FINAL REPORT

Evaluation of Upfront Family Finding | Phase 2

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Nationally, more than 250,000 children enter foster care each year as the result of abuse or neglect, and more than 400,000 children and youth are in out-of-home care at any time (U.S. DHHS, 2020). Over the past decades, child welfare agencies have strived to identify and engage relatives with whom children can be placed or maintain close connections during and after their time in foster care. Previous research has found that, while in foster care, children placed with relatives experience greater placement stability and have better mental health and behavioral outcomes than children placed with non-relatives (Winokur et al, 2018). Additionally, children placed with relatives continue to reach permanency (reunification, guardianship, or adoption) and have lower rates of re-entry than children placed with non-relatives (Winokur et al, 2018, Wheeler & Vollet, 2017). Many agencies, including Los Angeles County's Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), have implemented relative search and engagement programs, known as "family finding," to strengthen children's family connections and to enhance the likelihood that children can live with kin when they are unable to remain at home.

Before implementing the Upfront Family Finding (UFF) program, DCFS focused its family finding efforts on children who had been in care for long periods of time. With UFF, which started in October 2016 in two local "pilot" offices (Glendora and Santa Fe Springs) and has now expanded to 10 offices, specialized workers in the Permanency Partners Program (P3) conduct family finding when children are first removed from their home. P3 workers serve children not initially placed with relatives, but the importance of finding and engaging relatives for placement and other supports for all children is emphasized to all staff in the offices implementing UFF. In 2018, Child Trends completed Phase 1 of the UFF evaluation in the two pilot offices and found that UFF resulted in increased relative placements, although findings related to the stability of relative placements and timely reunification were mixed. In 2020, Child Trends completed Phase 2 of the evaluation to analyze longer-term outcomes for children placed with relatives in the pilot offices and to examine the program's implementation and outputs as well as short-term outcomes for children in the six UFF "expansion" offices that began implementing the program in 2019.[1] This report summarizes the findings from the Phase 2 evaluation.

Study Methodology

Phase 2 of the UFF evaluation included outcome and implementation studies. The goals were to:

- Examine longer-term outcomes for children placed with relatives (initially or subsequently) in the pilot offices compared to children placed with relatives in offices not implementing UFF (comparison offices). Outcomes were drawn from administrative data, California's Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) and included: placement stability, reunification, adoption/guardianship, subsequent allegation, and re-entry.
    - The study compares children placed with relatives through UFF to children *also placed with relatives* in offices not implementing UFF to isolate the effects of UFF specifically, not relative

[1] The six UFF expansion offices are: South County, Belvedere, West San Fernando Valley, Santa Clarita, Wateridge, and Hawthorne. The first four began UFF in May 2019, and the latter two began in November 2019. Two additional offices, West LA and VT Corridor, began implementing UFF in January 2018. They were not included in this study because implementation was not during the same timeframe.

care more generally. As noted above, the benefits of relative placement (versus non-relative placement) for children in foster care are well established by previous research.

- Describe the program and identify successes or barriers to implementing UFF in the expansion offices through interview and focus group findings.
- Examine relative identification and engagement for children served by P3 workers in the expansion offices. Ideally, we would have also investigated relative engagement for children in the comparison offices, but these data are collected only by P3 workers and are not available in the administrative data.
- Measure the program's effect on relative placement, relative placement stability, and reunification for all children in the expansion offices and the subpopulation of children not initially placed with relatives.

For this study, a relative placement was defined as a foster care placement with kin or with a non-relative extended family member (NREFM). Examples of NREFMs include teachers, medical professionals, neighbors, and family friends. The term "relative" in this report includes kin and NREFMs. Relative placements in our study did not include instances where children were released to non-offending parents because these situations are not included in CWS/CMS as relative foster care placements. As a result, we were unable to track placement, safety, and permanency outcomes for these children in a rigorous way. Los Angeles County's Office of Child Protection (OCP), however, does include children released to non-offending parents when reporting on the percentage of children in the UFF offices placed initially with family upon removal from their homes, because releasing children to non-offending parents effectively maintains family connections. Information about release to non-offending parents is recorded separately by staff in UFF offices and reported to OCP.

Long-term Outcome Findings (Pilot Offices)

- **UFF did not change the likelihood that, once placed with a relative, children move to a non-relative placement.** Children placed with relatives through UFF were equally likely to consistently stay with relatives (either with their first or subsequent relative placements) during their time in foster care as compared to children placed with relatives in DCFS offices not implementing UFF.
    - We did find, however, that UFF increased the probability that a child's first relative placement would disrupt when we measured placement moves to non-relative placements *and* other relatives. P3 staff reported that, to place children more quickly with relatives, workers in UFF pilot offices sometimes placed children in short-term relative placements while readying another relative for a longer-term placement. Children in comparison offices were less likely to be placed with relatives, and those who were placed with relatives were not placed as quickly; however, they were less likely to leave their first relative placement for another relative's home.
- **Overall, UFF did not change the likelihood that children placed with relatives would reunify with their parents.** For all children placed with relatives in both pilot offices, UFF had no effect on reunification. However, for the subpopulation of children not initially placed with relatives, children served by P3 workers had a lower likelihood of reunifying, a finding driven by the Santa Fe Springs office. This finding could be unique to Santa Fe Springs because UFF had no effect on reunification for children in Glendora or in the six expansion offices.
- **UFF was associated with an increase in the likelihood that a child placed with relatives would be adopted or have a finalized guardianship.** This was true across the two pilot offices and for all children as well as children not initially placed with relatives, but the finding was stronger in Santa Fe Springs, where reunification had decreased following the implementation of UFF.

- **UFF did not adversely affect child safety.** There was no evidence that UFF influenced the likelihood that children placed with relatives who then exited to permanency (reunification, adoption, or guardianship) would experience a subsequent substantiated maltreatment allegation. Descriptive trends pointed to reductions in re-entry for children who were placed with relatives and then reunified or had a finalized guardianship,[2] but findings were not statistically significant.

Table 1. Summary of findings from long-term outcomes study, statistically significant effects of UFF noted

	All children placed with relatives	P3 children placed with relatives
Relative placement disruption (to any placement)	Increase	Increase
Relative placement disruption (to a non-relative placement)	None	None
Reunification	None	Decrease
Adoption/guardianship	Increase	Increase+
Subsequent allegation	None	None
Re-entry	None	None

+ Marginally significant increase p<.10

Expansion Office Findings

Program outputs and implementation findings

- **Findings from virtual focus groups with staff and administrators from two of the six expansion offices (Wateridge and Hawthorne) indicate implementation of UFF in these offices was similar to the pilot offices.** Challenges and successes identified during focus groups were also similar to the pilot offices, notwithstanding the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (more below).
- **The COVID-19 pandemic affected the implementation of UFF.** Much of the study period (May 2019 – November 2020) occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic that began in early March 2020. COVID-19 affected office operations which in turn hindered communication among staff and staff's ability to perform many of their job responsibilities, including meeting with families and children in person and approving relatives for placement.
- **An average of 10 relatives were found for children served by P3; all but 9 of the 722 children served by P3 workers during the study period had at least one relative identified.** The average number of relatives identified was lower than the pilot offices, where an average of 17 relatives per child were found. It is not clear why fewer relatives were found, but two possibilities include the ongoing COVID-

[2] We could not measure re-entry among children who were adopted since children who re-enter care after adoption are assigned a new unique id in the administrative data system.

19 pandemic and the community's distrust of DCFS, raised by focus group participants in some of the expansion offices.

- **P3 workers in the expansion offices were equally likely (compared to the pilot offices) to successfully engage found relatives.** The majority (94%) of P3 children had at least one relative willing to provide some type of support (e.g., phone calls, financial support, transportation).
- **After P3 services ended, more than half of children had caregivers who agreed or strongly agreed that they were benefitting from relative engagement**. Specifically, these caregivers (relative or non-relative foster caregivers or biological parents)[3] agreed that the child had more relatives involved in their life, benefitted from relative involvement, and appeared to be more connected with relatives.

Outcome findings

- **UFF increased the probability of relative placement for children who were not initially placed with relatives (those served by P3 workers).** Before UFF was implemented, 32 percent of children not initially placed with relatives had experienced a relative placement within six months. Post-UFF, this increased to 40 percent. When this outcome was examined among the broader group of all newly detained children in the UFF offices, however, there was no statistically significant increase. This differs from the findings from the pilot offices where there was an increase in relative placement for all children, indicating an office-wide impact of the program. We know that, because of COVID-19, the UFF expansion offices were unable to have the same frequent office-wide meetings related to family finding that were held in the pilot offices. In addition, the pandemic limited informal conversations among P3 workers and other staff, likely lessening UFF's office-wide impact.
- **Across the expansion offices, there was no effect of UFF on relative placement disruption when measuring moves to any placement (relative or non-relative) and when measuring moves to non-relative placements only.** We did, however, find some evidence of an increase in relative placement disruption in Service Bureau 1 (South County) when we examined the Service Bureaus separately.[4]
- **Across the expansion offices, we found no effect of UFF on a child's likelihood of reunification.** This was true for all children and for the population of children not initially placed with relatives.

Table 2. Summary of findings from expansion offices outcomes study, statistically significant effects of UFF noted for each outcome of interest

	All children	P3 children
Relative placement disruption (to any placement)	None	Increase
Relative placement disruption (to a non-relative placement)	None	None
Reunification (among children placed with relatives)	None	None

[3] The survey respondent was the child's caregiver at the end of P3 services (approximately 90 days after removal); their relationship to the child could be a relative, non-relative, or the biological parent (if the child reunified or was placed with the non-offending parent).
[4] South County was the only office in Service Bureau 1; the remaining five offices were in Service Bureau 2.

Conclusions

In summary, results from the study of the expansion offices indicate that UFF appears to have been implemented in these offices in a manner similar to the pilot offices (COVID-19 notwithstanding) and that P3 workers are successfully engaging relatives and finding relative placements for children in the program. Findings indicate that the program can be scaled successfully throughout the county. Outcome findings from pilot and expansion offices indicate that more children are being placed with relatives and that these children are equally likely, compared to similar children placed with relatives in offices not implementing UFF, to experience stable placement with relatives and to reach permanency through reunification. Findings from the pilot offices further suggest that children placed with relatives through UFF have a greater likelihood of being adopted or having a finalized guardianship if unable to be reunited with their parents.

Section 1. Introduction

Nationally, more than 250,000 children enter foster care each year due to some form of abuse or neglect (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [U.S. DHHS], 2020). Previous research has found that, while in foster care, children placed with relatives experience greater placement stability and have better mental health and behavioral outcomes than children placed with non-relatives (Winokur et al, 2018). Additionally, children placed with relatives continue to reach permanency (reunification, guardianship, or adoption) and have lower rates of re-entry than children placed with non-relatives (Winokur et al, 2018; Wheeler & Vollet, 2017). Though efforts to place children in foster care with relatives are increasing, children are still almost twice as likely to be placed in the care of non-relatives than with relatives (58% in non-relative foster homes, group homes, institutions, and supervised independent living placements, compared to 32% in relative foster homes in 2018; U.S. DHHS, 2020). Over the past several decades, child welfare agencies have strived to identify and engage relatives with whom children can be placed or maintain close connections during their time in foster care and beyond. Many agencies have implemented relative search and engagement interventions, often referred to as family finding.

Prior to the initiation of the Upfront Family Finding (UFF) program in 2016, Los Angeles County's Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) focused its family finding efforts on children in care for long periods of time. UFF was first implemented in two local "pilot" offices (Glendora and Santa Fe Springs) and has now expanded to a total of 10 offices. Specialized workers who are part of the Permanency Partners Program (P3) conduct family finding when children are first removed from their home. P3 workers only serve children not initially placed with relatives, but the importance of finding and engaging relatives for placement and other supports for all children is emphasized to all staff in the offices implementing UFF. In 2018, Child Trends completed Phase 1 of the evaluation of UFF (Welti et al., 2018) in the two pilot offices and found that UFF resulted in more children placed with relatives, although findings related to the stability of relative placements and timely reunification were mixed. This report presents findings from Phase 2 of the UFF evaluation, examining longer-term outcomes for children placed with relatives in the pilot offices and early findings from the UFF "expansion" offices.

Background

For many children in foster care, connecting to family members who can provide ongoing emotional support, if not a placement, offers substantial benefits. These include increasing the children's sense of self-efficacy and well-being and enhancing their ability to safely and successfully navigate their lives (Andersson, 2005). Identifying and engaging a large group of relatives for foster youth is a common approach to connecting children in foster care to their extended families, providing an opportunity for placement while in foster care, as well as legal and emotional permanency (Vandivere & Malm, 2015). Many studies demonstrate the benefits of placing children in foster care with their kin as opposed to with non-related foster families or in congregate care settings. Children in foster care who are placed with relatives experience fewer behavior problems and mental health disorders and better well-being than children placed in non-relative care (Winokur et al 2018). They also experience more placement stability (Winokur et al. 2018; Bell & Romano, 2017) while in out-of-home care. Some studies have found that placement with relatives can slow reunification with birth parents, while increasing guardianship placements (Bell & Romano, 2017). However, other studies have found similar reunification rates (Winokur et al. 2018). Finally, children placed with kin

are less likely to experience subsequent maltreatment or to re-enter care than children who had been in non-relative placements (Wheeler & Vollet, 2017).

Many child welfare agencies have replicated Kevin Campbell's Family Finding model, inspired by family tracing techniques that agencies, such as the Red Cross, have used to locate and reunite family members separated by civil disturbance, natural disaster, or war (National Institute for Family Connectedness, 2020) and other relative search and engagement interventions to ensure family connections for children in care (Vandivere & Malm, 2015). In 2008, when Child Trends conducted a review of existing family finding programs around the country, agencies in 22 states were implementing programs based on the model. More than a decade later, most states are implementing some type of family finding program.

Federal legislation over the past several decades has encouraged family finding efforts. The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (FCSIAA) of 2008 promotes permanent family placements for children in care by requiring that relatives be notified when children enter care. More information about FCSIAA can be found in Child Trends' first evaluation of UFF (Welti et al., 2018). The Family First Prevention Services Act of 2018 provides further supports for kinship placements by allowing states to claim federal Title IV-E funding for kinship navigation programs that meet a certain evidentiary standard, allowing states to expand these programs (McKlindon, 2019).

Establishing and expanding Upfront Family Finding

Family finding and engagement is a critical part of the California's Continuum of Care Reform (CCR)'s initiative to reduce the use of congregate care and improve children's outcomes by identifying and notifying relatives when children have been placed in foster care, as well as fostering lifelong connections for youth in care (California Department of Social Services [CDSS], 2017). At the same time, one of CCR's key elements, the Resource Family Approval (RFA) process streamlined approvals of relatives and nonrelative extended family members (NREFMs) as foster care providers (CDSS, 2017). For more details of CCR and RFA, see the previous UFF evaluation report (Welti et al., 2018).

In May 2016, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors enacted a motion mandating the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and the Probation Department, in collaboration with the Office of Child Protection and the Courts, to report on ways to accomplish a set of specific goals. As presented in the motion, these goals were to:

a. develop a plan to increase relative and NREFM placements and the overall role of relatives;
b. establish the UFF program based on current legislation, models, and best practices from other jurisdictions, and partnering with Community Based Organizations (CBOs); and
c. develop a single countywide protocol for UFF to be coordinated with the existing P3 program and Probation Child Welfare, with a timeline and estimated budget for program implementation, training, and policy development (LA DCFS, 2016).

In response to the motion, Los Angeles DCFS, in consultation with the Office of Child Protection and the Center for Strategic Public-Private Partnerships, developed a pilot program that incorporates the key elements outlined by the Board of Supervisors. The UFF program focuses on children who are detained (DCFS's term for removing children from their parents) and are to be placed in non-relative care at the time of detention.

The UFF program began on October 1, 2016, in two DCFS offices, Glendora and Santa Fe Springs (referred to as "pilot offices" in this report). In January 2018, UFF expanded to Vermont Corridor and West LA and then in May 2019 the program expanded again to the South County, Belvedere, West San Fernando Valley and Santa Clarita offices. Most recently, in November 2019, UFF was initiated in the Hawthorne and Wateridge offices. Upfront Family Finding was initially funded by DCFS for the Glendora, Santa Fe Springs, Vermont Corridor, and West LA offices. The Department of Mental Health provided additional funding between October 2018 and June 2020 to help extend the program to the six expansion offices. Ongoing funding for UFF is provided by DCFS. UFF is just one component of the broader P3 within DCFS. In 2004, DCFS implemented P3 to address the need for permanent families for older youth in long-term foster care (LA DCFS, n.d.). P3 Children's Social Workers (CSWs) are recently retired social workers and supervisors who are employed on a part-time basis to find kin and NREFMs for children with ongoing cases (LA DCFS, 2014). As part of UFF, P3 CSWs are re-assigned to assist the primary social workers of newly detained children in searching for and engaging relatives during the first 90 days the child is in foster care. In offices implementing the program, back-end P3 referrals (i.e., referrals for P3 services for children already in care for some time) are assigned to P3 units in non-UFF offices. To support the P3 workers, clerical staff in each UFF office received training on searching for relatives and sending letters to notify family members when children enter care. Notably, as part of UFF implementation, the importance of family finding was emphasized to all staff in the UFF offices.

Prior to UFF, Los Angeles County's family finding efforts were focused on children in care for long periods of time, i.e., the back-end referrals mentioned above. Through the UFF pilot, DCFS examined whether family finding conducted at the front end, that is, when children are first detained, resulted in more children being placed with relatives, more stable relative placements, and more timely reunifications. Results from the first evaluation of the UFF, conducted by Child Trends, (Welti et al, 2018) found an increase in relative placement for children served by the pilot offices implementing UFF, both for the children not initially placed with relatives (and served by P3 workers) and for all children. Findings related to the stability of relative placements and reunification were mixed.

This report presents findings from Child Trends' Phase 2 evaluation, examining 1) long-term outcomes for the children served by the pilot offices (Glendora and Santa Fe Springs) and 2) short-term outcomes and P3 program outputs for children served by six expansion offices (South County, Belvedere, West San Fernando Valley, Santa Clarita, Wateridge and Hawthorne). Child Trends also examined UFF implementation in two of the expansion offices, Hawthorne and Wateridge.[5] It is important to note that the start of the COVID-19 pandemic coincides with the evaluation period, particularly for the expansion offices. During phone interviews and focus groups in June 2020, staff indicated the pandemic was affecting office operations and their ability to perform many of their job responsibilities.

Study design

The goal of the long-term outcome study was to measure the program's effect on longer-term outcomes for children who were placed with relatives (either initially or subsequently) including placement stability, reunification, other permanency outcomes (adoption and guardianship), subsequent allegation, and foster

[5] Child Trends focused analyses on these six new offices because these newer offices began implementation during a similar timeframe (May 2019—November 2019) and are collecting additional information regarding P3 children that is not available for children in West LA and Vermont Corridor (which began implementing UFF in January 2018).

care re-entry. The observation period of the initial evaluation was too short to examine effects on adoption/guardianship, subsequent allegation and re-entry, but these outcomes could be added in this second phase as the program had been running in the pilot offices for four years at the time of data analysis. It is important to note that the study compared children placed with relatives through UFF to children also placed with relatives in offices not implementing UFF. In this way, the evaluation isolated the effects of UFF specifically and not relative care more generally. As noted above, the benefits of relative placement (versus non-relative placement) for children in foster care is well established by previous research. This evaluation aimed to understand if the more dedicated efforts by UFF to place children quickly with relatives at the beginning of their case could result in different outcomes for these children.

The goal of the expansion office study was to measure UFF's effect on shorter-term outcomes for children in the six expansion offices including: the probability of relative placement, relative placement stability, and reunification. Additionally, in the six expansion offices, we examined relative identification and engagement outcomes for children served by P3 workers. For both the long-term and short-term outcome studies we analyzed outcomes for all newly detained children, as well as for children who received P3 services (i.e., new detentions where the child was not initially placed with relatives). Finally, the goals of the implementation study were to gain a detailed description of the family finding activities and strategies in two of the expansion offices, to determine whether any challenges were encountered during the start of implementation, and to identify what was working well during implementation. Wateridge and Hawthorne are unique in that they serve communities that have fewer resources and have a history of distrust of DCFS. These offices also had very little family finding structure in place prior to the program, compared to other offices that have implemented UFF. Results from this data collection can provide DCFS with an understanding of the early implementation of UFF in offices with these characteristics.

Defining relative placement

Per California law, "relative" means an adult who is related to the child by blood, adoption, or affinity within the fifth degree of kinship.[6] In addition to relatives, DCFS includes non-relative extended family members (NREFMs) in its family findings efforts. Examples of NREFMs include teachers, medical professionals, neighbors, and family friends. For this study, placements with NREFMs were counted as relative placements and the term "relative" in this report includes both kin and NREFMs, unless NREFMs are explicitly identified. Relative placements in our study did not include instances where children were released, following a detention hearing, to non-offending parents because these situations are not categorized as relative foster care placements in the administrative data used for our analysis. As a result, we were unable to track placement, safety, and permanency outcomes for these children in a rigorous way. Los Angeles County's Office of Child Protection (OCP), however, does include children released to non-offending parents when reporting on the percentage of children in the UFF offices that are placed initially with family upon removal from their homes, because releasing children to non-offending parents effectively maintains family connections.[7] Information about release to non-offending parents is recorded separately by staff in UFF offices and reported to OCP.

[6] This can include stepparents, stepsiblings, and all relatives whose status is preceded by the words "great," "great-great," or "grand," or the spouse of any of these persons, even if the marriage was terminated by death or dissolution.
[7] For example, Progress Update on the Work of the Office of Child Protection – October 2020. Available at: http://ocp.lacounty.gov/Portals/OCP/

Research questions

The Phase 2 evaluation addressed several research questions, which are presented below according to the component of the study in which we addressed them.

Long-term outcome study (pilot offices)

The long-term outcome study addressed the following research questions related to child-level outcomes for all newly detained children served by the pilot offices.

- Did UFF change the likelihood that children who were placed with relatives (either initially or subsequently):
    - experienced placement disruptions?
    - reunified with their parents?
    - were adopted or had a finalized guardianship?

- Did UFF change the likelihood that children who were placed with relatives and who exited to permanency:[8]
    - experienced a subsequent substantiated allegation?
    - re-entered foster care?

These same research questions were then addressed for the subpopulation of children who were served by the P3 workers.

Short-term outcome study (expansion offices)

The short-term outcome study addressed the following research questions related to child-level outcomes for all newly detained children served by the expansion pilot offices:

After UFF implementation, were more children placed with relatives (initially or subsequently)?

- Did UFF change the likelihood that children who were placed with relatives:
    - experienced placement disruptions?
    - reunified with their parents?

These same research questions were then addressed for the subpopulation of children who were served by the P3 workers.

We also examined program outputs for P3 children served by the six expansion offices:

- How many relatives were identified and interested in support/placement at time of P3 case closure?
- What types of relatives (maternal, paternal, NREFMs) were identified and interested in support/placement at time of P3 case closure?

[8] We could not study re-entry among children who exited to adoption because their unique identification number changes in the administrative data system.

- What were children's placements at time of P3 case closure (including placement with non-offending parents)?
- Were P3 children receiving social support? (participation of family members at meetings)
- Were P3 children benefitting from relative involvement? (based on caregiver reports pre- and post-UFF)
- What percentage of P3 children changed schools after detention?

Ideally, we would have also investigated relative engagement for children in the comparison offices, but these data are only collected by P3 workers and are not available in the administrative data.

Implementation study

- What was the process for beginning implementation and training staff?
- How was the relative search process implemented? What types of non-placement supports were relatives providing children?
- Were the P3 services implemented differently across offices?
- What were the roles of the P3 workers, and how did program managers and staff feel about the shift in focus of family finding services?
- How, if at all, did other child welfare policies and practices (RFA requirements) affect the P3 workers' duties and the services provided?
- What were some successes and challenges of implementing UFF as reported by staff at different levels?

Data collection

Long- and short-term outcome studies

Data collection for the outcome study utilized two sources, which provided information on child placement and permanency outcomes as well as relative connections for children served by P3 workers.

Supplemental program data

The evaluation team received supplemental data logs, kept by staff at the expansion offices, on the children served by the P3 workers. These data were provided for the six offices for all closed cases from May 2019 to August 2020 and included information about relatives identified and the types of support offered by relatives. Logs also included responses to a questionnaire given to the children's caregivers at the start of P3 services (pre-survey) and again at the end of the P3 services (post-survey). The questionnaire asked the caregiver to report on whether the child appeared to be benefiting from relative involvement and whether caregivers themselves felt supported.

Administrative data

In November 2020, the evaluation team received extracts from the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS), the state's administrative data system, for newly detained children in out-of-home placement between August 2015 and November 2020. The extracts contained demographic, referral, medical, placement, and discharge information for children county-wide.

Implementation study

The implementation study focused on the two expansion offices that most recently implemented UFF, Hawthorne and Wateridge. In June 2020, Child Trends conducted focus groups with staff from these offices. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all focus groups were conducted by phone and generally lasted between one to one and a half hours. Child Trends conducted focus groups with administrators, supervisors, caseworkers, clerical staff, and P3 CSWs. See Table 1 for the number and types of site visit participants.

Table 1. Number and types of focus group participants

	Offices	
	Hawthorne	Wateridge
Administrators	4	3
Supervisors	6	6
Caseworkers	3	10
Clerical Staff	2	3
P3 CSWs	2	3
Total	17	25

Section 2. Long-term Outcomes Study (Pilot Offices)

Methods

Child Trends used difference-in-difference analysis, a quasi-experimental design, to study whether UFF affected the outcomes of interest. Specifically, we estimated the effect of UFF by comparing changes in outcomes over time for children served by the pilot offices (Glendora and Santa Fe Springs) to changes in outcomes over time for a population that did not received the UFF intervention (i.e., children served by all other DCFS offices). If UFF influenced an outcome, we would expect to see a larger change in that outcome for pilot office children than for comparison office children when comparing the pre- and post-UFF time periods.

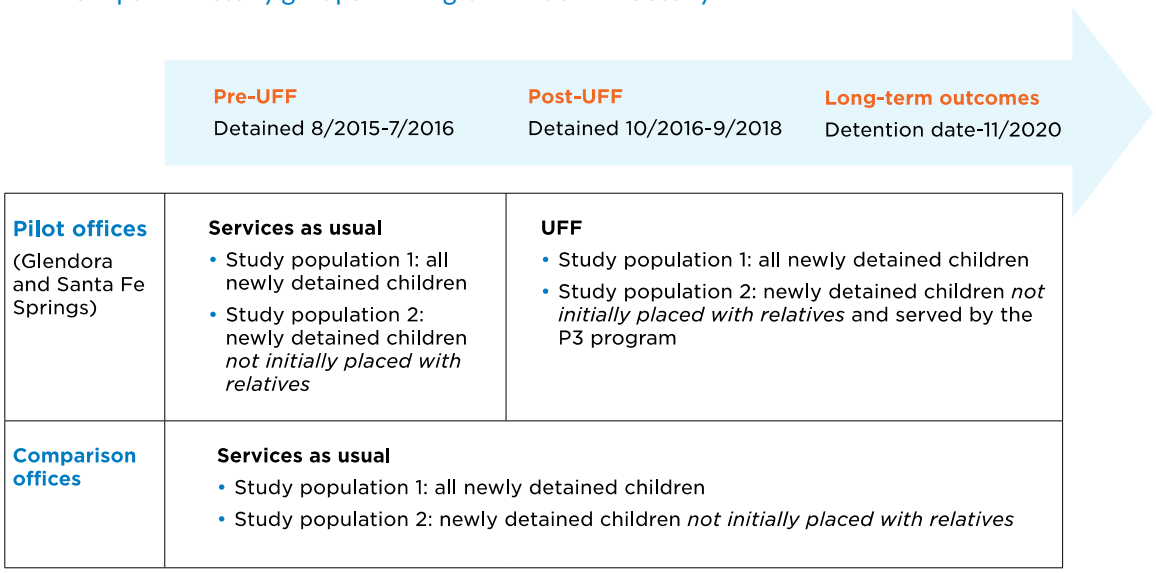
To incorporate the difference-in-difference design, our analytic sample included all children newly detained before and after the implementation of UFF in both the comparison and pilot offices. We also examined a subsample of newly detained children who were not initially placed with relatives (in the pilot offices, after the implementation of UFF, these children were served by P3 workers). This allowed us to compare outcomes for children served by P3 to similar children in the pilot offices before UFF, as well as to their counterparts in the comparison offices.

Within the difference-in-difference design, we employed survival analysis to calculate the probability and timing of the outcomes of interest. For relative placement disruption, reunification, and adoption/guardianship, we use competing risk analysis, a type of survival analysis that controls for competing events that prevent a child from reaching the outcome of interest (e.g., a child who reunifies is no

longer eligible to for adoption).[9] We calculated the probability and timing of our outcomes of interest separately for four groups: 1) children detained before the implementation of UFF in the pilot offices, 2) children detained after the implementation of UFF in the pilot offices, 3) children detained before UFF in the comparison offices, and 4) children detained after UFF in the comparison offices (See Figure 1). We also split the groups and conducted the analysis separately for pilot office children by specific office—Glendora or Santa Fe Springs.

We graphed our results to illustrate the incidence of our events of interest over time. The differences in the graphed functions demonstrate the effect of UFF (per the difference-in-difference design). We then used multivariate models to test whether differences were statistically significant, that is, large enough to be considered not due to chance. Findings reported as statistically significant are significant at $p < .05$ (95% confidence interval). Findings that are noted as marginally significant are significant at $p < .10$ (90% confidence interval). For more information about our methods, see Appendix 1.

Figure 1. Description of study groups for long-term outcomes study



Analytic sample

Our data included 19,135 children newly detained between August 1, 2015 and October 31, 2018. This time period includes one year prior to the start of UFF training activities, which began in August 2016 and two years after the implementation of UFF. We excluded children detained in August or September 2016 from the pre-UFF period because pre-pilot activities were already underway, and we wanted the pre-UFF period to represent a true baseline. The UFF program is designed for children who have not previously received any type of family search and engagement services, so the focus of the evaluation was on new detentions only. A child was considered newly detained if this was the first detention in their case, and if the child was

[9] For relative placement disruption, the competing event was exiting care. For the reunification outcome, the competing event was exiting care to a non-reunification outcome. For the adoption/guardianship outcome, the competing event was exiting care to reunification or a non-permanency outcome.

detained within two months of the case's opening. This eliminated detentions occurring during provision of family maintenance services or other circumstances in which family search and engagement could have occurred as part of case management. Very few children (2%) had two unique cases within our study period; among these children, we kept the first case to include in our sample (or the case associated with P3 services).

For the analysis of likelihood and timing of relative placement disruption, reunification, adoption/guardianship, we limited the sample to children placed with relatives, either initially or subsequently.[10] This limited our total analytic sample to 12,082. For the analysis of likelihood and timing of subsequent allegation and re-entry after the focal episode, we limited to children who were placed with relatives during their time in care and reunified, had a finalized guardianship, or were adopted (the re-entry analysis does not include those who were adopted since children who re-enter after adoption are assigned a new unique identification number in CWS/CMS). Total sample size for the analysis of subsequent allegation was 9,558 and total sample size for the analysis of re-entry was 7,406.

See Table 2 for a breakdown of the total number of children and the sample of children placed with relatives by pilot office and comparison office status. Table 3 displays characteristics that may influence the long-term outcomes of interest for the analytic sample of children placed with relatives (pre- and post-UFF time periods combined). These are the same characteristics included as controls in our multivariate analysis, as described above. Children placed with relatives in the UFF pilot offices (Glendora and Santa Fe Springs) were similar to children in other offices in terms of demographics and case characteristics, with a few exceptions. Children in the pilot offices were less likely to be Black and more likely to be documented as Unknown race/ethnicity. Most children with Unknown race/ethnicity were from Santa Fe Springs. Additionally, pilot office children were less likely to be part of a sibling group.

Characteristics of children in the pilot offices and the comparison offices were similar in the pre- and post-UFF periods, except a higher percentage of children were part of a sibling group in the post-UFF period (51% versus 57% for pilot offices and 53% versus 61% for comparison offices) and a higher percentage had a positive mental health screen[11] (1% versus 3% for pilot offices and 2% versus 3 % for comparison offices). Additionally, for the pilot offices, a higher percentage of children were documented as Unknown race in the post-UFF period (10% versus 20%) and fewer were documented as White, Black, or Hispanic (results not shown).

In the post-UFF period, the subset of children served by P3 (and eventually placed with relatives) in the pilot offices generally had similar characteristics to their counterparts—children in the comparison offices who were not initially placed with a relative (and eventually placed with a relative) with the exception of the racial/ethnic differences found for all children and noted above (results for the subsample not shown).

[10] We limit the sample to children who ever experienced a relative placement during the study period. We do not account for when the relative placement occurred or whether (and when) the relative placement disrupted.
[11] The Mental Health Screening Tool assesses for indicators of mental health or behavioral problems and environmental risk factors associated with the development of mental health needs. For this study, we identified children with a "positive-acute" or "positive-urgent" mental health screen, which would indicate the immediate need for further assessment by a mental health professional.

Table 2. Numbers of children in study groups

	Pre-UFF		Post-UFF	
Detainment period:	**08/2015 – 07/2016+**		**10/2016 – 10/ 2018**	
Study group:	All children	Children not initially placed with relatives	All children	Children not initially placed with relatives (served by P3 workers in pilot offices)
	Comparison offices			
Total	5,526	3,228	11,093	6,558
Relative care*	3,411	1,120	6,907	2,376
	Pilot offices			
Total	844	472	1,672	602
Relative care*	572	200	1,192	295
Glendora total	402	239	784	317
Relative care*	248	85	534	145
Santa Fe Springs total	442	233	888	285
Relative care*	324	115	658	150

+ Children detained in August and September 2016 in the pre-UFF period because pre-pilot activities were underway.
*Child was initially or subsequently placed with relatives.
Note: During the post-UFF period, there were children served by the pilot offices who, based on their CWS/CMS data, were not initially placed with relatives and not served by P3 workers. Some of these children were ineligible and others were referrals missed by staff. Our analyses do not include these children in the sample of children not initially placed with relatives for the pilot offices post-UFF; we include only children served by P3 workers.

Table 3. Characteristics of children newly detained during the study who experienced relative care

	Comparison offices	Pilot offices
Analytic sample: number of children placed with relatives pre- and post-UFF combined	10,318	1,764
Age at removal		
0-2	39%	38%
3-5	18%	17%
6-12	29%	30%
13+	14%	15%
Male	50%	48%
Race/ethnicity		
Non-Hispanic White	10%	10%
Non-Hispanic Black	23%	7%*
Hispanic	61%	63%
Non-Hispanic Other	2%	3%
Unknown	4%	17%*
Part of a sibling group	58%	55%*
Allegation type		
Sexual abuse	3%	2%
Physical abuse	11%	11%
Neglect	77%	77%
Emotional abuse	4%	5%
Other	5%	4%
Perpetrator was member of extended family	24%	25%
Positive mental health screen (positive-acute or positive-urgent)	2%	2%

*Difference between comparison offices and pilot offices is statistically significant at $p < .05$.

Results: pilot offices combined

In this section we describe the long-term outcomes for all newly detained children and for the subpopulation of newly detained children who were *not initially placed with relatives*. The subpopulation analysis compared the outcomes of P3 children (children not initially placed with relatives and thus served by the P3 workers in the pilot offices after the implementation of UFF) to the outcomes of their counterparts in the pilot offices before the implementation of UFF (children that would have been served by P3 workers if the program had been implemented at the time) and to the outcomes of their counterparts in the comparison offices (children that would have been served by P3 workers if they had been in the pilot offices).

We present findings for the pilot offices combined as they provide a more accurate depiction of the effect of UFF. We also comment on whether findings differ across the pilot offices. In Appendix 3 we include figures illustrating findings for pilot offices separately.

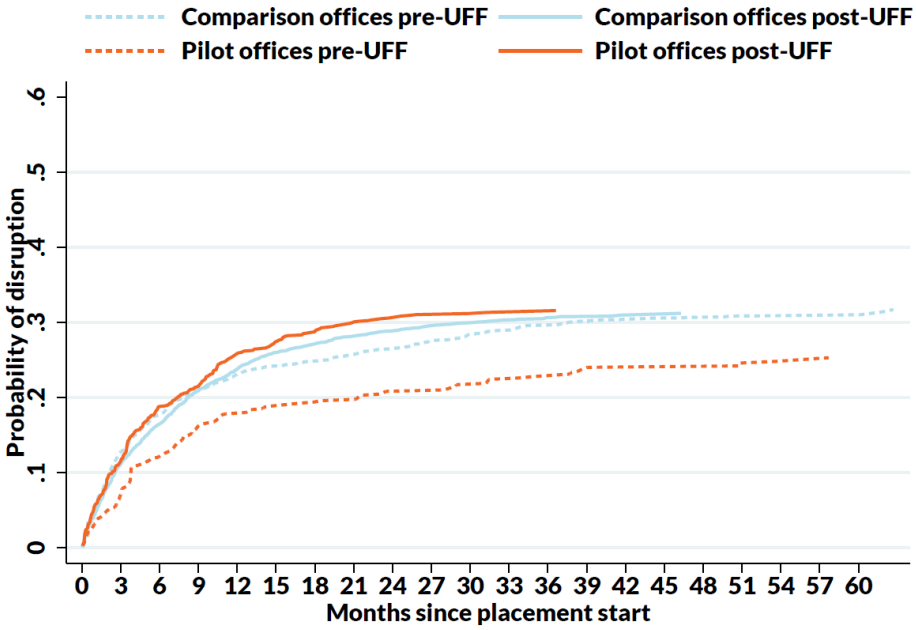
Relative placement disruption (moving to any other placement): All children

For children who ever lived with a relative during the study period (including children initially placed with a relative, as well as those not initially placed with a relative but who moved to a relative placement), we examined the probability that children's first relative placement would disrupt. We defined disruption as a move from the first relative placement to any other out-of-home placement or non-permanency outcome.[12]

We found evidence that UFF increased disruptions of first relative placements. This increase can be seen by comparing the sizes of the gaps between 1) the dashed and solid orange lines, pertaining to the pre-and post-UFF periods for the pilot offices, respectively, and 2) the dashed and solid blue lines, pertaining to the pre-and post-UFF periods for the comparison offices, respectively, in Figure 2. This trend was found in both offices but was stronger and statistically significant in Glendora only (see Figure A1 in Appendix 3). In considering this finding, however, it is important to note that the pilot offices had a relatively low baseline rate for disruptions; following UFF implementation, the disruption rate became similar to the average for the comparison offices. Following UFF implementation, the probability that the first relative placement would disrupt within one year was 25 percent for pilot office children, and 24 percent for children across the comparison offices.

[12] Non-permanency outcomes include (but are not limited to) running away, incarceration, or moving to a medical facility. We did not consider emancipation or reaching age of majority to be a disruption.

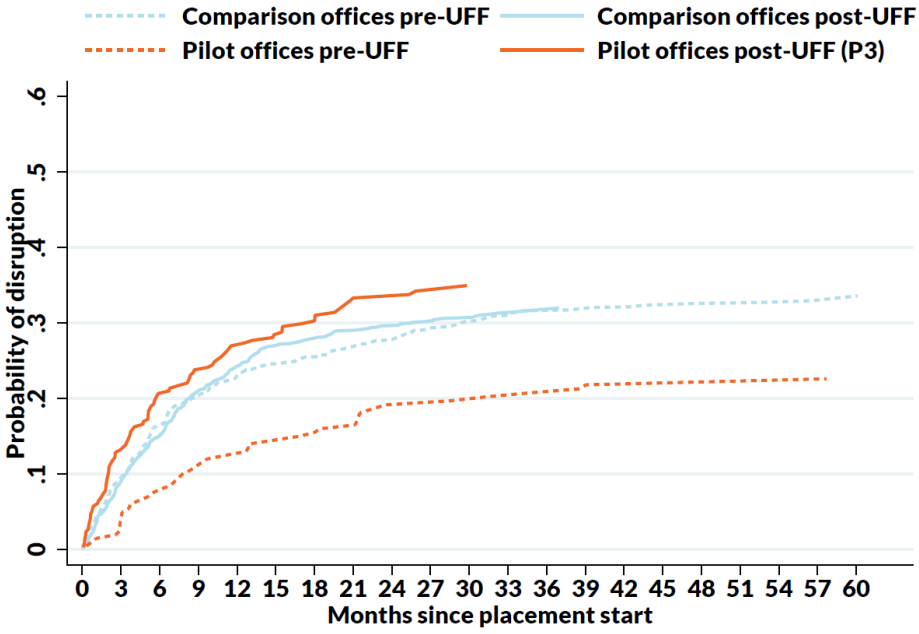
Figure 2. Probability of relative placement disruption over time, pilot and comparison offices pre- and post-UFF, all children



Relative placement disruption (moving to any other placement): Children not initially placed with relatives

As was the case with the full sample, we found that UFF was associated with an increased likelihood of relative placement disruption for children not initially placed with relatives (see Figure 3). The increase in disruption was similar in both offices (see Figure A2, Appendix 3).

Figure 3. Probability of relative placement disruption over time, pilot and comparison offices pre- and post-UFF, children not initially placed with relatives

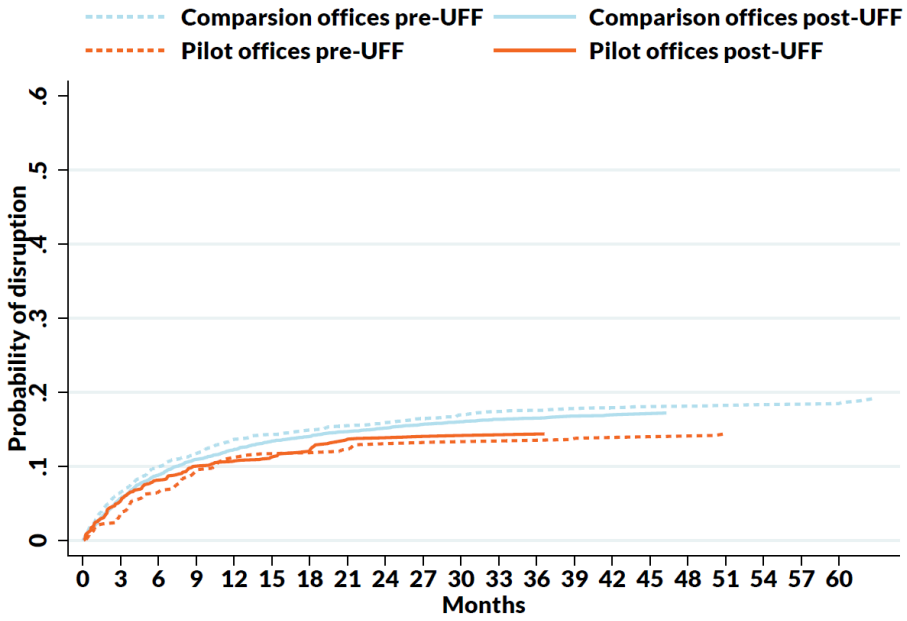


Relative placement disruption (moving to a non-relative placement): All children

Children in out-of-home care may move from a first relative placement to another relative's home, a move that is possibly planned and likely less traumatic than transitioning to a non-relative placement. For this reason, we examined only disruptions from the first relative placement to a non-relative placement.

Since this outcome does not count moves from one relative to another relative placement as disruptions, the disruption rate across all four groups was lower than when any move was treated as a disruption (i.e., all four lines in Figure 4 below are lower than the corresponding lines in Figure 3). UFF had no effect on whether a child's first relative placement would disrupt to a non-relative placement.

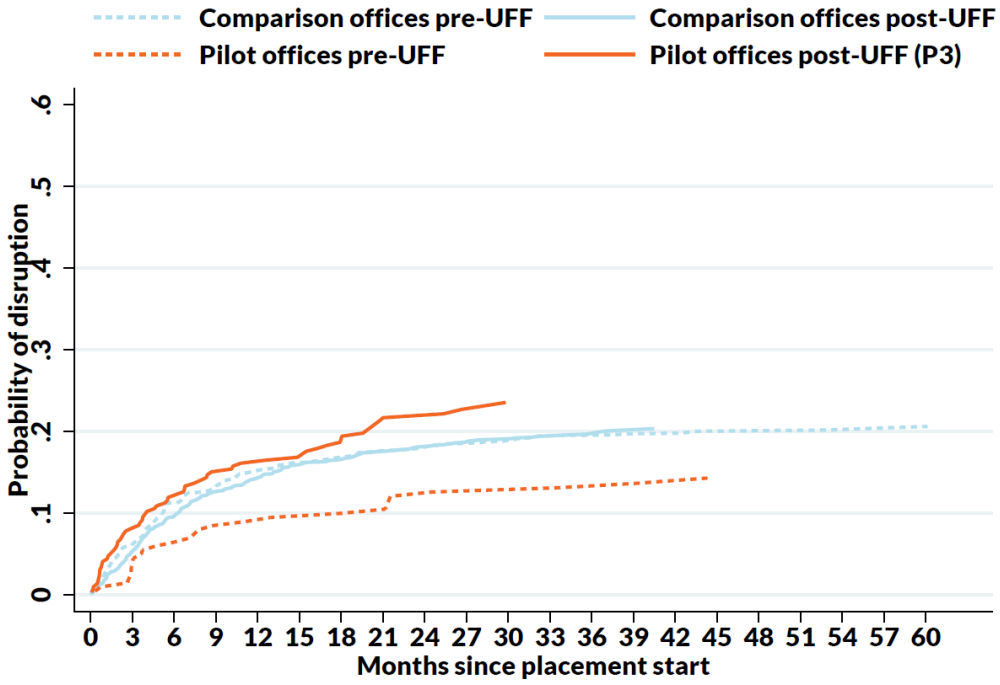
Figure 4. Probability of relative placement disruption to a non-relative placement, over time, pilot and comparison offices pre- and post-UFF, all children



Relative placement disruption (moving to a non-relative placement): Children not initially placed with relatives

For children not initially placed with relatives, but who were subsequently placed with relatives, the gaps in the graphed cumulative incidence functions appear to show an increase in disruption of first relative placements to non-relative placements after UFF (see Figure 5). However, the finding is not statistically significant in multivariate survival analysis models.

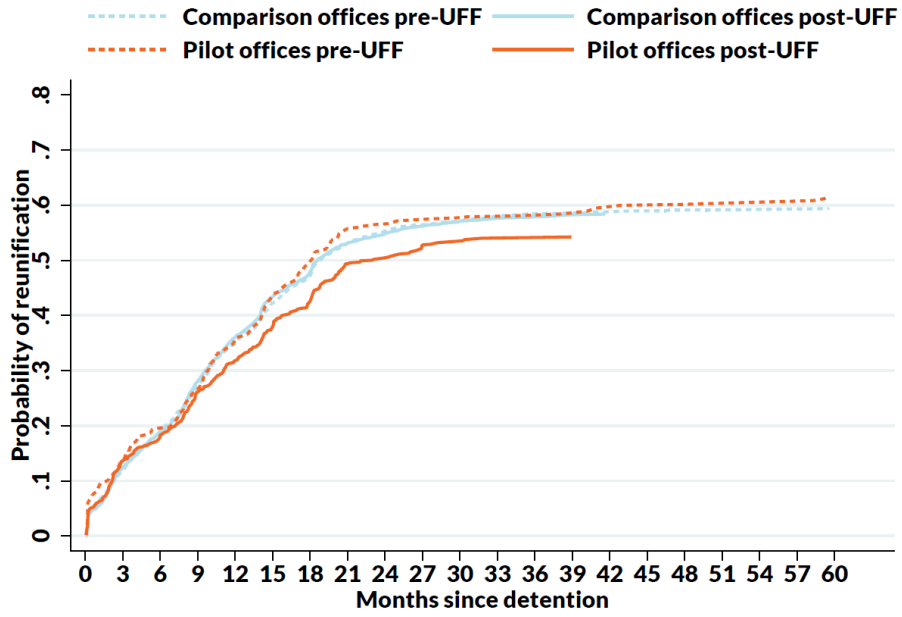
Figure 5. Probability of relative placement disruption to a non-relative placement, over time, pilot and comparison offices pre- and post-UFF, children not initially placed with relatives



Reunification: All children

Examining outcomes for children placed with relatives during the study period, we found no evidence that UFF had a statistically significant effect on the probability of reunification when we combined the pilot offices (see Figure 6). However, when studying reunification separately for the two pilot offices, we found that implementation of UFF was associated with a decrease in reunification in Santa Fe Springs (see Figure A5, Appendix 3). There was no statistically significant change in the probability of reunification for Glendora children.

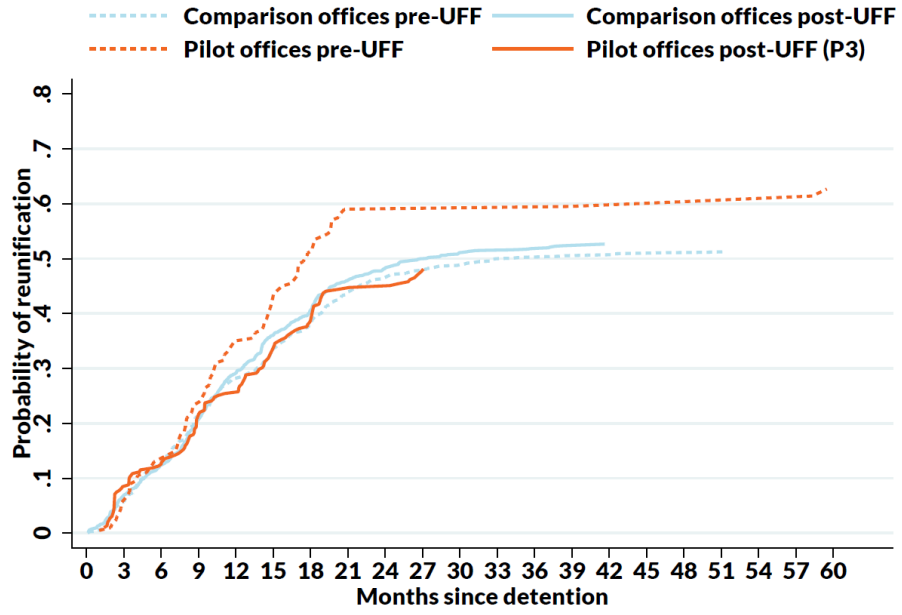
Figure 6. Probability of reunification over time, pilot and comparison offices pre- and post-UFF, all children



Reunification: Children not initially placed with relatives

For the subpopulation of children not initially placed with relatives who subsequently moved to relative placement, UFF resulted in a lower likelihood of reunification over time. At 18 months post-detention, the likelihood that a child would have reunified fell from 51 percent to 39 percent between the pre- and post-UFF periods for the pilot offices (see Figure 7). This finding was primarily driven by Santa Fe Springs (where there was a relatively high rate of reunification pre-UFF); there was no statistically significant change for children in Glendora (see Figure A6, Appendix 3).

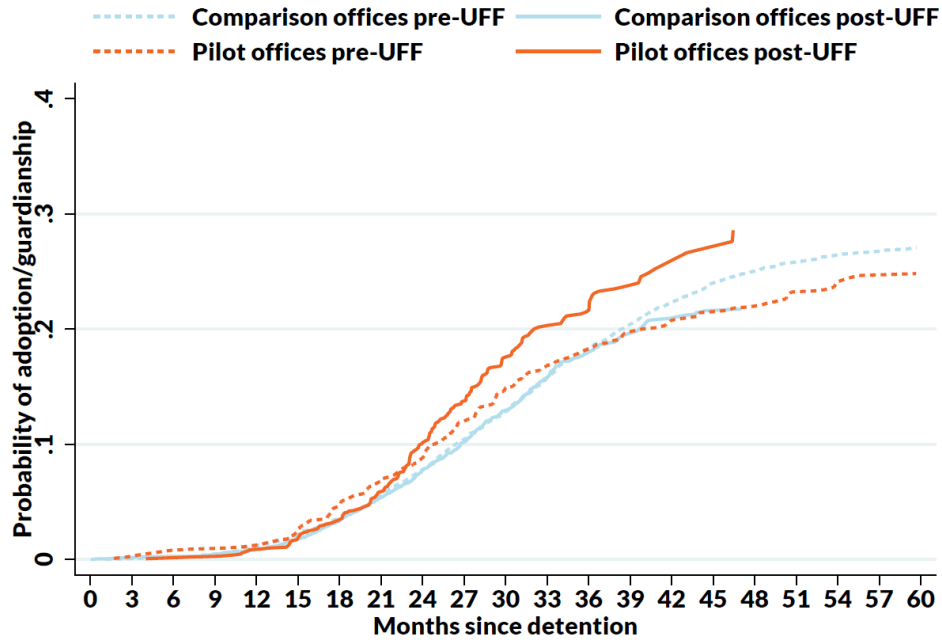
Figure 7. Probability of reunification over time, pilot and comparison offices pre- and post UFF, children not initially placed with relatives who experienced relative placement



Adoption and guardianship: All children

We found that UFF increased the likelihood that a child who experienced relative placement would exit out-of-home care to adoption or guardianship. By 48 months post-detention, 29 percent of pilot office children detained post-UFF exited to guardianship or adoption, versus 22 percent pre-UFF. For comparison office children, there was a small reduction in the percentage achieving guardianship or adoption (25% pre-UFF and 22% post-UFF; see Figure 8). Taken together, the increase between the two time periods among pilot office children and the decrease among comparison group children resulted in a statistically significant effect of the UFF program on the likelihood of adoption and guardianship. The finding was statistically significant in both offices but stronger in Santa Fe Springs (see Figure A7, Appendix 3).

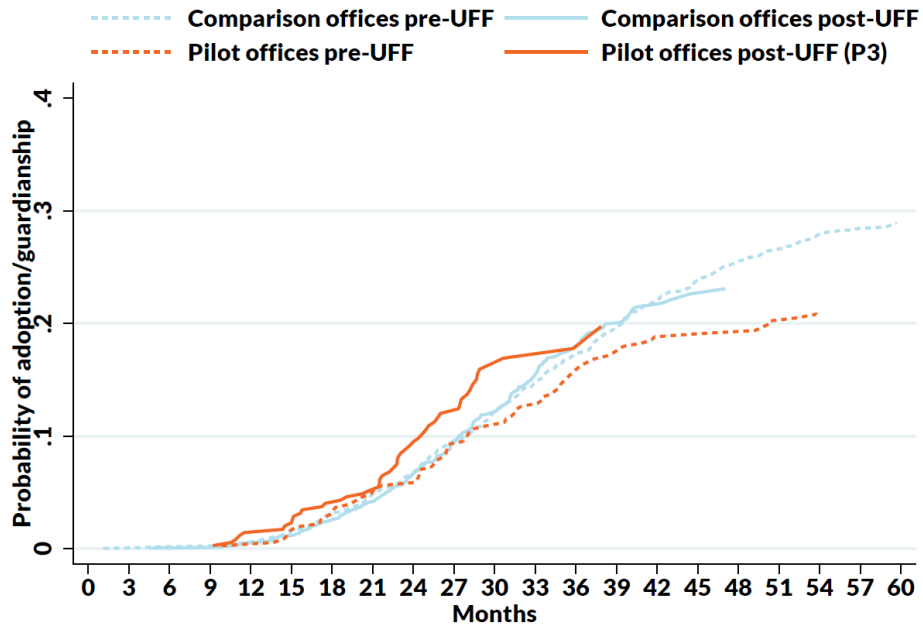
Figure 8. Probability of adoption/guardianship over time, pilot and comparison offices pre- and post-UFF, all children initially or subsequently placed with relatives



Adoption and guardianship: Children not initially placed with relatives

For children not initially placed with relatives, trends in adoptions and guardianship were similar to those found for all children, although the finding was only marginally statistically significant (p=.06). (See Figure 9.) This is likely because, for this subpopulation, the increase in adoption and guardianship was concentrated in one office, Santa Fe Springs (see Figure A8, Appendix 3).

Figure 9. Probability of adoption/guardianship over time, pilot and comparison offices pre- and post-UFF, children not initially placed with relatives who experienced relative placement

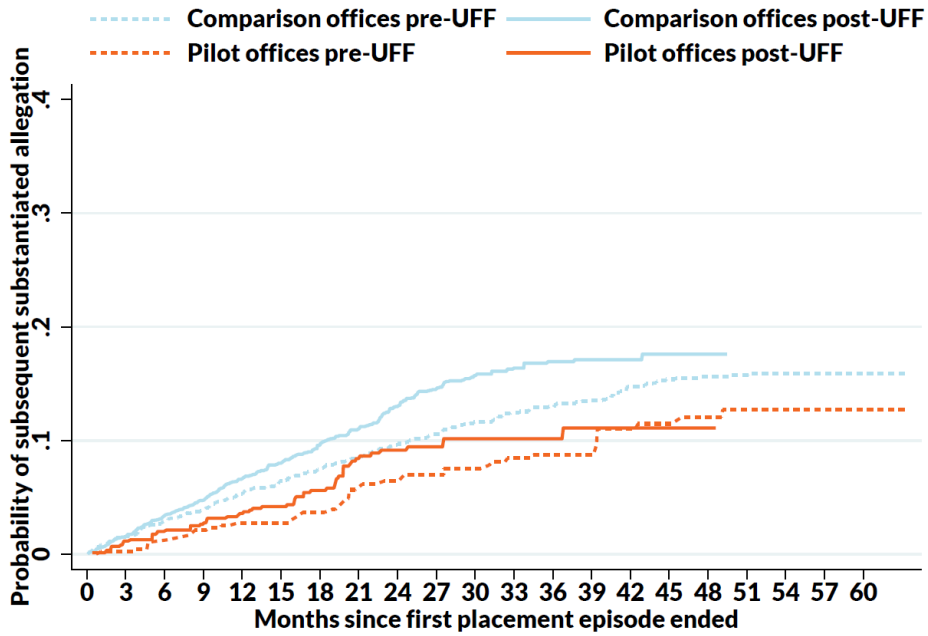


Subsequent allegation: All children

We examined children's probability of having a subsequent substantiated allegation of maltreatment after leaving their placement episode to a permanency outcome (reunification, adoption, or guardianship).[13] We found no evidence that UFF had an effect on children's likelihood of a subsequent substantiated allegation (see Figure 10). Findings were similar when pilot offices were examined individually (Figure A9, Appendix 3).

[13] It should be noted that there are children who re-enter care without a subsequent allegation. These children were not included in our analysis as the outcome of interest was a measure of substantiated allegation after the child exited care.

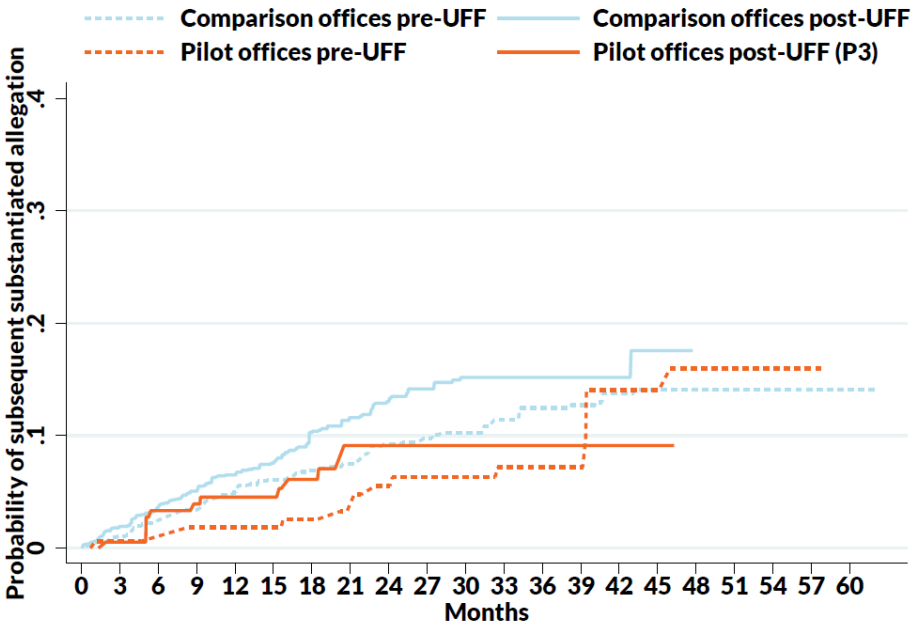
Figure 10. Probability of subsequent allegation over time, pilot and comparison offices pre- and post-UFF, all children who experienced relative placement and exited to permanency



Subsequent allegation: Children not initially placed with relatives

Similar to the findings for all children, UFF had no effect on whether a child who was not initially placed with relatives and exited to permanency would experience a subsequent substantiated allegation (see Figure 11).

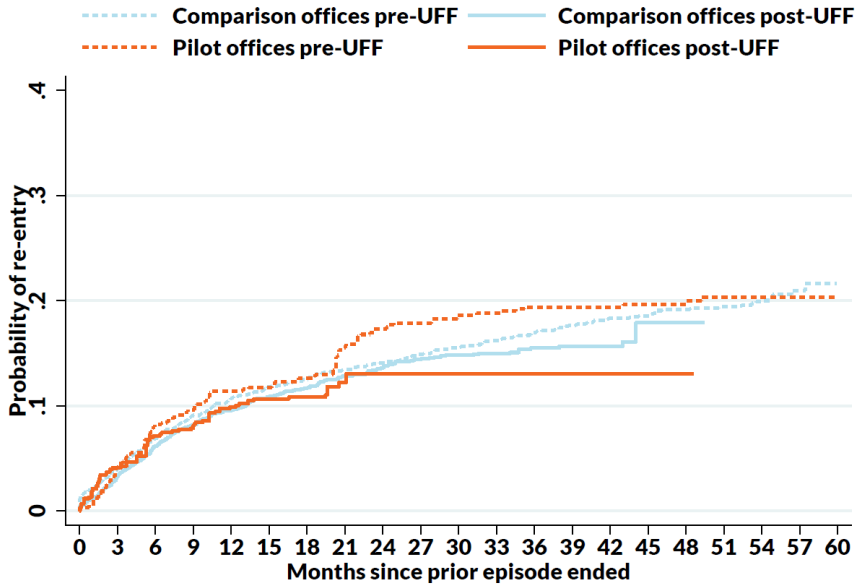
Figure 11. Probability of subsequent allegation over time, pilot and comparison offices pre- and post-UFF, children not initially placed with relatives who experienced relative placement and exited to permanency



Re-entry: All children

We examined re-entry into foster care among children who experienced relative placement (initially or subsequently) and whose placement episode ended in reunification or guardianship.[14] Although trends suggest a decrease in re-entry among pilot office children, in our multivariate survival analysis models we found no evidence that UFF had a statistically significant effect on re-entry for all newly detained children (see Figure 12).

Figure 12. Probability of re-entry, pilot and comparison offices pre- and post-UFF, all children placed with relatives (initially or subsequently) who exited to guardianship or reunification

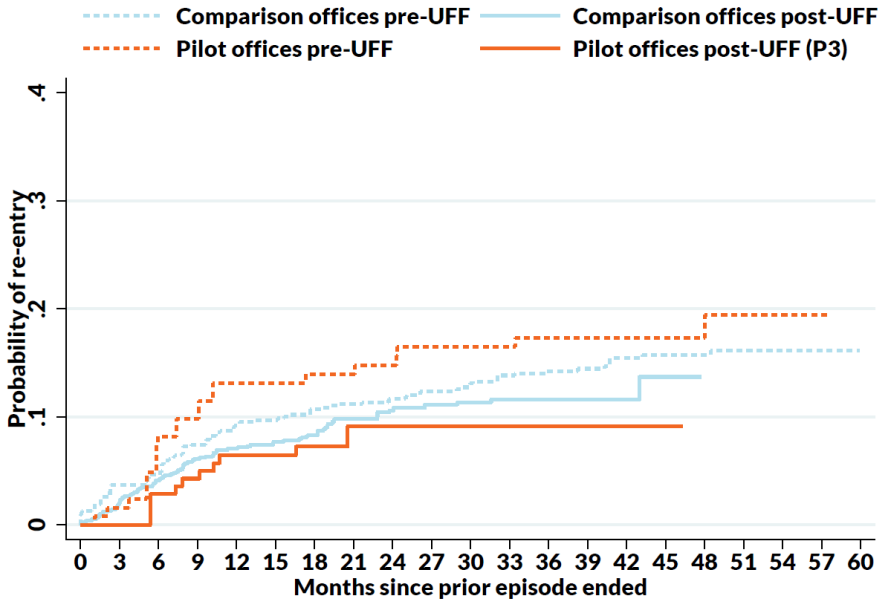


Re-entry: Children not initially placed with relatives

Among children not initially placed with relatives (served by P3 workers) and subsequently placed with relatives, descriptive trends indicate that UFF was associated with a lower likelihood of re-entering care after reunifying or achieving guardianship (see Figure 13). However, these differences were not statistically significant, possibly because the analytic sample was smaller once we limited the analysis to children who were placed with relatives then exited to reunification or guardianship and re-entered foster care within our study period.

[14] As previously mentioned, we could not study re-entry among children who were adopted since children who re-enter out-of-home care after an adoption are assigned a new unique ID in CWS/CMS.

Figure 13. Probability of re-entry, pilot and comparison offices pre- and post-UFF, children not initially placed with relatives who experienced relative placement and then exited to guardianship or reunification



Section 3. Program Outputs and Short-term Outcome Findings (Six Expansion Offices)

Program outputs

Methods

We used the supplemental P3 data logs described in Section 1 to tabulate counts of relatives discovered and interested in providing supports (e.g., visits, attending meetings, financial support) by type of relative (maternal, paternal, NREFM). We also calculated the percentage of children with closed cases who had at least one relative interested in providing supports, by type of relative. Data were examined for all offices combined and by Service Bureau (South County falls under Service Bureau 1 and the remaining offices fall under Service Bureau 2). We present select findings by Service Bureau in Table 4.

Based on the serial number indicator merged in from CWS/CMS, we determined that 470 of the 722 children with closed P3 cases were part of a sibling group. Because we tabulated our counts of relatives discovered and interested in providing supports based on the child-level data, our findings overcount the total number of relatives to the extent that the same relatives were identified for multiple children within sets of siblings. However, this analysis still provides an accurate picture of the proportion of children receiving relative support and types of supports offered.

Results

Relatives discovered through P3

Of the 722 children served by P3 (with closed cases) in the six expansion offices between May 2019 and August 2020, all but nine had at least one relative identified by the P3 worker. The average number of relatives identified per child was 10, and over one third of children had 11 or more relatives discovered. (See Table 4.) Across all offices, 7,571 relatives were identified, the majority maternal (55%), followed by paternal (39%), and NREFMs (6%) (results not shown).

Table 4. Relatives identified and placement outcomes for children served by P3 workers (May 2019 – August 2020) in the six expansion offices

	All Offices		Service Bureau 1		Service Bureau 2	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Children served by P3 (closed cases)	722	--	251	--	471	--
Placed with a relative while assigned to P3	315	44%	91	36%	224	48%
Number of relatives known at time of transfer from P3						
0	9	1%	3	1%	6	1%
1-10	443	61%	148	59%	295	63%
11-20	190	26%	88	35%	102	22%
21+	80	11%	12	5%	68	14%
Average	10	--	10	--	11	--
Median	8	--	9	--	8	--
Range	0-77	--	0-77	--	0-51	--
Placement status at time of transfer from P3						
Relative home	186	26%	58	23%	128	27%
NREFM home	35	5%	6	2%	29	6%
Home of parent	67	9%	26	10%	41	9%
Foster family home	352	49%	128	51%	224	48%
Group home	16	2%	8	3%	8	2%
Other	34	5%	15	6%	19	4%
Unknown	32	4%	10	4%	22	5%

Placements

Across all offices, 44 percent of children were placed with a relative during the 90 days they were served by a P3 worker (See Table 4.) At the time of P3 case closure, 26 percent of children were living with a relative, 5 percent were living with a NREFM, and 9 percent had reunified with a parent (or were living with the non-offending parent); just under half were living with a non-relative foster family.

Among children who had at least one relative identified, 48 percent had at least one relative who was interested in having the child live with them but not RFA-approved and 39 percent had a relative who was RFA-approved or pending approval. Interstate placements were infrequent; only 4 percent of children had one or more relatives who requested out-of-state placement (via an Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children request). Findings were similar across the Service Bureaus (results not shown.)

Relative engagement and supports

Across all offices, relatives were more interested in visits and phone calls with the child than in providing other types of support. Specifically, 28 percent of relatives were interested in visits, and 25 percent expressed interest in phone calls. Less frequently offered supports included offers to attend, or actually attending, CFT meetings (9%), willingness to assist with monitoring parent-child visits (13%), and willingness to assist with transportation (11%). Only 9 percent were willing (or able) to provide financial support, and 5 percent expressed no interest in any contact with the child. Maternal and paternal relatives were similar in their willingness to provide the various types of support, while NREFMs were more likely than kin to offer support. For instance, 18 percent of NREFMs attended or were interested in attending CFTs versus 9 percent of maternal and 7 percent of paternal relatives.

Even though many relatives were either unwilling or unable to provide supports, across all offices, for children with at least one relative discovered, the majority (94%) had at least one relative willing or able to provide support. Most children had at least one relative interested in visits (83%) or phone calls (74%). More than half of children had at least one relative willing to assist in providing transportation (52%) or monitoring visits (60%). Thirty-nine percent of children had at least one relative who attended or was interested in attending CFT meetings. Although only 9 percent of all relatives engaged were willing and able to provide financial support, almost half (45%) of children had at least one relative who could do so. Findings related to relative engagement and support did not differ across Service Bureaus.

Comparison with pilot office findings

In the expansion offices, the average number of relatives identified by P3 workers was lower than in the pilot offices (average of 17 relatives per child in the pilot offices versus 10 in the expansion offices). However, placement with relatives during P3 was slightly higher in the expansion offices (37% of children in the pilot offices were placed with a relative during their time with P3 versus 44% in the expansion offices). This is despite the fact that fewer children in the expansion offices had relatives that were interested in having the child placed with them but were not RFA-approved (48% versus 60% in the pilot offices) and fewer children in the expansion offices had relatives that were RFA-approved or pending approval (39% versus 51% in the pilot offices). Relatives' willingness to offer supports was similar for the expansion offices as compared to the pilot offices. The lower number of relatives identified could be due to the impact of COVID-19 on P3 workers' ability to connect with children and family members who could help identify relatives. Workers also reported that relative searches often took longer to complete when working from

home. Additionally, lower rates of relatives with RFA approval could be due to COVID-19 slowing down the RFA process.

Benefits of relative involvement

P3 children's caregivers filled out surveys before and after P3 services. Caregivers answering the surveys could be relatives or non-relative foster parents, depending on the placement, and in some cases could be the parent if the child was placed with a non-offending parent or reunified by the end of P3 services. Survey questions covered whether the caregiver believed the child was more connected to relatives and was benefitting from relative involvement. (See Table 5)

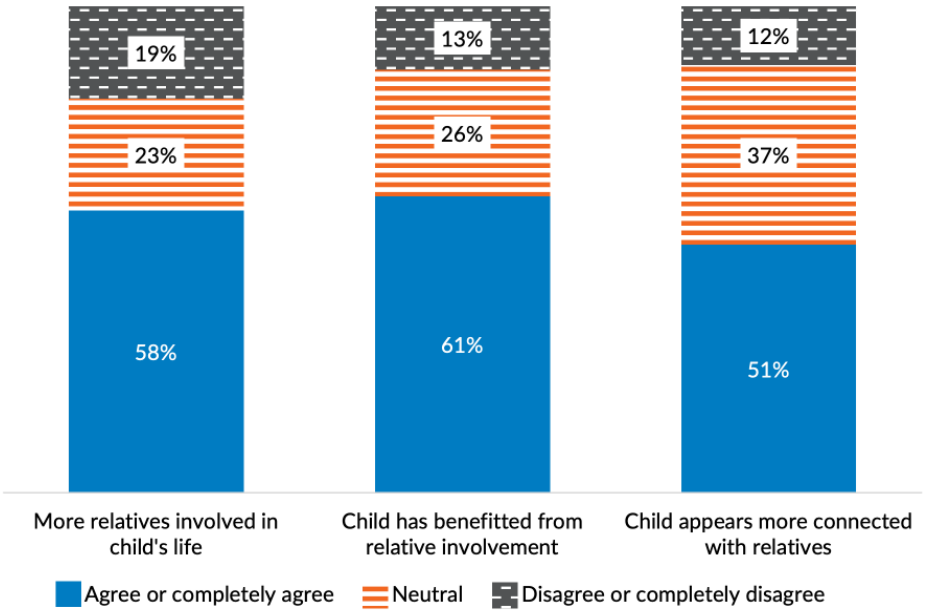
Table 5. Questions included on pre- and post-P3 surveys

Pre-P3 Survey Questions	Post-P3 Survey Questions
1. I feel there are relatives/NREFM involved in child's/youth's life.	1. I feel there **are more relatives**/NREFM involved in child's/youth's life.
2. I feel I have others who listen when I need to talk about any problems with the child's/youth's behavior.	[Same as pre-P3 question]
3. I feel that child/youth has relatives/NREFM to talk to when they are feeling sad or down.	[Same as pre-P3 question]
4. I feel that child/youth would benefit from more relative/NREFM involvement.	4. I feel child/youth **has benefited** from more relative/NREFM involvement.
5. Child/youth has expressed or appears to want to be more connected to relatives/NREFM.	5. Child/youth has expressed that they are or appear **to be more connected** to relatives/NREFM.

For several questions, the wording differed slightly between pre- and post-survey (e.g., the child *would* benefit from relative involvement versus *has* benefitted) so for those, we focused on the post-P3 responses. Based on caregiver survey response, we found that after P3, more than half of children had more relatives involved in their life (58%), benefitted from relative involvement (61%), and appeared more connected with relatives (51%) (see Figure 14). However, for a substantial percentage of children, their caregiver (including foster care providers and parents, for children who had reunified) answered "Neutral" on these questions and in many cases the caregiver disagreed or completely disagreed with the statements. Neutral responses could be due in part to some children not having been placed with caregivers for very long. We were unable to identify how long the child had been with the caregiver who answered the post-P3 survey (or whether the caregiver on the pre- and post-surveys was the same). However, given that P3 services are only provided for 90 days at the beginning of a removal episode, we know that even children still with their original caregiver

had not been in that placement for very long. Additionally, we found that non-relative caregivers (as well as biological parents) were more likely to select Neutral (results not shown).[15]

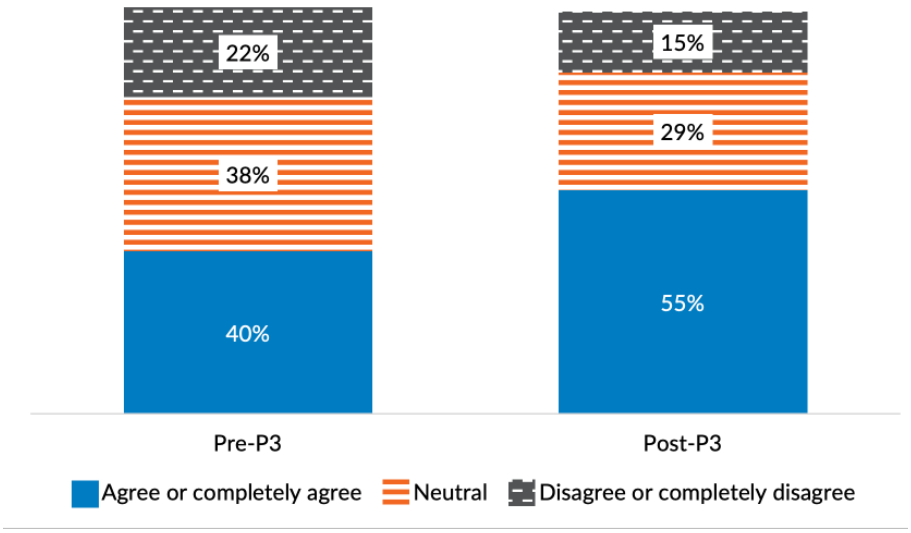
Figure 14. Caregivers' post-P3 survey responses regarding benefits of relative involvement, among children served by P3 workers (May 2019 – August 2020) in the six expansion offices



After P3 services concluded, more than half (55%) of children ages three and older had relatives they could speak to when sad. This was an increase from 40 percent before the program (see Figure 15).[16]

[15] We used the report of the child's placement at the time of transfer to determine the type of caregiver answering the post-P3 survey.
[16] We focused this analysis on children age three and older as this question was less likely to be salient for infants and toddlers with limited verbal skills. For about half younger children (ages 0-2), caregivers answered "Neutral" to this question.

Figure 15. Caregivers' pre- and post-P3 survey responses regarding whether child had relatives to talk to when sad, among children ages three and older served by P3 workers (May 2019 – August 2020) in the six expansion offices



Finally, more than three-quarters (77%) of children had post-survey caregivers who reported that they had someone to talk to about the child's behaviors (67% at pre-survey) indicating that caregivers involved in P3 may feel supported by other engaged relatives or P3 staff.

Stability of school enrollment for P3 children

We analyzed CWS/CMS to examine school stability among P3 children. Specifically, we measured how many school disruptions children had during their foster care episode. A school disruption was defined as a move to a new school for a reason other than promotion/graduation or a school opening/closing. CWS/CMS education data should include the child's school of origin (school at the time of removal) and any additional schools attended while in out-of-home care. However, nearly 20 percent of school-age children in our analysis sample (those ages 5 or older when removed) had no school data at all or no school entries where the enrollment dates matched the removal episode. Many children also lacked a school of origin, which made it difficult to determine school transitions. Acknowledging these data limitations, we found that 18 percent of P3 children ages 5 or older experienced one school disruption during their placement episode and two percent experienced two or more disruptions. It is likely that few children had more than one disruption as P3 children in the analysis had been in out-of-home care for an average of 11 months. Among similar children (not initially placed with relatives) in the comparison offices during our post-UFF study period, 12 percent experienced one school disruption and 3 percent experienced two or more disruptions. Overall, our findings show more P3 children than similar children in the comparison offices experienced a single school move, but there is no evidence that they are more likely to experience multiple school moves. However, given the data quality concerns with the school dataset, we are hesitant to draw conclusions from these findings.

Outcome findings

Methods

To analyze the outcomes (relative placement, relative placement disruption, and reunification) for children served by the expansion offices, we utilized the same difference-in-difference and survival analysis methods used in the long-term outcomes study (see the Methods under Section 2 and Appendix 1 for details). Note that in this analysis, children served by other offices implementing UFF (Glendora, Santa Fe Springs, Vermont Corridor, and West LA) were removed from the comparison office sample.

Figure 16 below outlines the study groups for the expansion offices study. We examined findings for the six offices combined as well as offices in Service Bureau 1 and Service Bureau 2 separately. Due to sample size, however, we did not study the six offices separately (except South County which was the only office in Service Bureau 1 and the largest studied office in terms of number of children in the analytic sample).

Figure 16. Description of study groups for expansion offices study

	Pre-UFF Detained 3/2018-2/2019*	**Post-UFF** Detained 5/2019-11/2020*
Expansion offices	**Services as usual** • Study population 1: all newly detained children • Study population 2: newly detained children *not initially placed with relatives*	**UFF** • Study population 1: all newly detained children • Study population 2: newly detained children *not initially placed with relatives* and served by the P3 program
Comparison offices	**Services as usual** • Study population 1: all newly detained children • Study population 2: newly detained children *not initially placed with relatives*	

* For the Hawthorne and Wateridge offices, the pre-UFF period was 3/2018 – 8/2019 and the post-UFF period was 11/2019 – 11/2020.

Analytic sample

Our analytic sample included 13,775 children newly detained between March 1, 2018, and November 18, 2020. This time period includes one year prior to the start of UFF training activities in the offices that began UFF in May 2019 (in which training began in March 2019) and approximately 19 months after the start of UFF in those offices. The post-UFF period is shorter for Wateridge and Hawthorne offices, as they initiated UFF in November 2019. For the offices who started UFF in May 2019, we excluded children detained in March and April 2019 from the pre-UFF period and for offices who started UFF in November 2019, we excluded children detained in September and October 2019 because pre-pilot activities were already

underway. As was done in our analysis of the pilot offices, we only included newly detained children (see the Analytic Sample section under the Long-term Outcome Study for description).

See Table 6 for a breakdown of the sample by expansion office and comparison office status. Table 7 displays child and case characteristics that may influence a child's probability of relative placement as well as placement disruption and reunification, broken down by comparison and expansion offices (pre- and post-UFF time periods combined). These are the same characteristics included as controls in our multivariate analysis, previously described. We found few differences between children in the expansion offices and children in the comparison offices in terms of the demographics and case characteristics measured with two exceptions. There were slightly more pilot office children with a positive mental health screening and more expansion office children were documented as race/ethnicity Unknown.

We found a few differences in children's demographics and case characteristics between the pre- and post-UFF periods that occurred for both the comparison offices and the expansion offices (not shown). More children were in sibling groups post-UFF (63% versus 70% expansion offices; 66% versus 69% comparison offices), more children were in care due to neglect (73% versus 78% expansion offices; 74% versus 79% comparison offices), and more children were White (9% versus 11% expansion offices; 11% versus 14% comparison offices). Comparison offices had fewer Hispanic children in the post-UFF period (62% versus 57%) while expansion offices had fewer children who were Black in the post-UFF period (24% versus 20%). Expansion offices also had an increase in the proportion of children for whom the perpetrator was an extended family member (22% versus 25%).

In the post-UFF period, the subset of children served by P3 in the expansion offices had similar characteristics to their counterparts (children in the comparison offices who were not initially placed with a relative), with the exception of the percentage of children with a positive mental health screening and the percentage of children documented as race/ethnicity Unknown, noted for all children (results for the subsample not shown). Additionally, P3 children were more likely to be ages 0-2 at removal (43%) versus their counterparts (38%).

Table 6. Number of children in study groups

	Pre-UFF		**Post-UFF**	
Detainment period:	**03/2018 – 02/2019[+]**		**5/2019 – 11/2020**	
Study group:	All children	Children not initially placed with relatives	All children	Children not initially placed with relatives (served by P3 workers in pilot offices)
	Comparison offices			
Total	3,266	1,915	5,127	2,923
	Expansion offices			
Total	2,492	1,323	2,890	1,115
Service Bureau 1	664	350	975	391

	Pre-UFF		Post-UFF	
Detainment period:	**03/2018 – 02/2019+**		**5/2019 – 11/2020**	
Service Bureau 2	1,828	973	1,915	724

+ For the Hawthorne and Wateridge offices, the pre-UFF period was 3/2018 – 8/2019 and the post-UFF period was 11/2019 – present.
Note: During the post-UFF period, there were children served by the pilot offices who, based on their CWS/CMS data, were not initially placed with relatives and not served by P3 workers. Some of these children were ineligible and others were referrals missed by staff. Our analyses do not include these children in the sample of children not initially placed with relatives for the pilot offices post-UFF; we include only children actually served by P3 workers.

Table 7. Characteristics of children newly detained during the study period, comparison offices and expansion offices (before and after the pilot)

	Comparison offices	Expansion offices
Analytic sample: number of newly detained children pre- and post-UFF combined	8,393	5,382
Age at removal		
0-2	38%	37%
3-5	17%	17%
6-12	29%	29%
13+	16%	17%
Male	49%	50%
Race/ethnicity		
White	13%	10%
Black	23%	22%
Hispanic	59%	58%
Other	3%	2%
Unknown/decline	2%	7%*
Part of a sibling group	68%	67%
Allegation type		
Sexual abuse	4%	4%
Physical abuse	11%	11%
Neglect	77%	77%
Emotional abuse	4%	4%
Other	5%	5%
Perpetrator was member of extended family	24%	24%
Positive mental health screen ("positive acute" or "positive-urgent")	2%	3%*

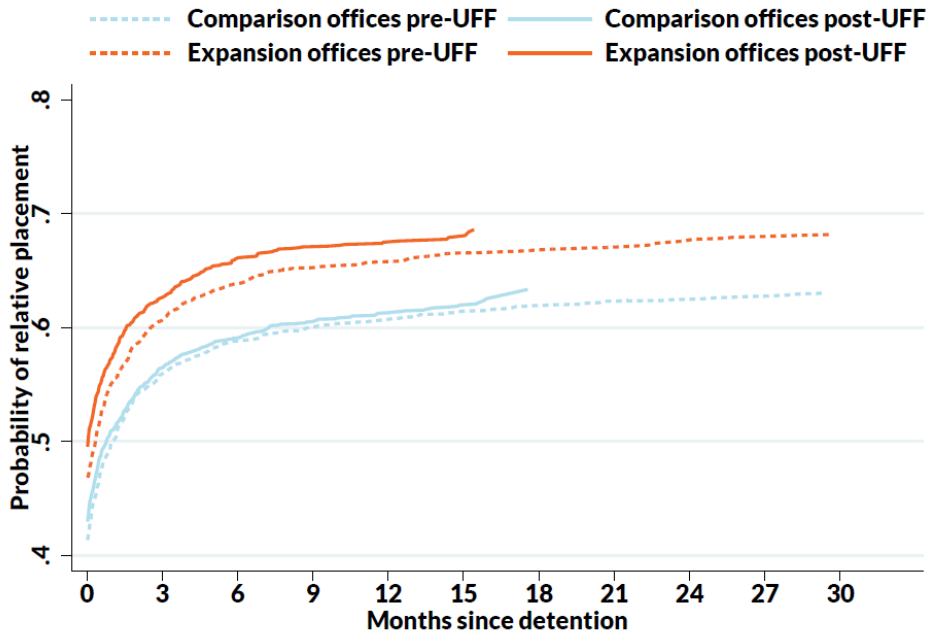
*Difference between comparison offices and expansion offices is statistically significant at $p < .05$.
+ For the Hawthorne and Wateridge offices, the pre-UFF period was 3/2018 – 8/2019 and the post-UFF period was 11/2019 – present.

Analysis results: Expansion offices combined

Relative/NREFM placement: All children

When examining all children, on average, the expansion offices had higher levels of relative placement than the comparison offices both before and after implementation of UFF. There was a slight increase in the likelihood of relative placement for children in the expansion offices after UFF; however, this increase was not statistically significant. The trend was similar for both Service Bureaus (see Figure A11, Appendix 4).

Figure 17. Probability of relative placement over time, expansion and comparison offices pre- and post-UFF, all children

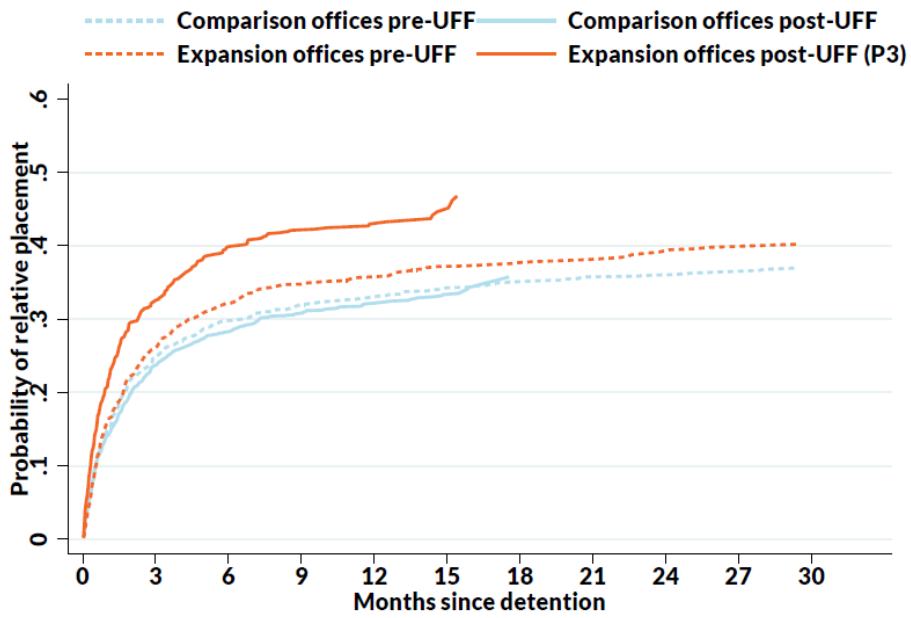


Relative/NREFM placement: Children not initially placed with relatives

When examining relative placement among children not initially placed with relatives (children served by P3 workers in the expansion offices post-UFF),[17] we found a statistically significant increase in the percentage of children who were eventually placed with relatives after the implementation of UFF. At six months post-detention in the pre-UFF period, 32 percent of children not initially placed with relatives had experienced relative placement. Post-UFF this jumped to 40 percent (see Figure 18). This trend was similar for both Service Bureaus (see Figure A12, Appendix 4). We found no such increase for children served by the comparison offices.

[17] A small percentage (2%) of P3 children had their first recorded placement in CWS/CMS as a relative placement. Based on a review of select case notes, these are instances of children referred to P3 while on hospital hold or detained at large. These P3 children were excluded from the analysis of relative placement among the subpopulation of children not initially placed with relatives.

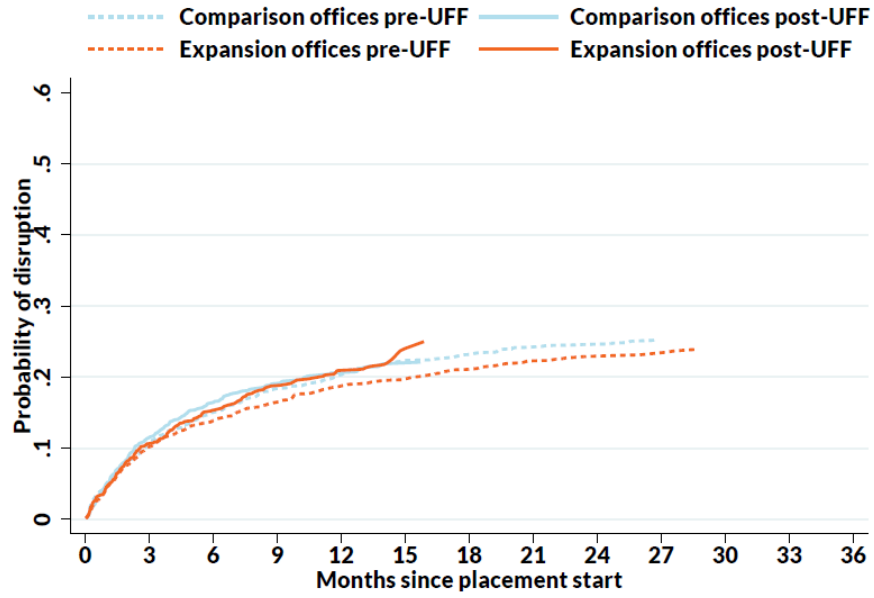
Figure 18. Probability of relative placement over time, expansion and comparison offices pre- and post-UFF, children not initially placed with relatives



Relative placement disruption (moving to any other placement): All children

Across the expansion offices, we found no evidence that UFF increased the probability of relative placement disruption for all children experiencing relative placement (see Figure 19). We did find that UFF was associated with a marginally significant increase (p=.06) in relative placement disruption for Service Bureau 1 (South County) when studying the Service Bureaus separately (see Figure A13, Appendix 4.)

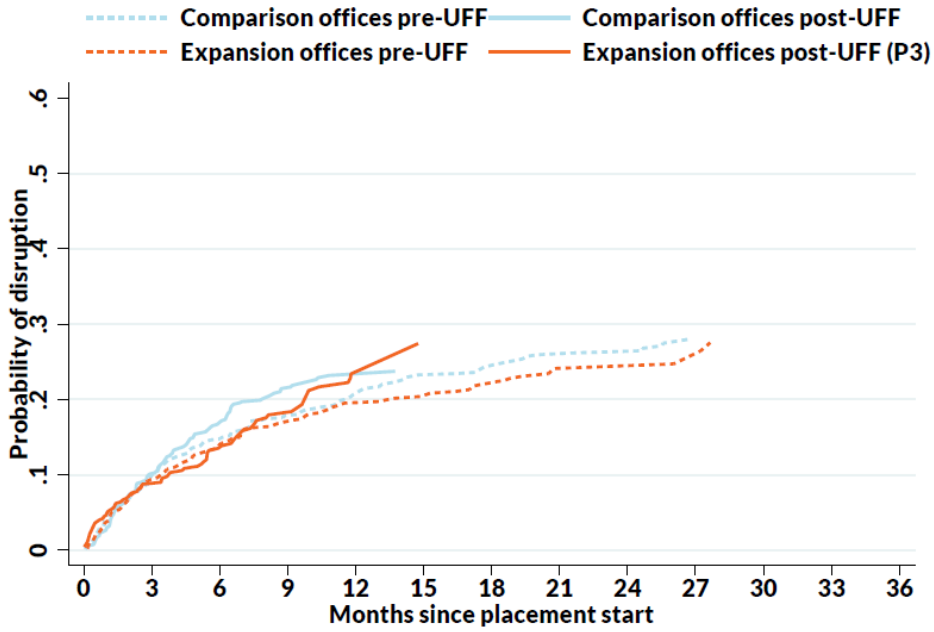
Figure 19. Probability of relative placement disruption over time, expansion and comparison offices pre- and post-UFF, all children



Relative placement disruption (moving to any other placement): Children not initially placed with relatives

For children not initially placed with relatives who were eventually placed with relatives, we found no evidence that UFF increased the probability of disruption of those relative placements, across the six expansion offices. Again, we did find a marginal increase (p=.09) in relative placement disruption for Service Bureau 1 (South County) when studying the Service Bureaus separately (see Figure A14, Appendix 4.)

Figure 20. Probability of relative placement disruption over time, expansion and comparison offices pre- and post-UFF, children not initially placed with relatives

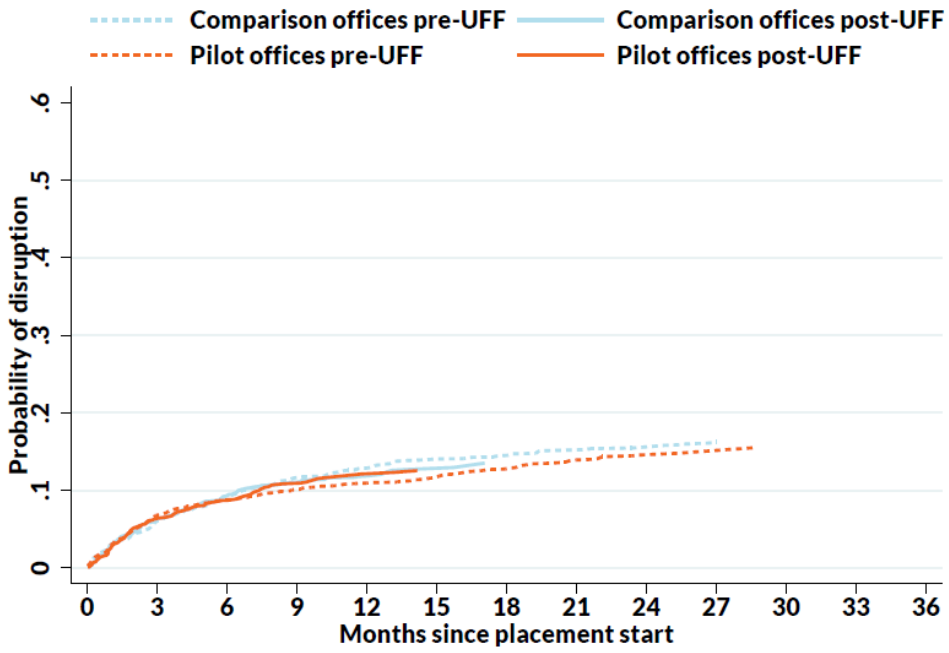


Relative placement disruption (moving to a non-relative placement): All children

As was done for the pilot offices, we also examined disruptions from the first relative placement to a non-relative placement.

Overall, we found no effect of UFF on whether a child's first relative placement would disrupt to a non-relative placement. One year after placement, the probability of disruption from the first relative placement to a non-relative placement was approximately 12 percent regardless of UFF status and time period (see Figure 21.) When analyzed separately, there was an increase in disruption for children in Service Bureau 1, but it was only marginally significant (see Figure A15, Appendix 4.)

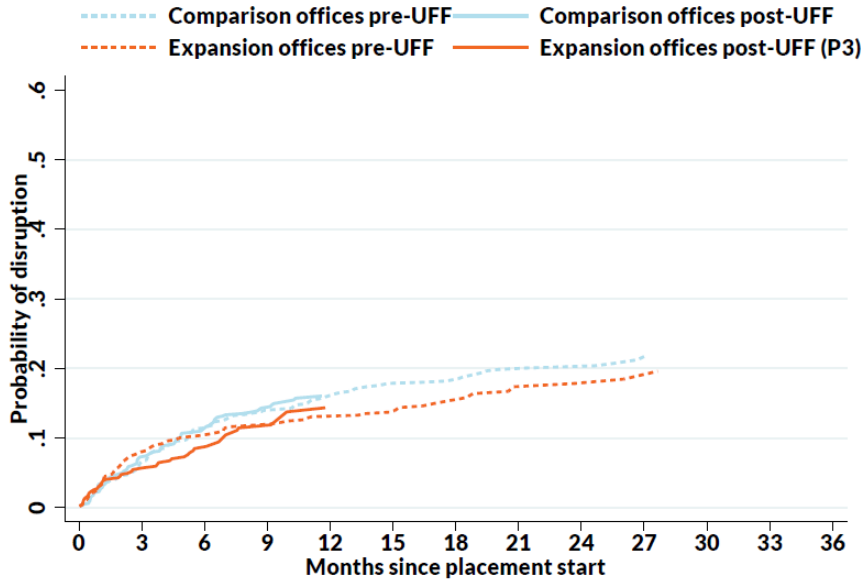
Figure 21. Probability of relative placement disruption to a non-relative placement, over time, expansion and comparison offices pre- and post-UFF, all children



Relative placement disruption (moving to a non-relative placement): Children not initially placed with relatives

Similar to the findings for all children overall, we found no effect of UFF on whether a child's first relative placement would disrupt to a non-relative placement among the subpopulation of children not initially placed with relatives (see Figure 22.) When examined separately, the trends for the Service Bureaus appear to go in opposite directions with a higher likelihood of disruption for children in Service Bureau 1 post-UFF and a lower likelihood of disruption for children in Service Bureau 2 post-UFF. The increase in Service Bureau 1 was statistically significant, but the decrease in Service Bureau 2 did not reach significance (p=.16; see Figure A16, Appendix 4).

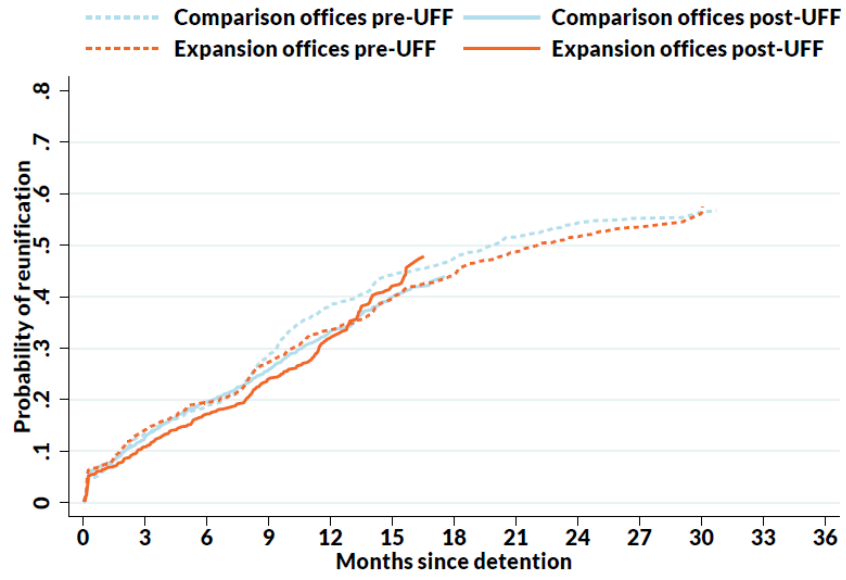
Figure 22. Probability of relative placement disruption to a non-relative placement, over time, expansion and comparison offices pre- and post-UFF, children not initially placed with relatives



Reunification: All children

We found no evidence overall that UFF affected a child's likelihood of reunification over time (among all children initially or subsequently placed with relatives). By 12 months post-detention, 32 percent of pilot office children had reunified with their parents in the post-UFF time period versus 34 percent in the pre-UFF time period (not statistically different; see Figure 23). Findings were the same when we studied the Service Bureaus separately (see Figure A17, Appendix 4.)

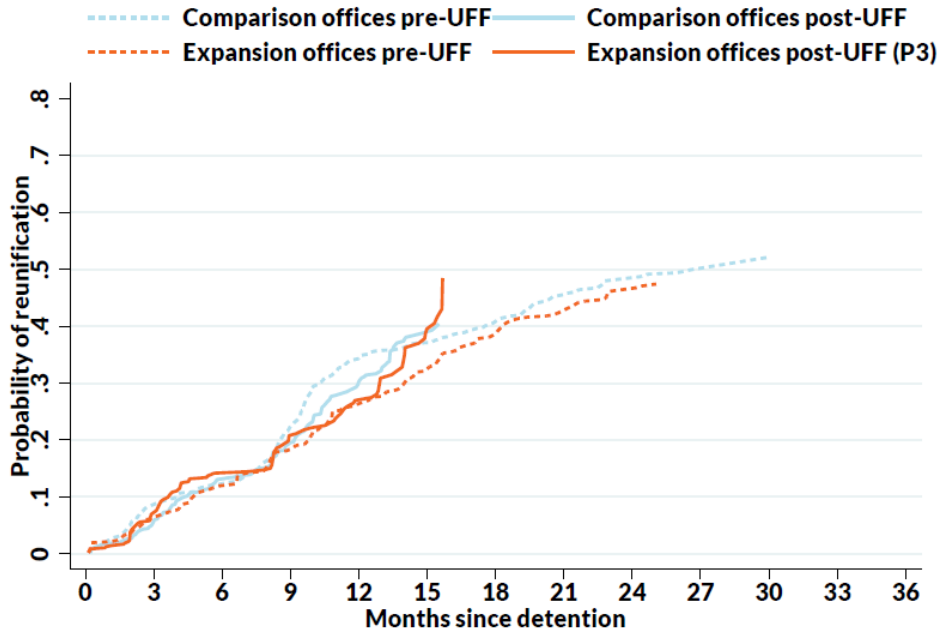
Figure 23. Probability of reunification over time, expansion and comparison offices pre- and post-UFF, all children initially or subsequently placed with relatives



Reunification: Children not initially placed with relatives

Similar to the findings for all children among the subpopulation of children not initially placed with relatives who eventually achieved relative placement, we found no evidence that UFF affected the likelihood of reunification over time (see Figure 24.) We again found no evidence of a statistically significant effect of UFF when the Service Bureaus were examined individually (see Figure A18, Appendix 4.)

Figure 24. Probability of reunification over time, expansion and comparison offices pre- and post-UFF, children not initially placed with relatives who experienced relative placement



Section 4. Implementation Findings (Select Expansion Offices)

Below, we present the findings from the implementation study conducted in the Hawthorne and Wateridge offices. DCFS identified these two offices for inclusion in the study for two reasons: (1) to examine whether UFF could be successfully implemented in offices that were different from the pilot offices in terms of the communities they serve and staff's previous family finding experience; and (2) to examine UFF implementation shortly following its initiation (these offices began implementation in November 2019, whereas the other four started in May 2019). We describe the planning and preparation for implementing the UFF program, details of program implementation, and successes and challenges. For a more detailed description of the UFF program, please see the previous evaluation report (Welti et al., 2018).

Planning and preparation

Office characteristics

Administrators in both offices cited the complexities of the communities they serve, which impacts how they work with those communities. The types of referrals, needs of the communities, and services and supports available are similar across the two offices. Administrators in both offices mentioned the communities' longstanding fraught relationships and frustrations with the department, and that some families in the communities have a long history of engagement with DCFS. Administrators in the Hawthorne office reported that the office primarily serves communities of color and the office has the highest percentage of Black children in DCFS in Los Angeles County. The office is working to learn from the communities it serves as they rebuild the relationships. Both offices have had to reestablish trust with the communities as it relates to engaging relatives and NREFMs. Prior to initiation of UFF, the Hawthorne and Wateridge offices had been one combined office and during focus groups, Hawthorne staff noted that the split from the Wateridge office, which resulted in staff working in different offices, likely affected implementation of the UFF.

Training

Staff reported that DCFS administrators held meetings in both offices during which the UFF program was described. In addition, P3 workers reported attending formal trainings prior to the initiation of back-end family finding. While not reporting any specialized training on UFF, the P3 workers did report having additional periodic trainings since their original back-end family finding training. Caseworkers reported learning about UFF from their supervisors in general trainings and team meetings. Both caseworkers and supervisors expressed a need for more information and trainings about aspects of UFF, such as the referral process.

Program description

Relative search

Clerical staff in both offices reported that the most common source of referrals of cases to P3 is Emergency Response (ER) caseworkers. Cases are referred to P3 if the ER worker has determined the child will be placed in out-of-home care with a non-relative at the time of detention. Once a case is referred for P3 services, clerical staff use various search engines and tools to find relatives. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown, all staff were working from home so clerical staff were conducting these searches from the home. Clerical staff reported the following sequence of events in conducting the searches:

- Identify the child's social security number through CWS/CMS. If they cannot find it in CWS/CMS, they use the Leader Replacement System (LRS), a social services case management system.
- Conduct a CLEAR search, which yields the names, dates of birth, and addresses of potential relatives. They use social security numbers, if available, in CLEAR to identify possible relatives with common last names. Clerical staff in the Wateridge office find up to 20 relatives for each parent listed on the referral.
- If the CLEAR search does not yield helpful results, workers in both offices noted that they also use the child support database to search for relatives.

- After completing the search, they provide the P3 supervisor with the search results.

Relative notification

Once the search is complete, clerical staff send letters to potential relatives of the child in care. They do not send letters to all relatives identified: clerical staff in the Hawthorne office usually send 40 letters, 20 letters to maternal relatives, and 20 to paternal. The agency contacts listed on the letter include the child's assigned social worker.

Before the COVID-19 shut down order, P3 workers in the Hawthorne office noted that changes were to be made to the relative notification letter including putting the P3 supervisor's contact information on the letter. However, those changes had not been made due to the pandemic (as of the time of the focus groups in June 2020).

P3 worker tasks

According to staff in both offices, a referred case first goes to the P3 supervisor, who then assigns it to a P3 worker. At the time the case is assigned to the P3 worker, it is transferred from the ER worker to the dependency investigator (DI) worker and a primary social worker known as a Continuing Services (CS) worker.

P3 workers in both offices "work" the case for 90 days after receiving it. The assigned P3 worker first reviews the case record to learn about the family, the list of potential relatives from the search, and the letters that were generated. After reviewing the file, the P3 worker contacts the CS worker and DI worker assigned to the case to inform them of the UFF work that will be happening and to obtain additional information about the case, such as names and contact information for relatives or other non-relative supports. These discussions allow the P3 worker to learn about any challenges that might arise during the work. In both offices, P3 workers attempt to contact identified relatives and engage them in discussion about being a potential support to the child.

According to P3 workers in both offices, the CWS/CMS case file is updated monthly with the new information about relatives and other supportive adults, collateral contacts, and the P3 workers' activities, such as locating relatives. In addition to updating the case file in CWS/CMS, P3 workers in both offices update the P3 tracking system, providing additional information on their case activities, collateral contacts, and goals for the children on their caseload. They also submit a monthly report.

P3 workers in the Hawthorne office reported that they have not attended CFT meetings, but the decision of their attendance is left up to the caseworker and family. Staff in both offices reported that relatives and NREFMs are sometimes able to provide supports such as visitation and assisting with child care and transportation.

Successes and challenges

Below we describe the successes and challenges noted during our virtual focus groups with staff from the Hawthorne and Wateridge offices.

Successes and facilitators

Buy-in

- Similar to findings from the previous evaluation (Welti et al., 2018), all levels of staff in both offices expressed support for relative placements and the importance of children being placed with family. Administrators and staff in both offices expressed positive attitudes about the program and its emphasis on identifying relatives and NREFMs for placement and other supports.
- Some caseworkers noted that the UFF program is helpful with finding relatives and NREFMs for youth, especially due to the lack of foster homes available for some youth. Workers reported the availability of foster homes has declined over the past few years and it is difficult to find non-relative foster homes for older youth in care. They noted the need to find relatives for children for whom it is harder to find foster home placements, and that the UFF program is helpful with finding those placements and building support systems for the youth and their family.

Supportive policies

- Administrators reported that the backlog for RFA has been addressed and hope that they are able to increase their resources by using RFA-approved homes to address the lack of foster homes available for youth.

Relative supports

- Various levels of staff noted that UFF presents opportunities for the office to build a support system around children by making family members aware of the need for their involvement. Although, as noted above, staff have experienced family members hesitant to get involved with the child welfare system.

P3 worker support

- Similar to findings from the previous evaluation (Welti et al., 2018), staff in both offices reported benefits to employing retired and part-time social workers as P3 workers as they were familiar with DCFS policies and procedures. Many P3 workers had worked full-time for DCFS prior to joining the P3 staff, thus having knowledge of general DCFS policies as well as those specific to family engagement.

COVID-19

- P3 workers reported that although the COVID-19 pandemic poses a barrier to in-person visits to children and relatives, they are now able to incorporate virtual visits into their work. They expressed hope that virtual visits will continue to be an option in the post-pandemic future.

Challenges

COVID-19

- Administrators mentioned the pandemic's effect on the implementation and functioning of the UFF program. The pandemic has affected in-person office staffing; as a result, staff are not able to communicate with each other (for example, caseworkers and P3 workers) as usual when they have

questions or concerns. Additionally, clerical and P3 workers are carrying out searches at home, and administrators have heard that tasks are taking longer to complete than usual.

Communication

- Caseworkers noted they want to be notified before their information is included in the relative notification letters so that when potential relatives contact the workers, they have updated information on where the cases are in the UFF process.
- Supervisors in the Hawthorne office noted challenges with not having a P3 worker who speaks Spanish to engage families who speak Spanish. This poses additional burdens on the workers assigned to those cases. They noted that in some instances they rely on colleagues who may be able to translate but did not know of current efforts to hire Spanish-speaking workers.
- P3 workers noted the extended wait time to access the databases that new P3 workers experience when joining the team. This wait time cuts into the time that they have to work their assigned cases.

Identifying and locating relatives

- Staff noted the limitations with finding relatives using CLEAR. For example, staff cited they have sometimes found records with the same names but different birth dates, or they were not able to find any relatives using the software and would then need to use other databases to continue their search.

Relative notification letters

- Similar to findings from the previous evaluation, supervisors and caseworkers in both offices noted challenges with outdated caseworker contact information included on the relative notification letters. The staff reported instances in which potential relatives have called the provided number, but the case has already moved to another caseworker in the office. As a result, relatives have experienced the unnecessary frustration and lag time of having to track down the assigned worker.
- Similar to the previous evaluation's findings, staff also noted frustration with individuals who are not the child's relatives being notified. As a result, workers also had confidentiality concerns and had to respond to frustration and confusion expressed by the individuals. Administrators in the Hawthorne office did report that the letter template has been tailored so that it is not as 'off-putting' to potential relatives.

Capacity and sustainability

- Due to the need to build trust with communities and families that the offices serve, administrators in the Wateridge office noted there were concerns about the capacity of staff to be able to do the level of work needed to build trust with families so that they feel comfortable sharing information with workers.
- Clerical staff in both offices noted the intensity of the search process and the need to have staff dedicated to the relative search process. Depending on the number of parents listed for siblings in a case, often times there are a multitude of letters that may need to be sent out.
- Staff also noted difficulties with completing searches during the times of year when the offices receive more reports of maltreatment that result in higher numbers of children removed from their families. Staff reiterated the need to have more staff dedicated to the search process or to have staff that only focus on the search process for the UFF program.

- While caseworkers and supervisors are not directly responsible for UFF tasks, caseworkers and supervisors in the Wateridge office reported wanting more training and information on the UFF processes so they could better understand P3 workers' duties and how the resulting information about family members can best be incorporated into their responsibilities. Clerical staff reported wanting a longer training. Administrators in the Wateridge office mentioned that information about the program is provided in section meetings, general staff meetings, and other conversations with staff.

Section 5. Conclusions and Implications

Pilot offices: Long-term outcomes study

In the previous evaluation of UFF (Welti et al., 2018), we found that the program resulted in increased likelihood of relative placement (both initially and subsequently) for newly detained children served by the two pilot offices (Glendora and Santa Fe Springs) who entered foster care between October 2016 and August 2018. The primary goal of the Phase 2 evaluation was to examine whether children placed with relatives through UFF in those offices experienced different long-term outcomes than similar children *also placed with relatives* without UFF. In this way, we were examining the potential incremental effect of UFF for children placed with relatives rather than comparing children placed with relatives to children not placed with relatives (there is already good evidence regarding the benefits of relative placement for children's placement, safety, and permanency outcomes; Winokur et al., 2018). Findings are summarized in Table 8. Overall, more children are being placed with relatives under UFF, and these placements do not have an elevated risk of disruption to a non-relative placement. However, we found an increased probability of first relative placement disruption when measuring disruption as a move to any other placement (relative or non-relative). Anecdotally, we were told by P3 staff that, in an effort to place children quickly with relatives, children in UFF offices were often placed in shorter-term relative placements while another relative was readied for a longer-term placement. Children in the comparison offices were less likely to be placed with relatives, and those who did were not placed as quickly. However, they were less likely to leave their first relative placement for another relative's home. Notably, we did not find evidence of elevated relative placement disruptions for the six expansion offices, regardless of whether moves to another relative's home were included (discussed in the Expansion offices: Outcomes study section).

Overall, UFF did not change the likelihood that children placed with relatives would reunify with their parents. For all children (placed with relatives) in both pilot offices, rates of reunification did not differ before and after UFF. However, when we studied the subpopulation of children not initially placed with relatives, we found that children served by P3 workers had a lower likelihood of reunifying, a finding driven mostly by the Santa Fe Springs office, where there was also a reduction in reunification for all children. Nonetheless, we do not believe there is good evidence that UFF has a meaningful effect on children's likelihood of reunification across all offices implementing the program (a conclusion that is supported by the findings of the outcomes analysis for the expansion offices, discussed in the Expansion offices: Outcomes study section).

The follow-up period of this Phase 2 evaluation study allowed for the examination of other permanency outcomes—adoption and guardianship. UFF was associated with an increased likelihood that a child placed with relatives would be adopted or have a finalized guardianship. This was true for all children as well as children not initially placed with relatives, but the finding was stronger in Santa Fe Springs, which makes sense given the reduction in reunification for children served by that office. Overall, findings indicate that children placed with relatives under UFF are reaching permanency and not experiencing longer stays in care. Regarding child safety, there was no evidence that UFF had an effect on subsequent substantiated allegations among children whose removal ended in a permanency arrangement (reunification, guardianship, or adoption). Trends point to reductions in re-entry for children who were placed with

relatives and then exited to reunification or guardianship, but findings were not statistically significant. This could be due to relatively small sample sizes once the analysis was limited to children who experienced relative placement, exited to reunification or guardianship (adopted children were excluded), and then re-entered within the study timeframe.

Table 8. Summary of findings from long-term outcomes study, statistically significant effects of UFF noted for each outcome of interest

	All children placed with relatives	P3 children placed with relatives
Relative placement disruption (to any placement)	Increase	Increase
Relative placement disruption (to a non-relative placement)	None	None
Reunification	None	Decrease
Adoption or guardianship	Increase	Increase (marginal)
Subsequent allegation	None	None
Re-entry	None	None

Expansion offices: P3 program outputs

The second goal of Phase 2 of the UFF evaluation was to study the implementation and P3 program outputs for the six expansion UFF offices and to examine short-term child outcomes (relative placement, relative placement disruption, and reunification). Findings from virtual focus groups with staff and administrators from the Wateridge and Hawthorne offices indicate similar UFF implementation as the pilot offices (Santa Fe Springs and Glendora). Challenges and successes identified during focus groups were also similar to the pilot offices, notwithstanding the effects of COVID-19.

P3 program outputs across the six expansion offices were generally similar to those of the pilot offices. For cases that closed by August 2020, P3 workers found an average of 10 relatives for each child within the 90-day case period, and all but 9 of the 722 P3 children with closed cases had at least one relative identified. The average number of relatives identified was lower than the pilot offices (on average, 17 relatives were identified per child in the pilot offices). Despite finding fewer relatives on average, P3 workers in the expansion offices were equally likely (compared to the pilot offices) to successfully engage found relatives. The majority of P3 children had at least one relative willing to provide support.

The lower number of relatives identified in the expansion offices compared to the pilot offices could reflect several factors. The on-going COVID-19 pandemic meant staff were working from home, limiting their ability to meet with children and families in person, as well as possibly affecting worker's productivity and ability to use family finding search tools. Another possible factor could be community distrust of DCFS, as mentioned by focus group participants in two of the expansion offices. Public distrust of DCFS may be a particular challenge for staff in Hawthorne and Wateridge as these offices are located in communities with higher rates of child poverty and a relatively high proportion of Black families, particularly compared with

the pilot offices. While the service areas of all four offices have a mostly Hispanic population (approximately three quarters of children under age 18 are Hispanic), the non-Hispanic population in the Hawthorne and Wateridge service areas is majority Black, whereas the non-Hispanic population in Glendora and Santa Fe Springs services areas is majority White or Asian.[18] Research has found that, nationwide, due to systemic bias, Black children are more likely than White children similarly at risk of abuse to enter the child welfare system at various decision-making points. Black children are more likely to be investigated as potential victims of maltreatment and are more likely to be removed from their homes and placed in foster care after an investigation (Dettlaff, 2015; Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016). These racial disparities are at the root of Black families' distrust of the child welfare system and can foster fraught relationships between communities and child welfare agencies (Roberts, 2008), as mentioned by focus group participants from Hawthorne and Wateridge. Focus group participants also noted the on-going work of building trust with the communities and families that the offices serve.

New to the expansion office study was an examination of the perceived benefit of relative engagement for children served by P3. After the conclusion of P3 services, more than half of children had caregivers who agreed or strongly agreed that the child was benefitting from relative engagement across several measures. However, a substantial portion of children (approximately one quarter across the questions) had a caregiver who selected "Neutral," indicating that perhaps surveyed caregivers did not feel equipped to answer the questions regarding relative engagement. This could be because children had lived with caregivers for 90 days or less (caregivers could be a relative, non-relative, or the parent, depending on the child's current placement at the end of P3). Neutral responses were also more common among caregivers that were non-relatives (foster homes, group homes, other[19]), as well as among caregivers who were the child's biological parent. P3 staff may want to consider also surveying children's caseworkers regarding the benefits of relative engagement.

We also studied school stability for children served by P3 workers in the expansion offices. We found that approximately 18 percent of P3 children (age 5 or older) experienced one school disruption during their time in out-of-home care and 2 percent experienced more than one (P3 children had been in care an average of 11 months). However, we found that the school data in CWS/CMS was not consistently entered and often missing, making it difficult to draw conclusions about school stability. Additionally, the relatively short follow-up period was less likely to capture children with longer stays and possibly more school instability. While relative placements tend to be more stable than non-relative placements (Winokur et al, 2018), which could lead to fewer total school disruptions, it is possible that prioritizing placing children with kin over a more proximate non-relative foster home could result in more instances of changing schools at the start of a foster care episode. This is a topic worth further exploration, particularly as CWS/CMS data collection around school enrollment improves.

Expansion offices: Outcomes study

Table 9 summarizes the findings from the expansion office outcomes study. We found that UFF increased the probability of relative placement for children who were not initially placed with relatives (those served by P3 workers in the expansion offices post-UFF). There was no increase, however, for the broader sample

[18] LA County DCFS (Personal Communication, January 22, 2021) Census data estimates for 2018 provided by the Los Angeles County ISD/eGIS Urban Research Team

[19] Other placements could include a hospital, juvenile detention center, or whereabouts unknown.

of all newly detained children. This finding differs from the pilot offices that found an increase in relative placement for all children, indicating an office-wide impact of the program. We know that, due to COVID-19, the UFF expansion offices were unable to have the same frequent office-wide meetings related to family finding that were held in the pilot offices. In addition, the pandemic likely limited informal conversations between P3 workers and ER, DI, and continuing service workers, further lessening the opportunity for UFF to have an office-wide impact. It is possible, therefore, that while the P3 workers were successful in finding relative placements for the children they served, there was less of a "spillover" effect that would result in an increase in relative placements for children outside the program.

Regarding relative placement stability, when studying outcomes for children across the expansion offices, there was no effect of UFF on relative placement disruption when measuring moves to any placement (relative or non-relative) and when measuring moves to non-relative placements only. We did, however, find some evidence of an increase in relative placement disruption (moves to any placement and moves to non-relative placement only) in Service Bureau 1 (South County) when we examined the Service Bureaus separately. This could reflect differences in the way the program was implemented in South County. However, given that an increase in relative placement disruption was not the overall trend, the variation between pre- and post-UFF in South County could also be driven by factors outside of UFF. Overall, findings indicate that the program places more children with relatives (who were initially placed in non-relative care) and children placed with relatives as part of UFF are equally likely to stay with relatives while in out-of-home care versus similar children placed with relatives without UFF. Additionally, we found no effect of UFF on a child's likelihood of reunification, indicating that the decrease in reunification found in Santa Fe Springs may be unique to that office and not to be expected, on average, for children served by offices implementing UFF.

Table 9. Summary of findings from expansion offices outcomes study, statistically significant effects of UFF noted for each outcome of interest

	All children	P3 (newly detained children not initially placed with relatives)
Relative placement	None	Increase
Relative placement disruption (to any placement)	None	None
Relative placement disruption (to a non-relative placement)	None	None
Reunification (among those placed with relatives)	None	None

Summary

In summary, results from the study of the expansion offices indicate that UFF appears to have been implemented in these offices in a manner similar to the pilot offices (COVID-19 notwithstanding) and that P3 workers are successfully engaging relatives and finding relative placements for children in the program. Findings indicate that the program can be scaled successfully throughout the county. Outcome findings from pilot and expansion offices indicate that more children are being placed with relatives and that these

children are equally likely, compared to similar children placed with relatives in offices not implementing UFF, to experience stable placement with relatives and to reach permanency through reunification. Findings from the pilot offices further suggest that children placed with relatives through UFF have a greater likelihood of being adopted or having a finalized guardianship if unable to be reunited with their parents

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Appendix 1: Methods for Long-term and Short-term Outcomes Studies

To test the effect of UFF on the outcomes of interest, Child Trends employed a difference-in-difference approach (Lechner, 2011). Difference-in-difference analysis is a quasi-experimental design that reduces biases in post-intervention period comparisons between the treatment and comparison groups that could result from pre-existing differences between those groups (e.g., the UFF offices may have performed better than the comparison offices in terms of relative placement even before UFF). It also reduces biases from comparisons over time in the treatment group alone that could be a result of other trends that influence the outcomes of interest (e.g., a new county-wide policy). Specifically, we estimated the effect of UFF by comparing changes in outcomes over time for children served by the offices implementing UFF (the pilot offices and the six expansion offices) to changes in outcomes over time for a population that did not receive the UFF intervention—children served by all other DCFS offices. If UFF had an effect on an outcome, we would expect to see a larger change in relative placement for children served by UFF offices when comparing children detained in the pre- and post-UFF time periods than would be found for comparison office children.

Within the difference-in-difference design, we used survival analysis to examine how UFF affected the probability and timing of our outcomes of interest. Survival analysis is the strongest approach for estimating the probability and timing of an event of interest (referred to as "failure"). Survival analysis accounts for the fact that the children in our sample were detained at different time points and in out-of-home placements for varying periods of time. It also accounts for the fact that some children may not have yet experienced a particular event of interest by the end of our study period. For relative placement, relative placement disruption, reunification, and adoption/guardianship analysis, we used a specific type of survival analysis—competing risk analysis. Competing risk analysis also accounts for the fact that there are "competing events" that can prevent the event of interest from occurring; for example, children may reunify with their parents meaning they will not exit to guardianship/adoption (Prentice, 1978). We calculated and graphed failure functions (1- Kaplan-Meir estimator; Kaplan & Meier, 1958) and cumulative incidence functions (in the presence of competing events) for the outcomes of interest separately for four groups: 1) children detained before the implementation of UFF in the pilot/expansion offices; 2) children detained after the implementation of UFF in the pilot/expansion offices; 3) children detained before UFF in the comparison offices; and 4) children detained after UFF in the comparison offices. We also split the groups of pilot office children and calculated the cumulative incidence function separately for children in Glendora and children in Santa Fe Springs (long-term outcome analysis) and for children in Service Bureau 1 and Service Bureau 2 (expansion office analysis). We conducted these analyses again for the subpopulation of children not initially placed with relatives and thus eligible for P3 services in the UFF offices in the post-UFF period. Comparing the change in the failure or cumulative incidence functions before and after UFF implementation for the UFF offices to the change for the comparison offices illustrates the effect of UFF on the outcome of interest.

We then employed multivariate cox proportional hazard models and competing risk models to test whether that effect was statistically significant, accounting for child characteristics that might make children more or less likely to achieve the outcomes of interest (these include age, race/ethnicity, gender, sibling group status, a positive mental health screen, allegation type, and whether the perpetrator was an extended family member). Our multivariate models also used cluster-robust standard errors to account for the fact that foster care children are often part of sibling groups, and the placement and permanency outcomes for

siblings are closely aligned. We also included office fixed effects to account for the existing variation among DCFS offices. Note that failure and cumulative incidence functions displayed in the figures in this report are not adjusted for child characteristics. Instead, we show unadjusted findings and then note whether the effect remains and is statistically significant in our multivariate analyses. All analyses were run in Stata 16.

Appendix 2: Limitations

A limitation of this evaluation is the ability to assess the nuances of how UFF may be more or less successful in different offices. The implementation study was limited to the two expansion offices that most recently implemented the program, so we do not have implementation details (successes, challenges, etc.) for the remaining four expansion offices. Additionally, limitations in sample size and the post-UFF follow-up period for the six expansion offices meant we could not calculate precise estimates and detect statistically significant outcome findings for individual offices (except South County). That said, the average effect of the program across children in multiple offices can be more reliably interpreted than the program effect for children in individual offices, particularly for outcomes less directly related to family finding efforts at the beginning of a case. Due to their smaller sample sizes, outcomes in individual offices can be more easily influenced by large sibling groups. They are also more susceptible to random variation than are outcomes in the combined study sample. Random differences in case-level characteristics between the cohorts of children served before and after UFF are more likely to occur the smaller the sample size is, and these case-level differences—rather than the implementation of UFF—might explain at least some of the outcomes observed for the office-specific findings. Although we do control for select measured child and case characteristics in multivariate models, we cannot control for all possible factors that may influence the outcomes of interest. Despite these limitations, this evaluation provides an important look at long-term effects of UFF for children served by the pilot offices as well as short-term outcomes for children served by the six expansion offices, giving a sense of the effectiveness of the program as a whole.

Additionally, we lacked sufficient sample to precisely estimate re-entry after children's placement episode ended. This was in part due to limiting the sample to children placed with relatives who then exited to reunification or guardianship as we were unable to capture re-entry for children who were adopted.[20] We did find trends that pointed to fewer re-entries after UFF. A larger sample would increase the power to detect program effects; however, we cannot assume that the outcomes for children in a larger sample would be similar to those in the present study.

Throughout this report we have mentioned the limitations that the COVID-19 pandemic placed on the implementation of UFF during the study period (shutdowns due to the pandemic began in March 2020). It should be emphasized again, that, particularly for the expansion offices, many of the children in the post-UFF period were detained during the pandemic while P3 workers and caseworkers were working under unusual circumstances. In this way, findings for the expansion offices may be less generalizable to future periods of time when the pandemic has resolved.

[20] Among all children in our sample (placed with relatives) whose placement episode had ended, 22 percent were adopted.

Appendix 3: Long-term Findings by Pilot Office

Figure A1. Probability of relative placement disruption over time, Glendora and Santa Fe Springs offices pre- and post-UFF, all children

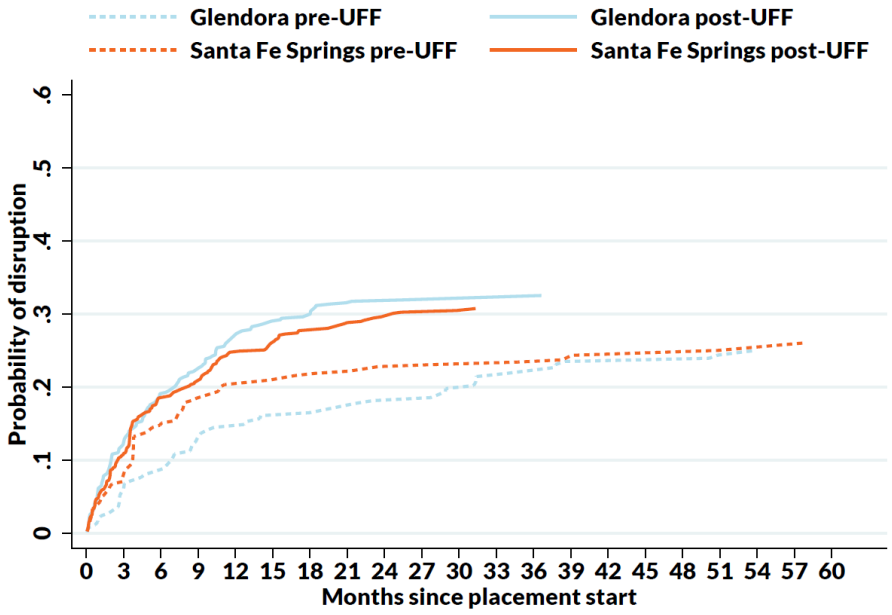


Figure A2. Probability of relative placement disruption over time, Glendora and Santa Fe Springs offices pre- and post-UFF, children not initially placed with relatives

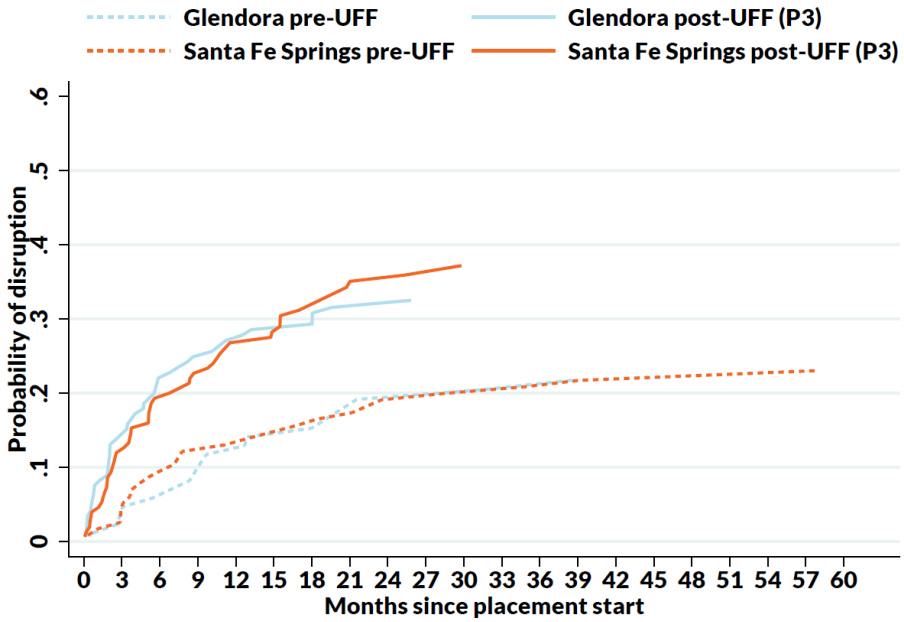


Figure A3. Probability of relative placement disruption to a non-relative placement, over time, Glendora and Santa Fe Springs offices pre- and post-UFF, all children

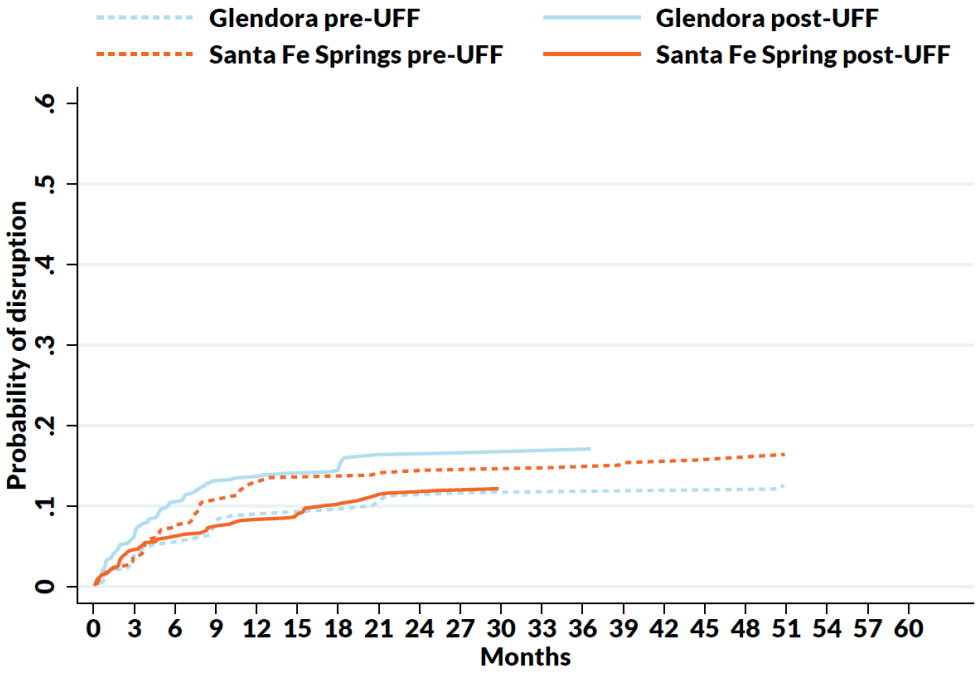


Figure A4. Probability of relative placement disruption to a non-relative placement, over time, Glendora and Santa Fe Springs offices pre- and post-UFF, children not initially placed with relatives

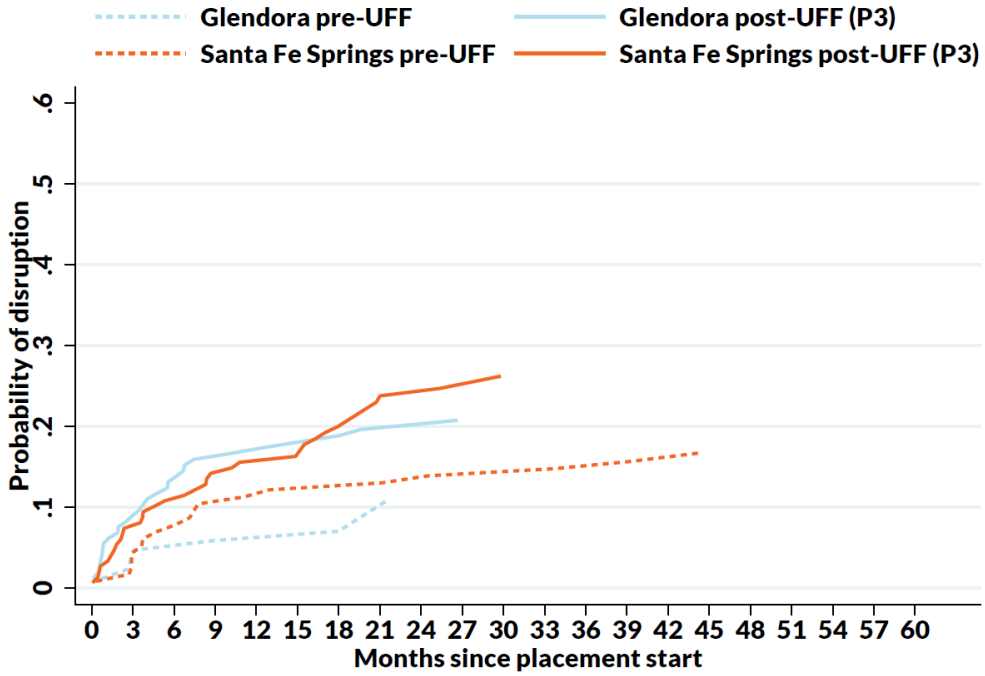


Figure A5. Probability of reunification over time, Glendora and Santa Fe Springs pre- and post-UFF, all children initially or subsequently placed with relatives

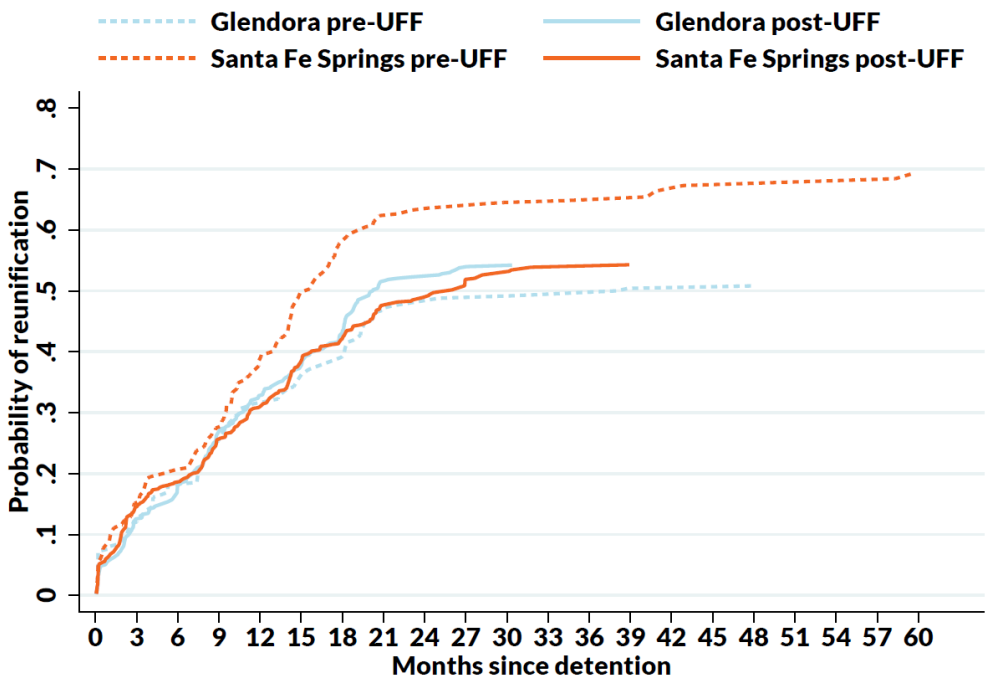


Figure A6. Probability of reunification over time, Glendora and Santa Fe Springs pre- and post-UFF, children not initially placed with relatives who experienced relative placement

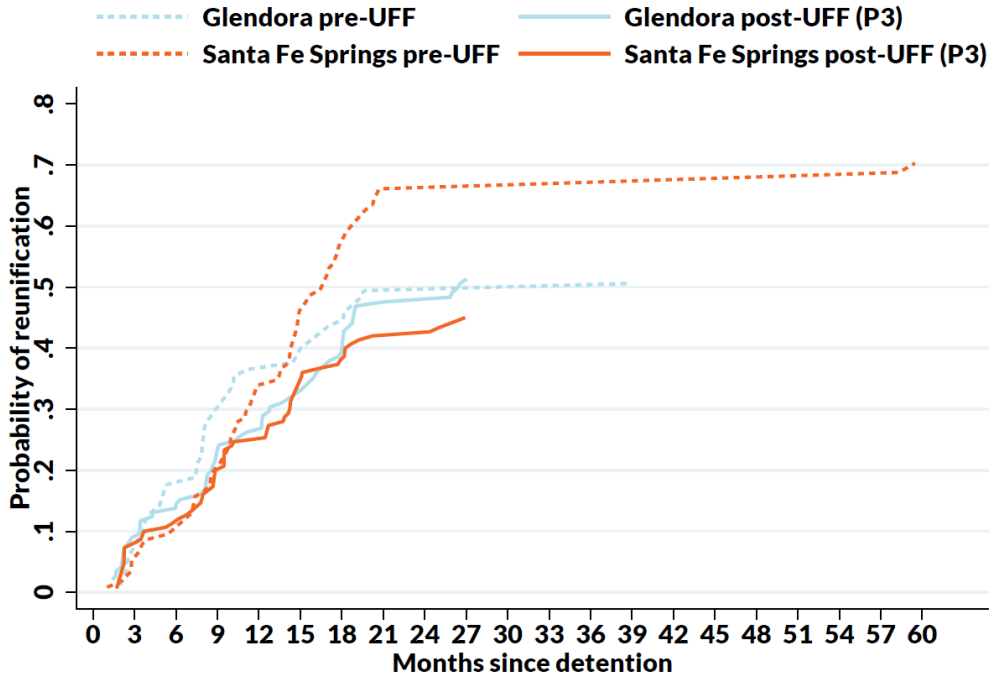


Figure A7. Probability of adoption/guardianship over time, Glendora and Santa Fe Springs pre- and post-UFF, all children initially or subsequently placed with relatives

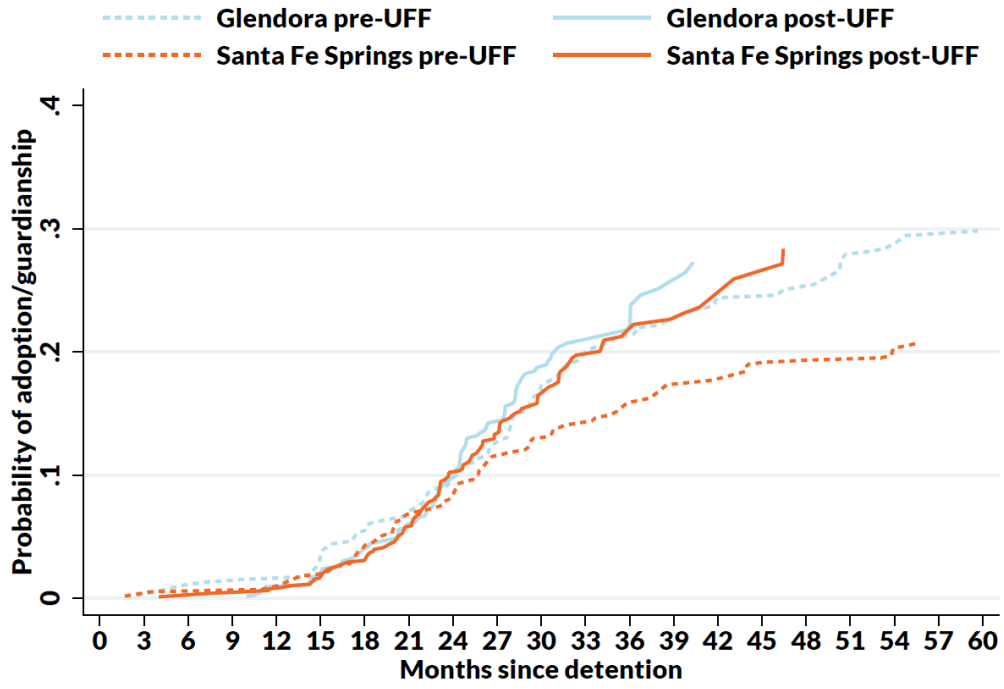


Figure A8. Probability of adoption/guardianship over time, Glendora and Santa Fe Springs pre- and post-UFF, children not initially placed with relatives who experienced relative placement

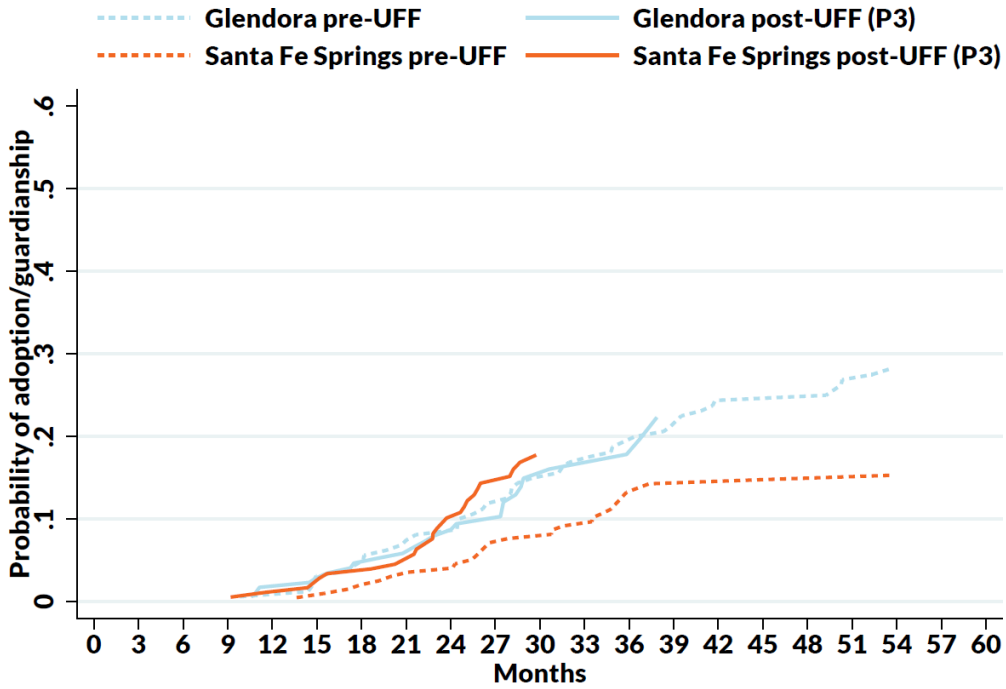
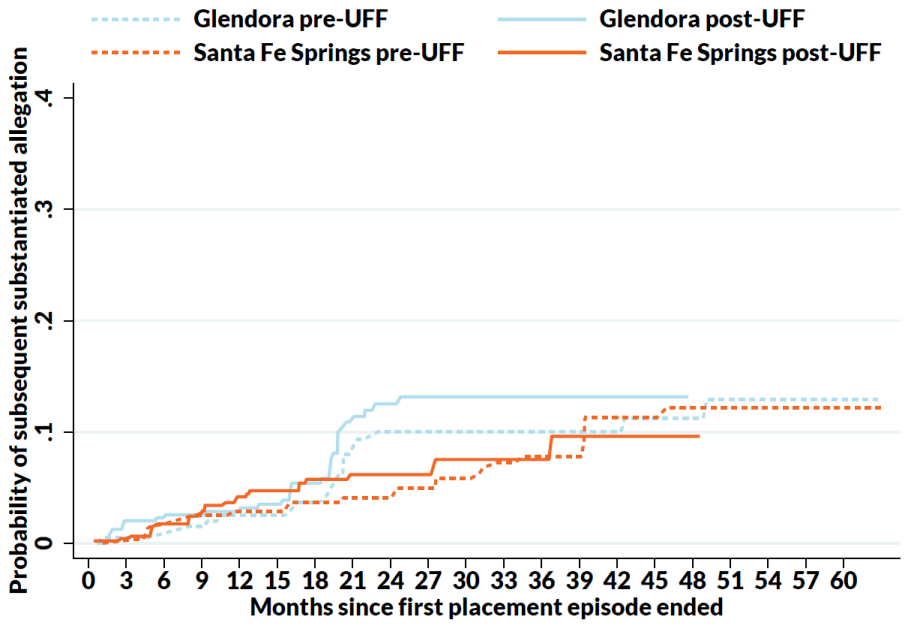
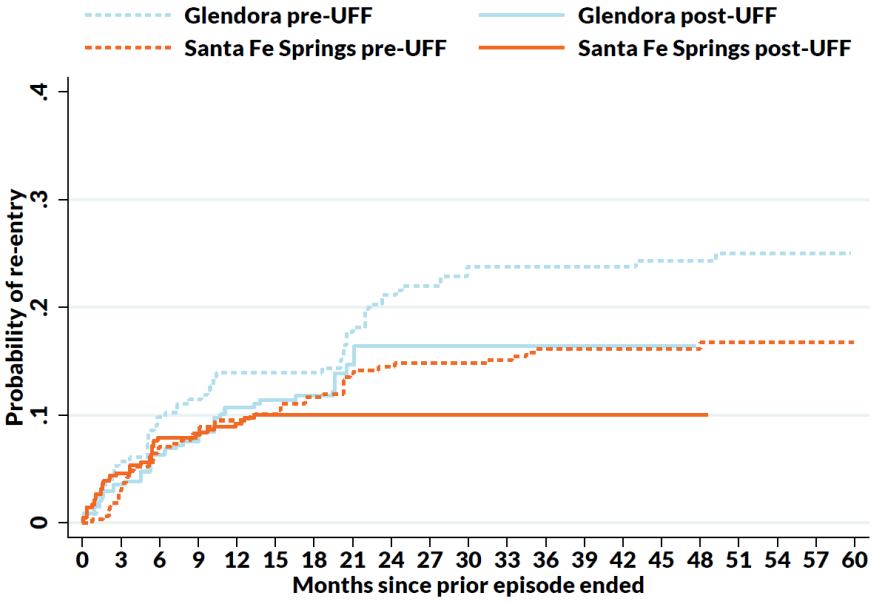


Figure A9. Probability of subsequent allegation over time, Glendora and Santa Fe Springs pre- and post-UFF, all children initially or subsequently placed with relatives whose episode ended in permanency



We did not have the sample size to study subsequent substantiated allegation for children not initially placed with relatives separately by office.

Figure A10. Probability of re-entry over time, Glendora and Santa Fe Springs pre- and post-UFF, all children initially or subsequently placed with relatives whose episode ended in reunification or guardianship



We did not have the sample size to study re-entry for children not initially placed with relatives separately by office.

Appendix 4: Short-term Outcome Findings by Service Bureau

Figure A11. Probability of relative placement over time, Service Bureau 1 and Service Bureau 2, pre- and post-UFF, all children

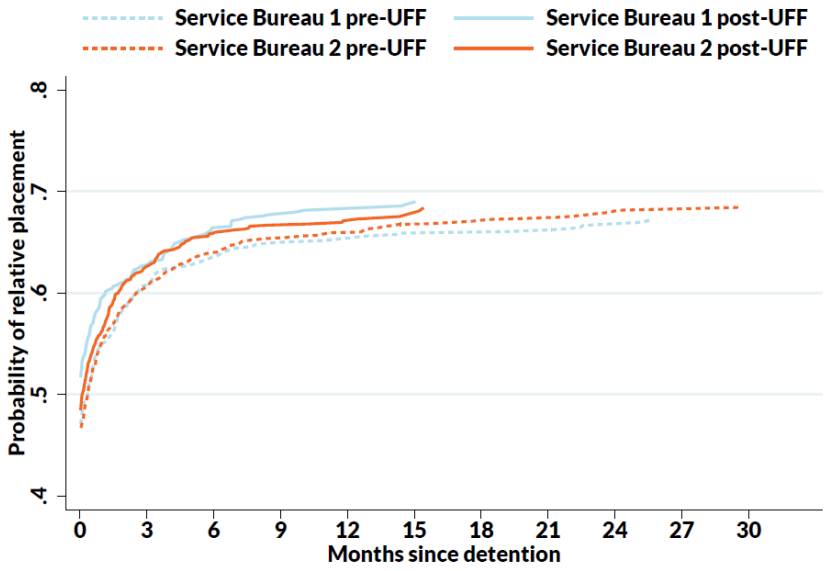


Figure A12. Probability of relative placement over time, Service Bureau 1 and Service Bureau 2, pre- and post-UFF, children not initially placed with relatives

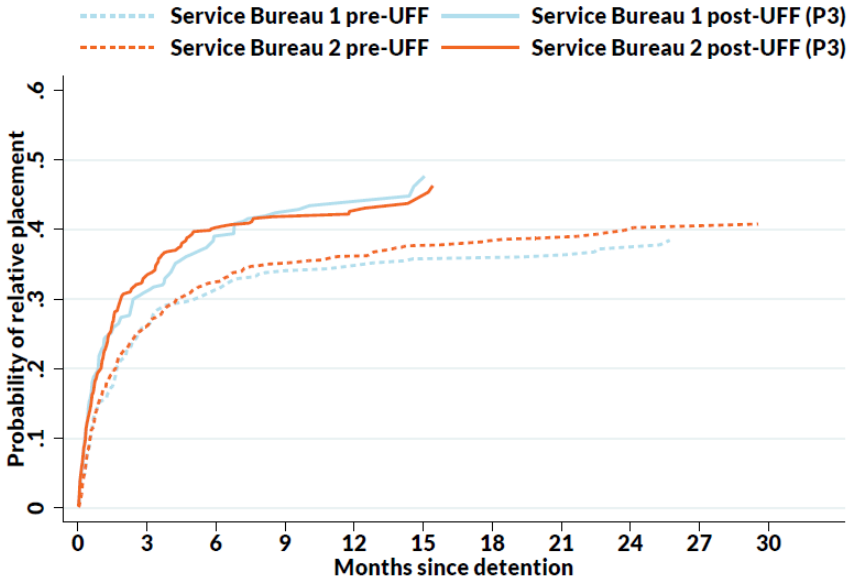


Figure A13. Probability of relative placement disruption over time, Service Bureau 1 and Service Bureau 2, pre- and post-UFF, all children

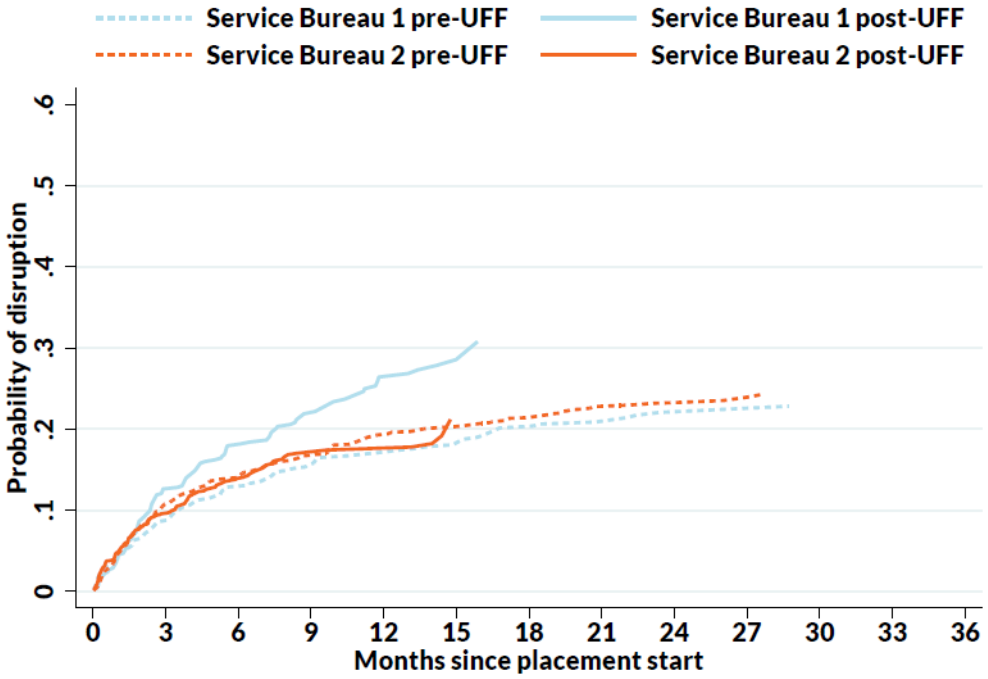


Figure A14. Probability of relative placement disruption over time, Service Bureau 1 and Service Bureau 2, pre- and post-UFF, children not initially placed with relatives

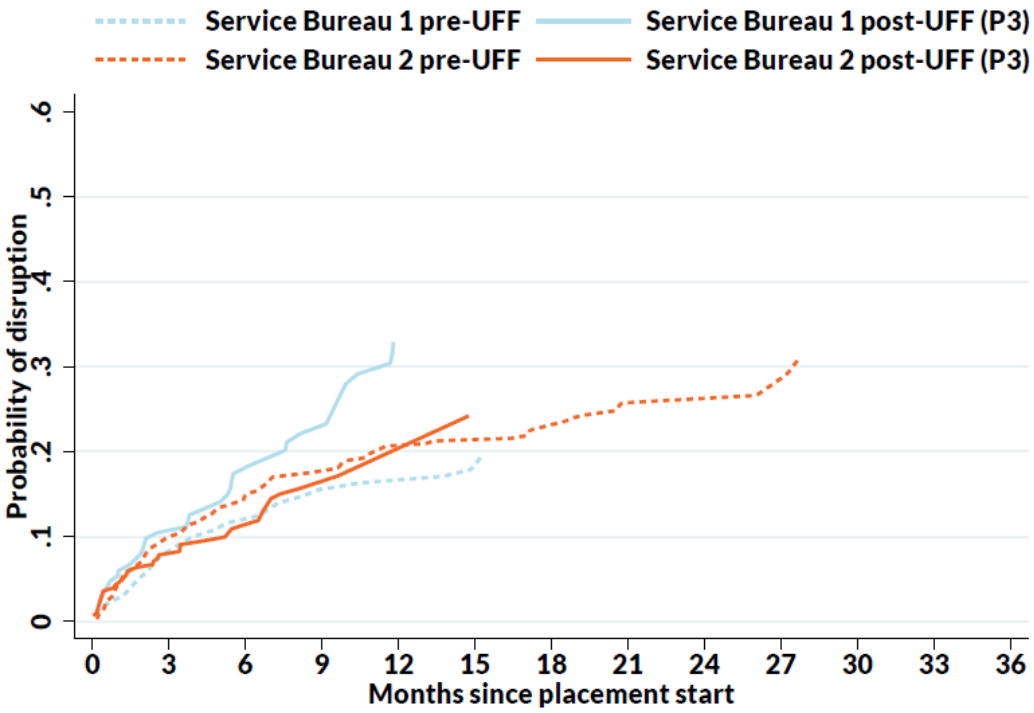


Figure A15. Probability of relative placement disruption to a non-relative placement, over time, Service Bureau 1 and Service Bureau 2, pre- and post-UFF, all children

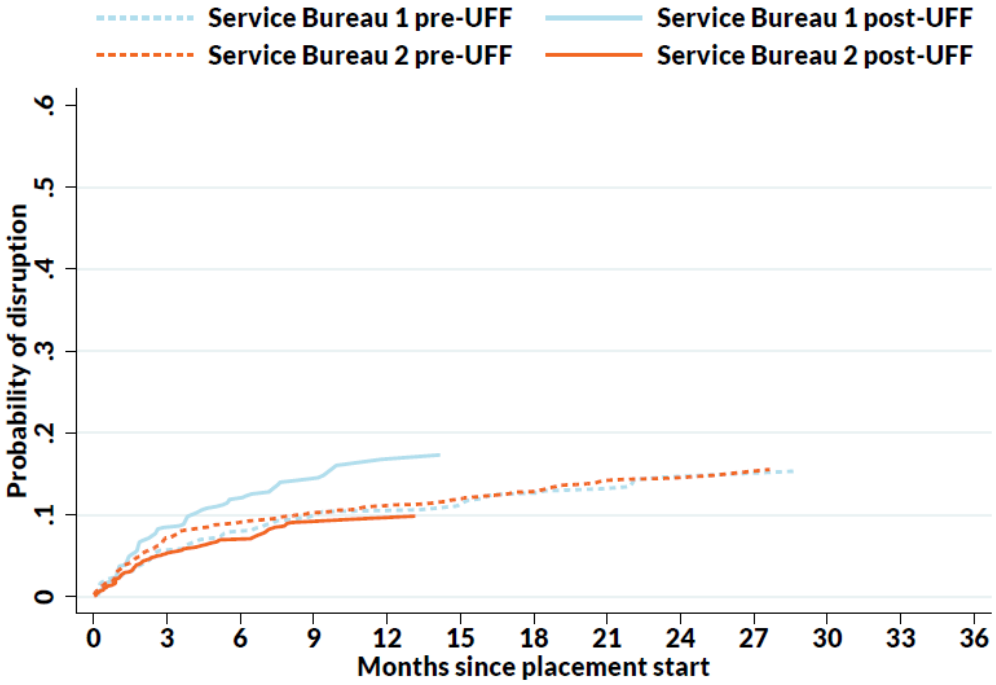


Figure A16. Probability of relative placement disruption to a non-relative placement, over time, Service Bureau 1 and Service Bureau 2, pre- and post-UFF, children not initially placed with relatives

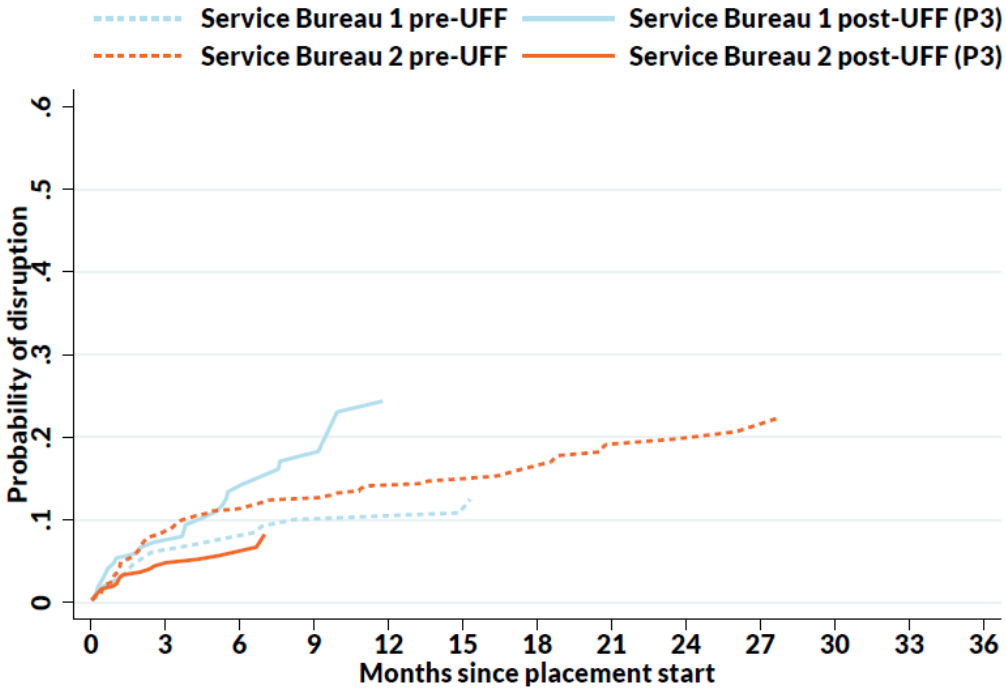


Figure A17. Probability of reunification over time, Service Bureau 1 and Service Bureau 2, pre- and post-UFF, all children initially or subsequently placed with relatives

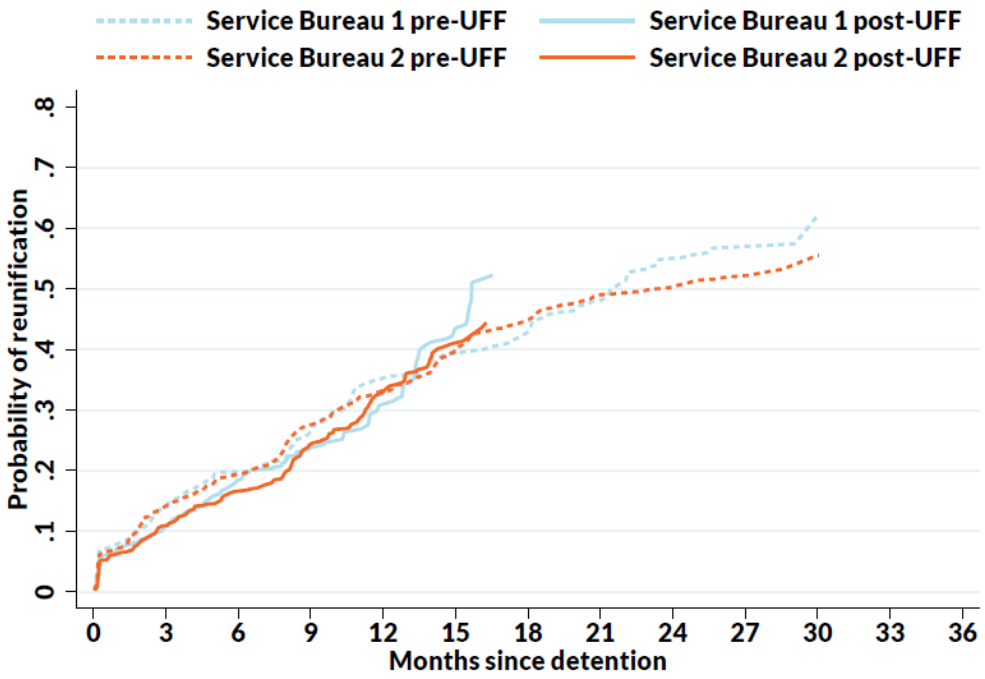
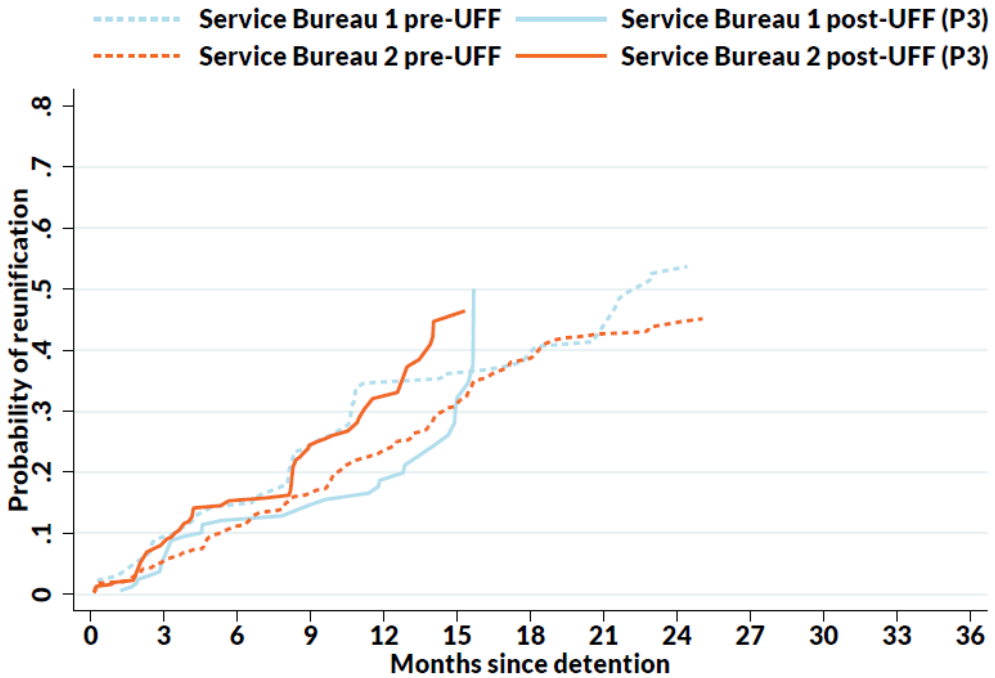



Figure A18. Probability of reunification over time, Service Bureau 1 and Service Bureau 2, pre- and post-UFF, children not initially placed with relatives who experienced relative placement