

Series: Pursuing Permanency

Post 1: “Enhancing Permanency for Youth”

Introduction

In April 2016, LSA CYF members launched a new learning cohort to identify and implement best practices for youth at risk of aging out of the child welfare system to achieve permanency, either with a permanent family (through reunification, adoption or guardianship) or through a lifelong connection to a committed, caring adult. The cohort’s objectives include exploring best practices, techniques and tools to support and assist organizations in integrating family placements for older youth into its culture and programming.

As part of this project, Natalie Goodnow from the Kennedy School at Harvard will share effective ways organizations can promote family placements for the older youth they serve.

This is the first of a summary of studies, toolkits, and papers on permanency for foster youth and while some of these will be more applicable to your organization than others, our goal is to provide you with resources and strategies that you can enrich to make your own, and that inspire innovation.

Today’s post summarizes the piece, “**Enhancing Permanency for Youth in Out-of-Home Care**,” from Child Welfare Information Gateway.¹ This piece looks at permanency strategies and barriers for physical and relational permanency.

Strategies for permanency planning with youth

- **Involve Youth in Permanency Planning**

- *Example: The Homecoming Project (MN)*

- “The Homecoming Project engaged youth through an intensive one-on-one relationship between each youth and a recruitment specialist who met frequently with the youth, spent significant time with the youth, and treated the youth as a true partner in the adoption process. . . . Youth also were encouraged to become involved in Our Voices Matter, a youth advocacy group that provided opportunities for public speaking, support groups, and leadership experiences. The 5-year Homecoming Project showed significantly better permanency outcomes for youth involved in the project compared to a control group of youth. Evaluators attributed this to the extraordinary youth engagement component of the project. Not only were more of the Homecoming youth actually adopted, but these youth were also less likely to have signed an affidavit stating that they did not want to be adopted” (5).

- **Strengthening Family Preservation and Reunification Services**

¹ <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/enhancing.pdf>

Youth Perspective

“If I hadn’t been given the opportunity to obtain permanency while in foster care, I am 100 percent positive that I would not be in the position I am in today. My foster mom ensured that I was treated like a traditionally raised youth and was identified as her son. I participated in extracurricular activities, school trips, and family vacations, which allowed me to feel a sense of belonging and create those lasting support networks that are of high importance when everything you had ever known changes overnight. Foster care was my saving grace; it gave me the chance to grow as a young man and transition into adulthood successfully. Permanency, whether legally defined or personally defined, should always be the number one goal when working with youth caught up in a system at no fault of their own.”

— *Jeremy, youth formerly in foster care (“Enhancing Permanency for Youth in Out-of-Home Care”)*

- *Example: Solution-Based Casework (KY)*
 - “SBC [solution-based casework] is based on three elements: full partnership with the family, a focus on the patterns of everyday family life, and solutions that target the prevention skills needed to reduce risks in everyday life. . . . Families receiving support from SBC caseworkers had significantly lower maltreatment recidivism rates than families with non-SBC caseworkers. Results suggest that workers implementing SBC may be better able to help families keep youth safe in their homes” (6).

- **Offering Guardianship and Subsidized Guardianship as Options**
 - *Example: Permanency Guardianship (ME)*
 - “Even before the passage of the Fostering Connections Act in 2008, Maine had established a State-funded guardianship program that provided a subsidy to families in which relatives or other adults became legal guardians of children or youth who might otherwise remain in foster care. . . . Since adding the Federal funding, the number of children and youth in permanency guardianships in Maine has grown from approximately 100 to about 300 (Children’s Defense Fund et al., 2012). Benefits have included more timely permanency and a slight bump in adoption numbers, with about 10 percent of permanency guardianships having moved to adoption (Children’s Defense Fund et al., 2012)” (7).

- **Maintaining Relationships with Kin**
 - *Example: Kinship Navigator Program (OH)*
 - “The Public Services Association of Ohio received a grant to develop an enhanced kinship navigator (KN) project in seven counties to support relatives caring for children and youth either informally or through the foster care system. . . . Counties with KN programs placed children with kin more often than did other counties, and children and youth served by KN programs were more likely to exit agency custody to legal custody or guardianship to a kin caregiver, experienced fewer days in custody, experienced lower recurrence of maltreatment, and had significantly reduced foster care reentry rates compared to children and youth in counties without KN programs. . . . KNs also performed a significant amount of outreach to faith- and community-based organizations. Once these organizations learned about kinship families, they were willing partners and generous donors, offering financial support and other resources, such as respite care” (8).
 - *Example: Extreme Recruitment (MO)*
 - “As part of Extreme Recruitment, the project hired two full-time private investigators to seek out and contact relatives and other potential family connections. . . . Within 2 weeks of

Quick Info

- **Youth preference:** A study of California youth in 2004 found that most prioritized relational permanence above legal and physical permanence (2).
- **Challenges:** The Midwest Evaluation on Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth found that “at age 26, individuals who transitioned out of foster care experienced more unemployment, lower incomes, more economic hardships (e.g., not being able to pay rent or utilities), poorer health, and higher arrest rates than youth of the same age in the general population” (3).
- **Multigenerational cycle:** The children of pregnant and parenting teens in foster care are much more likely to end up in foster care themselves than children with teen parents who were not in foster care (rate of 10% versus 2%). This was according to a study of more than 4,500 pregnant and parenting teens in foster care (3).

(“Enhancing Permanency for Youth in Out-of-Home Care”)

hiring an investigator to track down relatives, the project went from a 23-percent contact rate to an 80-percent contact rate (talking to a live person) (Serdjenian, 2011)” (9).

- **Recruiting Foster and Adoptive Families for Youth**

- *Example: You Gotta Believe! (NY)*

- “You Gotta Believe (YGB) is a New York City based program that uses a Finding Families model to place teens and preteens from foster care into permanent homes. After YGB receives a referral from a city, county, or other municipal foster care agencies, it assigns a mentor to each referred teen. The mentor gets to know the teen and attempts to learn about adults who have been important in the teen’s life and then contacts those adults to invite them to consider a parenting course. YGB also recruits families by sending staff members, current and former foster youth, and experienced adoptive families to talk to groups at places such as churches and street fairs. . . . In one 4-year federally funded study, 98 of the 199 youth referred to YGB achieved permanency” (10).

- **Focusing on Pre- and Postplacement Services**

- *Example: It’s up to Me to ReConnect (MI)*

- “The Children’s Bureau funded the It’s Up to Me to ReConnect project, which focused on helping youth achieve permanency while strengthening connections with extended families and involved the development of instruments to measure youth’s readiness for permanency (the Openness to Permanency Scale) and the quality of a relationship between a youth and adult (the Quality Relationship Scale)” (11).

- **Strengthening the Workforce to Support Enhanced Permanency**

- *Example: Permanency Roundtables (GA)*

- “One way to support the workforce is to bring in permanency experts and create new “specialist” staff positions to help caseworkers consider new ways to approach permanency. In 2008, Casey Family Programs, working with Georgia’s Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS), developed a Permanency Roundtable process designed to help youth who had been in foster care the longest achieve permanency and to help staff learn new ways of addressing permanency barriers. . . . Over 6 weeks, roundtable teams met to discuss the cases of 496 children and youth, including 269 teens. At each meeting, the caseworker presented the case, and the entire team brainstormed to identify permanency strategies and develop a permanency action plan (with an average of seven steps) for the worker to implement. There was structured follow-up to help the worker and supervisor, and the program included extensive data collection. At the 24-month follow-up, 34 percent of the teens had achieved legal permanency (i.e., reunification, adoption, guardianship), 36 percent had turned 18 and left care, and 27 percent remained in foster care” (13).

Barriers to permanency

- “Policies and attitudes may not reflect an emphasis on permanency for youth” (14).
- “Sequential case planning and a focus on independent living services may be inadequate for permanency” (14).
- “There are not enough families recruited to foster and adopt youth” (15).
- “Youth initially may be resistant to permanency planning” (15).
- “Court process may slow or hinder efforts towards permanency” (15).

If you would like to share what your organization is doing on permanency or have questions or a particular permanency focus/subject you wish to see a post on, please email Natalie Goodnow at NGoodnow@lutheranservices.org.