

**The 2006
National Convening
on Youth
Permanence**

Washington, D.C.
September 14 and 15, 2006

Summary





OVERVIEW

Background. On September 14 and 15, 2006, the Annie E. Casey Foundation and its direct service agency, Casey Family Services, hosted the 2006 National Convening on Youth Permanence, “Families for Life: Addressing the Needs of Older Children and Youth in Foster Care,” in Washington, D.C. This Convening, attended by more than 400 participants, built upon the successes of the four previous national gatherings in San Francisco hosted by the Stuart Foundation and the California Permanency for Youth Project. The 2006 National Convening broadened the impact of the previous events by moving the venue to our nation’s capital and by expanding participation to 40 states and the District of Columbia. Teams of key state and tribal decision makers comprised state delegations. National policymakers, researchers, consumers, and others critical to moving the youth permanency agenda forward at all levels participated in the 2006 Convening.

The 2006 National Convening offered a range of plenary presentations and smaller learning sessions designed to strengthen the ability of child welfare leaders to achieve and sustain family permanence for all older children and youth in foster care. Cosponsors included: Casey Family Programs, the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, the Freddie Mac Foundation, the Hite Foundation, the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, and the Stuart Foundation. In addition, more than 40 national organizations (see appendix) supported the work undertaken during the two days. A public policy briefing on youth permanence and a research roundtable for invited researchers (see www.caseyfamilyservices.org) preceded the Convening on September 12 and 13, 2006.

Achieving family permanence with older children and youth can happen in many ways. Family permanence has long been a key theme of the Casey Foundation’s work with young people in foster care. Permanence has been addressed through the work of Casey Family Services, the *Family to Family* sites, and the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, as well as through reform efforts with public systems and child welfare services across the country. The 2006 National Convening reflected the Foundation’s commitment to addressing the needs of older children and youth in foster care for whom family permanence has not been achieved.

The Need. Nationally, more than half of the children and youth in foster care are age 11 and older (almost 247,645). (See Figure 1.) Although overall rates of adoption and exits to other permanency outcomes for children in out-of-home placements have increased in recent years,¹ the lower rates of permanency exits for older youth remain a source of concern. Each year, as many as 25,000 teenagers “age out” of foster care, usually when they reach the age of 18.² Exiting the system as an older adolescent by “aging out” without a permanent family relationship is correlated with a range of deleterious outcomes for a young adult – dropping out of high school, early pregnancy or parenthood, criminal involvement, homelessness, lack of employment, psychiatric hospitalizations, and an inability to be self-supporting.³

“Linking youth with mentors and other community supports cannot be a substitute for having a family to count on for a lifetime.”

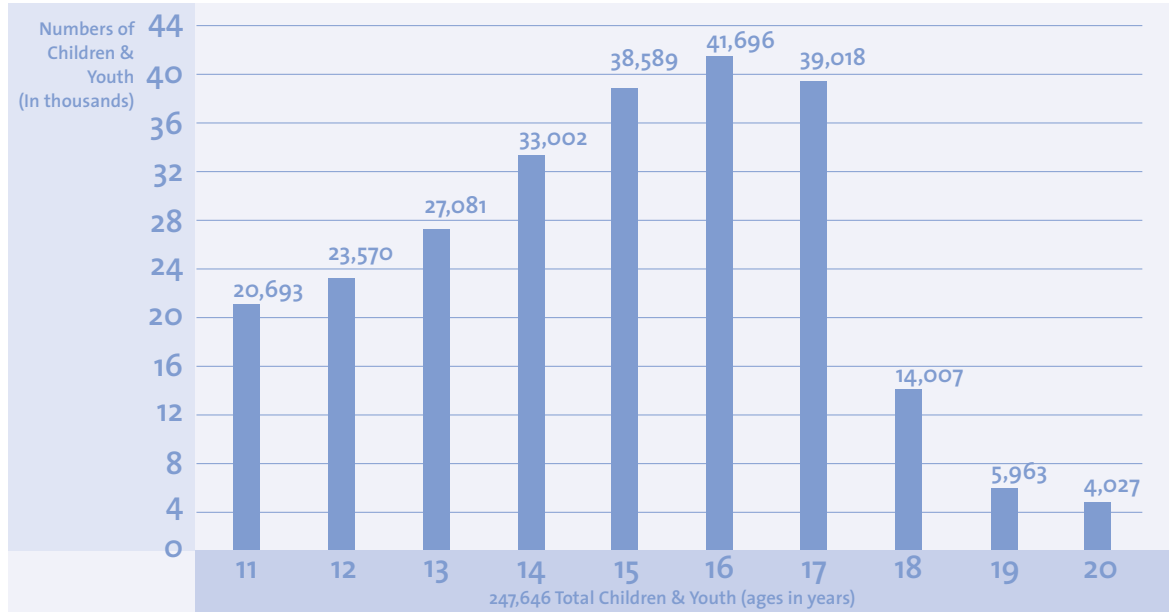
– Douglas W. Nelson
President
The Annie E. Casey
Foundation

1. Maza, Penny. *Adoption Data Update*. Paper presented at Children’s Bureau’s Sixth National Child Welfare Data Conference Making IT Work: Using Data to Measure and Improve Outcomes. Hyatt Crystal City, Arlington, VA. April 9-11, 2003.

2. Stangler, Gary and Martha Shirk, *On Their Own: What Happens to Kids When They Age Out of the Foster Care System*. 2004. Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. Westview Press, Boulder, CO.

3. Avery, Rosemary and Madelyn Freundlich. *Deleterious Consequences of Aging Out of Foster Care*. National Convening on Youth Permanence, Summary Report, 2003. (cyp.org)

Figure 1



“We have to teach more fully one fundamental proposition: While we can make children’s lives less dangerous by taking them out of harm’s way, we cannot make children whole without making sure they have a caring, permanent family.”

– Raymond L. Torres
Executive Director
Casey Family Services

The Urgent Need for Youth Permanence and Post-Permanency Services

All children need strong families and supportive communities for their healthy growth and development. They need consistent parenting and the continuity of family relationships to support their sense of belonging and identity formation. When children and youth enter foster care, they may not only have experienced the trauma of abuse and neglect, but also the trauma of separation, loss, and multiple relationship disruptions. They are more likely to experience higher rates of severe emotional, behavioral, and developmental problems than children and youth who have not been in foster care. As a result, they, and the families that raise them, need an array of community services to sustain their reconnected or newly forming family relationships.

In September 2005, there were 513,000 children in foster care:

- Half – 247,646 – were age 11 and older.
- One-fifth were not living with families.
- More than half (53 percent) were children of color (African American, 32 percent; Hispanic, 18 percent; Native American, 2 percent; and Asian, 1 percent).
- Long-term foster care and emancipation continued to be the goals for 69,566 children and youth (37,628 and 31,938, respectively) – despite the intent of the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 to eliminate both as permanency options.
- Consequently, 28,852 adolescents left foster care to be on their own with no meaningful connection to a family member or caring adult – 24,407 left to emancipation and 4,445 were considered runaways.

Convening Purpose. The 2006 National Convening on Youth Permanence focused on practice and policy strategies to change these negative outcomes and created an interactive “learning and doing” environment aimed at three core goals:

- To deepen awareness that permanence for older children and youth in foster care is urgently needed – and possible.
- To promote public policy, research, and practice strategies that increase the numbers of older children and youth who exit foster care with enduring family relationships that can help prepare them for adulthood and support them for a lifetime.
- To offer strategic-planning opportunities for state teams to address youth permanency policy and practice reforms as well as disparities in permanency outcomes for children and youth of color.



The Meaning of Permanence

In reaching positive permanency outcomes, the objective is to achieve the optimal balance of physical, emotional/relational, legal, and cultural supports within every child and youth's array of family relationships.

Permanence means having an enduring family relationship that:

- Is safe and meant to last a lifetime;
- Offers the legal rights and social status of full family membership;
- Provides for physical, emotional, social, cognitive, and spiritual well-being; and
- Assures lifelong connections to extended family, siblings, other significant adults, family history and traditions, race, ethnicity, culture, religion, and language.

– Casey Family Services. *A Call to Action: An Integrated Approach to Youth Permanence and Preparation for Adulthood*. 2005.

Convening Agenda. Four plenary sessions highlighted the benefits of family permanence from the perspectives of: 1) youth themselves; 2) California counties actively engaged in implementing permanence for youth initiatives; 3) judges and lawyers partnering with child welfare agencies to improve permanency options for older children and youth; and 4) print and broadcast media representatives working with child welfare agencies to inform the public.

Small-group learning sessions focused on core philosophies, practices, and policies that have shown promising results in advancing and sustaining permanence for older children and youth. “Courageous conversations,” facilitated small-group discussions, focused on the complex range of challenges, opportunities, and possible solutions involved in permanency planning with older children and youth in foster care.

Additionally, state teams and representatives from national organizations engaged in critical planning, creating roadmaps for future efforts to assure that all young people in foster care have a family for life.

The 2006 National Convening on Youth Permanence provided a potential and promising vehicle for change at the national, state, and local levels. Identified strategies have the potential to help states increase the number of older children and youth who have a lifetime family.

Guide to the Convening Summary. This summary is a synthesis of the broad themes that emerged from the 2006 National Convening on Youth Permanence. It describes the effective and promising approaches that were identified and the new learnings that emerged from the many opportunities for in-depth dialogue. Please refer to the Casey Family Services website (www.caseyfamilyservices.org) for detailed information on each of the Convening sessions. For a summary of the “courageous conversations” that took place during the event, visit: www.caseyfamilyservices.org/pdfs/nc_cc_summary.pdf.





The summary is organized into sections that highlight broad Convening themes:

- The perspectives of youth on the importance of permanence;
- Understanding the permanency needs of older children and youth;
- Achieving permanence through engaging youth and families;
- A series of “charting the course” sections identifying key organizational components, systems strategies, promising practices, and policies that support them – all of which emerged from the Convening; and
- Making the case for youth permanence with the media.

This summary was developed following a careful review of extensive notes and recordings taken throughout the Convening, materials that presenters and facilitators provided, and evaluations by participants. The Casey Center for Effective Child Welfare Practice at Casey Family Services developed this summary under the direction of Sarah Greenblatt, Center director, and consultants Madelyn Freundlich and Sally Tubbesing, with the assistance of the Casey Family Services Communications Department under the direction of Lee Mullane.



The Perspectives of Youth: The Importance of Permanence for Older Children and Youth

“Now I have a family that I can go to any time.

I don’t have to be alone anymore.”

– Nadege Mardy Breeden, Panelist

The 2006 National Convening on Youth Permanence opened with a panel of young people and the emotionally moving digital story of Johnny Madrid, a young man who, while he had made a successful transition from foster care, still yearned for a family to fill the “hole in [his] heart.” Having been in foster care and had a range of permanency experiences, each panelist shared his or her reflections and insightful comments, speaking eloquently about the importance of building family relationships and connections with older children and youth in foster care and the need for the full engagement and participation of youth in the permanency planning and relationship-building processes. Throughout the Convening, youth panelists addressed the key theme that permanence for older children and youth is possible, powerful, and must be a state and national priority. Their messages were clear:

Permanence is possible:

- It is never too late to have a parent.
- Permanent families for older children and youth can be found anywhere, often in a youth’s natural network of important relationships.
- Permanence means a special person who is willing to commit.
- For some youth, permanence means having many caring people in their lives.

Permanence is powerful:

- Family permanence is a powerful force in a youth’s life; it is “a place to call home,” “not having to worry about being kicked out,” and “belonging.”
- The power of permanence for many youth extends beyond traditional family relationships.
- Reconnections are powerful – and necessary.
- It’s powerful to “have family to care about – and to care about you; permanence means our children will have grandparents.”

Permanence is a priority:

- Permanence is a priority “for all of us.”
- Mentors are important but they “don’t do the job” when it comes to having relationships with family members who are there for you over the long term.
- Permanence must be prioritized and youth must be engaged in direct permanency discussions from the time they enter foster care.
- Child welfare agencies should “screen in” family resources, not “screen out” these resources.



Understanding the Permanency Needs of Older Children and Youth

“What is reasonable and what is enough must be measured by what we would want for our own child. Data may show systemic improvement but, if we fail a single child, we must ask if we stopped at what was ‘reasonable.’

We can only declare success at the individual child level.”

– Judge William Thorne, Panelist

Understanding the permanency needs of older children and youth is essential to achieving and sustaining family permanence. The importance of developing a clear understanding of the need older children and youth have for permanence was discussed in a variety of ways, primarily through:

“Family means having someone to cheer you on to the next step.”

“I feel like a whole person because I have a family.”

“Permanence doesn’t stop with parents – the more strands in your rope, the stronger the rope is.”

– Youth Participants

- The voices of youth who likened the absence of family in their lives to having “a hole in your heart,” even when youth are successful in other aspects of their lives.
- A discussion of the decision by Humboldt County, California, to focus its youth permanency work on youth whom “we were most worried about” – 14 young people with histories of suicide attempts, injury to others, and seriously negative behaviors, including in some cases, juvenile-justice system involvement.
- Learning sessions and “courageous conversations” to exchange promising practices and ideas.

Participants took with them a range of lessons learned.

Myths about family permanence for youth must be debunked. It is time to put to rest the myths that there are no families interested in being permanent families for youth; that youth do not need (or want) family permanence; and that the characteristics of many older youth make family permanence unlikely or impossible. Key strategies to counteract these myths include involving youth in educating decision makers, engaging youth in ongoing discussions and decisions about permanency options available to them, and providing all families with a range of community supports.

Learn more at: *Challenging the Myths about Older Children and Youth*, www.caseyfamilyservices.org/pdfs/nc_cc_one.pdf.

Integrated, developmentally appropriate approaches to achieving permanence with older children and youth are key. Preparing youth for permanence involves integrated work on issues of loss, safety, attachment/relationships, and resilience. Services and supports must be mobilized to sustain the permanent commitment of families and to promote the developmental growth and stability of older children and youth.

Learn more at: *3-5-7: An Innovative Practice Approach*, www.caseyfamilyservices.org/pdfs/nc_ls_nine.ppt.

There are promising inclusive-practice strategies that meet the permanency needs of young people of color. The disparate permanency outcomes for youth of color can be reduced through family-group decision making, expanded use of kinship care, greater attention to the educational outcomes of youth, and stronger preparation for adulthood services.

Learn more at: *The Impact of Youth Permanence Initiatives on Reducing Racial Disproportionality and Disparity*, www.caseyfamilyservices.org/pdfs/nc_ls_five.ppt.

The needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth for permanence must be recognized and addressed. There is a growing understanding of the impact of institutionalized homophobia and the need for greater attention to permanency planning in group home environments serving LGBTQ youth. Strategies are being developed to achieve permanence for LGBTQ youth who may face a lack of acceptance by their parents and families.

Learn more at: *Working with LGBTQ Youth and the Families who Parent Them*, www.caseyfamilyservices.org/pdfs/nc_cc_eight.pdf.

“We must never give up – all youth deserve love in their lives.”

– Convening Participant





Engaging Youth and Family Members to Achieve Meaningful Permanence

The critical importance of fully engaging youth and their families in permanency planning and service delivery was a consistent theme throughout the Convening.

Engaging Youth

“We need to provide youth in foster care with opportunities to make good choices. The only way that they can make good decisions is to have full and accurate information. ‘Should I plan to return home or pursue another option?’ Sheltering youth is a disservice and takes away from youth the very information that they need.”

– Jennifer Rodriguez, California Permanency for Youth Project

Plenary and learning sessions deepened participants’ appreciation for the central role of youth in planning, achieving, and sustaining permanence. A key theme that surfaced again and again was the importance of developing and implementing policies and practices that actively engage young people in their own permanency planning and in the development of permanency policies and practices. Some of the major learning points include the following:

- Open and inclusive engagement of youth is key to both the integrity of the planning process and the quality of family permanency work.
- Youth must be given opportunities to educate their child welfare agency staff, attorneys, and the courts about what is most meaningful to them.
- Youth voices must be heard in court through the effective representation of well-trained counsel who have met with them and who understand each youth’s needs and desires. When youth want to be physically present in the courtroom, they should be given this opportunity to appear and to speak directly to the judge.
- To ensure that they are well served, youth must actively be engaged in the development of permanency policies and practices.

Learn more at: *Empowering Youth As Leaders to Achieve Permanence: Youth Permanence and Positive Youth Development: A Paradigm Merge*, www.caseyfamilyservices.org/pdfs/nc_ls_a2.ppt.

California Youth Connection: Policy Recommendations to Facilitate Foster Youth Participation in Court Hearings

“The child welfare system should be required to involve foster youth as participants and equal partners in all decisions about their lives. Youth should be required to be involved in case plan development and case plan meetings, and be given the option to attend court hearings. Foster youth should be allowed to offer a formal response to court reports, incident reports, and proposed permanency plans. Child welfare professionals should be held accountable by the courts and advocates for ensuring that foster youth participate. Judges should notice at hearings if youth are not present and request an explanation in order to ensure that the youth was given the choice to attend.”

California Youth Connection: www.calyouthconn.org/site/cyc/.



Engaging Families

“We need to do a better job of working with birth families. We need to engage with the family at days one, two and 10, and we need to ensure that they receive needed services and supports.”

– Elizabeth Fassler, Center for Family Representation

The importance of family engagement emerged as a theme throughout the convening. Key concepts regarding family engagement include:

- The importance of engaging families to prevent the need for children and youth to enter foster care whenever possible;
- The importance of hearing the voices of family and of honoring and nurturing the voices of parents;
- The critical role of frequent and meaningful visits between parents and youth;
- The need to develop policies and practices that support the connection of youth with their birth families, even when their families cannot assume full-time parenting;
- The importance of revisiting the possibility of family connections when youth are older, including situations in which parents’ rights have been terminated;
- The need to involve birth parents in training child welfare staff;
- The critical importance of a youth’s permanent connections with siblings – placement of siblings together and the ongoing connections among siblings when they cannot be placed together;
- The importance of the court’s understanding of and attention to sibling relationships, as well as the parent-child relationship, when making permanency decisions; and
- The need to implement policies and practices that recognize and support kin as potential permanency resources for older children and youth in foster care.

“The focus needs to be on listening to youth and helping them find their voices.”

– Youth Participant

Learn more at: *Openness in Permanency Practice with Older Children and Youth*, www.caseyfamilyservices.org/pdfs/nc_cc_nine_discussion.pdf;
The Impact of Youth Permanence Initiatives on Reducing Racial Disproportionality and Disparity, www.caseyfamilyservices.org/pdfs/nc_ls_five.ppt.

A Model for the Effective Engagement and Representation of Parents

- Immediately engage parents when children enter foster care.
- Use a multidisciplinary team approach to represent parents.
- Involve an attorney, social worker, and parent advocate for each parent.
- Develop individualized case plans with parents.
- Include parent advocates who have personal experience with the child welfare systems.
- Provide strong support for visiting when safety is not an issue, including visiting hosting programs.
- Continue support services post-reunification.
- Collaborate with the courts to order services for parents whenever necessary.

Outcomes: The average length of stay for children in foster care in New York City is approximately four years. The average length of stay for children whose parents are represented by the Center for Family Representation is five months.

Learn more at: www.cfrny.org/

Center for Family Representation, a nonprofit law and policy organization in New York City.

“We tend to define permanence in legal terms. Clients’ concepts of permanence focus on relationships with family and, particularly, with siblings. Youth yearn for relationships with their siblings.”

– Robert Harris,
Cook County, Illinois
Public Guardian’s Office





Charting the Course to Achieve and Sustain Youth Permanence: Organizational Building Blocks

The Convening’s plenary sessions, learning sessions, and “courageous conversations” were designed to provide participants with opportunities to explore the organizational structures and processes, policies, practices, and systems-collaboration strategies needed to improve permanency outcomes for older children and youth in foster care. The results of these learning opportunities deepened the understanding of the essential elements needed to chart the course toward successful family permanence. This section and those that follow provide the key themes that emerged.

As participants delved into the need for an integrated strategy at the organizational level, four primary organizational building blocks emerged as key to achieving and sustaining family permanence for older children and youth: leadership to sustain momentum; making the case with data; funding to achieve and sustain permanence; and developing organizational structures to support youth permanence.

Building Block 1: Leadership to Sustain Momentum

“Before, we used to talk about change. Now we’re doing it.”
– Mary Gambon, Massachusetts Department of Social Services

Permanence for older children and youth can be achieved only with strong administrative leadership – a strong leader at the top and practice champions at all organizational levels. Leaders who:

- Create and sustain change within the child welfare agency;
- Have a vision and the capacity to share it;
- Are passionate;
- Communicate in a transparent way with agency staff, the public, and the legislature;
- Establish their credibility; and
- Bring others to the table, broadening ownership of the problems and the solutions.

Practical Suggestions for Creating and Maintaining a Change Environment

- Take a proactive stance: push the envelope.
- Frame change as compelling: relate change to a core idea.
- Say what is needed over and over again.
- Don’t get stuck on language – it can reduce flexibility.
- Create a learning environment that supports everyone who is involved in change.
- Be ready to listen to other perspectives.
- Be aware of the instinctive tendency to try to avoid risk.
- See “veterans” as the potentially greatest champions (or obstacles).
- Recognize the power of relationships and continuously work to build them.
- Nurture the voices of youth and parents.
- Actively engage outside groups and keep them at the table, since they will be there when leadership changes.

Learn more at: *Leadership to Sustain the Momentum*,
www.caseyfamilyservices.org/pdfs/nc_ls_one.pdf.



Building Block 2: Making the Case with Data

“We need to define our goals clearly. How will we know when we have achieved permanence for youth in our systems?”

– National Organization Representative

In order to make the case for policies and practices that promote and support family permanence for older children and youth, child welfare agencies must collect and analyze data and provide data-driven information to decision makers.

Data are needed to:

- Identify which youth should be the focus of state, county, or local family permanency efforts;
- Assess the extent to which different permanency options are being planned and achieved for youth;
- Understand the success of permanency efforts: who is achieving permanence, how permanence is being achieved, and how “permanent” permanence truly is;
- Evaluate the effectiveness of different permanency-planning approaches with different groups of youth;
- Track progress over time;
- Support transparency, instill pride in the work, and build hope for the future;
- Advocate for resources to support permanency work; and
- Increase the understanding of legislators and budget decision makers regarding the negative impact of youth who are “discharged to self” and the positive impact of youth leaving foster care to a family.

Participants identified two key strategies to make the case for youth permanence with data:

- Identify existing data and studies with particular attention to data available through child welfare information systems, surveys of youth and caregivers, and administrative data; and
- Use available data more creatively to support permanence for older children and youth.

Learn more at: www.caseyfamilyservices.org/pr_nc_research06.html.



Building Block 3: Funding to Achieve and Sustain Permanence

“Maximizing federal funding resources can help states and tribes find existing dollars to fund a creative array of permanency and post-permanency services.”

– Don Schmid, Presenter

Sustainable funding is a critical organizational building block in developing and implementing family permanency services. Without adequate and reliable funding, states, counties, and localities will not be able to provide youth and families with the mix of services and supports they need to develop and sustain family relationships.

There are multiple federal funding streams that can be used to achieve and sustain permanence for older children and youth. It was recommended that each state should assess its current strategies for maximizing federal dollars and determine whether the state is successfully drawing down its full share of federal dollars to add to the state dollars used for child welfare. By maximizing federal dollars, states can make available local dollars to support enhanced permanency services, often without having to find new funds.

Federal Funding Streams That Can Help Achieve and Sustain Permanence

- Title IV-E Adoption: Adoption Assistance, Administration, Training
- Adoption Incentive Funding
- Title IV-B, part 1 – Child Welfare Services
- Title IV-B, part 2 – Promoting Safe & Stable Families Program
- Chafee Foster Care Independence Act – Education and Training Vouchers for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care
- Title XIX – Medicaid (i.e., EPSDT & Targeted Case Management)
- Title XX – Social Services Block Grant
- TANF/EA
- Other Child Welfare-Related Funding Streams, i.e., Title II of the Keeping Families and Children Safe Act (formerly CAPTA)
- Federal Cooperative Agreements and Discretionary Grants

Post-Permanency Services in Pennsylvania Statewide Adoption Network (SWAN)

SWAN provides a range of post-permanency services to any family who has adopted (not limited to adoption through the child welfare system), and to families who provide permanence to children from the child welfare system through the state’s Permanent Legal Custodianship and Kinship Care program. These services include case advocacy, respite, and support groups. Post-permanency services are paid with a mixture of funding sources: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Title IV-E and Title IV-B, Subpart 1, and state dollars.

Learn more at: www.diakon-swan.org/main.asp

Post-Permanency Services in Pennsylvania, www.caseyfamilyservices.org/pdfs/nc_ls_four2.ppt.

Funding Permanency Services and Post-Permanency Supports: Financing Permanency and

Post-Permanency Services, www.caseyfamilyservices.org/pdfs/nc_ls_four1.ppt.

Building Block 4: Developing Organizational Structures and Processes to Support Permanence for Older Children and Youth

“It is a continuous learning process, and the answers are still unfolding.

But we must make a way out of ‘no way’ and develop a roadmap.”

– Pat Reynolds Harris, California Permanency for Youth Project

In addition to leadership, data, and funding, child welfare agencies need organizational structures and processes in place to achieve and sustain youth permanence. Critical to family permanency work with older children and youth is a “new look” at current organizational structures and processes. Do these ensure that youth permanence remains a priority? Or, alternatively, are youth “lost” in a siloed structure that places them either on the “permanence” track or on the “independent living” track? Do current structures and processes promote the ongoing exploration of family permanence, or are goals of “another planned permanent living arrangement” (APPLA) automatically used when youth reach a specified age?

“We need to support social workers who may feel anxiety about the ‘P’ word.”

– Convening Participant

Staff are central to organizational structures and processes. Family permanence for youth can be achieved only when staff understand that they are supported in undertaking new roles and assuming new responsibilities. The stresses of change, no matter how exciting, must be recognized or staff may succumb to “innovation fatigue” as they attempt to implement new initiatives. Positive permanency results for older children and youth must build on resources and relationships. These results can be achieved through the appropriate use of resources and through developing and supporting relationships.

Convening participants, recognizing that resources and relationships are critical, described a number of promising practices that support youth permanence, including: organizing casework staff into teams to work with youth and families; providing targeted training for staff on youth permanence; and planning for workload management when implementing family permanency initiatives (such as designating social workers who are not carrying cases to focus on permanence and lowering caseloads). Relationships also must be built and sustained with the courts and between public and private child welfare agencies, including the agencies that provide family foster care and group care.

California Permanency for Youth Project (CPYP) The Initial Building Blocks for Participating Counties

CPYP works closely with California counties to implement family permanence for older children and youth. This model is readily applicable to all systems, whether county or state administered.

- *Buy-in:* Build understanding and obtain support for the concept of youth permanence.
- *Leadership Commitment:* Obtain a letter of interest from the director or county executive that designates an executive sponsor and project manager.
- *Self Assessment:* Complete a self-assessment form designed by CPYP that addresses a range of organizational issues related to youth permanence.
- *Data:* Collect data on the youth for whom permanency efforts must focus and design methods to collect data on an ongoing basis.
- *The Plan:* Develop a plan that addresses administration and policy, practice, data, training, youth involvement, integration with other initiatives, and collaboration with outside partners.
- *The Team:* Identify a team of internal and external stakeholders.

Learn more at: Developing Organizational Structures to Support Youth Permanence, www.cpyp.org/



Charting the Course: Cross-Systems Collaborations

“When spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion.”

– Ethiopian Proverb, Shared by U.S. Representative Danny Davis (D - IL),
Convening Policy Briefing

Child welfare agencies (public and private) cannot achieve and sustain family permanence for older children and youth on their own. Youth permanence requires collaborative efforts with other service systems. Convening participants highlighted the importance of collaborations with a range of key stakeholders. They also identified multiple systemic barriers that impede the collaboration needed to achieve and sustain permanence, including:

- Inflexible funding;
- Stigma attached to older youth, resulting in their being given lowest priority ; for services and supports;
- Lack of shared information systems;
- Lack of integrated case planning;
- Reluctance on the part of educational systems to become full partners in serving youth in foster care;
- Lack of clear accountability; and
- Lack of understanding regarding the role of communities in supporting permanence.

Convening participants identified a number of ways that collaborations could be strengthened, including:

- Teaming in a proactive manner to promote solutions-focused decision making;
- Multisystem meetings with shared agendas;
- Involvement of youth at all levels of decision making;
- Support from the court;
- Presentations by youth, parents, and caregivers at legislative hearings and community meetings;
- Legislative mandates that direct cross-systems collaboration;
- Financial incentives for collaborating; and
- Accountability processes that set clear expectations, provide leadership, celebrate successes, and deal directly with challenges.

Collaborative Partners for Youth Permanence

- Court system
- Mental health system
- Health care community
- Education system, including higher education
- Juvenile justice system
- Organizations that provide economic stability services (such as the Job Corps and financial institutions)
- Communities from which large numbers of children historically have come
- Faith-based organizations
- Parent advocacy organizations
- Caregivers





Charting the Course: Promising Permanency Practices and Policy Options to Support Them

“We must close the gap between what we know and what we are doing. Permanency work forces us to live with the pain of the gap and change our practice so that we achieve for youth what we would want for our own children.”

– Harry Spence, Former Commissioner, Massachusetts Department of Social Services



“We can’t let ourselves follow what seems to be an easier road – independent living programs can’t be a substitute for building/having family relationships. The two must be combined.”

– Sarah B. Greenblatt,
the Casey Center
for Effective Child
Welfare Practice at
Casey Family Services

The 2006 National Convening offered more than 20 learning sessions and “courageous conversations” as a means of providing participants with information on promising practices and policy options. Participants at these sessions engaged in powerful conversations about what is possible and noted the central importance of building relationships with youth and family members and involving them in planning and decision making. They shared promising practices and policy options that states and tribes have implemented with positive outcomes in five key areas:

Teaming and Shared Decision Making: Teaming and shared decision-making approaches are increasingly being used to achieve family permanence for older children and youth. It is not uncommon, however, to find resistance within child welfare agencies to the use of teaming and to the involvement of youth and family in decision making. New policies, evidence-based practices, and training can support the full integration of teaming and shared decision making into youth permanency initiatives.

Learn more at: *Teaming Strategies: Building Lifelong Family Relationships for Older Children and Youth in Residential Care*, www.caseyfamilyservices.org/pdfs/nc_ls_seven.ppt.

Family Search and Engagement: Innovative strategies are being used to search for, approach, and engage parents, relatives, and other members of a youth’s extended family in planning for permanence. Specialized permanency practices also have evolved from the “active efforts” requirements of the Indian Child Welfare Act, with the implementation of concurrent planning to intensively engage family up front.

Learn more at: *True Concurrent Planning to Improve Timely Permanency Practice*, www.caseyfamilyservices.org/pdfs/nc_ls_ten.ppt.

Permanency Preparation and Support: Much can be learned from promising approaches that help children and youth deal with the trauma of abuse, neglect, separation, and loss; that engage them in planning for their futures; and that support them through the permanency-planning process and following their return home, placements with relatives, or adoption. Key to successful permanency preparation and support is collaborative work with families to learn what they need. Other essential elements include the expansion of services and supports that are available to youth and families over time and ensuring that services for youth and families are culturally sensitive.

Learn more at: *3-5-7: An Innovative Practice Approach to Achieving Permanence with Older Children and Youth*, www.caseyfamilyservices.org/pdfs/nc_ls_nine.ppt.

Openness in Permanency Practice: Practitioners must find ways to engage parents and relatives in planning and decision making even when a youth is freed for adoption. Greater openness in permanency practice is particularly needed when parental rights are terminated but the child is not adopted, and in cases in which adoptive parent(s) have died. Agency cultural barriers are a major challenge to achieving reunification or promoting ongoing connections with birth parents and relatives when older children and youth cannot be reunited, but these challenges can be overcome.

Learn more at: *Openness in Permanency Practice with Older Children and Youth*, www.caseyfamilyservices.org/pdfs/nc_cc_nine_discussion.pdf.

Integrating Permanence and Preparation for Adulthood: Permanence and preparation for adulthood often are not integrated. Youth either are on a “permanence” track or an “independent living” track. Recently developed policies and practices have shown promise in interweaving both, but challenges in integrating these historically very separate areas of child welfare practice can be expected. Among those challenges are federal and state eligibility policies for transition services that contradict sound permanency planning and support.





Making the Case with the Media

Moderated by *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer* Senior Correspondent Judy Woodruff and featuring leading print and broadcast journalists, the final panel provided participants with an in-depth look at how the media works. Panelists focused on how journalists think about and approach child welfare issues; the types of child welfare issues that are likely to attract the media's attention; and how to develop effective working relationships with the media so that stories can educate the public about key issues in a balanced and informative way. As one journalist noted, "Reporters understand safety, but they do not understand the meaning of permanence. It is essential to make clear the effects on children and youth when they have no one."

Working with the Media to Advance the Permanency Message

- Consider working with both the national and local media. Understand the differences.
- Work to bring in youth as experts, not simply in cameo roles that add color to stories.
- Develop relationships with reporters, keeping them informed of trends.
- Present reporters with solutions-based stories and stories that show emerging trends.
- Invite the press in and help them understand the sensitivities of the information that is shared.
- Help the media gain a better understanding of permanence and the impact on youth who do not have permanent families.
- Provide the media with positive stories that connect local people and places to the national issues. Demonstrate how agencies are helping strengthen youth and families and how youth and families are contributing to their communities.

A Key Resource: *Family to Family Strategic Communications:*

Media Relations for Child Welfare, www.aecf.org/initiatives/familytofamily/tools/16951.pdf.

Conclusion

At the end of the 2006 National Convening on Youth Permanence, participants engaged in an electronic – polling process to identify the key lessons learned and to confirm their commitment to moving the youth permanency agenda forward within their organizations and their states. They overwhelmingly agreed that family permanence for older children and youth in foster care is possible, can be a transformative experience, and must be the focus of policy and practice at the state and federal levels. In their feedback forms, participants confirmed as well that staff at all levels need to believe that permanence for older children and youth is possible. They also need information about how to make it happen and the support to engage in “out-of-the box” practice. Participants left the Convening with the resolve to make youth permanence a central and urgent priority as they move forward.

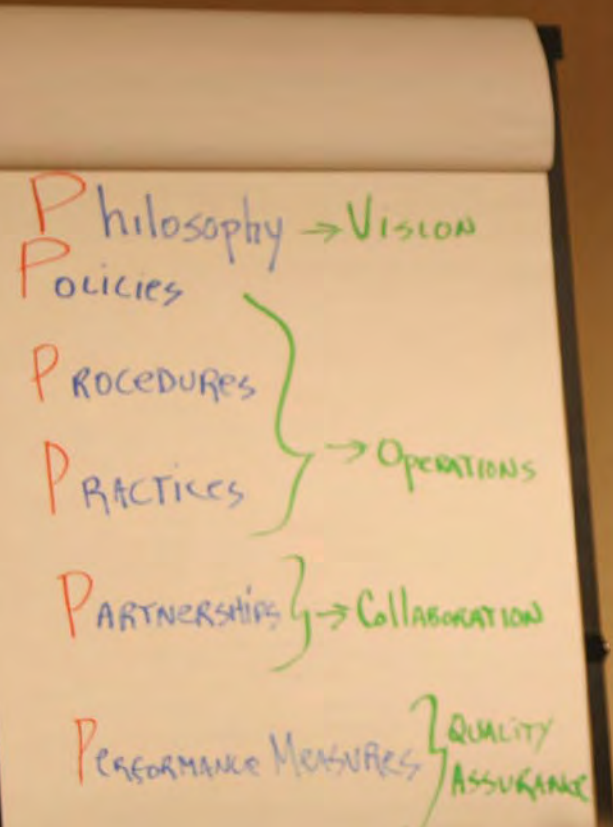
The Annie E. Casey Foundation, along with its direct service agency, Casey Family Services, is committed to building on the momentum created at the 2006 National Convening on Youth Permanence. Casey will continue to collaborate with Convening partners to support states, tribes, counties, and localities in implementing the lessons learned from the Convening by promoting promising policies and practices to achieve and sustain family permanence for older children and youth in foster care.

Casey also has made a significant commitment to highlighting the need for improved permanency outcomes for all children and youth in foster care by dedicating the *2007 KIDS COUNT Databook* to permanence. The Foundation draws on data to make the case that family permanence remains an urgent need for too many children and youth touched by child welfare systems nationwide.

Casey will continue to foster the compelling learning that emerged from the 2006 Convening by sponsoring the next National Convening on Youth Permanence. From April 30 to May 2, 2008, the Annie E. Casey Foundation will join with Casey Family Programs to host state, tribal, and national leadership as they reconvene in Washington, D.C., to measure progress, share new and emerging practices and policies, and bring their collective wisdom to address more deeply the complex challenges of achieving and sustaining permanence for older children and youth in foster care.

Appendices available on the Casey Family Services website:

- I: Convening brochure with agenda and list of supporting organizations
- II: Summary of convening feedback results
- III: State plan outline
- IV: Web-based Resource Guide





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