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The Importance of Permanency Planning in Juvenile Justice

By Maggie Bishop

Permanency planning is equally critical in child welfare and juvenile justice because nationally too many children could fall through the cracks of each system. In the absence of focused planning, many children experience inconsistent and changing placement settings, constant moves to new schools and communities and could potentially spend their entire lives without permanent connections. While children may enter placement for varying reasons, they sometimes end up staying because of inefficiencies in the system.

In 1997 President Clinton signed into law the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), which amended the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1980, and placed requirements on state systems to promote timely permanency for children. ASFA requires permanency efforts that assure reunification services are provided to the family at the same time that an alternative permanency plan is being made in the event that reunification efforts fail.

One key element that ASFA brings to permanency planning is an explicit hierarchy of permanency goals for children and youth. It mandates that the preferred permanent placement for a child is with a legally permanent family, whether that be with birth parents or with adoptive parents. If the agency proposes a lower priority permanent option it must justify that decision with compelling reasons. This is required as the other options provide less legal permanency and stability for the child.

CT’s Kinship Care Reform

By Ken Mysogland

A fundamental belief we all share is that children deserve to be raised in a family. In this setting, our history, cultural norms, identity and sense of self are established. As we grow and develop, it is our family that guides us and provides us this forever place to call “home.”

In today’s world, factors such as domestic violence, substance abuse and untreated mental illness strain and erode the family structure outweighing both the capability and capacity of a child’s caregivers. Despite these conditions, being separated from your family is one of the most traumatic experiences of a child’s life. Being placed with kin can dramatically reduce the negative impact of the placement process for a child, while at the same time allowing the child’s caregivers to receive the necessary help leading towards rehabilitation.

For decades, the Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF) placed a high proportion of children in traditional foster and adoptive families. Too often, the system did not embrace kin as a placement option, leaving children in unfamiliar surroundings without a viable permanency plan. In January 2011, Connecticut Governor Dannel P. Malloy appointed Supreme Court Justice Joette Katz to serve as DCF Commissioner. From the start, Commissioner Katz articulated the necessity to increase the number of kinship placements as demonstrated by the data reflecting child placements at that time:

- 4,780 total youth in care;
- 21 percent in kinship care;
- 17.4 percent placed initially into kinship care;
- 29.8 percent in congregate care;
- 362 youth in out of state placement; and
- 67.5 percent of youth overall placed with families.

What did the statistics tell us? We recognized that our entire system reflected significant issues with the manner in which we looked at and worked with families. At DCF we realized our need to do a better
Stay Connected With Child Welfare Information Gateway

By Alicia Gallant

Jennifer is a case worker in a public child welfare agency where she handles in-home cases. Her's is a fast-paced, changing environment where the problems of the families she is serving are becoming more complex. Her agency has just implemented a practice model that is focused on a more family-centered approach. To support this change, she wants to learn more about family group conferencing and what a more family-centered approach will mean for her agency and the families they serve. Jennifer recently visited the Child Welfare Information Gateway (Information Gateway) website to search for current resources on these topics. Through her search, she found Information Gateway's recently updated publication on engaging families in case planning.

Tanya supervises a permanency unit, in which she is responsible for overseeing foster care and adoption services. She wants information that she can use to help her workers assist families with homelessness, substance use, and domestic violence issues. She also would like to improve her supervisory skills and find resources and tools to help her support her agency's quality improvement efforts. Since her state's laws regarding domestic violence have changed, Tanya searched Information Gateway's website to find more information on the current statutes. After finding the relevant information in the State Statutes search, she still had some questions, so she sent an email to Information Gateway to further clarify the answers.

Mark is a director of a child welfare division of a county social services office. He is extensively involved with cross-system collaboration and is always looking for ways to strengthen collaboration with other agencies that serve vulnerable children and families. He is particularly interested in ways to more effectively engage families and needs information on evidence-based programs and models to achieve this within his own agency and partner organizations. He is also interested in learning more about how to better use data to improve outcomes in his state. Mark likes to stay in tune with what is happening in child welfare nationwide, and he really appreciates his daily Child Welfare in the News program, which helps him to stay current.

Like many thousands of child welfare professionals across the country in the more than 3,000 public and private agencies and related professions, Mark, Tanya, and Jennifer (not their real names) need current information and resources to effectively serve children and families. They turn to Child Welfare Information Gateway, a service of the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, to find the information they need.

Created in 2006, Child Welfare Information Gateway's mission is to promote the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and families by connecting professionals and the public to practi-
cial, timely, and essential information and resources to help them address the needs of children and fam-
ilies in their communities. Information Gateway provides access to print and electronic publications, websites, and online databases covering a wide range of topics from prevention to permanency, including child welfare, child abuse and neglect, adoption, and much more. For busy professionals who want to stay current with the latest information and resources, Information Gateway offers many free services, including an online library of over 75,000 documents, more than 150 Information Gateway publications (including publications in Spanish), subscription services, and an information support center with knowledgeable staff available Monday through Friday to answer questions.

While services and products are intended to be responsive to the needs and priorities of Federal, State, and local child welfare agencies, Information Gateway also provides information and resources for related professionals—including counselors, teachers, judges, health and behavioral health professionals, and law enforcement workers—as well as the general public, including fact sheets for families with information on child abuse and neglect, foster care, and adoption.

Topical scope
Child Welfare Information Gateway was developed to achieve the Children's Bureau's vision of a single resource for the field covering its entire topical scope. Information Gateway encompasses the broad range of child welfare topics, from prevention to permanency, including:

- Family-centered practice
- Child abuse and neglect
- Preventing and responding to child abuse and neglect
- Supporting and preserving families
- Out-of-home care
- Achieving and maintaining permanency
- Adoption and post adoption

The Systemwide web section includes information on topics that are relevant across the child welfare continuum, including management and supervision, assessment, courts, cultural competence, disaster preparedness, funding, laws and policies, statistics, mental health, domestic violence, youth, workforce and training resources, and other practice approaches and organizational issues.

Professionals and members of the public involved in child welfare can connect to extensive information on all aspects of child welfare by visiting the comprehensive website (www.childwelfare.gov). It provides your connection to the most current resources through new and enhanced sections on the pressing issues in child welfare. For example, a new section on child, youth, and family well-being recently launched. New sections on rural child welfare and immigration and child welfare are designed to frame the issues in current practice and help professionals at all levels better assist the children and families they serve. Each year, special web sections and materials are developed for National Child Abuse Prevention Month (April), National Foster Care Month (May), and National Adoption Month (November). The goal is to lead child welfare professionals to the information they need quickly, helping them to connect the dots across disciplines and program areas and to link to relevant websites and resources.

Website content is continually updated, and new sections and features are added in order to accomplish this goal. Spring 2014 will see the launch of an interactive Family Engagement Inventory (FEI) focusing on family engagement in child welfare as well as juvenile justice, behavioral health, early childhood education, and education. The FEI is intended to promote cross-system collaboration and understanding of family engagement by providing practical information to support professionals working directly with families, managing programs, and leading systems.

Working together
Information Gateway assists professionals and concerned citizens in meeting their goals through collaboration and partnerships. Information Gateway partners with other governmental entities, national, state, and local child welfare organizations, universities, researchers, and others. Yet the most important collaboration is with professionals in the field. Information Gateway staff attend, exhibit, and present at state, regional, and national conferences and meetings; conduct focus groups on emerging issues; and participate in listserves—all to continue to gather and gain a better understanding of effective strategies, helpful tools, and programs that are working.

Stay connected!
Child Welfare Information Gateway helps professionals learn about the latest child welfare news, research, and resources through free subscription services. A variety of subscriptions are offered to meet the needs of busy professionals, including:

- Children's Bureau Express (CXB), the Children's Bureau's online digest, published 10 times a year, which provides brief articles summarizing the

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Alicia Gallant

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Understanding the Adolescent Brain...

Now That We Know Better, How Do We Do Better?

By Sarah B. Greenblatt and Dianna Walters

The emerging science of adolescent brain development has deepened our understanding of adolescent capabilities, behaviors and potential. Neuroscience has made clear that the brain is not "done" in early childhood. Instead, adolescence provides a second powerful window of developmental opportunity. It is also now widely understood that young people need more time than was previously believed to master the distinct social and developmental tasks needed to become healthy, connected, and productive adults. Young people that are removed from opportunities to practice and master these tasks often have greater difficulty achieving success in school, work and relationships. Young people in foster care, because of the often traumatic experiences associated with being in foster care, face multiple barriers to success as they transition to adulthood.

Unlike younger children in foster care, for whom safety and protection are the greatest need, older youth are in the process of developing greater autonomy and practicing adult roles and responsibilities. It is during adolescence and early adulthood that young people develop a personal sense of identity, establish emotional and psychological independence, build adult vocational goals, learn to manage sexuality and sexual identity, adopt a personal value system, and develop increased impulse control and behavioral maturity.

Since 1999, more than 230,000 young people have left the foster care system, typically at age 18, without having stable family or community supports to count on. Far too many of these young people face troubling challenges upon aging out of foster care, including homelessness, lower graduation rates from high school and college, and difficulty securing stable employment. The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative has been focused on improving outcomes for all youth in and transitioning from care to assure they are connected to the supports and relationships needed to be successful adults. In 2010 we published "The Adolescent Brain: New Research and its Implications for Young People Transitioning from Foster Care"1 with research findings that offer recommendations in this article.

We are learning that experiences matter more than we ever thought during adolescence, especially experiences within relationships.

We share some of the key findings and recommendations in this article.

Understanding the Adolescent Brain: What’s Going on in There?

Recent research has helped us understand the adolescent brain in new and powerful ways. Adolescence and early adulthood provide just as much opportunity to impact healthy brain development as in the early childhood years. We now know that not only during the teenage years but through the late twenties, a young person’s brain is in a period of gradual yet major growth and development. The frontal part of the brain— which governs the executive functioning capacities of critical thinking, impulse control, planning, and decision-making—is in fact the last part of the brain to fully develop during these years. It is important while their brains are still developing to intentionally provide opportunities for older youth and young adults to practice these “thinking skills” that are so vital to later positive life outcomes.

From recent research about adolescent brain as well as childhood trauma, we also now know that the capacity to practice life skills best evolves within trusting relationships; and that young people can indeed learn to trust adults when these relationships are supportive and provide continuity and consistency. Thus, we are learning that young people have a developmental need for trusting, committed adult relationships as a context within which they can practice adult roles and learn from their mistakes— without the threat of being moved, rejected or at worst, left behind.

Risk-Taking Serves a Purpose

We don’t have to tell anyone about the seemingly thoughtless and even risky behaviors that adolescents engage in—we’ve all been there! What is exciting about new brain science is that we now know more about why this happens. We are learning how chemical changes in the adolescent brain actually prime adolescents’ brains for these risk taking behaviors. With shifting levels of dopamine and other hormones in the developing adolescent brain, it takes more exciting experiences for most teens to feel emotionally satisfied or stimulated. Chemical changes in the brain present rich opportunities for learning from experience and mistakes and, with adult support, for practicing greater self-regulation, coping, and resiliency skills. This is critically important for young people as they practice becoming adults. Thus, until the frontal lobe’s critical thinking capacities are fully developed, adolescents are still relying heavily on their emotionally charged brains to guide their thinking and behaviors. This is what sometimes gets them into trouble, and leads to a negative labeling of what is in actuality a necessary and powerful developmental period. They will need age-appropriate structure, guidance and support as they experiment and make mistakes they can learn from. Adolescence therefore becomes a period of growth when the right opportunities for learning can shape the planning, decision-making, judgment, and coping skills a young person needs as an emerging adult.

The Impact of Trauma, Ambiguous Loss and Foster Care

Young people who experience foster care can be viewed as trauma survivors. They may have experienced abuse and neglect, separation and ambiguous loss from family and community, multiple relationship disruptions and unresolved grief. These traumatic experiences can have a negative impact on all aspects of child and adolescent development which can linger well into adulthood— without the right support and peer relationships and experiences. New lessons from neuroscience teach us that there is a window of time to counteract the damage caused by earlier traumatic experiences and ambiguous losses. Adolescence is that time and it offers tremendous opportunity to support young people in exploring and understanding what happened to them while they are engaged in planning for where they are going and who will be there to support them. With the right support and guidance, they are able to better understand the past so they can be freed up to move forward.

This means that professionals from all disciplines that work with and on behalf of youth in foster care must be guided by the knowledge that interpersonal experiences, neurobiological development, and a foundation for functioning later in life go hand in hand. Trauma impacts developmental functioning in children and youth within the developmental domains of social, emotional, intellectual, physical and even spiritual functioning. We now know more about how traumatic experiences also have an impact on the developing brain. When traumatic events occur, the body’s stress response system is activated and causes temporary chemical or hormonal changes in the brain. Stress is a normal and even functional part of everyone’s life experience, providing opportunities to develop ways to cope that can help us weather temporary changes or life crises. When children and adolescents feel the world is a safe place to be, they are better able to master the developmental tasks associated with the ages and stages of growth; and their brain development is not hindered from chronic or toxic hormonal stress levels.

However, for those who experience chronic stress brought on by neglect, abuse and unpredictability in relationships, brain development can be slowed or disrupted resulting from ongoing elevated levels of stress hormones. The brain actually becomes wired to expect an unsupportable and unstable environment or sudden, arbitrary placement moves. This state of high anxiety and fear negatively impacts the child and adolescent’s sense of self, others and the world. When high stress levels are prolonged or repeated, it may result in dysfunctional neurobiological changes rather than adaptive coping responses to a specific situation. Research has shown that without the protective factors of nurturing, supportive and continuous relationships during stressful experiences, children and youth are at risk of having difficulty regulating their feelings, emotions or behaviors; and they may experience excessive help seeking and dependency, social isolation or disengagement. In other words, they may perceive the world as an unsafe place to be, and have “survival” responses which are internalized (such as depression or sadness) or externalized (such as disruptive or oppositional behaviors). Over time, without the right intervention and support, they may become afraid of accepting the very support, protection and help they are most in need of.

Relationships and Experiences Matter

We are learning that experience matters more than we ever thought during adolescence, especially experiences within relationships. When adolescents who have experienced past or present trauma are exposed to an array of developmentally healthy

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“At our best level of existence we are part of a family, and at our highest level of achievement, we work to keep the family alive.” Maya Angelou

E leven people filled in to the room at a Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF) area office for a meeting that was called only two hours earlier. They were parents, grandparents, friends and neighbors. They had come together at the Department’s request to participate in a critically-important decision regarding the safety of two small children and to determine if the children could remain at home safely or would need to be placed outside the home. The family was able to recognize that mom needed interim help to adequately supervise and provide a safe environment for the children. Family members set up a schedule to support mom during the day-time hours until dad returned home from work. This safety plan was signed off on by all present, and the children were able to remain at home.

This “Considered Removal Child and Family Team Meeting” is a new practice at DCF that was implemented on February 11, 2013. Most accurately, it represents an extension in application of the “team decision making” process that started here in Connecticut last year, whereby the Department sought family members and their natural supports in the community to enable youths to leave congregate settings.

DCF is committed to child and family teaming as a primary engagement strategy and it has been evolving in application to different groups of children over time. Our experience last year with “team decision making” as a mechanism to reduce the number of children in congregate care was instrumental in reducing the percentage of children in congregate care from 29.8 percent in January 2011 to 23.1 percent in July 2013. This also paved the way for successful implementation of considered removal teaming as staff saw firsthand the value of bringing families and their supports to the table as true partners in decision making and planning. The next step for the Department is the implementation of “permanency teaming” planned for winter 2014, which will apply the teaming process to youths whose permanency needs have yet to be met.

The philosophy and values behind it

The process is based on the belief that families, when asked, have a lot to say about ensuring the well-being of their children. When supported, families can make well-informed decisions about keeping their children safe. Considered Removal Child and Family Teaming — as well as teaming in all its applications — is one of four core components of the Department’s Strengthening Families Practice Model along with respectful engagement of families, purposeful visitation and family-centered assessment. By policy, a considered removal meeting must take place before any child is removed from home. In situations where there is imminent danger, necessitating immediate removal, the meeting must be held within two business days. Families are invited and encouraged to bring family, friends, and formal and informal supports to assist in the decision making and safety planning for the child or children involved and, if necessary, serve as placement options. Meetings are led by a neutral facilitator (not the child’s social worker or the supervisor) with the goal of ensuring everyone is heard and to bring the group to consensus regarding the safety and well being of the children involved.

The purpose of the Considered Removal Child and Family Team Meeting is to maintain children at home whenever possible or, if not, place with relatives/kin. We are convinced the practice will improve the Department’s decision-making process, deepen partnership with families, and assist us in developing specific, individualized interventions for children and their families. It is well recognized in the field that the threat of or actual removal from home is highly traumatic to children and their families. The considered removal process is a trauma-informed practice designed to reduce the negative impact. Children of all ages can have a voice in the meeting — if not by attendance then through letters, pictures, phone calls and/or the designation of a team member to ensure the child’s needs and voice is fully represented. If it is determined that a child needs to be removed from home, the members are empowered to determine who will speak to the child and plan for visitation without delay.

Job at valuing families in the decision-making process and to act upon the belief that families are an equal partner with a voice that must be listened to and respected.

Challenging our values and behaviors

Kinship care is a manifestation of solid engagement with families. Yet, we were making many negative assumptions about kin that were not data driven and which led to exclusionary practices. In order to move forward, we had to address biases, values and beliefs at all levels of the agency as they pertained to families of all types. We would not be able to embrace kin until we fully accepted that families play a vital role in the decision-making process.

Why are kinship placements so important?

Both state and national data clearly demonstrate that children placed into kinship homes experience:

- Decreased trauma during removal and placement;
- Increased family connections;
- Increased stability;
- Better educational, mental health and social outcomes;
- Increased frequency of siblings remaining together;
- Lower rates of maltreatment in out-of-home care; and
- Quicker permanency.

While there was no doubt that Connecticut had cause for improvement, changing practice also meant that we needed to change the culture.

There is good reason why the phrase “culture eats strategy for lunch” is often heard in discussions about organizational change. How did Connecticut go about changing the culture of the organization to address the barriers?

Commissioner Katz and her leadership team issued a variety of messages all with the theme that families hold answers. A new DCF mission issued a variety of messages—all with the theme of bringing families and their supports to the table as true partners in decision making and Family Team Meeting is to maintain children at home whenever possible or, if not, place with relatives/kin. We are convinced the practice will improve the Department’s decision-making process, deepen partnership with families, and assist us in developing specific, individualized interventions for children and their families. It is well recognized in the field that the threat of or actual removal from home is highly traumatic to children and their families. The considered removal process is a trauma-informed practice designed to reduce the negative impact. Children of all ages can have a voice in the meeting — if not by attendance then through letters, pictures, phone calls and/or the designation of a team member to ensure the child’s needs and voice is fully represented. If it is determined that a child needs to be removed from home, the members are empowered to determine who will speak to the child and plan for visitation without delay.

Taking action

In collaboration with the Annie E. Casey Foundation Child Welfare Strategy Group, “kinship process mapping” exercises occurred with staff in each DCF regional office across the state. This intervention focused on interviewing staff at all levels of the agency and kinship foster parents to understand the perception, policy, and practice barriers surrounding kinship placements.

The most common barriers expressed by staff were:

- Policies did not support kin as the presumptive placement;
- A perception that the kinship family may not function any better or keep a child any safer than the birth parent;
- Licensing standards were unreasonable;
- Lack of a timely waiver process did not allow families with previous criminal or child protective services histories to be licensed even if those past issues have been resolved;
- Paperwork is overwhelming and confusing;
- No internal mechanism existed for emergency “walk through” requests;
- Services are not offered or made available to kinship families; and
- Search for kin does not occur throughout the lifetime of a case.

Following this assessment process, changes ensued. DCF re-aligned staffing to ensure that...
The New England Youth Permanence Convening: A Regional Approach to Improving Outcomes
by Joy Duva, Julie Sweeney Springwater, and Madelyn Freundlich

All youth, including youth in foster care, need family. Young people’s ability to successfully develop through adolescence and into young adulthood is tied to their relationships with their families. An important predictor of adolescent adjustment and adult self-sufficiency is their parents’ support for their healthy separation and individuation during adolescence. Young people are more likely to develop as healthy adolescents and adults when they feel connected to family, can discuss their problems with parents and extended family members, know that their parents have high expectations for them, frequently participate in shared activities with their families, and have the consistent presence of their parents at the start and end of each day. Young people need somewhere to return for reassurance, support, and unconditional love in tough times.

The understanding of the importance of permanent families for youth in foster care, like other youth, has taken root over the past decade. Youth remain in foster care longer and achieve permanence at lower rates than younger children, and a significant number of youth age out of foster care each year to live on their own. Since FY 2002, more than 250,000 young people have exited foster care without a legally sanctioned permanent family relationship to offer guidance and support as they make the gradual transition into adulthood. Youth who age out of foster care without support from their families or other caring adults, and who lack community connections, tend to fare poorly.

With the enactment of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) and the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (FCA), achieving permanency for all children and youth in foster care has become a primary goal. States and local communities are seeking to reduce the number of children in foster care and the New England states—having experienced the same challenges as their national counterparts—have encountered challenges in implementing quality youth permanence policies and practices and ensuring that young people in foster care leave care to permanent families. In unprecedented ways, however, the New England states made youth permanence a priority for their states and the New England region as a whole. In 2006, at a meeting of the members of New England Association of Child Welfare Commissioners and Directors and the New England Foster Care Association, commissioners and directors of the six public child welfare agencies and the board presidents of their state Foster and Adoptive Parent Associations recognized the importance of a multi-year commitment to youth permanence and the power of manifesting their commitment by signing a pact pledging that commitment. By signing this pact, A Declaration of Commitment to Permanent Lifelong Connections for Foster Youth, each commissioner, director, and board president pledged their individual commitment and the commitment of their respective agencies to support and achieve permanent, lifelong connections for all children and youth that they serve.

Even as leadership at the commissioner, director, and board president levels have changed, each new leader has added his or her signature to the Declaration and used it as a symbolic guidepost in assessing progress toward the goal of permanency for all youth in foster care in their states.

State-to-State Peer Learning

Recognizing that steps were needed to operationalize the Declaration, the New England Association of Child Welfare Commissioners and Directors (The Association)—a consortium of child welfare agency leaders and staff members from Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont—mobilized regional efforts to support the New England states in achieving their pledges. The Association collaborated with Casey Family Services and Casey Family Programs—organizations actively providing consultation and technical assistance on youth permanence in the New England states—to develop a strategic regional approach to training and peer consultation in the form of Youth Permanence Convenings. The strategy was intentionally designed as an inclusive, collaborative approach to challenging assumptions, refusing to accept barriers to youth permanence, and working in teams for the best possible permanency outcomes for young people.

The Association reached out to the child welfare commissioners and directors in each New England state to provide information on the regional strategy and obtained their support. Each commissioner/director selected a state team leader to assemble and guide the members of the state’s youth permanency team. Beginning in 2009 and continuing through 2012, the New England state teams annually participated in Convenings that the Association, CFS, and CFP organized to provide them with space to reflect, recharge, learn and grow and to continue their work on strategies and actions for achieving legal permanence for youth in foster care. Learning opportunities, peer sharing, and the development of customized state action plans were critical components of each Convening.

Each Convening was aimed at helping states achieve the following measurable outcomes: reduction in the overall number of children in foster care and the number of children entering foster care annually; increased proportions of exits to permanence; decreases in the proportion of youth placed in congregate care; reductions in the proportion of older youth with APPLA goals; and reductions in the percentage of exits to “aging out.” State participants heard the voices of young people and families, had opportunities to share with colleagues, and participated as members in state-specific action planning. Each Convening also featured new and emerging information from research, policy and practice. Plenary sessions were devoted to such topics as adolescent brain development and trauma, developing court and agency partnerships, reinstatement of parental rights, and leveraging forces for change. Specific strategies were employed in the convenings to promote continued knowledge development, collaboration, and action (see table below).

New England Convening on Youth Permanence: The Strategies

- Learning about research and practice approaches that support efforts to increase youth permanency outcomes
- Identifying policy barriers and opportunities for strengthening state policies to promote youth permanence and the impact of policy changes on improving youth permanency outcomes
- Identifying options for assuring that youth and families are connected to ongoing supports that help sustain permanence
- Learning about successful approaches to reducing disparities in permanency outcomes for youth of color
- Examining successful approaches for building strong partnerships between child welfare agencies and the courts
- Customizing state action plans to achieve and sustain legal permanence for youth exiting foster care Data Source: Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS)

Outcomes of the Regional Approach

From the outset, the New England states recognized that changing policy and practice to achieve family permanence for young people in foster care would take time. However, in the period during which the Convenings were held, important changes have taken place, and more are expected in the coming years.

Data Trends. Over the four-year period of the Convenings (2009 through 2012), all New England states saw a reduction in the number of children in foster care. Four of the six saw overall reductions in the number of children entering foster care over the same time period. Region-wide, the number of younger teens (ages 13-15) entering care declined, while the number of older teens (ages 16-17) remained the same. Across New England, the proportion of exits to permanency for all children increased from 80.2% in FY 2007 to 83% in FY 2011. Among older youth, however, only about 60% of exits from care were to legally permanent families. Between FY 2005 and FY 2011, three New England states saw a
Planning for Permanency Right from the Start at MA DCF

By Mary Gambon, Leo Farley, Leslie Akula

Expanding understanding of permanency and improving skills for working with families are front and center activities for staff at the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families (DCF). Prompting the increased focus on permanency is a new, comprehensive Permanency Planning Policy that took effect on July 1, 2013.

Development of the policy actually began with a large group of staff in 1999. Influenced by new state and federal law, the policy grew to incorporate emerging best practices from Massachusetts and across the country. The policy lays out the framework for permanency and it also provides guidance on the steps that we expect our staff to take in creating permanence for families. We were deliberate in anchoring our permanency work in the first contact with every family. The policy makes it clear that every worker is a permanency worker regardless of their title or role in the agency. Investigators have as much responsibility for permanency as adoption workers. The efforts of the current worker are built on and supported by the work of everyone who has been involved with the family.

Implementation was planned by a broad-based working group of staff and consumers. A training of trainers approach was undertaken in May of this year and it has been extraordinarily successful. Supervisors have been trained alongside caseworkers and other managers to foster team-building and to emphasize the important role of both case-carrying and managerial staff in supporting permanency practices. The entire DCF work force was trained in only two months thanks to the hard work and dedication of the staff that volunteered to be responsible for delivering the training. Foster and pre-adoptive parents, contracted providers and DCF managers are receiving training this fall. Over the coming year, additional training modules addressing specialized aspects of the permanency planning policy will be provided to DCF staff and community partners.

Improving Permanency through Integrated Case Work on Children and Families

DCF’s policy addresses permanency from the first contact with the family through case closing. Permanency plans range from stabilization of the family or reunification to achieving permanency through adoption, guardianship, care with kin and for youth age 12 and older alternative planned permanent living arrangements. While the comprehensiveness of the policy added to its length and complexity, DCF believes that the planning for permanency from the outset, improved engagement with families, and shared commitment to permanency by our entire staff improves our practice.

Why Develop the Permanency Planning Policy?

Because every child deserves a family, the new policy defines actions and practices intended to:

• **Improve permanency outcomes** for every child and family that becomes involved with DCF.
• **Promote statewide consistency** in stabilizing families and preventing out-of-home placement; carrying out safe and stable placements when needed, preferably with kin; and achieving permanency within time frames that reflect the child/youth’s sense of time through safely stabilized/preserved families, reunified families or created families.
• **Comply with current requirements** of federal and state law, especially the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, Foster-Caring Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, and DCF’s enabling legislation of 2008.
• **Align practice with DCF’s Foster Child Bill of Rights and Sibling Bills of Rights.**

Key Features

To promote family stabilization and placement prevention, the policy:

• Clarifies what are reasonable efforts to strengthen and stabilize families and when such reasonable efforts are not required;
• Stipulates when the social worker will, in consultation with the family and child age 12 and older, identify kin and families, including the non-resident parent, and how such information will be documented. DCF uses a very broad definition of kin including fictive kin and the parents of sibling already adopted or in a guardianship;
• Provides a checklist to support activities to locate missing parent/caregivers;
• Embeds DCF’s approach to concurrent planning in all of our casework.

To improve the quality of placement decision-making and outcomes, the policy:

• Identifies the clinical placement team responsible for making the removal decision and overseeing the placement;
• Identifies factors indicating the “child has suffered from or is at imminent risk of serious harm” that should be considered prior to removal;
• Requires documentation of the reasonable efforts to strengthen and stabilize the family and prevent placement prior to removal or the judicial determination that (1) remaining in the home is contrary to the child’s best interests when one or more circumstances exists when reasonable efforts are not required prior to removal;
• Requires that a manager must approve and coordinate any emergency removal;
• Requires:
  o placement of children with full, half and/or step siblings already in or requiring placement. This requires our staff to fully explore the family and to be very aware of any prior involvement the family may have had with our agency;
  o consideration of placements in the following order of priority—non-resident parent, other kin, child-specific resource or unrestricted resource;
  o attention to the child’s best interests related to safety, well-being, permanency, continuity of significant relationships, educational stability; and
  o placement in the least restrictive setting that meets the child’s needs, as close to home as possible.
• Seeks to reduce the traumatic impact of placement by requiring safety-planned, parent-child contact within 24 to 48 hours after placement. In addition we have instituted a requirement for a face-to-face visit no later than 5 working days after placement. This is a new requirement which will engage families and foster parents in working together from the time the child enters care. Ongoing visits between the child and parents, siblings and grandparents are expected.

To promote the timely permanency decision-making when placement continues, the policy:

• Specifies practice expectations, tasks, time frames and assignments and requires a 6 Week Placement Review Meeting, involving the placement team, parents, child age 14 and older, foster/pre-adoptive parents or other placement provider, and optionally kin, the DCF nurse and/or other specialists (substance abuse, domestic violence, mental health, adolescent), family advocate and service providers.

While DCF has had placement review meetings for some time, we have made a commitment to have the family and the foster parent participate in these meetings. We believe inclusion will reduce misinformation and clarify expectations for the family, DCF staff and foster parents. While there are challenges in arranging a meeting that involves so many people so early in the placement, we believe these meetings will lead to shorter stays in care for many children.

• Stipulates that the Permanency Planning Conference which is our internal planning vehicle is required as soon as the prognosis for reunification is poor and is required at 9 months after placement. States DCF’s exceptions when termination of parental rights will not be sought for a child who has been placed for 15 of the previous 22 months, as well as the compelling reasons why TPR is deemed not to be in the child’s best interests describes Massachusetts’ court 12 month permanency hearing process. The Permanency Hearings have been a very successful cooperation between the Department and our Juvenile Courts. Judges have been very enthusiastic about having older youth come to the hearings to present their view of their needs and the services that they have and will receive from DCF.

Continued on page 12
New Hampshire's Division for Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) has developed and implemented a unique model for conducting child protection assessments with families throughout the life of a case. Dubbed the NH Integrated Assessment model (NHIA), it represents not a new model of practice, but rather an integration of existing assessment models in order to guide a balanced, comprehensive, and collaborative assessment practice and for families. Specifically, NHIA combines assessments using the Structured Decision-Making (SDM) Model, safety informed practices, and Solution Based Casework into a single format. The creation of this model was a gradual and evolving process, directed by shifts in practice both in New Hampshire and nationally. The new model brings the best of evidence-based actuarial assessment tools together with evidence-based clinical assessment and family engagement strategies.

Since 2001 child protection staff at DCYF have been utilizing the Structured Decision-Making (SDM) Model to guide assessments of safety, risk, strengths and needs of families involved with child protection. In use in many jurisdictions nationally, SDM is an evidenced-based model developed by the Children's Research Center (CRC) that provides an approach to screening reports of child abuse and/or neglect, determining response priority, identifying danger for children, evaluating risk of future maltreatment, and assessing the strengths and needs of families. SDM has brought objectivity and validity to practice at critical junctures in case planning in New Hampshire since its implementation.

In recent years, DCYF also embraced a national trend toward safety-informed practice, collaborating with families in the assessment of potential danger in a deeper and more strengths-focused manner. Like many other child protection jurisdictions, DCYF incorporated this practice so that when children are assessed to be in danger, the focus turns to ensuring safety first by utilizing the family’s strengths and protective factors to create a plan.

Most recently, both child protection and juvenile justice in DCYF have moved forward with implementing a Practice Model that has Solution-Based Casework (Christensen, Todahl, & Barrett, 1999) at its’ foundation. Solution Based Casework (SBC) focuses on working collaboratively with families to reach consensus with them regarding the maltreatment of children, which is framed in terms of developmental everyday tasks. Assessment using an SBC framework includes tracking the sequence of events that led up to the maltreatment, individual patterns of adult behavior that interfere with safe family functioning, family supports and child or youth development. Strengths of the family members and exceptions to the problem are highlighted, and used as a means to overcome the maltreatment. SBC has also been proven to be an evidenced-based practice, demonstrating improvements in child welfare outcomes.

As DCYF child protection staff moved forward with adopting SBC, it became clear that it was shaping a new way of conducting assessments collaboratively with families and reaching consensus with them regarding danger and needs, so that a plan that truly addresses these issues effectively could be developed. But how could SBC work with SDM and the other practice shifts underway? How could consistency and accuracy in assessment practice be maintained, while still allowing for true and individualized family voice throughout the life of a case? And last but hardly least, how would these different assessment practices all be used by staff in their everyday work without leading to confusion?

Aligning the various assessment methods

NHIA was conceptualized and developed in response to questions such as these. This unique format of integrating these three assessment models, also designed in response to DCYF’s federal Program Improvement Plan, prioritized SBC as a model of practice while at the same time recognized the need for continued use of SDM and safety informed practices. A decision was made to organize the models into one overarching assessment practice and to have the new format be incorporated into DCYF’s Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) system. A workgroup of DCYF administrators, field staff, and IT staff met regularly over many months to develop the new format and design its integration into the SACWIS system. As the new system was developed, special attention was paid to the IT design to ensure it allowed adaptation of the tools to real life case situations so that it would be truly used to support everyday work.

Academy Players of Rhode Island helps celebrate National Adoption Month

By Paula Fontaine

Earlier this year I became involved with Academy Players of Rhode Island’s production of They Chose Me. Since this was a cast made up of children only, I was fortunate to have a nine year old nephew to drag along to an audition. Throughout rehearsals for the show, the cast and production crew displayed a passion for their work as together they were exposed to the many emotions that adopted children experience. They Chose Me is a musical spotlighting the subject of adoption, as seen through the eyes of children ages 7 to 18. In the course of the show, a group of adopted youngsters assemble to tell their stories—funny and poignant—to Sarah Cook, herself an adoptee. The show encompasses a variety of issues typically experienced by adopted children. Among them; foster homes, parental loss, gay adoption, and multi-cultural families. It’s a funny and moving show, enjoyable to both youngsters and adults. While covering a wide range of experiences, it also educates audiences on the topic of adoption.

The idea of writing a musical about adoption was proposed by composer/writer Ned Ginsburg, whose son Alex was adopted. Lyricist/librettist Michael Colby agreed to collaborate, contributing the show’s structure. Colby did extensive research, using such sources as “How It Feels to Be Adopted” by Jill Kremenetz, “The Adoption Resource Book” by Lois Gilman, and “Being Adopted: The Lifelong Search for Self” by David M. Brodzinsky, Ph.D., Marshall D. Schechter, M.D., & Robin Marantz Henig. Ginsburg contributed insights and information via his firsthand experiences and contacts. For further view-points, he tracked down videotapes featuring panels of adopted kids. It is recommended that those involved in productions of THEY CHOSE ME! do some homework on the topic as well, whether it be research and/or talking to adoptees they may know.

CEO and Artistic Director of Academy Players, Rita Maron, was introduced to this show and its history while researching show choices for her theater company. Rita and her husband Tom have considered adoption and have contributed to Adoption RI via the fundraising wing of their theater company. Rita’s daughter, Chelsea Morgan, founded The Stage Door Project, an outreach program that allows the theater to raise money for many different causes. At performance time they chose a charitable organization and designate a performance to that cause. Any profits that Academy Makes on the show are then turned over to that cause. Academy chose Adoption RI to benefit from this production. A special preview performance was held on November 6th, 2013 with all proceeds being given to Adoption RI. Although the show was open for Continued on page 15
New England Youth Coalition: Promoting Regional Youth Development

By Grace Hilliard Koshinsky

“For a long time, we were really focused on staying afloat. Now we’re at a point where we’re moving toward sustainability for the long term.” —NEYC Members

The New England Youth Coalition (NEYC) was created with the support of the New England Association of Child Welfare Commissioners and Directors (NEACWCD) in 2008, following a Breakfast Series Collaborative on Adolescent Permanence held in Massachusetts, and it has been meeting since that time. Members of NEYC are current and former foster youth as well as adult supporters from the six New England states. NEYC’s mission, which was developed by its members, is to better the quality of life for youth involved with the foster care system through education, advocacy and improvement of policy and practice. NEYC youth members are 16 years of age and older interested in making a positive change in the child welfare system. Youth members actively participate in leadership roles within their state on local and state youth boards, panel discussions, conference workshops, as well as in other opportunities for self-advocacy. Youth and adult supporter members meet in person 2-3 times a year and hold monthly conference calls in between meetings to move the work forward.

NEYC’s partners

NEYC is fortunate to have partners who believe in the importance of youth voice and the part it plays in creating system change. Casey Family Services provided funding and support for NEYC’s initial start up and continued this until they were closed in 2012. For several years Casey Family Programs (CFP) has provided ongoing support to NEYC staff to plan and facilitate in person meetings and to offer technical assistance and skill building to the youth advisory boards of its member agencies. Early on, The National Resource Center for Youth Development (NRCYD) worked with NEYC to conduct an initial strategic planning process, and more recently to develop and strengthen leadership capacity within the coalition that is carried back to member agencies where it spreads.

NEYC in 2013

Winter meeting: January 8-9, 2013
NEYC convened in person in Devens MA for its winter meeting. Among the many items that NEYC members were focusing on at this meeting were strategies for regional youth development, determining measures of success for the implementation of the Sibling Bill of Rights and planning future projects. The idea to plan and host a regional youth leadership convening was suggested at this meeting and with NRCYD’s technical assistance and facilitation this was held in summer of 2013.

NEYC Regional Youth Conference July 15-16, 2013
NEYC was fortunate to receive technical assistance from the NRCYD for its first regional youth conference which focused primarily on leadership. During this conference, which was attended by over 30 youth along with adult supporters, staff of NRCYD facilitated a leadership development session which included curriculum from Presenting with a Purpose. NEYC members also participated in sessions on Leadership Strategies for Holding Ourselves Accountable and How We Use Data and Why it’s Important. Another goal of the conference was to build increased awareness of the opportunities for youth to become involved with NEYC as well as building relationships between youth and adult supporters on a regional level.

Summer Meeting: August 19-20, 2013
During our summer meeting, the NRCYD returned for a second time to assist NEYC in developing a strategic plan to set priorities to guide their work for the next 1-3 years. Based on these priorities, three committees were created: NEYC Growth and Development, Education, Normalcy/Permanency.

The work of NEYC committees

NEYC Growth and Development Committee: (NEYC 4Life, for short) Building a sustainable infrastructure for NEYC is the main goal of the NEYC 4Life Committee. Areas of Focus include:

• Make the youth leadership conference an annual event in New England—focused on leadership/self empowerment
• Meeting with legislators around New England and in DC
• Pursue opportunities to present at local and national conferences.
• Increase development and use of marketing materials
• The continued recruitment of new members

Normalcy/Permanency Committee: A regional Definition of Normalcy for our region is the main goal for the Normalcy Permanency Committee. When NEYC met with the New England Commissioners and Directors in November, they received affirmation that sufficient data on Normalcy has been gathered. As a result, the Normalcy/Permanency Committee is working on proposing a draft of a definition. When asked why a regional definition was important NEYC members responded:

“If you’re in residential and you learn that being violent is the way to escape from a violent situation we’re doing ourselves all a disservice to the youth as well as the community at large.” —Gee (VT)

Native Foster youth should be able to maintain, explore and learn about their culture and heritage while in care. —Tyneisha (ME)

Over the last year, NEYC has seen significant growth in the following ways: dramatically increased attendance and commitment of youth, as well as increases in the amount of work completed in between calls. This growth has been possible in part because of our partnerships with the NEACWCD, CFP and the NRCYD. NEYC is looking forward to their next in person meeting which will take place in Summer 2014. In the mean time, three working committees are forging ahead with a variety of agenda items, celebrating small victories and continuing their mission of professional youth development in New England.

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Consulting the Experts: Empowering our youth through the magnification of their voices.

By Anna Berg

The hard working professionals, volunteers, and foster families who make up the backbone of the child welfare and juvenile justice systems are continuously searching for better ways to care for, educate, and protect children and youth who have already lived through more trauma than any person should. We have committees, councils, task forces—you name it—filled with intelligent and dedicated people doing whatever they can to make improvements wherever they can.

But there are other child welfare experts that must be invited to these councils and committees: the youth. Who better to consult on where improvements are needed than youth with experience in the system? Their most intimate parts of their lives have revolved around what worked and what didn’t work. They know what made the difference, or what could have made the difference. They have reflected, analyzed, and discussed with their peers, and now they want to bring their stories, their reflections, and their discussions to the people who will care for the next generation of young Vermonters thrust into the arms of the child welfare system.

Their stories and their insights are valuable. They keep us grounded, they keep us focused, and they keep us humble. They introduce us to things we may have missed and they keep us in touch with the demands of a constantly changing youth culture. The youth in our state are fortunate in that the adult professionals seem to truly understand this and are eager to listen to what they have to say. Youth voices are already contributing to policy and best practice initiatives within Family Services, and with any luck this trend will continue to grow exponentially.

The value of having youth voices in policy development is clear, but perhaps the greatest benefit is the empowerment it brings the youth. Including youth formerly and currently in foster care in our initiatives to improve the system allows them to redefine their relationship with child welfare and juvenile justice, a relationship that may have been painful for them, and gives them a chance to express themselves and their ideas in a healthy productive way rather than through rebellion or self-deprecation. In the Youth Development Program we believe that fostering youth leadership is one of the key components to helping youth make a successful transition into adulthood. Coordinating ways for youth to share their insights allows them to build positive connections with their community and shows them the benefits of being civically engaged. Youth become empowered to speak up and learn that it’s important for them to strive to improve their world.

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Bettering Our Family Foster Care System

By Jake Terpstra

Child welfare services are far more intricate and significant than most people realize. There are approximately 7,000 foster parents in Michigan caring for approximately 12,000 children. Nationally, nearly a quarter of a million children enter the child welfare system each year; the average length of care remains over two years. At any given moment almost a half million children are in care. This indicates that in a ten year period, two and a half million children have been in care. For better or worse, these children have a tremendous effect on society. We generally understand that they are our future, but may not fully realize that we are their present.

The percentage of these children who are in group foster care varies widely from state to state but the average is near to 10 to 15 percent. The other 85 to 90 percent are in family foster homes.

The cast of people in the child welfare system who work with the children are foster parents, caseworkers and their supervisors, lawyers, Guardians ad litem, and judges. There are others who have an impact on children in the system such as Court Appointed Special Advocates, teachers, school social workers, and their parents or other relatives who may be involved; however, caseworkers and their supervisors maintain a significant amount of influence.

Child welfare is the only discipline concerned to be the domain of social workers. For many years child welfare services were separate state organizations administered by social workers. The educational norm for case-work staff was one year of graduate school. Schools of social work and child welfare agencies collaborated when practice issues were incorporated into curricula. In the 1960s, the Federal government imposed administrative changes that reduced the number of child welfare caseworkers who had social work training to 25 percent. Because of current Federal Title XX training funds have increased to allow 40 percent of case managers to have social work training; many of their parents or other relatives who may be involved; however, caseworkers and their supervisors maintain a significant amount of influence.

Many studies indicate that this lack of training is significant for both workers and clients:

- Albers E., Reilly, & Ritner B.(1993). Possible Factors Affecting Permanence. This article shows that social workers with BSW and MSW degrees are more effective in developing permanence for children who have been in foster care more than two years.
- Anderson & Dinah (1994). Coping strategies and Burnout Among Veteran Child Protection workers. The study shows that social work education, especially graduate education, reduces burnout which is a major cause of turnover. These findings are especially significant. A study in Milwaukee several years ago indicated that if a child has one caseworker there is a 70 percent chance of achieving permanence. With two caseworkers, the chance of achieving permanence drops to 17 percent.
- Child Welfare League of America.(1990). FL Recruitment and Retention. This study showed that workers without educational preparation for child welfare were most likely to leave before one year. The study links to research by Hess, Floran, and Jefferson; and Jefferson, which found that worker turnover was a major factor in failed reunification efforts.
- Agency support also was cited as a major factor in social worker retention by Harrison, Selma, and Garrett (1995), whose study found that workers who believe their knowledge, skills, and professional education are utilized are most likely to leave.

What is “permanence”? It simply means that a child has been connected with a lifetime family, connected with their own relatives, or adoptively non-relatives. While this sometimes is not possible, it should be the goal for every child and is the primary focus of the caseworker.

The quality of social work education also depends on whether schools of social work provide courses specific to child welfare. Social work theory is necessary, but learning how to apply it is equally as important. In my opinion, courses specific to child welfare can do this and should be encouraged at both the BSW and MSW levels.

The attitudes and actions of persons with authority can help or hinder performance of the people they supervise. A 2006 University of South Florida study in child welfare indicated that about 40 percent of workers who resign do so in order to get away from a supervisor. With careful selection, training, and administrative oversight this can be avoided. Turnover of foster parents, like agency staff turnover, is extremely expensive for agencies and reduces positive outcomes for clients. Many of the dynamics are similar for worker-supervisor relationships and worker-foster parent relationships.

Child welfare agencies often provide training for supervisors. Even though foster parents are not supervised administratively, the process in many respects is similar. Caseworkers who work with foster parents need supervisor training as much as casework supervisors do. Some of the qualities applicable to both supervisors and caseworkers are:

• taking responsibility for knowing agency policies and its resources, utilizing them when needed
• clarifying expectations of foster parents
• being aware of community resources that foster parents can use
• maintaining positive relationships with other units of the agency where cooperation is needed
• accepting that their role is to educate, support, guide and encourage
• encouraging foster parents to provide quality care and supporting their efforts
• promoting team effort with parents
• listening to concerns of foster parents, children, and their parents
• willing to learn from the knowledge sets of others
• being sensitive to the unique needs of foster parents and children
• keeping a sense of humor

Child welfare agencies train casework staff and foster parents; some agencies combine training for both casework staff and foster parents with positive results. This has many advantages and often increases the sense of teamwork. Foster parents also are able to conduct training of staff as it helps foster parents explain their needs to caseworkers and the agency.

The best of training can be negated when the agency CEO is not aware or supportive of what is taught. This is extremely difficult for staff. Administrators need to learn alongside their staff in order to be able to support the training or make changes.

One of the most difficult experiences for foster parents is being accused of abusing children in their care. It is especially frightening because agencies stop all contact with them until the report has been investigated. While this may be unavoidable, foster parents need to know in advance what the agency policy is. They also need to connect with someone who can be supportive of them when it occurs while also remaining neutral.

If agencies are not able to provide that service they can encourage other foster parents to take that role. There are many advantages to developing a local foster parent association and this is one of the ways they can provide support to their own members.

Caseworkers have a central role in a complex social service system while at the same time must adhere to judicial orders. Each person in this system needs to be well informed about the roles, tasks, and responsibilities of each stakeholder involved in a foster care case. Because of this, older children, foster parents, and parents, where reunification is possible, are needed in court hearings to help the judge be as informed as possible about children and parents’ needs, potential, and goals.

The catalyst role of the caseworker can make this possible and hopefully always keep the focus on the simple question: “What is best for the child?”

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decrease in the proportion of older youth (ages 13-17) in congregate care. The most substantial and consistent positive trend was the reduction in the proportion of older youth in care with goals of Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA). Regionally, for the period FY 2005 through FY 2011, the proportion of teens with APPLA goals declined from 38% to 23%. Three New England states significantly reduced the percentage of exits from foster care to “aging out” with decreases ranging from 20% to 49%.1

State Policy and Practice Changes. In addition to measureable outcomes, each of the New England states has made significant policy and practice changes as a result of their participation in the Convenings.

Connecticut drew on Convening presentations on the role of the court in ensuring youth permanency and collaborated with the state’s juvenile court, the child protection attorney, and the Attorney General’s Office to develop a standardized process to ensure youth participation in court hearings. The state also updated its training materials regarding the legal rights of young people in foster care and instituted training for staff on these issues. After learning about permanency pacts at the Convenings, the state incorporated this practice into training for its adolescent workers. Following a presentation on other state’s laws on reinstating parental rights, Connecticut began to explore potential statutory language proposals regarding reinstatement of parental rights and guardianships.

Maine made significant policy changes based on what was learned at the Convenings, including expanding the eligible population of young people who are served with both supportive and permanency planning services. After hearing directly from youth at the Convenings, Maine focused on refining extended care for young people ages 18-21 to provide educational, employment, and life skills support for the young people and permanency planning. Following one Convening, the Performance and Quality Improvement Unit reviewed all APPLA cases and provided recommendations to senior management on implementing best practices to reduce the number of young people in the state with APPLA goals. Maine took the conversations that were held at the Convenings and within the agency to the community to broaden the base of stakeholders engaged in ensuring youth permanency. Nine such community conversations were held in 2012; they will be continued and expanded in 2013. After learning about Roundtables at the Convenings, Maine customized the approach to meet its own unique needs and called for the need for congregate care.

Vermont was able to implement new practices that the state learned about at the Convenings and increase the percentage of all exits to permanence from 84% to 90%. The state has expanded its use of Family Engagement Strategies, including the use of Family Safety Planning and Family Group Conferencing, to develop plans for children and youth in custody. These practices have been expanded in the state’s work with youth in residential care in order to plan for their return to the community. In 2011, after learning more about Permanency Roundtables at the Convenings, the state began to explore how it might embed this methodology into practice in a sustained manner.

The Benefits of a Regional Approach to Youth Permanence

The participating states highly rate New England’s unique regional approach to achieving youth permanence. Among the range of benefits they identify to a regional approach are the following:

- A regional approach brings a focus to youth permanence that is reinforced as states come together.
- A regional approach brings a diverse group of people together who generally do not have opportunities to interact. Regional meetings support the convening of various stakeholders across systems and disciplines, including youth with focus on a comprehensive approach to youth permanence.
- Regional meetings assemble people together who understand the challenges because “we are all in the same boat.”
- Regional meetings provide new ideas and new insights from other states that can be applied to practice. Peer-to-peer learning can be shared across state lines. States can “steal shamelessly” from one another.
- Regional meeting allow states to showcase what is working in the state. States that are showcased have a sense of pride in their work and accomplishments.
- Regional meetings hold participating states to a high standard of accountability because they are reporting back to colleagues in the region.
- A regional approach has the benefit of doing something “close to home” but not “at home.”

Regional meeting provide the opportunity to build and sustain cross-state relationships. People reconnect at each Convening, and there are opportunities between regional meetings to connect by telephone.

Conclusion

Planners and participants agreed that the Convenings’ greatest successes were the excitement and enthusiasm that existed around making permanency a priority—giving people “time apart” to look at the issues from multiple perspectives, learning from colleagues in a collaborative environment, and developing state action plans. For the states, it was a unique opportunity for child welfare professionals to work shoulder-to-shoulder with parents, foster parents, and other key stakeholders in their own state and across the region. Challenges were inevitable, including the two-day commitment to annual convenings, although only one state struggled to send a team regularly. Participants were required to find answers to challenging questions: How do we make this new conversation part of what we are already doing? How do we incorporate and embed it into our current work? A number of key lessons were learned that can be of assistance to other states considering a regional approach: the need to take time to reach a common understanding of permanence, the importance of using time and other resources strategically in the planning process, the need for a multi-year initiative, the importance of working across systems and roles to achieve positive outcomes, the importance of using data from the outset, the critical importance of the ongoing support and visibility of State Commissioners and Directors, and the need for state team members who are able to keep the focus on permanence and maintain momentum.

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To promote the timely and successful achievement of specific permanency plans, the policy reaffirms the goals that DCF implemented in 2008. At that time we made a conscious decision to include the word Permanency in every goal. We also chose to create a set of goals that emphasized connections with a family for every child:

- **Permanency through Stabilization of Family,** makes it clear that our priority is keeping children safely at home whenever possible the policy states that the child must be safe at home and face no imminent risk of serious harm in the future and requires a case plan developed jointly with the family. This goal may also be used when it is necessary to place a child out of the home in order to meet the child's extraordinary needs. We recognize that there are some situations where it would be impossible for any family to meet the needs of the child in a home setting.

- **Permanency through Reunification of Family,** is the first option when it was necessary to place a child in care. The policy requires efforts to maintain the child's safety and well-being prior to and following return home, including home visits within 7 days before and 7 days after, and specifies when reunification cases may be closed, including the possibility of a case conference for decision-making and planning.

- **Permanency through Adoption,** is identified as the preferred goal when it is clear that a child cannot safely return home. We want the highest degree of legal permanence whenever possible regardless of the age of the child. The policy clarifies the tasks of the Adoption Social Worker and recruitment staff, supports openness in adoption, including use of “post-termination” and “post-adoption” agreements, and describes procedures for adoption legalization.

- **Permanency through Guardianship,** recognizes that for some situations, particularly those involving placement of children at risk of abuse or neglect, adoption may not be the best option for the child and family. The policy requires prior exploration of reunification and adoption, removes the age restrictions that had previously limited the use of this goal, clarifies that the child must reside with a prospective guardian (who has an approved License Study) at least 6 months prior to legalizing the Guardianship and requires that youth age 14 and older to consent to the plan.

- **Permanency through Care with Kin,** requires prior exploration of reunification, adoption and guardianship; has no age restrictions, requires that child has resided with a relative who has an approved License Study) at least 6 months prior to establishing the plan and provides for children age 14 and older to clearly consent. This is a goal that we do not use often and we intend this to be limited to a small number of unique cases.

- **Alternative Planned Permanent Living Arrangement,** is a term that originated in the federal language. In Massachusetts it can be considered only for youth age 16 and older and only after all other permanency options have been explored. In addition, this goal requires youth to be in a stable living environment and have at least one permanent relationship with a competent adult. Youth with this goal must also receive life skills training. We intend this to be limiting both in terms of when the goal can be used and the components that must be in place if/when this goal is selected.

To promote the successful transition of youth and young adults to adulthood, the policy built on the work of our Adolescent Services Unit, and has incorporated a number of changes that had been implemented in Massachusetts. There are a number of changes that support the provision of the Fostering Connections law and others that support our commitment to the youth in our care. Massachusetts currently has 1,765 youth over the age of 18 in our care, a 5% increase over last year. In the spring of this year we celebrated the graduation of 45 youth with Bachelor Degrees, 17 Associate degrees, and 31 vocational certificates. An additional 400 youth graduated from high school and 60 youth received their GEDs.

The policy:
- Introduces the use of the new Youth Readiness Assessment Tool for evaluating youth and young adults in life skills in 11 areas. The tool leads to a plan to promote skill-building;  
- Requires transition planning at the first Foster Care Review (FCR) after the youth turns age 17 and 3 months, documentation of transition planning efforts and a written notification to the youth 90 days prior to discharge;  
- Requires that all youth in care will sustain their DCF connection, unless they are returned home, adopted or placed with a legal guardian. We have clarified that youth who meet one of the following criteria will stay in care:
  - Completing secondary education or a GED program within 1 year of turning 18.
  - Enrolled in post-secondary or vocational education or a trade school, or
  - Participating in a program or activity to promote/remove barriers to employment, or
  - Employed for at least 80 hours per month, or
  - Incapable of doing any of the above due to a medical condition, or
  - Participating in a program which promotes specific education or rehabilitative services, or
  - Participating in a program which promotes/supports developing and fulfilling his/her potential to be a participating citizen under conditions agreed upon by both DCF and the youth/young adult;
- Creates Young Adult Review Panels with at least 3 members. The panel may include a manager, a DCF staff person, a foster/pre-adoptive parent who is not the youth/young adult’s; a peer; or a community volunteer. The panel is responsible for hearing the requests of youth who wish to remain in or return to care. The panel can approve requests to sustain DCF connection that are not approved at the FCR or to reconnect a young adult who left DCF care/custody at age 18. The policy provides for the youth/young adult with a right to a Fair Hearing if the request is denied by the Panel. Services for youth currently in care must be continued until the Fair Hearing decision is received. Massachusetts recognizes that young adults may make decisions that do not work out and we allow youth who leave our care at or after age 18 to return to care if they believe that will promote their positive development;
- Specifies the requirements of the Young Adult Support Payments program and how this benefit can be obtained or how an appeal can be filed if denied. We believe that part of becoming an adult is learning to handle money and budget responsibly. We will provide the equivalent of foster care payments directly to youth when that is appropriate;  
- Identifies documents that DCF must provide to young adults prior to discharge including the birth certificate, Social Security Card, MassHealth card, immigration documents, driver's license/state ID card, education records, medical records, health care proxy form if requested, and any personal letters and photos that the Department may have.

This policy represents many years of evolving best practice in Massachusetts. The structure of the actual policy lays out what the work of the agency should be with families, children and youth. It also provides our staff with guidance on the steps needed to make that work predictable, consistent and effective. The policy document is designed to be a tool for staff at all levels to use in their day to day work, particularly our direct service supervisors. By creating very specific tasks and time frames we have created a document that we believe can be used as a teaching tool as well as a framework for achieving permanency as quickly as possible.

Although the introduction of the policy and the initial training and monitoring has been challenging there is a great deal to be done to reach full implementation. While there are few new pieces of work in the policy, there are some changes that will impact every one of our offices. Other pieces of the policy are embedded in some offices but weak in other offices. Our next challenge is to work toward full implementation in each of our offices, each of our four regional offices. We will be creating and monitoring implementation plans for the offices in their regions. We will be creating trainings to assist our staff in understanding and becoming skilled in the tasks required by the permanency planning policy.

The full text of the policy can be viewed on the DCF website at www.mass.gov/dcf.

Mary Gambon, MSW is an Assistant Commissioner and Leo Farley, MSW is the Director of Adoption Services at MA DCF. Leslie Akula, MSSS, LICSW is a Policy Consultant for MA DCF. They can be reached at Mary.Gambon@state.ma.us, Leo.Farley@ma.state.us, and leslieakula@hotmail.com

**Launching Tomorrow’s Dreams Today**

The National Foster Parent Association and Florida State Foster/Adoptive Parent Association are dreaming of the future and a magical land of Florida

**NFPAA/FSFAPA National Conference**

**June 5–8, 2014**

Caribe Royale Orlando

Join us and learn how the dreams of you and the children in your care can become a reality.

Visit [www.nfpaoilne.org](http://www.nfpaoilne.org) for more information
relationships and experiences, the brain can actually begin to “rewire” itself. Continuity in supportive, accepting, and loving relationships can help any young person, regardless of prior trauma feel more secure and get on a path to a better future. Thus, understanding the impact of trauma on brain development, overall well-being, and the capacity to form healthy relationships is important fuel for more focused case planning and decision-making with adolescents and young people transitioning from foster care. Trauma-informed casework practice can tap into the resources young people have and help them strive for more positive youth development.

Staff, families, and other caring adults in the community can engage young people in assessing their trauma and relationship histories, and intentionally build casework and family relationships as well as community experiences that support reflection, healing, growth, learning, and ultimately preparation for the complex responsibilities of adulthood.


Our review/application of research about adolescent brain development has taken us down the path of learning how to counteract the disconnections that many young people experience during developmental stages. From a developmental point of view, adolescents are supposed to be separating from family in order to experiment with multiple roles to figure out who they are and what their options are in building their post-institutional adult identity. Yet, when they don’t have family they can count on to separate from, the process of “becoming” is that much more difficult. Thus, in working with adolescents in foster care, we have been promoting an approach that helps them to build a network of varied positive relationships within the domains of family, peers, school/work, and within their community — what has become known as having social capital. Research is beginning to show that the more social capital young people have when transitioning from foster care, the better positioned they will be to achieve a healthy and successful transition from foster care to adulthood. When young people in foster care approach the age of 18 without permanent, committed families, they suddenly face the prospect of being on their own at an age when even well-supported young people rarely can “make it.” They have not been graduated to early adolescence and they are clearly not ready to take on adult roles, and their options are to leave care or to continue in a foster care system designed to serve children, not legal adults.

The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative’s Success Beyond 18 is a national campaign to advance policies and practices designed to set young people transitioning from foster care on the right track for success in family, work, and adult life. The overarching objective: To give young people in foster care the same building blocks for success in life and positive experiences that are more often associated with their peers in intact families. The Campaign has three policy and practice goals that, when implemented together, can empower and support them as they move forward in their “becoming” process — and beyond. Extending foster care and doing it right also allows young people to engage in an individualized planning process that clarifies their options for continued post-secondary learning or building work and employment skills without the fear of where they will live on school vacations or when they lose their first job. Allowing them to remain in foster care, or to return to foster care when disconnected from supportive relationships — gives them the opportunity to better practice adult roles and responsibilities in a safe and supportive environment. These are the opportunities young people in the broader community have when securely connected to families and caring adults in their twenties. These are the opportunities for learning and stable connections we must provide for vulnerable young people who have experienced foster care.

With more intentional practice and additional time, we can help young people safely make sense of their stories, make peace with their past and make realistic plans for their future. We can help them be better connected to the knowledge, skills, and resources needed for a successful transition to adulthood. And most of all, we can be a bridge to the relationships all young people need for a reason, a season and a lifetime.
Improving Permanency Outcomes

Permanent placement within juvenile justice recognizes that long-term security for youth will be assisted by a permanent placement, which is defined as a "long-term" placement, which provides a safe, nurturing and secure environment. In both systems a permanent placement may be achieved through:

- Reunification with a parent
- Adoption
- Guardianship with a relative
- Placement with a fit and willing relative
- Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA)

The four preferred permanency plans, reunification, adoption, guardianship, and placement with a fit and willing relative, consider more than the physical place where a child resides. They involve a specific adult, not a program or facility, who will have responsibility for and hopefully live with the youth. This familial relationship with the youth will be lasting.

One potential difference

However, one key factor must be recognized and acknowledged: When reunification cannot occur in juvenile justice cases, adoption may not be as viable an option as it is in child welfare. Compelling reasons not to seek a Termination of Parental Rights and Adoption in juvenile justice are based on individual circumstances but these could include:

- No grounds exist
- The youth does not agree or want a TPR/ adoption
- Parents are willing and able to provide for the youth
- There are fit and willing relatives
- Adoption within a reasonable time is unrealistic

When the more preferred goals identified above are not appropriate or available in a juvenile justice case the less preferred plan of APPLA should be identified. Not intended to be a catch all, APPLA is a living arrangement that is truly planned and permanent in nature. “Planned” means the arrangement is intended, designed, considered, premeditated, or deliberate. “Permanence” means enduring, lasting, or stable. The term “living arrangement” includes not only the physical placement of the youth, but also the quality of care, supervision, and nurturing the youth will receive. While “living arrangement” may not necessarily be a specific residence or facility it does imply certain stabilizing features.

Due to the realities of the juvenile justice system which include, but aren’t limited to the age of youth at the time they enter the system an APPLA arrangement could be simply a stable and safe place to live. Timely, concurrent planning, however, increases the likelihood of also creating at least some ties to an adult, fulfilling a quasi-parental or mentoring role. The ultimate goal being that a youth leaving the juvenile justice under an APPLA will at the very least have a safe stable place to live and ideally, at least one adult connection.

Juvenile justice agencies must understand and value the need for permanency and have the vision to see the benefits of permanency planning within the system. Quality permanency work in juvenile justice requires a paradigm shift in the way staff does their work. Historically, the focus has been only on juveniles themselves. Permanency planning now allows the opportunity for a broader look at the entire family unit to achieve better and more long-term outcomes through facilitated and planned treatment and services. The ultimate focus must be on connections. The system needs to assure that every youth has at least one connection to count on when transitioning out of state care. If juvenile justice systems across the country were truly focused on the youth then why would they overlook the value and need for a permanent connection? We should want and accept nothing less for our youth.

Juvenile Justice

Common Ground, March 2014

Improving Permanency Outcomes

It is imperative that states establish the ability to address issues affecting youth and families in the juvenile justice system. They must establish consistent planning, practices, policy and regulations that are a part of each system’s responsibility regardless of petition type or agency case manager responsible for the planning. It should not matter if a child is in out of home care due to child protection or juvenile justice factors. What should matter is that similar permanency planning occurs for every child as soon as they are removed from their home of origin.

Clearly within juvenile justice there needs to be a culture shift to one that understands and accepts the concepts of true permanency starting with the fact that adoption actually is an expected option for older youth. Obviously, adoption within the juvenile justice system is an unusual and sometimes difficult plan but it nonetheless needs to be embraced as an option.

Values and philosophy cross systemic lines

Permanency planning should be based on the philosophy that every child has the right to a permanent and stable home and preferably that would be with his or her own family, if possible. To be successful, permanency practices must be supported philosophically and with adequate resources and training. There has to be an overarching philosophy that is identified passionately and creatively from the top agency officials responsible for the services to children and families in both child welfare and as well as the juvenile justice system. It is time for juvenile justice agencies across the country to embrace permanency planning and see the value of connections and permanency for the youth entering their system.

Juvenile Justice

continued from page 1

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through her production of They Chose Me, Rita was able to provide a venue for increased adoption awareness as well as a creative recruitment effort. The RI Child Welfare Institute also offered training credit for any DCYF professional who attended the performance. Paula Fontaine is a Regional Director at RI Department for Children Youth and Families. She may be reached at paula.fontaine@dcyf.ri.gov

Maggie Bishop is the director of the NH Division for Children, Youth and Families. She can be reached at 603-271-4440 or at mbishop@dhhs.state.nh.us.

“Not Such Thing As a Bad Kid”

The Power of a Strength-Based Approach in Reshaping the Lives of At-Risk Children, Youth, and Families.


The Program: Strength-based practice is an emerging approach to guiding at-risk children, youth, and families that is exceptionally positive, inspiring and inflexible young people; strategies and activities for enhancing self-esteem in at-risk kids; a host of creative cognitive-behavioral techniques; core verbal interventions and de-escalation strategies; respectful limit-setting; and strategies for helping caregivers and educators manage themselves first.

About the Presenter: Charlie Applestein, M.S.W. is a nationally prominent youth care specialist and author who trains and consults all over the United States as well as internationally. He has authored three youth care books that are widely used within the field, including No Such Thing as a Bad Kid: Understanding and Responding to the Challenging Behavior of Troubled Children and Youth.

Date and Time: March 21, 2014, 9:00 am–4:00 pm
Location: Sheraton Hotel & Conference Center, S. Burlington
Cost: $125.00/per person; $110.00/groups of 5 or more
Includes: Cont. Breakfast and lunch
CEU’s pending, Attendance Certificate available for Educators

Cast members of They Chose Me

all to attend, child welfare professionals and families touched by adoption were especially welcomed. The Academy Players constantly look for shows with a message that complements their mission. They Chose Me was this season’s choice. The main stage shows were presented during the month of November to coincide with National Adoption Month.

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Elsie Stone misses longer to complete than were SDM tools, they case decision-making. One DCYF Supervisor as well as increase the integration of SDM into ity and consistency of the implementation of SBC, the NHIA Model is expected to enhance the fidel-
force new practices, as well as provide a format informed practices, it serves to guide and rein-
for the integrated use of SDM, SBC and safety support of the implementation.

tive group of field staff continues to meet regu-

to use by field staff since that time. A representa-

Roll-out of the NHIA model in NH’s SACWIS and SBC models remained true to their design. development process, to ensure both the SDM Ph.D., developer of Solution-Based Casework, children’s Research Center and Dana Christensen, to provide an accurate reflection of the ongoing data to evaluate if safety and risk are assessed a sampling of cases by supervisors and admin-

The evaluation plan is multi-faceted in order to assess the various expected outcomes. First, to support accurate usage of the model, a case read tool has been developed, and will be applied to a sampling of cases by supervisors and admin-

Next steps in the process As with all practice innovations, evalua-

port practice, rather than simply compliance with documentation. For example, staff are able to define and modify a “household,” so that if a child’s household members change throughout the life of a case, the tools are able to continue to provide an accurate reflection of the ongoing assessment. Consultation with both the Chil-

• Children having a considered removal meet-

While the Considered Removal practice is still very new in Connecticut, we are extremely encouraged by results to date. Since February 11, 2013, the Department conducted meetings on behalf of 505 children. Of these 505 children, 350 were NOT removed by DCF — nearly 70 percent. Of the 155 who were removed, 49 per-

• Exits to permanent placement have increased by 40 percent over five years;

On behalf of 505 children, of these 505 children, 350 were NOT removed by DCF — nearly 70 percent. Of the 155 who were removed, 49 percent were placed with relatives/kin. In the three months preceding this article alone, 320 moth-

686 friends, neighbors, pastors, providers par-

Telling success! Seeing positive results There are currently 20 state child welfare agencies that have implemented considered removal teaming with very positive outcomes which include:

• Functional teams, including as facilitators, to coordinate and review systems.

The child’s statement, as qualified by the children’s counselor, is also used to make the decision. The Children’s counselor is a professional who assesses the children’s statements and presents them to the decision-makers, along with other relevant information.

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Regional Round-Up

National
May 6-8, 2014 — CWLA hosts CWLA Advocacy Summit in Washington, DC. For more details visit www.cwla.org

May 28-30, 2014 — Daniel Memorial Inc. hosts their 21st Annual National Foster Care Conference, “Footsteps to the Future” in Daytona Beach, FL. For conference information visit www.danielkids.org

June 5-6, 2014 — The Network for Social Work Man- 

June 5-8, 2014 — The National Foster Parent Associa- 
tion in collaboration with the Florida State Foster Adop-
tive Parent Association is hosting their annual training conference “Launching Tomorrow’s Dreams Today” in Orlando, FL. For more information visit http://npadultline.org/conference2014


July 16-18, 2014 — University of Vermont hosts “Restor-
ative Justice: Responsive Regulation and Complex Prob-
tems” at the Davis Conference Center at University of 
Vermont Burlington, VT. For information on registration email ConferenceRegistration@uvm.edu

July 20-23, 2014 — Foster Family Based Treatment Associ-
ati hosts the 28th Annual conference on Treatment Foster Care. “Happyly Ever After: Overcoming Barriers to Perma-
nancy and Wellbeing” in Lake Buena Vista, FL. For more information or to register visit www.ffta.org/conference

August 6-8, 2014 — National Resource Center for Youth 
Development hosts the 2014 National Pathways to Adult-
hood: A Convening on Youth in Transition in Philadelphia, PA. For more information visit www.nrcyd.edu

August 26-29, 2014 — Daniel Memorial Inc. hosts the 
27th Annual National Independent Living Conference, “Growing Pains 2014” in Denver, CO. For more information please visit www.danielkids.org

Massachusetts
April 13, 2014 — Adoptive Families Together hosts a 
Panel On Transracial Adoption For adults with a connection to adoption/foster care from 2 PM-6 PM at MSPCC office, 3815 Washington St Jamaica Plain, MA 02130. There is no fee but registration is necessary. For more information contact Lori Baenmier at 857-728-2157 or baenmler@mspcc.org

May 18, 2014 — Adoptive Families Together hosts the 
Impact of Social Media on Adoption Workshop For adults with a connection to adoption/foster care from 10 AM to 12 PM at MSPCC office, 3815 Washington St, Jamaica Plain For more information contact Lori Baenmier at 857-728-2157 or baenmler@mspcc.org

Common Clips

The Adoption Advocate is a monthly publication created by the National Council for Adoption to educate policy-
makers, families, child welfare and adoption professionals, and interested parties on today’s most relevant child 
and adoption issues. You may access information or to register visit www.adoptioncouncil.org/publications/ 
adoptions-advoateservice.aspx

Parents Helping Parents Massachusetts (PHP) is a non-
profit organization whose mission focuses on preventing 
child abuse through offering a variety of resources includ-
ing free parenting help and parent support groups across 
Massachusetts. It also operates a 24 hour Parental Stress Help Line that caregivers can call for any issue related to 
parenting. The number is 800-632-8188. For more infor-
mation about this organization and the resources it offers please use this link http://www.parentshelpingparents.org/ 
or you may call 617-926-5008.

Adoptive Families Together (AFT) offers parent-
en, confidential groups to share personal concerns and 
needs around adopting a parent. AFT provides education, advoca-
cy, support, and more. These groups are held in many 
locations around the state. We also welcome adopted 
individuals, birth parents, foster parents and all those 
with a connection to adoption. Please visit our website www. 
adoptedhasrisen.org

Working with the Impacts of Trauma
Feeling safe and protected, physically and emotionally, are key elements necessary for normal physical and emo-
tional growth and health. Children in unsafe situations may 
find themselves traumatized by a cascading series of events 
that are beyond their control. These events may affect them in a 
myriad of ways that impact their current and future physical, 
intellectual and emotional growth and development. These 
include the ability to learn, to understand and communicate 
their feelings, and to sleep through the night. Reactions to 
traumatic stress can result in increased use of substances, 
such as drugs and alcohol, difficulties in developing relation-
ships, physical illness and depression.

Staff in child welfare and behavioral health agencies work 
with children and families impacted by trauma. Over time 
they have developed knowledge, insight and more effective practices 
for working with these individuals and the issues they present. 
Resource families and relative caregivers are also critical part-
ners in the effective care of children and in the support and men-
toring of families. The impact of secondary trauma on caregivers 
and staff must always be considered and addressed.

What are your agencies doing to assess the impacts of 
trauma, and to treat and support children and families? What 
resources are being developed that promote the use of effec-
tive coping strategies? What methods are being employed to 
address stress experienced by professionals that has been 
shown to result in burnout and less effective work perfor-
mance? How is your agency working with the multiple sys-
tems and community partners that deal with children and their 
families to develop cross system service delivery that 
minimizes duplication and promotes integration?

Adoptive and Foster Family Recruitment and Retention
Adoptive and foster families are essential partners with 
child protection agencies as they strive to successfully meet the 
outcomes of permanency, safety and well being for the chil-
dren and families who become involved with their agencies. 
These foster and adoptive families are critical contributors to 
an agency’s ability to meet its defined mission. The fact is 
that foster care programs cannot run successfully without compe-
tent resource families. And although the number of children 
adopted has risen dramatically over the past few years there are 
still several thousand children in the foster care system in New 
England states waiting for permanency. These children range in 
age from infants to adolescents.

The recruitment and retention of foster and adoptive fami-
lies, while never easy, has become more challenging, as children’s 
needs and family dynamics change. It can be argued that all chil-
dren who experience placement away from their family need 
special emotional, behavioral or medical needs. How do agen-
cies find and prepare individuals for this demanding yet reward-
ing work? How does your agency work to support resource fami-
dlies? Do you have foster parents involved in these support efforts 
or working with you to help educate the public and recruit new 
families? If so, what are their roles and responsibilities?

Adoption is another major area that can lead to cor-
rect misperceptions about foster parents and to build greater 
respect for their contributions? Have you developed partner-
ships with corporate sponsors, individual or civic groups to 
assist with these efforts? Can you share with others about 
this work?