

**Process Evaluation of The Children's Study Home Family Stabilization  
Program:**  
*Parenting Journey*

*Prepared for*

**The Children's Study Home Family Stabilization Division**

*By*  
**Kevin Hull**

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Abstract

The goal of this project is to show the effectiveness of the new Parenting Journey Program compared to already implemented parent aide services at The Children's Study Home Family Stabilization Program.

This study was conducted using a cross-sectional quasi design through surveys completed by participants within both programs.

Key words: Parent Education, Renunciation, Parenting Journey, Cognitive Focused Programs, Behavioral Focused Programs

**Literature Review**

In 2013, an estimated 3.5 million referrals concerning the suspected maltreatment of approximately 6.4 million children were made to CPS agencies. Out of the 3.5 million referrals, roughly 2.1 million reports regarding about 3.9 million children were screened in for CPS response.” (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2015). That is a huge amount of children experiencing maltreatment, no matter the severity, and it is believed that if parents receive parent education from trained professionals that number will be decreased in the future.

Parenting education and support has expanded rapidly and continues to be needed for a wide range of reasons, such as child maltreatment or child abuse. “It is widely accepted that by working with parents, professionals can help parents to strengthen parent-child relationships; find better ways of dealing with challenging behavior; and become equipped to recognize the importance of their role” (Hollingworth & Osgood 2004). “Poor discipline practices and lack of parental monitoring have been shown to account for up to 50% of the variance in criterion measures of child antisocial behavior” (Sanders & Turner 2005). Parenting support can be provided in various ways such as in a group setting or individual setting with different focuses such as a behavior focus or a cognitive focus. The difference between programs which focus on changing parents’ behavior (behavior focus) and programs that focus on changing parents' attitudes and beliefs (cognitive focus), is that cognitive based programs often use interventions based around education while behavior based programs often use interventions based around training (Hollingworth & Osgood 2004). This study seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of the Parenting Journey program in use by the Children’s Study Home. Parent education programs may be cognitive based programs, such as a Parenting Journey, or behavior based programs, and may take place in an individual or group setting.

Family life has a central role in maintaining the physical, psychological and social wellbeing of children and parents (Sanders & Turner 2005). According to The Parenting Journey program, a cognitive focused support group for parents, 86% percent of participants transition from negative

feelings to positive feelings about life and themselves (Moffatt 2004). In addition, 86% of participants positively change in their relationship with their children (Moffatt 2004). Since 1982, The Parenting Journey program has been helping families become safer and stronger through strengthening parents by focusing on adult development and the emotional understanding of what it means to be a parent instead of focusing on child development and disciplinary techniques like traditional parenting classes. It was created around the idea that, “effective parenting is influenced by one’s past, by the whole family, and by the cultural, social, and economic circumstances in which families live” (Moffatt 2004). Currently, the Parenting Journey program has been replicated in nearly 500 locations across the United States, and is actively reaching out to multiple communities around the United States, such as Springfield.

Now that we have looked at the results of Parenting Journey, let’s look into other parenting program that uses a cognitive focus and intervenes to change parent’s attitude, such as the Positive Parenting Program (Triple P) created by Matthew R. Sanders and colleagues at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia (Sanders & Turner 2005). “The Triple P system of parenting and family support aims to promote family harmony and reduce parent–child conflict by helping parents develop a safe, nurturing environment and promote positive, caring relationships with their children, and to develop effective, non-violent management strategies for dealing with a variety of childhood behavior problems and common developmental issues”(Sanders & Turner 2005). Triple P has been tested in more than 600 international trials, studies and published papers, including more than 200 evaluation studies, which also includes more than 100 randomized control trials. These tests showed that Triple P helps parents feel more confident, less stressed, less angry and less depressed (Triple P: DOES IT WORK?) The Triple P program draws from social learning theory and the idea that many people learn from imitating important role models within their past. Nowak and Heinrichs (2008) conducted a study on the Positive Parenting Program and found that the program had positive affects across all settings for child behavior problems, parenting behavior, and parental well-being (Sanders,

Matthew R. 1999).

In contrast to cognitive based parent programs, behavioral based parent programs, like many traditional parenting classes or programs, are focused around training or teaching the parents about child development or disciplinary skills. Most parenting programs use behavioral parent training (BPT) and focus on changing the behavior of the parent. Dr. Popkin has designed a series of parenting classes that are being taught all over the world by parent and family educators, and within these classes parents are taught, “effective, nonviolent discipline techniques, mutual respect, the power of encouragement, and successful communication skills” (Popkin). At the start and completion of each class, participants take a survey to measure their growth as a parent. However, the results are not posted for the public.

Parenting programs can also be conducted in an individual setting compared to a group setting. According to Community Coordinated Child Care, parents involved with individual programs can have a plan created specifically for them; however, they do not get to socialize with peers with similar experiences (Community Coordinated Child Care. 2007). Another advantage to providing parenting in an individual setting is for clients who are struggling with intense shame, guilt, or emotional pain can share with less fear of being judged. Lastly, parents involved in individual parenting education received more intensive and focused attention, which can be very beneficial for some clients (Individual vs. Group Therapy).

At The Children’s Study Home Family Stabilization Program, each client is involved in a program called parent education where the client meets one-on-one with a Family Support Worker to work towards mutual goals. The focus in this program is education and strengthening of parent/child relationships, mostly through behavioral focused interventions. The family and the Parent Educator work as a team to achieve the specific identified goals. Even though an individual parent education program has worked at The Children’s Study Home, they have added Parenting Journey Program to their services provided so that they can service more clients.

Traditionally, parents that have maltreated their children have not participated in parenting programs available in the community and of those parents who do participate are more likely to be resistant to change and are at greater risk of dropping out of the program. Although many parents who maltreat their children do not participate in programs or drop out before completion, available evidence suggests that parent programs do lead to improvements in parenting competence and behavior, and that these changes are an important aspect of minimizing the risk for future abusive behavior towards children (Sanders & Turner 2005).

According to the evidence within this literature review the best format of developing proper parenting skills is within a group setting with a cognitive focus compared to an individual setting or a behavior focused group. Karen M.T. Turner and Matthew R. Sanders state, “the development of interventions that promote positive, caring, and consistent parenting practices has been repeatedly highlighted as being critical to any attempt to reduce the incidence of child maltreatment or behavioral disorders in children” (Sanders & Turner 2005). Knowing this information from various parenting programs, the researcher was able to formulate the hypothesis that states, parents that successfully complete Parenting Journey at The Children’s Study Home will have a better understanding of the emotional commitment necessary to be a parent compared to parents not involved with Parenting Journey.

**Introduction**

Executive Summary: This report is the findings from a process evaluation performed for The Children's Study Home (CSH) Family Stabilization Program on the newly implemented Parenting Journey Program (PJP) in Springfield, Massachusetts by Kevin Hull a senior Social Work major at Western New England University. The primary goal of the PJP pilot is to improve parenting styles by providing class like support for parents already involved with The Children's Study Home parent aide services or reunification services. The PJP services are provided by Family Support Worker Eric Cora and the Family Stabilization Program Director Gloria Williams.

This report utilizes and examines data collected on those enrolled in The PJP from January 2016 through April 2016 in Springfield, Massachusetts to evaluate how well the pilot was implemented at The Children's Study Home. The data for this report was collected by conducting a survey of parents enrolled in the PJP and parents involved solely in parent aide services and reunification. The researcher also created a pretest survey for future participants, however, the pretest will not be examined within this report.

Intended Use and Users of Evaluation: This report is primarily intended for The Children's Study Home Family Stabilization Program Director Gloria Williams, Family Support Worker Eric Cora, The Children's Study Home's Executive Director Eliza Crescentini and The Children's Study Homes many Board of Directors that make the funding decisions. The intention of this report is to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the PJP and to work towards program development and improvement based on the data that was collected.

Program Description: Gloria Williams and Eric Cora participated in the PJP Facilitator training in Eastern MA. The PJP is an, “evidence-based curriculum, focused on providing education and coaching for parents and helping them, in turn, to teach, nurture and strengthen their own family” (Moffatt

2004). Simply put, Parenting Journey is a peer support group. The Parenting Journey program will be offered weekly for 12 weeks at the Springfield Children's Study Home office. The program is offered to any parent involved with either parent education services or reunification. The PJP pilot is funded as part of the funding of the parent education services (Moffatt 2004).

Problem Statement: The main purpose of the evaluation is to obtain information that will be useful for future Parenting Journey classes, and ultimately to evaluate the effectiveness of The PJP. The information collected in this study will be supplied to Gloria Williams and Eric Cora for their use in making changes to the curriculum that will enhance the effectiveness of the program.

Goals of the Parenting Journey Program: The first goal of the PJP is that parents become more confident in their parenting styles by building on their strengths. This will be done by following the proven curriculum that focuses on promoting attitudes that enhance good parenting behaviors and providing the parents with the necessary tools in order to effectively carry-out these behaviors at home with their children. The next goal of the program focuses on the emotional understanding and development of what it means to be a parent and adult rather than focusing on child development and disciplinary techniques like many other parenting classes do. Lastly, the final goal of The PJP is to improve the parents' overall parenting style by building upon their strengths.

Hypothesis and Variables: Parents that successfully complete The PJP at The Children's Study Home will have a better understanding of the emotional commitment necessary to be a parent compared to parents not involved with the PJP. This study contains multiple variables such as gender of participant, age of participant, number of children, age of children, and domestic status, as well as whether the participant is involved with parent education services or reunification services through The Children's Study Home.

**Research method and design**

A cross-sectional quasi design is used in this report to be able to conduct an appropriate program evaluation. The researcher does not have a random sample, yet the researcher does have a control group to test The PJP parents against. This will allow the researcher to compare the control group, parents that are involved solely in parent education or reunification, to the experimental group, participants enrolled in The PJP , and see how effective the program was. Unfortunately, the researcher was not able to conduct a pretest for the participants enrolled in The PJP, however; the researcher did create a pretest survey for future participants.

The researcher used both qualitative and quantitative designs, also known as mixed-method design to collect the necessary data. Within each survey the first six questions are quantitatively designed questions based around demographic information. The next four questions of the posttest and control group survey and next three questions for the pretest survey are qualitative and focus on gathering information. The pretest questions are focused on goals and expectations for The PJP. The post-test questions are focused on the effectiveness of The PJP. The control group questions are focused on effectiveness of individual parent education.

**Data collection**Pretest survey

In order to evaluate The PJP the evaluator created a pretest survey that will be given out to the participants of the program prior to being involved. This will allow the evaluator to be able to see a difference between the pretest and the post-test results, creating reliable data. This survey will be administered by Eric Cora and Gloria Williams on the first day of group. This will eliminate any bias that may arise if conducting the surveys individually with their Family Support Worker. If the participant feels like they can possibly be identified then there may be a chance they answer differently. A copy of the pretest survey used can be found in Appendix A.

\*It is important to know that this report does not include a pretest; however a survey was created for

future use.

#### Post-test survey

In order to evaluate The PJP the evaluator created a survey that questions the participant on important demographic information followed by four questions about the effectiveness of the program. This survey was administered by Eric Cora and Gloria Williams on March 23<sup>rd</sup> 2016. This will eliminate any bias by conducting the surveys individually with their Family Support Worker, because if the participant feels like they can be identified then there is a possibility they will answer differently. A copy of the posttest survey used can be found in Appendix B.

#### Control group survey

In order to evaluate The PJP further, the evaluator created a survey for the individual Parent Education program to be used as a control group or comparison group. This survey will collect important demographic information followed by four questions about the effectiveness of individual Parent Education program. This survey was administered by the client's Family Support Worker between March 22<sup>nd</sup> and April 21<sup>st</sup> 2016. With the Family Support Worker conducting the survey there could be bias because the client may feel they can be identified; however there is no other way for this data to be collected. A copy of the parent education survey used can be found in Appendix C.

### **Results**

The researcher has broken the results of this experiment into four sections. The first section is the basic demographic information of the experimental group or parents involved with The Parenting Journey Program. The sample size of the PJP, unfortunately, is small. The group began with twelve participants both females and males and ended with 6 female participants. The researcher received four posttest surveys from the participants that graduated the program. All of the participants that completed the program and the posttest survey were single females between the ages of 19 and 38 with children ranging from ages 8 months to 21 years. Two of the participants that completed the survey are involved

with the parent education services while the other two participants are involved with the reunification services. Lastly, the researcher was interested in the number of children each participant had and it ranged from one child to ten children.

The second section shows the results of the program effectiveness for The Parenting Journey. The researcher included four separate questions that measure the effectiveness of the new program. The first question was, "Why did you participate in this program?" The two answers that the researcher received from the four completed surveys were "to reunite with my children" and "to become a better parent." The next question that was asked in the survey was, "Was this program useful for you? If yes why and if no why?" Each participant said "yes" that it was useful with comments such as it gave them a better understanding on how to be a mother and taught them new parenting skills. In fact one participant said that the "group felt like a family." The third question was, "Will you apply the skills you learned in this program? If yes how and if not why?" Again each participant said "yes" that they are going to apply the skills that they learned. Participants said that they learned new disciplinary skills and how to be patient with their children. The last question of the posttest survey was, "What did you learn about yourself while being involved in this program?" Each participant responded with a positive answer. One participant responded "I learned that I am not a terrible parent" and another responded, "Everyone thinks I'm funny, shy until I open up" and "Talking things over relieves stress."

The third section of the results show the demographic information of parents solely involved with The Children's Study Home parenting aide services or reunification services. The same demographic questions were asked in both the Parenting Journey survey as the control group survey, supplied to clients of only the parent aide and reunifications services. Similar to the PJP sample, the control sample was also small, containing only four participants. Two of the surveys were completed by females, one by a male, and one by a female and male couple. The participants ranged in ages from 25 to 35 and had children that ranged from 7 months to 18 years. Two of the participants were single,

another was in a partnership, and another is legally married but separated. All of the participants are currently involved in parent education services; however one of them was previously involved in the reunification services. Lastly, the researcher was interested in the number of children each participant had and it ranged from one child to three children.

The fourth and last section of the results demonstrates the program effectiveness of the Parent Aide services. The researcher included five separate questions that measure the effectiveness of the new program. The first question was, “Why are you participating in Parent Education?” Three out of the four participants said, “DCF recommended it” and the other participant said, “to help my child.” The next question that was asked in the survey was, “Why are you not participating in Parenting Journey?” For this question the researcher got four different answers, from Parenting Journey did not fit in my schedule to I started services after the program began and my services were supposed to close out before the end of the program. The following question asked, “Was Parent Education useful to you? If yes why and if not why?” Each participant answered “yes” the services were useful. Two participants said that it makes them feel less overwhelmed; another said it is more helpful for my kids than for me, and another said that it is good to have someone to talk too. The fourth question on the survey asked, “Will you apply the skills you learned in Parent Education? If yes how and if not why?” Again each participant answered “yes,” they will apply what they have learned in Parent Education. Furthermore, each participant explained how they plan to change the discipline of their child. The last question in the survey was, “What topics were addressed in Parent Education?” Answers ranged from Routine to Discipline.

### **Discussion**

After the researcher finished gathering data about the effectiveness of both the Parenting Journey and Parent Education the findings suggested that more positive feelings come out of participating in the Parenting Journey. Parent education does provide participants with many beneficial tools to be a

competent parent; however The Parenting Journey did not only help parents develop appropriate skills but also helped increase their self-confidence. Ultimately, the researcher's study suggests that parent education programs need to start considering becoming more based around cognitive focused programs, such as The Parenting Journey, instead of behavioral based programs, such as The Children's Study Home Parenting Education.

Unfortunately due to such a small sample the findings within this study are not reliable. However, the researcher was able to gather information from two separate groups, experimental and control, allowing the researcher to be able to compare the results, giving the study reliability. Another limitation to this study was that the control survey (participants of solely parent education) were conducted in a one-on-one setting with their Family Support Worker creating a bias because the participant may answer differently because it is not completely anonymous.

### **Conclusion**

The findings within this study correspond to the findings of other studies discussed in the literature review, stating that cognitive focused programs are more effective for parent education. According to Karen M.T. Turner and Matthew R. Sanders, "the development of interventions that promote positive, caring, and consistent parenting practices has been repeatedly highlighted as being critical to any attempt to reduce the incidence of child maltreatment or behavioral disorders in children" (Sanders & Turner 2005). Lastly, through this study the researcher is able to state that parents that successfully complete The Parenting Journey Program at The Children's Study Home will have a better understanding of the emotional commitment necessary to be a parent compared to parents not involved with the Parenting Journey Program.

**Appendices**  
Appendix A

Parenting Journey Program  
Program Entrance Survey

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Age of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of children: \_\_\_\_\_

Ages of children: \_\_\_\_\_

Domestic status (circle one): Single    Married    Divorced    Widowed    Partnership

Type of services received (circle one): Parent Education                  Reunification

Will you use the personal skills you obtain through this program? If no, why not?

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Do you have any personal goals while participating in this program? If yes, what are they?

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What do you expect to get out of this program?

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Appendix B

Parenting Journey Program  
Program Completion Survey

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Age of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of children: \_\_\_\_\_

Ages of children: \_\_\_\_\_

Domestic status (circle one): Single    Married    Divorced    Widowed    Partnership

Type of services received (circle one): Parent Education    Reunification

Why did you participate in this program?

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Was this program useful to you? If yes why and if not why?

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Will you apply the skills you learned in this program? If yes how and if not why?

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What did you learn about yourself while being involved in this program?

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Appendix C

Parent Education  
Program Survey

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Age of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of children: \_\_\_\_\_

Ages of children: \_\_\_\_\_

Domestic status (circle one): Single    Married    Divorced    Widowed    Partnership

Type of services received (circle one): Parent Education    Reunification

Why are you participating in Parent Education?

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Was Parent Education useful to you? If yes why and if not why?

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Will you apply the skills you learned in Parent Education? If yes how and if not why?

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What topics were addressed in Parent Education?

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