

Child First Safety Brief

Children that Participate in Child First are Less Likely to be Reported to Child Protective Services than Comparison Children Left at Home after an Initial Maltreatment Investigation

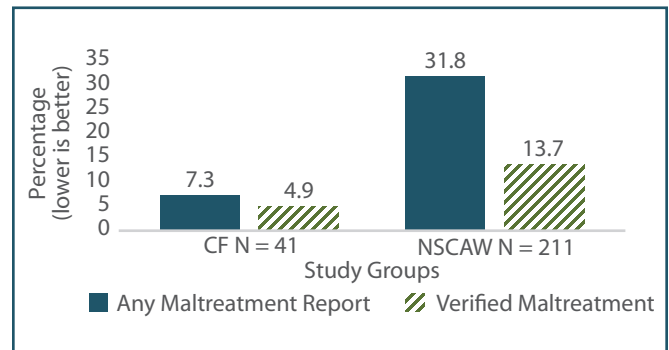
The Children's Services Council of Palm Beach County (CSC) adopted the Child First Program (CF)¹ to reduce child maltreatment, improve child and parent outcomes, and prevent families from entering child protective services. Child maltreatment records from the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) between enrollment in CF (baseline) and follow-up 18 months later were compared with a group of matched families from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW II) that had a child between 1 and 5 years old who remained with their parents during the 18 months following an initial investigation by child protective services.² About half of the families in CF had a previous maltreatment report and/or reported being involved with FL DCF. About 80% of families matched from NSCAW II received the usual services provided by child protective services.

What we found: Maltreatment reports between baseline and follow-up were significantly less likely among CF children compared to NSCAW II. This continued to be true when adjusting for possible COVID-related effects on a small reduction on maltreatment reporting among young children during the first year of the pandemic. Comparisons of maltreatment reports between baseline and follow-up that took into account various sociodemographic factors and risk factors like domestic violence showed that the difference in maltreatment reports continued to be true when adjusting for other factors.

What it means: In the CF evaluation, services and follow-up occurred during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic before vaccines were available and during national economic and racial equity crises. Challenges faced by Palm Beach County families related to the pandemic included meeting basic needs, loss of income and employment, contracting COVID-19, suffering the

loss of a loved one, food insecurity, eviction, and barriers to access public assistance and childcare.³ In contrast, the environmental context during the time of the NSCAW II study (pre-pandemic) was one of relative calm and economic stability. Despite these challenges, families receiving CF showed positive safety outcomes when compared with NSCAW II. This finding shows the key role of psychotherapeutic services integrated with intensive care coordination, such as those provided through CF for keeping vulnerable children safe and avoiding deterioration during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. The role CSC plays in supporting families in vulnerable situations is critical during periods of sustained crisis.

Any Maltreatment Report and Any Verified Maltreatment Between Baseline and Follow-Up by Study Group



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- 1 Child First involves intensive home visits for families who are experiencing adversity and children at risk of abuse and neglect. Families receive a comprehensive assessment, an integrated, family-driven plan, home-based guidance for parents, Child-Parent Psychotherapy, and a coordinated, hands-on connection to community resources. Along with supporting and healing the parent-child relationship, collateral parent sessions address parent trauma, stressors the families are experiencing, and social determinants of health, as well as health needs and substance abuse as indicated.
- 2 CSC selected RTI International to evaluate CF. The evaluation followed the natural flow of families supported by CSC without interfering with the clinical triage already in place that referred families with the highest risk to CF. RTI used a quasi-experimental design with propensity score matching (PSM) to identify comparison cases within a subgroup from NSCAW II, the second nationally representative sample of children reported to child protective services sponsored by the Administration for Children, Youth and Families. NSCAW II collected data between 2008 and 2012 by administering questionnaires to a representative sample of the population through face-to-face interviews with caseworkers, children, caregivers, and teachers. Over 200 families from NSCAW II were matched to 41 CF families for this comparison. While NSCAW II and CF families were largely similar, mothers in CF were nearly twice as likely to have major depression.
- 3 Families in this study were mostly Latino and Black. General population surveys show that Black and Latino families face serious racism and inequity, financial problems in the areas of housing, difficulties covering monthly bills, and challenges with overall family well-being that are exacerbated during the pandemic.

