

ECCFE

EARLY COLLABORATIVE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IMPLEMENTATION PILOT REPORT



TEXASCASA
Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN



SEPTEMBER 2021

SUMMARY OF REPORT AND PILOT LEARNINGS:

Texas CASA worked closely with four local CASA programs to observe and learn from their early engagement with families, which takes place during the first 14 days starting from the initial appointment of CASA at the ex-parte hearing through the adversary hearing. The programs reported on collaboration data involving parents, families, youth and Child Protective Investigations (CPI) as well as the effectiveness of using tools to engage connections of the youth and family. The four programs all reported that engaging early with families and using Collaborative Family Engagement (CFE) tools helped increase the number of connections who are engaged by the time the adversary hearing occurs, increased collaboration with both CPI and family members, and helped the CASA volunteer learn more about the family structure much earlier, which helped them to ensure that the child was connected from the earliest point of the Child Protective Services (CPS) case. The work done in the first 14 days of the case helped build positive relationships with the family and gained invaluable information that was shared with CPS at the transfer staffing and helped make informed decisions on the parent plan, placements and visitations.

PURPOSE OF THE PILOT PROGRAM

The purpose of the ECFE pilot was to study four programs in different regions that currently implement CFE and have a history of working with families prior to the adversary hearing. It was hoped that the pilot would achieve the following goals:

- A pathway would be identified for other local CASA programs to be appointed at removal and start their advocacy and engagement with families sooner by using the CFE approach.
- Information-sharing with CPI would occur, connections for the child would be identified and engaged; a relationship would be started with parents and family, if possible; and collaboration between all legal parties would be established by the time of the adversary hearing.
- A determination about how CFE could best be used within the first 14 days of CASA appointment would be made and outcomes would be understood.

PILOT DETAILS

Numerous CASA programs were interested in participating in the pilot. CASA of Williamson County, Child Advocates of Fort Bend, CASA of Red River and CASA of El Paso were selected based on their CFE implementation year and amount of pass-through funding available. Each program was observed for 90 days (April 1, 2021 through June 30, 2021) on their work with families and children within the first 14 days of the case. During that time, they were asked to track certain metrics and provide them to Texas CASA periodically throughout the pilot. Each program received pass-through funds to support the ECFE work. The programs met monthly with Texas CASA regarding metrics, operational practices and volunteer advocacy as well as to share information regarding successes and challenges of the pilot.

HISTORY

Three CASA programs (CASA of Williamson County, Child Advocates of Fort Bend and CASA of Red River) had implemented early family engagement as a part of their daily practice. CASA of El Paso had previously implemented an early engagement model based on the Early Family Engagement (EFE) program that CASA of Travis County used but had stopped this approach a few years ago.

All four programs were appointed at removal with a Suit Affecting the Parent-Child Relationship (SAPCR) in place and were at various years of CFE implementation. Child Advocates of Fort Bend has been involved in CFE since 2015, CASA of El Paso and CASA of Williamson County since 2018, and CASA of Red River since 2019.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

At the beginning of the pilot, expected outcomes were:

- Earlier engagement with families
 - Engagement with the child and family at the beginning of a case instead of waiting until 14 days or longer passed
- Increased collaboration with stakeholders
 - Establishment of a process for sharing of information between CPI and CASA
 - Stronger collaboration between CASA, CPI and legal parties
- Increased connections for youth and family
 - More connections of the child are known and engaged prior to the adversary hearing, thus reducing trauma for the child by keeping those connections safely intact
 - More connections for the family are identified to support the parents/family as they work with the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) to achieve reunification, when safe and possible
- Earlier placements with family or fictive kin
 - Additional advocacy in the first 14 days will help identify possible placements for the children
 - Children are placed with family or fictive kin earlier in the case, which reduces trauma on the child
- Increased positive working relationship between the CASA volunteer and parents
 - A more positive relationship will exist between the CASA volunteer and parents/family, resulting in increased information-sharing and trust
- Increased participation in family meetings
 - Stronger attendance of family members/fictive kin at family meetings

OVERVIEW OF THE PILOT

The pilot programs were each given an agreement of what should occur during the pilot and what metrics Texas CASA would be collecting. The local programs were asked to complete the following between April 1, 2021, and June 30, 2021:

1. Use CFE within the first 14 days of being appointed on new cases:
 - a. **Collaborate** – work with CPI, CPS, the legal community, and other stakeholders in family engagement work; share information with family including the parent postcard and family meeting information;
 - b. **Cultivate** – use CFE tools to find and engage families as able;
 - c. **Convene** – work with family and CFE Team to increase attendance and participation in family meetings as able;
 - d. **Connect** – work to locate, build and engage connections for the child in care; identify opportunities to create connection points and actions for children from the earliest point in the case possible. If possible, create a calendar of support to present at the adversary hearing.
2. Provide Texas CASA names of local community stakeholders for an invitation to a focus group.
3. Ensure that communication with CPI occurs consistently throughout the pilot timeframe. Share timing and type of communication that appear to work most effectively with CPI and with Texas CASA. Also as needed, receive feedback and thoughts from CPI about the role of the CASA program in early CFE work.
4. Provide Texas CASA language and input it into a draft MOU for local programs and their CPI partners.
5. Track early CFE work in Optima, as possible.
6. Report requested data points on May 15 and July 15, 2021.
7. Meet virtually with Texas CASA and other pilot programs once per month to share feedback and monthly data trends and make recommendations on early CFE process and any needed resources.
8. Share, with Texas CASA, the local program process and actions regarding case appointment with the court, case assignment to volunteer and those timeframes, including any messaging in recruitment or training.
9. Acknowledge that Texas CASA does not encourage making recommendations regarding removal of the child. Individual programs should work directly with their courts to determine the level of engagement and information that their court requires/asks for. Share with Texas CASA how local program handles testifying at the adversary hearing.
10. Make efforts to complete and/or report on the above with previous early engagement work in the instance of no new appointments occurring during the pilot period.

Programs were asked to track metrics around the following data:

Collaborate – number of meetings/contacts with CPI or other CFE team members within the first 14 days; dates/timeframes of that contact (e.g., two days after affidavit received); number of contacts with parents and other family members and when they happened within the first 14 days.

Cultivate – name of CFE tools used and in what timeframe within the first 14 days.

Convene – number of family, natural supports at the first family meeting.

Connect – number of connections known and active at the time of CASA appointment, at the adversary hearing and at the end of the three-month pilot period.

RESULTS OF PILOT PROGRAM

There were some key characteristics of the programs that had the best increase in known and engaged connections.

- The first key characteristic is that the CASA staff, including leadership, all believed in the idea that engagement of family is key to advocating for the child. This was evidenced by consistent value and language of engagement with family throughout the program, from recruiting to training to supervision of volunteers. The message that it is imperative that we engage with family is firmly a part of the core values of the programs. Programs where the supervisors coach the volunteers within the first two weeks also made a big difference in the number of connections identified and engaged.
- The second key characteristic is that work done by volunteers who have received training in CFE and the CFE tools results in more tools completed and more information learned. If the volunteer is not trained, a supervisor needs to work closely with them in the first two weeks.
- The third key characteristic of success is strong recruitment and pre-service training, which includes CFE tools and practices training. The programs that had a strong flow of volunteer recruits and actively taught engagement tools (Connectedness Map, Circles of Trust, Three Houses) in their pre-service had better outcomes.

RESULT #1: EARLIER ENGAGEMENT WITH FAMILIES AND CHILDREN DID APPEAR TO HAVE POSITIVE METRICS ON MOST OF THE ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES – BUT TO A DIFFERING DEGREE WITHIN PROGRAMS. CASA of Williamson County, CASA of Red River and Child Advocates of Fort Bend were able to actively engage with families from the very beginning of the cases and were able to support the work with volunteers. CASA of El Paso had the largest share of new cases but also the lowest availability of volunteers, so its metrics were not as positively affected as the other three. However, in the eight cases where volunteers were assigned to a case in El Paso for early engagement, there was a marked difference of positive impact on children and families regarding known and engaged connections.

RESULT #2: INCREASED COLLABORATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS

All four programs reported better collaboration between CPI and their CASA program than prior to the pilot period. Collaboration was defined as sharing of information between the CASA program and CPI (email, phone calls, meetings included). The average number of days before the first information was shared was two for all four programs. **On average, the programs reported collaborating with CPI two to three times during the first 14 days.** All four of the programs met with CPI at the beginning of the pilot to share information about CFE and early engagement with families. **The programs where CASA attended the ex-parte hearings had the best collaboration with CPI because they could meet right after the hearing to share information.** Communication after the hearing was done primarily via email, unless mediation was held. Additional sharing was done at the adversary hearing and again at the transfer staffing with CPS.

PROGRAM AREA	# OF FAMILIES	% OF CASES WITH CPI COLLABORATION	AVERAGE NUMBER OF COLLABORATIONS PER CASE WITH CPI	% OF COLLABORATION WITH FAMILY/ YOUTH (AT LEAST ONE TOOL USED)	AVERAGE NUMBER OF TIMES CASA ENGAGED WITH FAMILY/ YOUTH
El Paso	40	60%	2	28%	2
Williamson	14	100%	2	71%	2
Wichita Falls	30	100%	1	93%	2
Fort Bend	14	100%	4	86%	3

TABLE 1, COLLABORATION RESULTS

RESULT #3: EARLIER ENGAGEMENT WITH FAMILIES/MORE POSITIVE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CASA AND FAMILIES

It was believed that earlier engagement would result in earlier and increased communication between the family and CASA, which could lead to a stronger level of trust and a more positive working relationship. **All four programs reported an increase in sharing of actionable information between CASA and parents/family when CFE tools were completed within the first 14 days.** Collaboration was defined by tools being completed with parents or information-sharing by the CASA program. Programs reported that the initial conversation with parents/family was usually positive and gave them an opportunity to explain the role of the CASA volunteer and the desire to keep children connected while in care.

CFE tools, especially the Connectedness Map, were usually completed after the ex-parte hearing (via Zoom) or within three to four days after removal. When parents could not be reached, CASA volunteers reached out to other family members to complete tools. **All programs reported that this was the biggest change in their early engagement practice.** The volunteers

actively reached out to family to complete engagement tools. Volunteers reported that families were very open to completing the tools once they explained the purpose. There were occasional barriers with attorneys not allowing CASA volunteers to meet with parents. CASA programs reported that a solution was either to have the attorneys complete the tools with parents or to complete the tools in the presence of the attorneys.

RESULT #4: INCREASED CONNECTIONS FOR THE CHILD KNOWN AND ENGAGED

“Increased known connections” was defined as when more connections (positive, supportive people) of the child are known and engaged by the point of the adversary hearing. Programs also reported on known and engaged connections at the end of the pilot program. **All programs reported a substantial number of additional connections known and engaged by the adversary hearing, and this increase continued through the pilot program.** Connections were identified by CFE tools that were completed with parents and children, along with the use of some searching tools when necessary. Programs used connection tools (usually Connectedness Map and Circles of Trust) with both youth (if age-appropriate) and parents and/or family members. On average, two tools were done with each group. Two programs also used family searching through Connect Our Kids software on all cases. Although this tool did not necessarily increase the number of engaged connections, it was helpful to learn more about who was in the family and gave important information for future work, if needed.

PROGRAM AREA	% OF INCREASED KNOWN CONNECTION BY ADVERSARY HEARING	% OF CONNECTIONS ENGAGED AT ADVERSARY HEARING	NUMBER OF FAMILIES WHERE KNOWN CONNECTIONS INCREASED BY END OF PILOT	% OF CHANGE IN KNOWN CONNECTIONS BY END OF PILOT	% OF CHANGE IN ENGAGED CONNECTIONS BY END OF PILOT
El Paso	76%	13%	15	107%	20%
Williamson	62%	82%	10	92%	80%
Wichita Falls	54%	73%	25	75%	81%
Fort Bend	57%	67%	10	57%	83%

TABLE 2, CONNECTIONS RESULTS

All programs felt, within the first 14 days, that the focus needed to be on engaging current family members that were identified through tools as opposed to starting the search for additional family members. If a program used Connect Our Kids software, the information gathered was used by volunteers or CFE leads after the adversary hearing if no connections were identified through engagement tools. **All the programs felt that, by the adversary hearing, the volunteers had a better understanding of the family and who would be willing to engage with and support the child if the child stayed in foster care.** Two programs were able to use the calendar of connections and presented it either at the adversary hearing or at the transfer staffing with CPS, so a plan could be put in place with actionable items to keep the children connected while in care.

OUTCOMES NOT DETERMINED IN PILOT

OUTCOME #1: EARLIER PLACEMENTS FOR YOUTH WITH FAMILY OR FICTIVE KIN

This outcome was not supported in the way it was defined at the start of the pilot program.

The hope was that placement options with family or fictive kin could be identified and children moved more quickly into those placements by the adversary hearing. In CASA of Red River, the CASA program identified two cases where family was identified, and the judge was able to court order placement to the relatives. CASA of El Paso was able to place four children (in two families) with a relative at the end of the pilot, based on information gathered by the CFE tools completed in the first 14 days. In the other programs, some possible family placements were identified, and home studies were ordered in the hope that placement could occur in the future. Programs reported that, within the current CPS system, 14 days was not enough time to place a child in a family placement or that possible placements had been identified but needed to be explored further. **All programs felt the work they did in the first 14 days would help identify possible placements sooner.** If the programs continue to track these cases within the CFE tracking system, there may be more placement data in the future.

OUTCOME #2: INCREASED PARTICIPATION IN FAMILY MEETINGS

This outcome was inconclusive due to numerous factors. Three out of the four programs reported that they shared contact information with their family meeting facilitator or talked to parents about whom to invite to the family group conference (FGC) but could not determine whether the level of participation or attendance increased as a direct correlation. With the information gathered from CFE engagement tools, CASA volunteers worked with parents to help identify those supportive relationships that could then be invited to the permanency conference (PC) or FGC.

PROGRAM AREA	NUMBER OF CONNECTIONS ATTENDING FGC/PC (IF HELD)
El Paso	12
Williamson	18
Wichita Falls	38
Fort Bend	8

TABLE 3, ATTENDANCE AT FAMILY MEETINGS

PILOT FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS AND STAKEHOLDERS

Benefits of early engagement using CFE:

- Reaching out to relatives sooner
- Contacting family early on
- Portraying CASA as a supportive role
- Helping make the process more collaborative and less adversarial
- Helping change the tone of the communication with parents to a more positive one
- Creating a more collaborative relationship with CASA helps families feel less judged
- Helping family take ownership

Pilot program feedback on important requirements of a program to be ready to engage early with families:

- CASA leadership buy-in to engaging family and making sure they are consistent in their focus when talking to staff.
- A strong recruiting program that has a steady flow of volunteers.
- Willingness to collaborate well with CPI and a strong relationship with conservatorship caseworkers (CVS).
- Strong belief that families and connections matter by CASA staff and who convey this belief with their volunteers consistently.
- CASA staff who will follow up with volunteers to ensure they are engaging with family, using CFE tools and incorporating family engagement language in every interaction.
- Incorporation of early family engagement into pre-service training.
- Training class schedules planned to meet the needs of the program since cases need to be assigned immediately.
- Understanding of confidentiality (parents versus fictive kin).
- CVS buy-in on the importance of early family engagement.
- Understanding of the ideal volunteer (jumping right in, flexible, collaborative, problem-solver) as part of the recruitment message.
- Supervisor's support of the volunteer during the first 14 days, if this is their first case.
- Understanding that the first 14 days is for family engagement; family searching can be done later, as needed.

- Addressing the perception of some attorneys that CASA volunteers give up too quickly when trying to engage parents.
- Addressing the desire of some attorneys for families to understand that family engagement is important and that CASA is not trying to replace the known family – attorneys mentioned that it is important to be clear about the role of family engagement and family searching.
- Training with CPI and the CASA program should occur prior to starting any early family engagement:
 - CPI was very positive about working closely with the CASA volunteer,
 - CPI often is not aware of the role of the CASA volunteer,
 - CPI feel like CFE tools are very effective.
- An MOU incorporated between the CASA program and CPI so there is a clear understanding of what information should be shared, by whom and when:
 - Ex: Information on the caregiver resource form is critical for CASA to have.
- Relationship-building opportunities:
 - Informal opportunities to connect between CPI and CASA,
 - “Lunch and learns” with CPI and CASA volunteers to share respective roles and responsibilities,
 - Meeting with CPI at the ex-parte hearing (if held) is strongly recommended.

Potential barriers programs need to be aware of:

- Parents meet a lot of people at the adversary hearing, and it can be overwhelming to them. The CASA volunteer should explain their role and how it is different than CPS.
- Collaboration between CASA, CPI and CPS can seem like an us-versus-them mentality to the families.
- CASA volunteers must demonstrate that they are neutral in their role as the child’s advocate to improve their bond with family members.
- If attorneys are not appointed until the adversary hearing, CASA volunteers must follow a consistent process for communication with parents.
- Some volunteers do not “see” family. There is a concern that occasionally volunteers make a judgment about the family based solely on the CPS case. They do not step back and objectively look at the strengths/possible strengths of the family or the trauma that has occurred. There is still work to do to help volunteers understand the importance of learning about and engaging the families without judgment.
- Sometimes volunteers do not engage with fathers, and this is a critical part of ECFE.
- If a criminal investigation exists, early engagement with parents might be more difficult to do.
- Perceptions that CASA volunteers need to stay in the CASA lane of advocating for children.
- CASA volunteers should reach out to attorneys to let them know what tools they are using and ensure information is shared.
- CASA programs need to be efficient in Optima, as a lot of information is gathered in the first 14 days.

EARLY COLLABORATIVE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

When should implementation of ECFE occur?

After reviewing data from the pilot programs, the recommendation is that ECFE is integrated into year two of the CFE implementation pathway. The reasons for implementing in the second year are the following:

- Training of CFE will have occurred, and the CASA program will have made the shift to understanding that engaging family and building connections is a critical part of its role.
- Tools will be a part of the volunteer role and incorporated into their work with families and children.
- Both CPS and CPI should be trained to understand the role of the volunteer in advocating for the child and working with the family to gain information about the child.
- All cases can receive this early engagement with families as opposed to “designating only certain cases CFE cases.” Cases where family cannot be engaged by the CPS transfer staffing can then strategize through a team meeting with CPS, attorney ad litem (AAL) and CASA volunteer to determine next steps.

Essential functional requirements of a CASA program that must be in place prior to incorporating ECFE

- CASA has automatic appointment to cases at removal or is appointed at the ex-parte hearing.
- The case is filed or dually filed as a SAPCR.
- CVS, CPI and the legal community are made aware of CASA’s role earlier on, if ECFE is a change for the local area
- CASA and CVS leadership buy into and support CFE.
- A strong relationship with CPI/CPS is established.
- Strong recruiting efforts are in place to ensure volunteers are available for assignments. Recruiting efforts discuss the importance of engaging with family for volunteers.
- The legal community has a clear understanding of early engagement and the role of CASA at this stage (local program can use the legal engagement template letter).
- CFE is currently implemented at the program and a subsequent cultural shift has occurred, embracing working with family.
- A strong training program for volunteers with an emphasis on engagement of child and family using CFE tools is implemented.
- A strong team of CASA supervisors to ensure effective coaching of volunteers is in place.
- An effective and consistent process of assigning cases to volunteers within 48 hours of assignment of CASA is established.
- Volunteers consistently use Optima to record data.
- CFE assessments are conducted by Texas CASA CFE Coaches (using a checklist that is to be developed) that look at how the program has bought into the CFE approach, whether CFE core values are evident in the program, the utilization of CFE tools, and whether cultural change has been established in the program regarding the importance of family and connections.

Important data sources to review prior to implementing ECFE

- Number of cases assigned to CASA per county.
- Number/percentage of volunteers assigned to children per county.
- Use of Optima for data management.
- Placement data (when children were placed with family)/case-closure rate.

Recommendations for increased collaboration between CASA and the legal community

- If ex-parte hearings are held, CASA ideally can attend and meet with attorneys and family.
- Appointment letters can be used so attorneys have contact information for assigned volunteers.
- Attorneys can sit in on any parent conversation, as needed.
- CASA can use the AAL as a resource.
- Family engagement can be included within court reports.

Recommendations for increased collaborations between CASA and family

- Meet with the family at the ex-parte hearing, if possible or as soon as possible, prior to the adversary hearing, which helps to gain information quickly.
- Clearly explain the role of the CASA volunteer at the initial hearing to help build a more positive relationship.
- **Emphasize that the role of the CASA volunteer includes keeping children connected while they are in care and that reducing their level of trauma helps to gain trust from parents.**
- If court hearings are virtual, use a breakout room with CASA, family, CVS, CPI and legal parties, which is seen as a best practice.

Recommendations for recruitment of volunteers

- Communicate the importance of volunteers working with families, which was critical to the success of ECFE.
- Provide additional recruiting materials that help focus on working with families, which may be helpful to programs.
- Recruit volunteers that match the flow of affidavits to the best of a program's ability. Those programs who were able to have a flow of recruits each month fared better in assigning volunteers to cases and completing CFE tools more quickly.
- Ask interview questions for potential volunteers around family engagement and how they view families that may be involved with CPS.

Recommendations for training of volunteers

- Provide training on the CFE engagement tools in pre-service training, which was critical for the success of ECFE.
- Use the language of family engagement in pre-service, which consistently led to better outcomes in early engagement.
- Have CASA supervisors continue the coaching of engagement with families with all volunteers and use family engagement language consistently, as they are more successful with early engagement.

- Encourage CASA supervisors to get comfortable with the CFE engagement tools and to support the volunteer's use of those tools, as supervisors with these traits had better engagement outcomes.
- Instruct CFE leads from the programs to work with and coach supervisors in engagement tools and how to engage with families, as these had better outcomes than CFE leads who did the engagement work themselves. (If a CFE lead worked directly with the volunteer, that helped increase outcomes but not as much as when the supervisor coached the volunteer directly.)

Recommendations for informing family about CPS meetings

- Use the tools in the CASA programs that can help to educate parents about the FGC or PC meetings and encourage parents to invite their support system. The use of the parent postcard in particular helps with that discussion.
- CASA programs can use CFE tools to help identify family supports that can/should be invited to FGC/PCs.

Recommendations for CASA ECFE operational processes

- Implement a clear process of affidavit assignment, as CASA programs that had a clear process were able to start the engagement work sooner. (Affidavit assignment to a supervisor that occurred within one day had better engagement outcomes.)
- Send appointment notices to attorneys, CPI and CVS. Programs that did so had more effective collaboration between legal parties and a better collaboration with attorneys. **Having a process for communication of appointment and contact information for CASA supervisors and volunteers to all legal parties is critical.**
- Attend ex-parte hearings if held, because the programs that did attend increased collaboration and gained more information than those that did not attend the hearing.
- Provide an ECFE checklist or training document for supervisors to support new volunteers. Programs that did this had more consistent engagement outcomes in the first 14 days.
- Complete an initial family search on Connect Our Kids, as doing this allowed volunteers to quickly access information on the family after the adversary hearing if the family could not be engaged in the first 14 days.

ECFE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Recommended implementation steps for Early CFE work within the first 14 days

1. Meet with leaders of CVS, CPI and the CASA program to gauge buy-in and program ability to engage with families within the first 14 days:
 - Important to gauge buy-in from Regional Directors, Executive Directors and Program Directors to ensure that support for engaging families early exists.
 - Determine if training needs to occur with CPI on the role of CASA volunteers, CFE tools and schedule if needed.
 - Confirm that the process for CASA to attend the ex-parte hearing and transfer staffings between CPI and CVS is in place.
 - Emphasize how closely CASA supervisors need to work with volunteers and that early engagement is most effective when done with a volunteer, not just a CFE lead.
 - Reiterate that ECFE is not something new, that the CASA program and CPS/SSCC are already working together in this way, and that ECFE begins this work by CASA earlier.

2. Meet with judges and attorneys to explain ECFE and tools:
 - Discuss case assignment process if changes need to be made.
 - Determine whether CASA can be appointed at the ex-parte hearing if they are not currently appointed that early in the case.
 - Ensure the case is filed or dually filed as a SAPCR at the time of appointment.
 - Discuss the role of the CASA volunteer in the first 14 days and communicate that, per CASA standards, the CASA volunteer may not make a recommendation on removal.
 - Determine automatic or early appointment to the CASA program:
 - Timeframe of appointment to the program
 - Timeframe of assignment from CASA staff to the volunteer
 - Determine how contact information for CPS, AAL, attorneys for parents and CASA supervisors and volunteers will be shared.
 - Reiterate that ECFE is not something new, that the CASA program and CPS/SSCC are already working together in this way, and that ECFE begins this work by CASA earlier.

3. Provide training with CPI team, if needed, to include:
 - Role of the CASA volunteer, their role as guardian ad litem (GAL) and engagement with family.
 - Overview of CFE.
 - Tools most used during first 14 days (Connectedness Map, Genogram, Circles of Trust).
 - Family searching capability.
 - CASA/DFPS MOU and discussion of confidentiality.

4. Pre-service training and in-service training on ECFE, CFE tools and the value of family engagement, to include:
 - The role of CASA volunteers in the first 14 days.
 - CASA advocacy and family engagement during ECFE.
 - Key tools used by volunteers in the first 14 days.
 - Data entry into Optima to track CFE tools and CFE meetings activity types.

CONCLUSION

Earlier engagement of families within the first 14 days between CASA appointment and the adversary hearing is beneficial for all involved. The use of Collaborative Family Engagement in this time period can be helpful for relationship-building between CASA and parents; increasing communication between the CASA volunteer, parents, and CPI; and increasing the number of connections known for the child. For programs that are appointed at the ex-parte hearing and are involved in CFE, using CFE early, beginning in the second year of implementation, is recommended.



**FOR MORE INFORMATION OR QUESTIONS PLEASE CONTACT THE CFE TEAM AT
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