*Fundamentals in Evidence Based Decision-Making*

**Session 1: “I observe that… I think it’s because…”**

Observations & Hypotheses Workbook

**Goals for the session:**

1. Make an observation about the permanency within 12 months for children entering care in your county.
2. Generate hypotheses as to what might be driving that outcome.
3. Develop a plan for generating evidence to support/refute your hypotheses.

The *Fundamental*s will focus on counties’ efforts to understand and improve the likelihood of timely permanency for children/youth entering placement.

Evidence-based problem solving requires managers to support the following statements with evidence:

* I observe [some outcome that needs improvement].
* I think it’s because [of this reason].
* So I plan to [implement some intervention]…
* …which I think will result in [an improvement to the observed outcome].

**Part 1:** In this session, we begin by using administrative data analyses to support the first statement. You will use the results of these analyses to make a series of observations about the speed and likelihood of permanency in your county. Part 1 of this workbook provides space for you to record your observations. Each section corresponds to a tab in the **FundamentalsWorkbook\_Permanency** workbook. At the end of Part 1, synthesize your observation(s) into a paragraph.

**Part 2:** Once you’ve made an observation about permanency, begin to hypothesize as to what might be driving the outcome that you see. Then, develop a plan for how you will gather evidence to support (or refute) those hypotheses.

**ANALYTIC NOTES**

* Analyses are based on California’s state customized FCDA spell file (fcda.chapinhall.org).
* Only children adjudicated for child abuse/neglect are included (i.e., juvenile justice youth are excluded).
* First foster care spells and reentry spells are included but displayed separately.
* Censor date is 12/31/2017.
* Smaller counties will have smaller cell sizes – be sure to attend to the count as well as the percent when interpreting the permanency rate.

**PART 1: I OBSERVE THAT…**

**ENTRY COHORT ANALYSES**

Note: Look at the overview tab to see this rate for ALL enterers –and the focus specifically in this section on **first entries.**

1. Of all children who entered care during the most recent year, how many exited to permanency (XPM) within 12 months?
2. How does the likelihood of permanent exit within a year of entry vary over time?
3. Among children who entered care between 2012 and 2016 AND exited to XPM within 12 months, how does the likelihood of permanency **vary by child age at entry**?
4. Among children who entered care between 2012 and 2016, how does the likelihood of permanency within one year **vary by first placement type?**
5. Among children who entered care between 2012 and 2016, how does the likelihood of permanency within one year **vary by predominant placement type?**

**ENTRY COHORT ANALYSES – Reentry Spells**

Note: Keep in mind the size of your county, remind yourself or permanency rates for ALL entrants and first entrants, and consider using the second set tabs to see if there are differences in permanency likelihoods for children who are RETURNING to care.

1. Of all children who returned to care during the most recent year, how many exited to permanency (XPM) within 12 months?
2. How does the likelihood of permanent exit within a year of entry – for returning children -- vary over time?
3. Among children who returned to care between 2012 and 2016 AND exited to XPM within 12 months, how does the likelihood of permanency **vary by child age at entry**?
4. Among children who returned to care between 2012 and 2016, how does the likelihood of permanency within one year **vary by first placement type?**
5. Among children who returned to care between 2012 and 2016, how does the likelihood of permanency within one year **vary by predominant placement type?**

Additional **entry cohort** questions asked and answered:

Consider making comparison across counties or to the state.

Consider making comparisons of similar age groups in different counties.

Consider if there are differences between first entrants and re-entrants that you may want to understand.

Review the fdca codebook – what other elements captured in the administrative data might be worth considering?

**SUMMARIZE YOUR OBSERVATIONS**

I observe that…

**PART 2: I THINK IT’S BECAUSE…**

**SKETCH OUT YOUR HYPOTHESES**

In the grid below, write each of your observations. Next to each, write your hypothesis as to what might be driving that outcome. Add rows as necessary.

Which of your hypotheses is/are the most plausible? Which is/are the most testable?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **I observe that…** | **I think it’s because…** |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

**Create a plan for gathering evidence TO support (or possibly refute) your hypothesis**

Just as making an observation about performance requires you to “know your question and write it down” so does making an evidence-based hypothesis as to the cause of that observation. For each of your hypotheses, follow the five steps below to articulate a research question and determine a systematic plan for answering it.

***EXAMPLE:***

**Step 1: State question/curiosity in general terms.**

*I observe that of all children entering care in my county, teens are least like to exit to permanency within 12 months. I think it’s because teens have behavior problems that parents can’t manage, which prevent their swift return. I wonder if we are giving parents of teens the right so that they are able to manage these behaviors when their children return home. If there’s a gap there, maybe we can do more to support parents and promote those reunifications. So, generally speaking, my questions are:*

* *Do teenagers in fact have more behavioral issues that affect reunification than younger children?*
* *Are we supporting families enough when their children are in our care?*
* *Are parents of teens more/less likely to receive age-appropriate parenting support?*
* *Could we work with foster families to leverage their assistance in promoting permanency?*

**Step 2: What method do you need to answer the question? Some possibilities are:**

* Administrative data analysis
* Case review
* CANS data analysis
* Focus groups
* Interviews
* Adding a variable to your spell file?

*I can use a case review to answer these questions. In the record I should be able to find out the child’s behavioral needs at the time of entry, and how they been addressed while in care. I should also be able to see what type of parenting support the parent received while the child was in care.*

**Step 3: Pick the type of population that you will use to answer the question.**

* If you’re analyzing administrative data, will you use an entry cohort, exit cohort, or an in-care population?
* If you’re selecting a sample for case review, will it be from an entry cohort, exit cohort, or an in-care population?
* If your population is foster parents, will they be selected from an entry cohort (starting FPs), exit cohort (leaving FPs), or an in-care population (active FPs)?
* If your population is service providers, how will they be selected?

*My observation about permanency is made from an entry cohort (“Of all children who entered…”) so I would take a sample from an entry cohort. I need a random sample of teens and a random sample of younger children. Also, in each group, I also need to select some children who exited within one year and some who didn’t.*

**Step 4: Identify the specific population(s) you will use to answer the question.**

*I will select a stratified random sample of children who exited care in 2016. (Hint: remember censoring – pick a sample that will allow you to make the observation). Specifically, I will take 10 random cases from each of the four following populations:*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *Entry age* | *Exited to XPM within one year* | *Did not Exit to XPM within one year* |
| *0-12* | *10 cases* | *10 cases* |
| *13+* | *10 cases* | *10 cases* |

**Step 5: Write the analytic question(s).**

* *Did the parent receive age-appropriate parenting services while the child was in care?*
* *Does the record indicate that at the time of entry, the child had behavioral problems that would affect timely permanency?*
* *Did the worker work with the foster family to help promote permanency?*
* *How many times did the worker visit the family while the child was in care?*
* *Did the parent receive age-appropriate parenting services early in the case? If yes, how many times did the parent attend that program?*
* *Did the parent receive any other services that might support timely permanency?*

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**Step 5: Write the analytic question(s).**