiveness of the Parent Partner program. Thus, the researchers created an instrument to gather data concerning social workers’ views of the effectiveness of the Parent Partner program. The researchers of this study
have created this instrument in an effort to assist San Bernardino County Children and Family Services with ways to better serve their clients who utilize the Parent Partner program. However, since the reliability and validity of the newly created instrument was unknown, the researchers pre-tested the instrument by administering the questionnaire to three randomly selected SSPs and SW IIs who did not participate in the final data collection process, to gather feedback concerning the clarity of the instrument. With the feedback, the researchers were able to make any necessary corrections to the instrument before collecting data.

Procedures

The first step in conducting research into the social workers' perceptions of Parent Partners was to seek support from the San Bernardino County Children and Family Services (CFS). A research project proposal explaining the proposed study and a sample of survey questions were administered to the appropriate unit of CFS. The participants of the study were social workers from San Bernardino County such as Social Worker II's (SW IIs) and Social Service Practitioners (SSPs) who had
previous experience working with a Parent Partner within the last 12 months. There were screening questions in the beginning of the survey to find out if the social workers should continue with the questionnaire, determined by their experience.

In coordination and direct contact with Sandra Wakcher, Statistical Analyst, the questionnaires were administrated via email to social workers of the following offices for San Bernardino County Children and Family Services: Carousel, Gifford, Fontana, Rancho, Victorville, Yucca Valley and Barstow/Needles. Participants were provided an online survey questionnaire containing an introduction, informed consent, survey questionnaire, and a debriefing statement along with instructions on how to complete and return the online survey questionnaire. Each participant was provided with a link, which gave consent for participating in the researchers' online survey questionnaire. Within the introduction, participants were informed of a raffle incentive. Social workers who chose to participate in the raffle were asked to provide their contact email after completing the survey to Sandra Wakcher, the Statistical Analyst for San Bernardino County Research Department.
The email information provided was used only for the purpose of entering the participants' name in the raffle for a chance to win a $10 Starbucks gift card, as a token of appreciation for completing the survey. To ensure confidentiality, all identifying information was completely separated from the data collection. The participants had approximately one month to fill out the survey due to the social workers' demanding schedules.

Protection of Human Subjects

The key component of this study was to survey social workers whose clients have been involved with Parent Partners. In doing so, all measures were taken to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants. Each participant consented to participate by clicking the online link which lead them to the survey. To ensure confidentiality of all participants, researchers did not ask participants to provide any identifying information. Within the consent form, participants were informed that the study was completely voluntary. If the participant decided to leave any questions blank or withdraw at any time, they were able to do so without penalty. In addition, participants were informed that there were no
foreseeable risks for participating in this study. Also, participants received information concerning the raffle connected to the study as a benefit for completion. However, if the participant decided not to participate in the raffle they were informed that there were no consequences as a result. All information gathered from this study was entered into the SPSS system and kept on a password protected computer. Once the study has been completed, all emails and evidence will be destroyed. Lastly, upon completion of this study, participants were provided with a debriefing statement, informing them of how and where they were able to access the results of this study.

Data Analysis

The study employed quantitative data analysis techniques. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the characteristics of the sample in terms of demographics by using frequency distributions, measures of central tendency (e.g. mean, median, and mode), and measures of variability (range, variance, and standard deviation). To determine the winner of the raffle a method of random selection was utilized, an excel
spreadsheet was generated which assigned random numbers to each participant using ‘=RAND ()’ function. Afterwards, the random numbers were sorted in ascending order and the top five random numbers were chosen. As previously stated, all data was entered into SPSS to be analyzed for results.

Summary

The research method employed for the Parent Partner study is quantitative survey design by utilizing online, self-administrated survey questionnaires. The participants are San Bernardino County, Children and Family Services social workers amongst seven regional offices of Barstow/Needles, Victorville, Yucca Valley, Gifford, Carousel, Fontana, and Rancho. This study reached 134 social workers who had previous experience with a Parent Partner within the last 12 months. The survey questionnaire consisted of questions based on the social worker’s general experience with a Parent Partner and included demographic information. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of this study. Specifically, the characteristics of demographics and an understanding of the social workers' perception of the effectiveness of the Parent Partner program will be described. Lastly, additional relevant information gathered throughout the study will be presented.

Presentation of the Findings

The sample for this study consisted of approximately 50 social workers including both SSPs and SW IIs throughout San Bernardino County Children and family Services. Out of the 50 participants, 100% of the participants reported that they had some form of interaction with a Parent Partner within the last 12 months.

Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the 50 participants for the Parent Partner study. Within the regional office characteristics, over 34% of the participants were staffed in the Carousel Mall location, 18% worked in Victorville, 16% worked at
Gifford, another 16% worked out of Fontana, 10% in Rancho Cucamonga, 2% in Yucca Valley, 2% out of the Barstow/Needles locations and another 2% from the Placement Resource Unit. Nearly 96% of the participants were Social Service Practitioners with 4% being Social Worker II's. Of the 50 participants, 94% held a MSW degree, 2% either having a MA or MFT degree, and 4% having other professional degrees. When pertaining to the ethnicity of the participants, 39.1% were white/Caucasian, 32.6% were African American, 21.7% Latino, and 6.5% Asian or Pacific Islander.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency (n)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regional Office (N=49)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barstow/Needles</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifford</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carousel Mall</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rancho Cucamonga</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fontana</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victorville</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yucca Valley</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job title (N=49)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSP</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>95.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SW II</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education (N=50)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA or BS</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA or MFT</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSW</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD or DSW</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other professional degree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity (N=46)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>39.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Native American</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 presents the characteristics of the social workers' perception of the effectiveness of the Parent Partner program in the context of which family members
utilized a Parent Partner. Of the social workers who had
previous experience with a Parent Partner, over 42% of
the social workers worked with the both parents, 40%
worked with mothers, 16% worked with fathers, and 2% of
the social workers who had experience with a Parent
Partner worked with legal guardians.

Table 2. Social Workers’ Perception of the Effectiveness
of the Parent Partner Program Contact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency (n)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 presents the characteristics of social
workers perception of families engaging in services
quicker when utilizing a Parent Partner. Out of the
participants, over 56% of the social workers either
agreed or strongly agreed that families who utilized a
Parent Partner engaged in services quicker than families
who did not utilize a Parent Partner. Approximately 28%
of the social workers neither agreed nor disagreed about the Parent Partners helping families engage in services quicker. 16% of the social workers either disagreed or, strongly disagreed with the statement.

Table 3. Social Workers' Perception of Clients who Sought Services Quicker

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency (n)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quicker Services (N = 50)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 summarized the characteristics related to communication between the families and social worker when utilizing a Parent Partner. As it relates to the families who utilized Parent Partners and having better communication with the social worker, compared to the families without a Parent Partner, over 54% of the participants' agreed or strongly agreed that Parent Partners helped clients better communicate with their social worker. Approximately 30% of participants neither
agreed nor disagreed. Nearly 16% of the social workers either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.

Table 4. Social Workers Perception of Clients who had better Communication with Social Workers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency (n)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Better Communication (N = 50)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in table 5, over 90% of the social workers responded that they would use a Parent Partner again when they were asked whether they would use a parent partner for other clients. However, approximately 10% of the participants responded that they would not utilize a Parent Partner for their other cases. The participants for this research were given the opportunity to explain in detail about their thoughts of the Parent Partner as it pertains to utilization. Of the four participants who commented on utilization, three were concerned about the
communication issue between the Parent Partner and the social worker. One participant stated, "Parents Partner do not give us reports on what they are working with the client on...they provide a verbal update when you run into them which is not official" (Participant 1, personal communication, March 2013). Another participant stated, "more communication from the Parent Partner with the social worker" (Participant 2, personal communication, March 2013). Other participants were concerned about the motivation of families as the Parent Partners were assigned to the case. With the utilization of Parent Partners, one participant responded, "motivated people will engage regardless of Parent Partner, unmotivated parents will stay unmotivated whether a Parent Partner is there or not" (Participant 3, personal communication, March 2013).
Table 5. Social Workers' Perception of the Effectiveness of the Parent Partner Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency (n)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Utilize Again (N = 50)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6, provides a summary of participants' responses in regards to the overall benefit of families with Parent Partners. Nearly 86% of the participants perceived the Parent Partner programs as being beneficial. Nearly 14% of those participants perceived the program as not being beneficial. Major categories extracted from the 12 responses were that social workers were concerned about the motivation of the families, the support provided by the Parent Partner, and the similar shared experience between the family and Parent Partner. On the open-ended responses, in regards to motivation, one participant stated, "clients appeared more motivated to participate in services and more willing to complete case plan" (Participant 4, personal communication, March 2013). When discussing the support system provided by the Parent Partner, some responses were "I believe that
Parent Partners offer more support than Social Workers... it appeared that the parent partner was a good support for my clients” (Participant 5, personal communication, March 2013). Finally as it pertains to the similar shared experiences, one participant stated “I believe clients benefited by having someone who has had similar experience with CFS to listen and assist them” (Participant 6, personal communication, March 2013).

Table 6. Social Workers Perception of the Effectiveness of the Benefits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency (n)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall Beneficial Program (N = 50)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, participants were asked of their suggestions to help improve the effectiveness of the Parent Partner program. Of the 10 responses, some common categories from the responses were regular communication between social worker and Parent Partner, monthly updates to social worker provided by Parent Partner, and the Parent Partner having more knowledge about available
resources in the community. In regards to regular communication, one participant responded with "continue to maintain regular communication with the social worker in regards to any concerns or lack of contact with client" (Participant 7, personal communication, March 2013). Some other suggestions related to monthly updates were "it would be helpful to receive an email or update in writing from the Parent Partner...having a monthly update would be nice" (Participant 8, personal communication, March 2013). Lastly when discussing the knowledge of available resources, one participant suggested "it is in my opinion that more parent partners should be encouraged to support our families in their efforts to understand the system and resources available to them" (Participant 9, personal communication, March 2013). Another participant stated "Parent Partners should be knowledgeable of the community resources and help provide those resources to their clients." (Participant 10, personal communication, March 2013)

Summary

This chapter describes in detail the findings of the study. In addition, to the demographic characteristics
additional responses were provided as a result of the open-ended questions presented in this study.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION

Introduction
This chapter will discuss the major findings of the quantitative study. Also, the results and limitations of this study will be discussed, in comparison with previous studies. Lastly, this chapter will provide recommendations to the social work practice and conclude with suggestions for further research.

Discussion
The purpose of this study was to identify the social workers’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the Parent Partner program for San Bernardino County Children and Family Services. In doing so, the research provided the county of San Bernardino with additional feedback, to ensure that family reunification efforts were more successful. Additionally, researchers were able to identify significant findings, as the study shows trends from other previous research on Parent Partners.

This study found that most social workers who participated in the study supported the Parent Partner program and would utilize a Parent Partner again with
their other cases. While this study focused solely on the social workers' perceptions, there are no previous existing studies that focused on the social workers' experiences utilizing the Parent Partner program. However, some of the social workers in the study provided explanations of why they would utilize a Parent Partner, such as improved communication patterns and the motivation of the clients. Prior studies have focused on the client's experience with a Parent Partner and the areas that were successful such as communication, motivation, and support, while this study focused only on the social workers' experience (Berrick et al., 2011).

The study also found that majority of the social worker participants felt that their clients who were involved with a Parent Partner sought services quicker than clients who were not involved with a Parent Partner. This finding was consistent with the results of Frame et al. (2006) who examined Mendocino County Family Services Center peer support model and found that the birth parents were more likely to engage in child welfare services with peer support. Furthermore, Frame et al. (2006) reported that staff and clients noticed a high degree of engagement in overall services with peer
support, which showed trends with the current Parent Partner study, as families participated in services quicker when utilizing a Parent Partner.

Another important finding of the study was that most of the participants thought that the families who utilized a Parent Partner had better communication with their social worker than families without a Parent Partner. In a previous study, Anthony et al. (2009) found that Parent Partners in Contra Costa County served as a support to families by frequently contacting parents and encouraging them to meet their goals. Further, Parent Partners communicated with other professionals and foster parents acting a role model for families. These findings were consistent with this study's findings, as social workers agreed that families had better communication while utilizing a Parent Partner.

Furthermore, the study found that some of the social worker participants would want to improve the Parent Partner program by implementing regularly scheduled communication, monthly updates from Parent Partner, and the Parent Partner having more knowledge of available community resources. According to Wisdom et al. (2011), some strengths of the Parent Partner were that
they provided clients emotional support, linked participants to community resources, and helped parents seek additional available services such as group therapy and information on treatment programs. It seems natural and appropriate that the social workers expressed suggestions about the need for Parent Partners' knowledge about available resources in the community. Furthermore, the Parent Partners for San Bernardino County could better serve the families by providing information about resources and case plan services.

Although, the existing research regarding this subject focuses more on the client's experiences with Parent Partners rather than social workers' perception of the effectiveness of the program, there are similarities in the findings such as positive responses to shared experiences and families' motivation to actively participate in services.

Limitations

The study had various limitations. One limitation of this study was limited existing research which examined the social workers' perception of the effectiveness of Parent Partners in county child welfare agencies. Thus,
it was not possible to compare the findings of the current study with those of previous studies; there is a major need for more research and studies focusing on Parent Partners as a family reunification strategy.

Another limitation of the study was the sample size. With the researchers having a three week time constraint to gather data, there were only 50 participants from the 134 dispersed survey questionnaires. Given more participants in the study, researchers could possibly have more feedback from the social workers as it pertains to the overall effectiveness of Parent Partners.

Lastly, an additional limitation was the unknown reliability and validity of the newly created instrument. Although the instrument used in this study was developed by the two researches along with feedback from San Bernardino County CFS, it is not clear whether the instrument captured the overall perception of the effectiveness of child welfare workers. Further research is needed, using a more refined, valid, and reliable instrument to assess social workers’ perception of effectiveness of Parent Partner program.
Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

The findings of this study suggest that social workers view the Parent Partner program as an effective early engagement strategy for reunification. Although the findings provided a consensus among workers who found the program to be effective, there were areas of concern when workers were asked their opinions of increased client communication. Workers expressed dissatisfaction with the level of communication between the Parent Partner and worker, as well the lack of communication between the client and worker during the time of Parent Partner involvement. Therefore, the study suggests that the program would benefit from developing a communication database, in an effort to help bridge the communication between the social worker, parent partner, and client.

San Bernardino County Children and Family Services currently utilize the Child Welfare System/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) to effectively communicate among departments. However, due to the sensitivity of data entered into this system, paraprofessionals are not granted access to this system. Therefore, it is recommended that CFS develop a database in which Parent
Partners can gain access, to ensure open communication with workers, as an effort to work collaboratively in the family reunification process.

Additionally, the findings indicated the need for Parent Partners to become more familiar with community resources. When workers were asked in what ways the Parent Partner program could be improved, a majority of the workers in this study recommended that Parent Partner receive more training as to the needs of the client population. Based on the client's needs, social workers suggest that Parent Partners have resources available to aid clients in accessing appropriate services. In addition to the trainings Parent Partners currently receive, they would further benefit from going into the community to build connections with service providers that would benefit the clients of Children and Family Services through their reunification process. Also, the program supervisor of the Parent Partner might consider asking each Parent Partner to bring one to two resources to their monthly meeting to share with the Parent Partners who may be able to utilize those resources to be more effective with the client in which they are working with.
This is a fairly new program to San Bernardino County Children and Family Services and no previous research has been conducted related to social workers’ views of the Parent Partner program. Therefore, it is highly recommended that a more extensive survey design be conducted to include more variables and a larger sample size as an effort to determine social workers’ perception of the effectiveness of the Parent Partner program. Furthermore, additional research using experimental designs needs to be conducted to assess the effectiveness of the Parent Partner program.

Conclusions

This study examined social worker’s perception of the effectiveness of the Parent Partner program. In addition, the study provided San Bernardino County Children and Family Services with an overall understanding of how well social workers and parents were responding to the newly introduced Parent Partner program.

By utilizing a quantitative online survey questionnaire, researchers gathered information related to social workers’ views of the Parent Partner program.
The study found that most social workers supported the Parent Partner program and would utilize the program again with other clients. In addition, the study found that social worker agreed that clients who participated in the Parent Partner program sought services quicker than those who did not engage in services with the program.

Overall, this study suggests that the Parent Partner program is an effective early engagement strategy for family reunification. The program provides families with support, help to bridge the gap between clients and social workers, as well as increases client’s ability to reunify with their children. Despite the positive responses of this study, it is recommended that CFS develop an effective communication database to increase communication between the workers and Parent Partners. It is also recommended that in addition to the current trainings provided, Parent Partners receive professional trainings related to effective methods for connecting with community resources.
APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE
Social Workers' Perception on the Effectiveness of the Parent Partner Program

For the purpose of this survey, we ask that you only answer the following questions based on your most recent experience with the Parent Partner program, preferably within the last 12 months. All of your responses will remain confidential. Please take a few minutes to share your opinions, which are essential in helping this program provide the most efficient services to our clients.

1. Have you had experience with the Parent Partner program within the last 12 months
   - Yes
   - No

   (If no please refrain from completing this survey)

2. Within the last 12 months, which parent on your caseload, did you use the Parent Partner for? (Select all that apply)
   - Mother
   - Father
   - Both
   - Other ____________________________________________________________

3. Did you feel the Parent Partner helped your client seek services quicker than those of your clients who were not involved with a Parent Partner? (Check box below)
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Neutral
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

4. Overall do you feel that clients who utilize a parent Partner have better communication with you, compared to those of your client(s) without a Parent Partners? (Check box below)
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Neutral
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

5. Would you utilize a Parent Partner again for other clients you have? (Check box below)
   - Yes
   - No

   If you answered no please explain:
   ________________________________________________________________

   ________________________________________________________________

63
6. Overall, do you think your clients benefited from working with Parent Partners?
   o Yes
   o No

7. Describe how your clients benefited from working with a Parent Partner and if you believe some clients benefited more than others?
   Please explain:
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________

8. In our efforts to improve on the quality of the Parent Partner program, we ask that you provide any helpful suggestions and or comments that you feel will assist with our efforts.
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________

Demographic Questions

The following questions are optional. However, the researchers of this study would appreciate your cooperation in answering the following question for the purpose of collecting data for their research project.

1. What office do you currently work out of? (Check box below)
   o Barstow/Needles
   o Gifford
   o Carousel Mall
   o Rancho Cucamonga
   o Fontana
   o Victorville
   o Yucca Valley

2. What is your current Job title? (Check box below)
   o SW II
   o SSP
   o Other (specify): ____________________________________________

3. What is your highest level of education? (Check box below)
   o BA or BS
   o MA or MFT
   o MSW
   o PhD or DSW
   o Other professional degree: ________________________________
4. How long have you been in your current position? _____Years _____Months

5. What is your ethnicity? (Check below)
   - Black/African American
   - White/Caucasian
   - Asian/Pacific Islander
   - Hispanic/Latino
   - American Indian/Native American
   - Other __________________________________________
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT
INFORMED CONSENT

You are invited to participate in a study of the social workers' perceptions of the effectiveness of Parent Partners for San Bernardino County. The study is being conducted by graduate students in the Social Work students from California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB) under the supervision Professor Janet Chang and Sally Richter, Field Instructor Supervisor of San Bernardino County Children and Family Services. The study has been approved by the School of Social Work Sub-committee of the CSUSB Institutional Review Board.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explore the social workers' perceptions of the Parent Partner program effectiveness in family reunification.

Description: If you take part in this study, you will be asked to fill out a brief survey that asks about your perceptions of the Parent Partner program as well as your demographics.

Participation: Participation for this study is fully voluntary and you are able to skip any questions that you do not want to answer.

Confidentiality: The information given in the study will remain confidential and anonymous. The data will be reported in a group format not individual.

Duration: Completing the survey should take no more than 20 minutes.

Risks: There are no foreseeable immediate or long-term risks to the participants who participate in the study. The participants will be informed that they are able to withdraw from survey or skip any questions at any time during the study. After the completion of the questionnaire, participants will be given a debriefing statement in which information about the study is listed.

Benefits: To show appreciation of a participating in the survey, the social workers will be entered into a raffle for a chance to win a $10 gift card. To ensure confidentiality, all identifying information will be completely separated from the data collection.

Contact: If you have any questions or concerns about this study you can contact Dr. Chang (909)537-5184.

Results: The results will be available at the Pfau Library at California State University, San Bernardino after December 2014.

By marking below, you agree that you have been fully informed about this survey and are volunteering to take part.

_________________________________________  ____________________________
Place check mark here                      Date
APPENDIX C

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT
Social Workers' Perception of the Effectiveness of the Parent Partner Program

Debriefing Statement

The study you have just completed was designed to explore the social workers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the Parent Partner program for San Bernardino County Children and Family Services (CFS). In this study the perceptions of the social workers, who have previously worked with a Parent Partners, was assessed. We are interested in the programs efficacy and how it serves families who are working toward family reunification. This study will provide CFS with the social workers feedback to make informed decisions about the program in the future.

Thank you very much for taking a few minutes to let us know your views. If you have any questions or concerns about this study you can contact Dr. Chang (909) 537-5184. If you would like to obtain a copy of the study, please contact Pfau Library at California State University, San Bernardino at the end of December 2014.
REFERENCES


ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE

This was a two-person project where authors collaborated throughout. However, for each phase of the project, certain authors took primary responsibility. These responsibilities were assigned in the manner listed below.

1. Data Collection:
   Assigned Leader: Marion Wheeler
   Assisted By: Maisha Albert-Alexander

2. Data Entry and Analysis:
   Team Effort: Maisha Albert-Alexander & Marion Wheeler

3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:
   a. Introduction and Literature
      Team Effort: Maisha Albert-Alexander & Marion Wheeler
   b. Methods
      Team Effort: Maisha Albert-Alexander & Marion Wheeler
   c. Results
      Team Effort: Maisha Albert-Alexander & Marion Wheeler
   d. Discussion
      Team Effort: Maisha Albert-Alexander & Marion Wheeler