

## Engaging Fathers and Paternal Relatives in Child Welfare Breakthrough Series Collaborative

### Focus group with fathers and paternal relatives

This focus group will help the FCL project team understand fathers' and paternal relatives' experiences with the child welfare system and whether they have noticed any changes in how they are treated or engaged by staff at child welfare agencies over the course of their most recent involvement with the child welfare system. The respondents will include fathers and paternal relatives who have had experiences with the focal child welfare agency relatively recently (including, if possible, individual interviews for those who participated on Improvement Teams). The protocol is designed to be used in an individual interview if necessary.

The average estimated public reporting burden for this collection of information is about 90 minutes per focus group. Providing information is voluntary, and all responses that are collected are kept private to the extent permitted by law.

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## Fathers and Continuous Learning in Child Welfare (FCL) project

### Focus group with fathers and paternal relatives

#### Note to interviewer

The following detailed script should not be read verbatim. As the interviewer, you must be familiar enough with the script to introduce the study and the focus of the interview, and adapt the language for an individual interview, without reading from the script word-for-word. Please familiarize yourself thoroughly with the text before you conduct interviews. Respondents for this focus group will include:

- Fathers and paternal relatives: individuals who have had relatively recent experiences with the focal child welfare agency (including, if possible, individual interviews for those who participated on Improvement Teams)

### A. Background

#### 1. Introduce the moderator and co-facilitator

Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today. My name is [NAME], and my colleague is [NAME]. We are from Mathematica, an independent research firm, and we are here to learn about your experiences with the [AGENCY].

#### 2. Explain the project and purpose of the discussion

I am going to start out by giving you a bit of background and talk about why we wanted to meet with you today. We are conducting the Fathers and Continuous Learning in Child Welfare (FCL) project for the Administration for Children and Families, which is part of the United States Department of Health and Human Services. We are talking with fathers and paternal relatives about their experiences with the [AGENCY]. Talking with people like yourselves who have worked with [AGENCY] will help us learn about how well the agency worked with you.

#### 3. Privacy and recording

We expect this discussion to take about 90 minutes [60 minutes for an interview]. We will use the information you share with us to write a summary of what we have learned, and we will not connect your name to your response, so please share your opinions freely. We will keep your identity private to the extent permitted by law.

We want to record what you share to make sure we capture the information as we write up reports. We will destroy the recording once we have created a transcription. If you want to say anything that you do not want recorded, please let me know, and I will be glad to pause the recorder. [*Site visitors: if recording is declined, please take notes.*]

There are no consequences if you choose not to participate in this discussion. If you do not know the answer to a question, please let us know, and we will move on. If you prefer not to answer a question for any reason, you do not have to. Your responses will not affect any services or benefits you or your family members receive.

Do we have your permission to proceed with the discussion?

#### 4. Agreeing on the terms of the discussion

We value the information you will share with us, and your participation in this discussion is voluntary.

[If focus group]: To make this a safe space, I am asking that we all make the following commitments to each other:

- There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. This will be an informal discussion. We are interested in learning everyone's opinion.
- *If virtual focus group:* We have unmuted all of you so you can talk as if we are in a room together. We want all of you to share your thoughts, but please let one person talk at a time. If you are not speaking, you may want to mute your line. If something someone says sparks your thinking (like you agree, disagree, or want to build upon something that you hear), please speak up at any time. You can either just jump in or signal to us that you have something to say by holding up your hand in front of the video [*facilitator demonstrates*].
- *If in-person focus group:* We want all of you to share your thoughts, but please let one person talk at a time.
- *If virtual:* If it is possible for you to turn on your video, please do so. It's easier to have a conversation when we can see others' faces.
- To help us learn all that we can, I might change the subject or move ahead from time to time.
- *If focus group:* Please feel free to step away whenever you need to. There will be no formal breaks.
- *If in person focus group:* We also ask that you keep this discussion private, and do not share what we say here with anyone outside this room. Use first names only to identify yourself or others.
- *If virtual focus group:* We ask that you keep this discussion private, and do not share the details of this conversation with anyone who isn't on the call today. We encourage you to find a quiet, private place where you feel comfortable sharing and where no one will overhear.
- After our discussion, you will receive a \$35 gift card to offset any costs from your participation. You will receive the gift card even if you do not get a chance to answer all of the questions.

[If individual interview]

- There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. This will be an informal discussion. We are interested in hearing your opinion.
- We ask that you keep this discussion private. We encourage you to find a quiet, private place where you feel comfortable sharing and where no one will overhear.
- After our discussion, you will receive a \$35 gift card to offset any costs from your participation. You will receive the gift card even if we do not get through all of the questions.

Does that sound okay? Do you have any questions or suggestions before we get started?

[If focus group] First, let's start by quickly going around the room and introducing yourselves with your first name only.

Thank you again for joining today. Now, I'll start the recorder. [Site visitors: Only start the recorder after everyone has introduced themselves].

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**B. Please tell us a little bit about how and when you most recently became involved with the [AGENCY].**

*[Probe on the following if needed]*

1. For example, how and when did you learn about the [AGENCY]'s open investigation on your child or relative? Or that [AGENCY] was considering placing your child or relative in foster care? Or that your child or relative was in foster care?

**C. Once you were aware of the agency's involvement with your family, how (if at all) were you involved with the case?**

*[Probe on the following if needed]*

1. Who contacted you about your family's involvement?

**D. Once you were involved, what kinds of activities did you participate in?**

*[Probe on the following if needed: case planning meetings, such as activities to develop case plans; conversations with agency staff aimed at assessing your progress; family conferences; routine home visits; visits with your child or relative; court hearings; meetings focused on the needs of the child, such as medical visits and meetings with the education system; parenting classes; fatherhood groups]*

1. Thinking about all of the services you received through [AGENCY], which services were most helpful to you?
  - a. Which were least helpful to you?
2. How has your satisfaction with the services you received changed over time?

**E. Who, if anybody, encouraged you or helped you to participate in activities, such as case planning meetings or court hearings?**

*[Probe on the following if needed]*

1. How did agency staff, lawyers, counselors, and other staff encourage you to participate?
2. What, if anything, did they do to support your participating in these activities? *[Probe: provide transportation support or meals, connect you to fatherhood groups, reach out via text or social media?]*
3. How important were these to you as a reason to either participate or continue participating? What else allowed you to participate?
4. Thinking about the different people you deal with in the child welfare system, like lawyers, judges, and court officials, who was most welcoming? What did they do that was welcoming?

1. Who was most helpful to you? What did they do that was helpful?
2. Who could have done more? What would you have liked them to do?
5. How has your satisfaction with the people you worked with while your case was open changed over time?

**F. What made it difficult for you to participate? How, if at all, did [AGENCY] help you overcome those difficulties?**

*[Probe on the following if needed]*

1. What else would have been helpful?
2. What could [AGENCY] have done to make your experience with them better?

**G. How well do you think that your case manager understood your needs? How so?**

*[Probe on the following if needed]*

1. Has the way your case manager works with you changed over time? How does it compare to your experience with case managers in the past? In what ways?
2. Overall, how satisfied are you with the individual support [AGENCY] has provided to help you resolve your family's child welfare case? Why?

**H. In what ways were your involvement and interactions with [AGENCY] different than what you expected?**

*[Probe on the following if needed]*

1. Thinking about all of your experiences with [AGENCY], what did [AGENCY] do that made you feel empowered to participate in resolving your family's child welfare case?
2. What did [AGENCY] do that made you feel like you were an important player in resolving your family's child welfare case?

Thank you for sharing your experiences with us today.