



# Case Reviews Used to Inform the Implementation of Hello Baby

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To explore how child welfare services could partner with families to work toward better outcomes for children and families, we consulted with a wide range of stakeholders and analyzed available data. Because descriptive data does not often give a full picture of families and their circumstances, we completed case reviews of 10 randomly chosen families who scored as high risk (a score of 20) on the research data set and in which the focus child ended up being placed outside of the home. These “true positive” cases were summarized to understand what services had been accessed prior to the birth of the child and what had happened to the family over the life of the child prior to the placement. The cases were de-identified, and reviewers signed confidentiality agreements. This document describes common themes and opportunities that were derived from the case reviews and describes two cases typical of the cases that were reviewed.

## COMMON THEMES

Analysis by the stakeholders of these cases revealed common themes. Overall, there is an extremely high burden on caregivers who receive high risk scores on the predictive risk model. Many of the caregivers had mental health and substance use issues as well as multiple children in their care. In each case, we looked at the situation when the child was born and the situation after the child was born, then identified opportunities for earlier intervention to mitigate the risk factors present. The following themes were present across the high-risk families studied:

### *Situation when the child was born*

- Mothers had extensive prior involvement in drug and alcohol services and mental health treatment, but treatment was inconsistent and not sufficient in duration/intensity.
- Prior history of child welfare involvement and, in several cases, history of children removed from mother's care.
- Mothers not living with father of the focus child.
- Lack of social support to help with caregiving responsibilities.
- Prior criminal justice involvement for one or both parents.

### *Situation after the child was born*

- Multiple child welfare referrals for various allegations, such as parental substance use, insufficient housing or neglect.
- Insufficient services provided to family to ensure safety and mitigate risk.

## OPPORTUNITIES

These case studies provide a fuller picture of family circumstances than might be drawn by the data alone. They suggest that the families who will be eligible for Hello Baby Priority services are likely to have very complex and high needs, and that many existing programs might not be able to address them.

However, our exploration of cases also suggested that the County was missing many early warnings that these families need more services and were missing opportunities to engage with them. Additionally, engagement often occurs too late and once the family is already in crisis.

*Identified opportunities included:*

- Address risk factors for maltreatment: substance use, domestic violence and unstable housing.
- Provide parents with social support and networks to ease caregiving burdens.

## CASE REVIEW EXAMPLES

The cases below are typical of the 10 cases we reviewed. Note that details have been masked to ensure no possibility of identification.

### Case IPI

Child was placed between 12 and 18 months of age because Mom was arrested on drug charges and incarcerated with no one to look after the child.

*Situation when the child was born:* Mom had multiple other children, both older than age five and from a different father than the focus child. Mom had received some mental health and substance use treatment during the year that the child was born and had been engaged in these services on and off for more than five years prior to the birth of the focus child. She had extensive jail history. Father had also had extensive history with substance use and mental health services. He also had some child welfare involvement for previous children (not with focus child's Mom). He also had jail history.

Mom had been screened for drugs at the birth of the child and tested positive for methadone. A child welfare case was not opened.

*Situation after the child was born:* Shortly after the child was born, the father died of an overdose. At age 12–18 months, the child was referred but no case was opened. The child was found to be clean and there were toys in the house. Shortly afterwards Mom was arrested for drug possession and because there was no one to look after the child, the child was removed.

*Opportunity:* The presence of toys in the house suggests that there was an adult in the house who was engaged with parenting. The fact that the Mom was on methadone at the time of the birth suggests that she was actively receiving treatment. A proactive offer of support services, including motivated and engaged case workers, might have reduced the chance of the child being placed outside of the home.

### Case LKA

Child was placed at 20 months because Mom was incarcerated, and Father was found to be unable to care because of alcohol use.

*Situation when the child was born:* Mom and Father were an intact nuclear family with multiple older children. There was extensive child welfare history as a result of father's alcohol use and allegations of inter-partner violence (with Mom as the alleged victim). Father had intermittent alcohol treatment and mental health treatment, but no evidence of treatment for more than two years before the focus child's birth. Father had some jail time. Mom was the main wage earner and father was caregiver.

*Situation after the child was born:* Multiple referrals were made for the focus child (every six months), but referrals were either screened out or the case was not opened. At the time of the fourth referral (when child was 12-18 months), the case was opened for services. One month after services were started, Father was arrested for intoxication with unsupervised children on the street. Mother was incarcerated for charges relating to endangering older children. Children were all placed in out-of-home care.

*Opportunity:* Child rearing with multiple children under age five is highly challenging, but Mom was holding down a job at the time, and there was evidence of involvement with extended family. Enrollment of the older siblings into pre-kindergarten suggests an opportunity for using a network of supports to reduce the caregiving role of Father. Father's alcohol use and intimate partner violence could have been addressed through a residential program or intensive outpatient services.