Action research project

One of the primary components of the MPLD fellowship is the completion of an action research project (ARP). The ARP provides opportunities for fellows to have on-the-job experiences that build practice, research, and leadership skills.

The ARP is a process in which participants examine their own practice, systematically and carefully, using the techniques of research. The plan-do-study-act framework is used to complete the action research project. Fellows will start the project at the beginning of the program and finalize it before the end of their fellowship.

The application process requires fellows to identify an issue or challenge related to adoption/guardianship that they would like to focus on for their action research project. The issue or challenge selected should be of great interest to the fellow and identified as a need within their state/tribe/territory/agency. It is critical to note that the proposed issue or challenge for the action research project may need to be adjusted after the fellow is accepted into the program.

Fellows will receive individualized assistance with their project throughout the program. This assistance will be provided by MPLD staff and supplemented with support by their mentor at the state/tribe/territory/agency. Mentors will be critical in helping fellows obtain information, data, and access to individuals that can assist them in completing their ARP. At the conclusion of the fellowship, fellows will present their research project, including results achieved and lessons learned, during the in-person meeting.

The action research project will consist of the following components:

• Identification of the issue or challenge related to adoption/guardianship that the fellow would like to address (submitted during the application process)

• Obtaining data/information that sheds light on the issue or challenge (submitted after the in-person kick-off meeting)

• Development of a plan to address the identified issue or challenge (submitted after the in-person kick-off meeting)

After the data has been obtained and the plan submitted and approved, fellows will work on implementing their plan throughout the remainder of the fellowship.

Potential issues/challenges identified for action research projects

Listed below are some topics for action research projects that fellows can use as examples as they identify a need within their own state/tribe/territory/agency that they would like to address with their action research project.

- Cultural competency training for adoptive parents and/or adoption staff

- Develop a process for successfully transitioning children into pre-adoptive homes and/or adoptive homes

- Develop and/or inform families of post adoption supports and/or services that exist within their community

- Recruitment of adoptive families

- Help adoptive families understand the importance of and/or develop birth family connections

- Identify characteristics of adoptive parents/guardians who are able to successfully care for older children

- Connect prospective adoptive families/guardians with post adoption services prior to finalization

- Recruit, develop, and support adoptive parents/guardians of color

- Empower and include youth in their own permanency planning

- Involve foster care alumni in adoption practice (recruitment, development, support)

- Unique dynamics in adoptions/guardianships in rural geographic areas

- Increase the understanding of disruption/dissolution (e.g., determining actual rates, understanding causes, etc.)

- Identify characteristics of successful African American adoption initiatives, such as Adoption Advocacy and Bennett Chapel Adoption ministry, and how these programs can be expanded to other states

Examples of completed action research projects

Example #1: Family support

The issue:

Families who had adopted their children were coming to the attention of Child Protective Services (CPS). CPS had no way to identify these families and were not aware of the services and supports available to these families through post permanency services.

The action research:

The fellow examined the state data on adoption disruptions to determine adoptive families' use of post-adoption services. They also conducted a survey to examine how post-adoptive services were being presented to families. The assumption was that adoption interruptions and CPS substantiations were related to a lack of knowledge and limited to lack of use of post-adoptive services.

The results:

- Survey findings revealed that agencies did not follow up with adoptive families to determine if post-adoptive services were being utilized.

- These findings led to a change in how CPS worked with adoptive families on the front end. Instead of just looking at allegations, workers were taught to obtain more information and work with these families slightly differently.

- Through data and an assessment of forms utilized by CPS, the fellow was able to develop a plan for cross-training between CPS and the post-adoption unit. The training provided CPS staff with information on services available to families on the post-adoption side, connected them with staff on the post-adoption side, and provided an overview of how these adoptive families differed from birth families coming to the attention of CPS.

- The fellow, through the project, assisted the agency with the development of a continuum of care training model for CPS and foster care and adoption workers.

- The project led to increased networking and trainings with adoption agencies and increased the knowledge of post-adoption resources for all staff.

- The fellow also worked to change the CPS forms so that families were asked if they had adopted any of the children in the home. This allowed CPS to keep better track of these families and to route them through a slightly different process than birth families.

Example #2: Language barriers

The issue:

This project was designed to examine the barriers (problems with communication, nurturing, trust, and attachment) presented when children are placed in foster/adoptive homes where the parents are monolingual and speak a language different from their own.

The action research:

The fellow conducted surveys and focus groups to examine individuals' experiences and perceptions of language barriers. They distributed a mail survey, available in English and in Spanish, to foster/adoptive families. Focus groups and surveys were also conducted with families. Staff were surveyed.

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The results:

- The research revealed a lack of resources available to bilingual and/or monolingual Spanish speaking foster/adoptive families.

- Family survey respondents reported that they participated in mandatory trainings that were not offered in their primary language.

- Families also reported that they believed materials provided in their primary language would provide for improved communication and attachment and better outcomes of safety, permanency, and well-being for foster/adoptive children in their homes.

- Staff reported a high level of discomfort speaking a language different than their primary. Those who reported some comfort level were for the most part identified as bilingual.

- This project resulted in the formation of a bilingual workgroup to translate foster care/adoption forms and training curriculum into Spanish.

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