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***Parents of Children with Disabilities and Their Experiences with Montana's Early Intervention Services***

Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Act offers family-centered early intervention services to the families of children with delays and disabilities. Research shows us that family-centered services are considered best practice in the field of early intervention, but there is a dearth of knowledge when it comes to the perspectives of the parents who receive these services and what they believe are the strengths and weaknesses of those services. The need to better understand families' experiences in our state has been described as essential by the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS). DPHHS identified a need to interview families who are receiving these services so that we have data to better understand how these early intervention services are influencing families' and children's lives. Therefore, the purpose of our research study was to gather data through in-depth interviews with parents of children with delays and disabilities regarding their experiences, so that this could be used to inform professional development for early intervention professionals. Data was collected via in-person interviews and surveys (N=30); interviews were transcribed and reviewed for common themes regarding parents' experiences. Preliminary results include that certain aspects of services are in line with family-centered recommendations (e.g., listening to families wants/needs, caring about the family in addition to the child), while there is room for improvement in other areas (e.g., services are primarily play-based and not inclusive of other important daily routines, services do not always occur within the child's natural environment).

*Acknowledgements: Phoebe Leverett (MSU Undergrad Student) - Health & Human Development, Jacie Meldrum (MSU Undergrad Student) - Health & Human Development, Alexandra Feigel (MSU Undergrad Student) - Health & Human Development, Kami Horner (MSU Undergrad Student) – Sociology & Anthropology*