Winter 2008

NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER
FOR FAMILY-CENTERED PRACTICE
AND PERMANENCY PLANNING
at the Hunter College
School of Social Work

Permanency Planning Today

From the Desk of THE DIRECTOR

Gerald P. Mallon, DSW

Seven years ago our predecessor, the National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice, proposed four essential components of family-centered practice in child welfare :

1) The family unit is the focus of attention.
2) Strengthening the capacity of families to function effectively is emphasized.
3) Families are engaged in designing all aspects of the policies, services, and program evaluation.
4) Families are linked with more comprehensive, diverse, and community-based networks of supports and services.

We have continued to reference these elements in our work with States and Tribes, but their struggle has been in how to incorporate those principles into a framework of practice that provides practical guidance to staff seeking to employ a family-centered approach to their work with children, youth and families. Increasingly we have found that states wish to document those principles in ways that both announce their intentions to do family-centered work and ground their intentions in clearly defined ways.

Recently I had the pleasure of reviewing work being done by NRCFCPPP consultants in Idaho which included the following list of principles of family centered practice, borrowed and adapted from similar work done in North Carolina:

- Everyone desires respect
- Everyone needs to be heard
- Everyone has strengths
- Judgments can wait
- Partners share power
- Partnership is a process

It became clear to me that there is no single set of principles that provide some ultimate definition and description of what it means to do family-centered social work. Each jurisdiction can – and should – develop a practice framework built on the input of its own staff, community, and consumers of services. In this way it can create an overarching set of principles that reflects the issues, practices, values, and cultures that make each agency unique in its work to provide safety, permanency, and well-being.

In this issue we publish excerpts from two interviews I had with leaders in child welfare whose jurisdictions are developing just such frameworks.

The first of those is Louisiana, which is undertaking a systems reform effort called Louisiana LIFTS (Leading Innovations for Family Transformation and Safety).

Louisiana LIFTS reflects OCS' (Office of Community Services) goal of reaching higher to ensure a family-focused and community-based system of care for the state's most vulnerable children. Too many of Louisiana's children still come into state foster care because their communities lack the programs and services needed to achieve more permanent outcomes. The LIFTS initiatives are designed to help serve children in the best place for them – safe and secure families.

THE SIX INITIATIVES WITHIN LOUISIANA LIFTS

1. **Improving intake decisions:** The new approach will utilize uniform assessment and decision-making criteria to ensure more consistent response to the more than 25,000 reports of child abuse and neglect received by the agency each year.
2. **Meeting family needs:** With the use of new, better and more uniform assessment and case planning tools, the agency's goal will be to keep families together in safe and secure environments. These "family-centered" evaluations will allow more households to remain intact and ensure that fewer children require out-of-home care.
3. **Community-based services:** To become more family-focused and community-based, services must exist in the children's own commu-

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nities. OCS is enhancing its commitment to working with prevention-oriented community partners to provide services to at-risk families. They are developing a comprehensive continuum of services with intensive home-based programs to build on the family's strengths and needs.

4 **Foster and adoptive parenting:** Recruitment and staff partnerships are being augmented to provide better support for foster and adoptive families as well as to benefit children by providing several placement options within their communities. Some enhancements include standardized training of internal policy and procedures, more foster and adoptive parental involvement in case decisions and stronger links between foster parents and birth families.

5 **Residential treatment:** The agency is evaluating the current residential decision-making and placement process to ensure that these facilities only are used as short-term interventions for children with emotional, physical or mental health needs that cannot be met in a family setting.

6 **Transitioning youth**: Dozens of Louisiana children "age out" of foster care each year. Better opportunities are needed for young adults to find permanent family connections and to take advantage of vocational, housing and educational support that will enable them to become successful adults. OCS is developing plans to ensure a smooth transition for all youth aging out of foster care.

The second jurisdiction is Massachusetts, which has embarked on a major initiative known as Working with Families Right from the Start. It includes six core values that describe specific behaviors and practices that define good child welfare practice. They are:

Core Practice Value: Child Driven

- Permanency, safety and well-being of children, as well as that of the people connected to them, form the center of the work DSS engages in with families and their communities.
- Children's physical and emotional safety is paramount.
- Children have the right to be part of a safe family.
- Children have the right to a fair chance in life and opportunities for healthy development.
- Children have the right to community protection.
- Children's experiences and perspectives are heard and understood.

Core Practice Value: Family Centered

- The family is the primary source for the nurturing and protection of children.
- Parents should be supported and respected in their efforts to nurture their children.
- Family is defined broadly by its members and is significant to all aspects of the child's development.
- Families are entitled to and deserve self-determination, privacy and access to resources and non-traditional supports.
- Families are capable of change and with support most can safely care for their children.
- Families are partners in meeting children's needs for permanency, safety and well-being.
- Families deserve to be engaged respectfully.

Core Practice Value: Community Focused

- Families are resources to one another and to communities.
- Every community has assets as well as needs.
- Identifying and strengthening informal and formal resources strengthens children and families.
- Informal supports are valuable for families and should be sought.
- Service providers and community resources must be accountable and responsive to the communities they serve.
- Work with families is focused on identifying and strengthening community resources.
- Child safety, well-being and permanency are a community responsibility.

STATE OF MISSISSIPPI
Division of Family and Children Services

Supervisor's Guide To Implementing Family Centered Practice

Mississippi Division of Children and Family Services is embarking on the development of a Family Centered Practice framework that will guide the creation of standards of practice, supervisory activities and the day to day interaction between families, social workers and the community of caregivers and providers. This guidebook was developed to support supervisors in the process of developing and supporting staff to be family centered in their work. It should serve as a support to helping workers integrate family centered practice in all aspects of assessment, service planning and service delivery. Find it on our website at http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/downloads/MS_SUPERVSORS_GUIDEBOOK.pdf

Core Practice Value: Strength Based

- Engaging families respectfully promotes involvement that focuses on and supports strengths.
- Children and families have strengths which need to be recognized and supported.
- Families have the ability, with support, to overcome adverse life circumstances.
- Families can grow and change through identifying and building upon assets and strengths.
- Identifying family strengths will inspire hope.
- Strength emerges from building partnerships between the family, community and DSS.

Core Practice Value: Committed to Cultural Diversity/Cultural Competence

- Families are diverse and have the right to be respected for their economic, ethnic, class, cultural and religious experiences and traditions.
- Practice and services are delivered in a manner that respects, supports and strengthens the child's and family's identity.
- Every culture should be recognized for its positive attributes and challenges for families, professionals and communities.

Core Practice Value: Committed to Continuous Learning

- Self-reflection, by individuals and systems, fosters growth.
- Data should be used to promote learning.
- Opportunities for continuous learning must be widely afforded to professionals, family and community providers.
- Child, family and community input are essential in the learning process.
- Positive growth and change must build on identified strengths.
- Families have a right to participate in services with highly skilled and trained professionals.

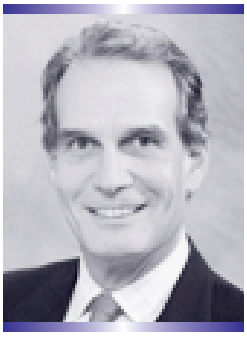
I'd like to encourage you to send a copy of YOUR jurisdictions's principles of family-centered practice or practice framework so that we can share them with others in the field and enhance the larger community of practice.

Gerald P. Mallon, DSW

CHILD WELFARE LEADERS TALK ABOUT PERMANENCY

This year the National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice and Permanency Planning changed the format of our series of Internet webcasts to one in which Executive Director Gerald P. Mallon has an extended informal conversation with one important voice in the field of child welfare.Both of these interviews included discussions about permanency for older youth; those portions are excerpted below. To watch the webcasts in their entirety, visit our website at http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/webcasts/index.html

The first interview is with Harry Spence, who had been the Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Social Services for five years. This interview is also the first which is available for audio download to your MP3 device.



Interview with Harry Spence:

Gary: I think that one of the things people know most about your administration is this strong emphasis on youth permanency and really looking at young people in different ways in child welfare systems. Clearly Massachusetts has been a real leader in getting ahead of the rest of us and taking a leadership role in looking at youth permanency in very different ways. Was that part of your initial discussion, or did something else happen that got that going?

Harry: Within the first nine months a lot of the vision was already there. I've come to understand that when you are the head of an organization your primary power as a CEO or Commissioner is twofold. One, you get a megaphone - you can amplify certain messages in the organization. The second, I've come to realize, is that the notion that you can make people do stuff turns out not to be very true. What you can do is you can give permission. So as I was listening to people and listening to the history of the organization as it was told by all sorts of participants in the process, one of the things that was very striking was how this notion, this very powerful mantra, of safety, permanency, well-being had actually increasingly become SAFETY ... permanency, well-being. The latter two values get completely lost. In the history of the organization, the high-profile cases, the pressures from the legislature and the Governor over multiple administrations had really driven an entire focus on safety, and permanency had increasingly disappeared. I actually think the Feds deserve some real credit around this, because it was the Congress and the Federal Government that began to say "Wait a minute, kids are languishing in foster care. What's happening with adoption?" and began to drive the push on adoption from the federal level. There were certainly strong strains within DSS that were beginning to revive the focus on permanency, but there was still this overwhelming focus on safety.

My second week on the job I went to a legislative hearing - my first legislative hearing - before the Human Services sub-committee and I was besieged by people who run homeless shelters in Massachusetts, running up to me and saying "You're the new Commissioner, do you realize that the most rapidly growing population of young people in our shelters is former foster kids?" That was a shock, I was really stunned by that, I didn't know what to say. But then I started learning about the work in Wisconsin, the studies that followed up on kids who aged out of care, and realized that a third of them, within in five years, are in homeless shelters. This wasn't just Massachusetts, this was a national phenomenon. The loss of permanency was doing huge damage to these kids. I began to analogize it, I used to say to people "Keeping kids safe and then not addressing permanency is like a heart surgeon who says 'Oh, I'll operate, put the new valves in or whatever', and then leaves without sewing you up, saying 'You'll have to take care of yourself, I need to go on to the next case.'" You leave that child with his heart wide open.

You've saved a life by putting it at huge risk. I used to say "Those first ten years of adulthood, twenty to thirty, you're laying down the foundation stones of life, you really need family. How many of us could ever get through it without family?" I was emphasizing that first decade. During my second year at the Department my mother died, and my father had died several years before, and I suddenly realized that I'm an orphan. But what was striking to me was how much all of a sudden my siblings meant to me. My brothers and sister meant a huge amount. And I realized, "What do you mean, Harry, that family's important from 20 to 30? Family's important to you at 50 and 60. Family's going to be even more important as you get closer and closer to death." What is it you want around? Family, and a lifetime. So to strip a person of family for a lifetime is a brutal, brutal thing to do.

So we all began to work on this question of "how do we bring back the core of child welfare work, which is safety, permanency, well-being. We began to say that the charge of the Department is not to protect children. It is to ensure that every child in Massachusetts arrives at adulthood with a permanent family or the closest approximation to a permanent family that the Department can help that child develop. And safety is the threshold condition of that. But it's the threshold condition - it's only the first step. You stop there and you're like the surgeon who walks away in mid-operation.

Gary: That's a really wonderful way of thinking about it and I think that's one of the reasons that people have really been excited about what Massachusetts is doing, because clearly there's been a lot of thought about "What does this mean for young people?" I know that people are always astounded when you give them the statistic that nationally 50% of the young people in the foster care system are over the age of 11. These are not babies. There are a lot of babies in the system, but these are older young people who are aging out and who are hopefully going to age out with family lifetime permanent connections.

You also did some wonderful things with the Breakthrough Series Methodology. Clearly Casey has done a lot on that as well, but as a region or national group. No state has taken on the effort as a state to look at a specific issue, but in Massachusetts you did that with youth permanency. Could you talk a little bit about that?

Interview with Harry Spence (cont'd)

Harry: We learned a lot about the Breakthrough at the feet of Casey. We've been involved in several of their national Breakthrough Series, where one of our 29 Area Offices would be involved in a BSC with a handful of people from Central Office, and we really felt the methodology was tremendously powerful. We learned a huge amount from it. We love the whole notion of PDSA (plan-do-study-act), and that every single person in the system can be an experimenter, has an obligation and is empowered to make change in their own practice. That fit with our whole notion of continuous learning, that each of us is responsible for improving our own child welfare practice; we're responsible for institutionally improving. So PDSAs were wonderful for that because they both oblige and empower everyone to engage in constant improvement. So we liked the whole methodology enormously.

As our focus grew increasingly, not just on permanency, we said we were going to try to line up all the systems to support a genuine marriage of safety and permanency (as opposed to safety without permanency). We found ourselves increasingly focused on adolescent permanency. As a result of ASFA and other pressures, our work with younger children had actually advanced a good deal, and it was relatively unusual for a young child to languish in foster care for a long time. The real problem lay with kids who were either latency or adolescent. We bumped up the notion about when adoption can occur - 15 years ago people would say up to age three or four - now they'd say up to 12. We began to learn from others that that didn't need to be, and in fact anyone can be adopted, there is no age at which adoption becomes impossible, not if you're serious, not if you're deeply committed.

So we wanted to share that learning with the entire organization, and knew of no better way to share and disseminate learning than through the Breakthrough Series. I have to give (credit to) Mary Gambon, the Assistant Commissioner for Foster Care and Adoption. She really was the sparkplug for this. She came to me one day and said, "Harry, I want to do a Massachusetts Breakthrough Series; one that won't be just one of our 29 Area Offices, one in which every single Area Office will participate." ... So she set about it with my support and encouragement, and all the senior staff. It was a tough time, actually. We were doing a huge amount in the Department. We were driving a very, very full agenda of change. There were some who said "we can't take on another major project, it will overwhelm the organization." But then we realized that actually a lot of our work had not engaged our adolescent units (we have units of adolescent workers in Massachusetts) and a lot of our work had engaged other elements of the system but we hadn't really engaged the adolescent units a lot, so that there was some room there to do that. The enthusiasm from the field was huge. They said "Do it, do it, we're ready, let's do it!" So we went ahead with it, all 29 Area Offices put together teams. Then we decided that every one of the Area Office teams had to have at least one youth in care on that team. That turned out to probably be the single most important decision. It was fascinating to watch the development of the relationship in each of those 29 offices - the development between the 5,6,8 adults, staff in the Department, and the youth in care who was part of their team. It was a huge shift over the period of the year or so of the Breakthrough Series.

We did three statewide Learning Sessions. The first one was difficult in some ways. The young people came - not universally, but a lot of them - with deep suspicion of the Department, angry about what had happened to them in the care of the Department, mistrusting the Department. They might make an exception for their particular social worker, but everyone else's ... that voice was very strong in the first session. The adults were used to sitting with an individual kid, working on their particular situation, but the idea of having young people sit with them, thinking about how they change their practice, advising them, bringing their voice to "how you should practice with adolescents" - that was a new idea for the adults, and they were pretty wary of that, too.

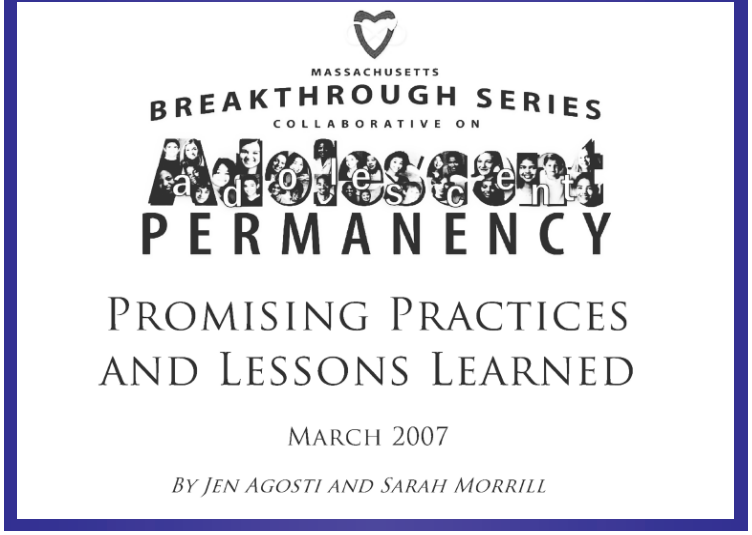
By the third Learning Session, almost a year later, one of the chief spokespersons for the 29 young people stood up and made this incredibly moving speech, saying "we've come to realize how deeply as an organization you really work to try to serve our needs and we're incredibly grateful for the work you do on our behalf - but we also think there's a lot of learning you need to do and we think there's a lot you can learn from us. We want to work with you as partners in developing the practice to support the young people who come after us." They were very eloquent about it. They said, "It will be too late for us, but we want the young people who come after us to have the benefit of an even better system, of a substantially better system." It was a very moving talk; there were tears in the group.

Gary: Well, I know that when (we and) our colleagues in AdoptUsKids ... decided to do a Breakthrough Series in the Mountain States on youth permanency we piggybacked on a lot of your ideas. One of things we very much wanted to do was that same idea of making sure that a youth was part of every team, and it made a huge difference there, as well. The young people themselves, again at the last session, were extremely eloquent about what it meant to be part of this and to be seen as partners in the process.

Harry Spence was Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Social Services from November 2001 to June 2007. He previously served as deputy chancellor for operations for the New York City public schools; receiver for the bankrupt city of Chelsea, Massachusetts; lecturer in public policy at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard; court-appointed receiver of the Boston Housing Authority, which became a model for public housing intervention across the nation; and executive director of the Cambridge Housing Authority. He received a J.D. in 1974 from Harvard Law School and a B.A. from Harvard College in 1969.

For more about the Massachusetts Breakthrough Series Collaborative on Adolescent Permanency, read the final report, "Promising Practices and Lessons Learned" at:
http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/downloads/permanency/MA_DSS_Adolescent_Permanency_BSC_Promising%20Practices_Final%20Report.pdf

Read this final report which highlights the key themes and promising practices that emerged from 31 participating teams on our website at http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info_services/youtpermanency.html



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This second interview is with Marketa Gautreau, Assistant Secretary of the Louisiana Office of Community Services.

Interview with Marketa Gautreau

During the course of an interview which began with a look at how the Louisiana Office of Community Services helped the citizens of New Orleans at the time of the Katrina and Rita hurricanes – both during the storms and in the recovery afterward – Gary also asked about Louisiana's current child welfare reform system, known as Lousiana LIFTS, and some of the specific work in the area of permanency.

Gary: I know that you're doing some initiatives in the area of youth permanency, as well. There is clearly, around the country, a focus on permanency for older adolescents. So could you tell us a little bit about that?

Marketa: You know, I think for everybody that works in the system one of the hardest things to deal with is when a kid turns 18 and they leave us. We say, "Bye, wish you well!" They're sick of the system and they can't wait to be rid of us. But you know, I have kids, and I just don't know...where do you go for Thanksgiving? Who do you go home to? That's the population that really grips me and tears at my heart. We need to do better with these kids as they leave us. We're spending a lot of time and energy looking at our young adult system. We're taking some of the relief money – this is what's exciting; money can "do stuff!" Child welfare systems are chronically underfunded. So we're taking some of this relief money from Congress and we're looking at the population of kids that are aging out and were Katrina victims, and we're just spending a lot of money on them. We're doing placement stuff we've never done; we're paying for car insurance; we're paying for long-term housing; we're doing more in tuition; we're doing more with living expenses. We're going to be able to actually prove: This is what you get when you make an investment in kids. So I'm really excited about our aging-out work. And we're doing some neat work with your group (the NRCFCPPP) on connections over the Internet and with Family Finding. That's amazing stuff.

Gary: We're really happy about doing that. The NRCFCPPP has been in Louisiana a lot. We're really committed to helping in some of those systemic areas, and youth permanency is one, along with family search and engagement. Our consultants are actually there right now, in the New Orleans offices, beginning to look at how we re-engage families with young people so that they can have these permanent connections that are sustainable.

Marketa: We are thrilled to have you and it's been real exciting. We've had some great success stories come out of that very quickly. That's all it takes for a social worker: Give them one happy ending and they are off and running, they are excited, they are energized. Staff is really excited. We're working very closely with the courts in this because you're really looking at rights – parental rights and kids' rights as they reunite with families. We're working with the Court Improvement Project and Mark Harris, who does that work for us in Louisiana. It's phenomenal. He actually sits on our steering committee for the whole reform initiative so that every conversation we have about where we're going and what we're doing, the court piece is right there and we're really connected to how we need to make sure the judges are hearing this or learning that, or being trained on this, and our staff is connecting with the judges.

We've been really blessed with the outside help that came in. The Annie E. Casey Foundation has been a phenomenal partner in working with us to bring some shape and form to this initiative and to help us figure out how do you this piece, and this piece, and this piece. I think Louisiana is very unique in that lots of child welfare systems have had the opportunity to really reform what they do, but they usually carve out a chunk. They take foster care and they say, "we're really going to reform how we do this." We're doing everything across the board at the same time, and it's in a really tight timeline because we only have the Congressional relief money for a certain period of time. This administration is committed to this project and this administration is coming to an end at the end of this year. So we are running as fast as we can and we are trying to get it all done, all the way across the board.

Gary: I know you're doing a little bit of work in the area of supervision, as well, which I guess is key to bringing it all together and looking at some of those elements of how you do you continually provide quality supervision to staff who are doing this work.

Marketa: It's really a unique thing to try to change a system as you're rolling with the system. Somebody compared it to building a bicycle while you're riding it. We have our bumps along the way. It's a lot of change for staff very quickly. But one of the things Katrina taught us is that this is an incredible child welfare staff and they do fabulous on the fly. So they're learning and picking it up and doing as we're creating it. It does take a lot of extra supervision to try to change how you work with your caseload as you manage your caseload. There's no magic day when you can flip a switch and say, "Now we'll do it the new way." So we're doing some coaching and some consulting, working with real small groups with outside consultants that are really just looking at "How do we look at a case differently than we used to look at a case?" Thinking big, thinking outside the box – all those buzz words. Figure out a way that maybe you've never looked at permanence in this way. Maybe you've never looked at going back to a family we removed from four or five years ago. Family dynamics change every day, so let's go back and revisit those families and let's see if this is a place now where the child could be safe. So it is a new way of thinking and a new way of doing business but staff is remarkable. Just like they did in Katrina – they were there and they did whatever was asked of them regardless of their status or rank in the organization ... I think that's kind of

Interview with Marketa Gautreau (continued)

how the Louisiana LIFTS initiative feels. We're going to do what needs to be done to make this the very best system it can be.

Gary: A couple of weeks ago we were talking about reinstatement of parental rights as a permanency option for older adolescents and at first glance it seems like, "Oh my gosh, what are you talking about? Kids are going to go home?" Well, we know about 25% of teenagers when they leave us do go home anyway. So why not look at families again, broadly speaking, and see if there might be families whose rights were terminated many years ago, who have done the work they needed to do to provide a safe person for this young person to live, but it's a different mindset. What I was impressed with is that people are really thoughtful about looking at permanency in all its variations - not just independant living or adoption- but really looking at guardianship and kinship and all of the other options that might exist and how we can really focus on providing permanency in its best form for the individual young person.

Marketa: We know that when kids run away from the system, when they leave congregate care, they go home. And when they age out, they go home. So why not get that family back together before they age out, so they have somebody they are bonded and attached to, and they can reunite and have that permanent connection, that safe place to go and have Thanksgiving dinner.

It is a different mindset for a lot of staff that have been brought up with "Family is bad, we take this kid away from the family, we've got to keep them safe, we've got to find a safe place for them." Well, sometimes home can be a safe place. Family dynamics change and we just need to be constantly reevaluating. The day that kid comes in is the day we begin their exit plan. If we're not evaluating that family constantly then shame on us! Because this is their family, and if we can possibly reunite them, then that's our primary goal. Our belief is that kids are served best in families - bottom line. If not their birth family, then a relative family, and if not that then a foster family; congregate care when you have to have it for the short term intervention when it's needed - and then back home.

Marketa Gautreau Marketa was appointed Assistant Secretary for the Office of Community Services in 2004. Prior to her appointment as the Assistant Secretary, she served as the President and CEO of Prevent Child Abuse Louisiana for nine years. Marketa has been an enthusiastic and committed advocate for children, youth and families for over 25 years. For more about Louisiana LIFTS, read the fact sheet at http://www.dss.state.la.us/Documents/DSS/LIFTSfactsheetEDITED.pdf

Using Digital Media to Tell the Story of Permanency for Youth

Preparation for Adulthood - Supervising for Success is a three year curriculum development and training project funded by the Children's Bureau Discretionary Grants Program - ACF/DHHS. The goal of the project is to develop, implement, evaluate and disseminate a training curriculum for public child welfare supervisors. This curriculum will strengthen supervision of staff's interventions with older youth who are in foster care. Our state and city partners in this project are Oregon Department of Human Services, State Office for Services to Children and Families, the New York City Administration for Children's Services and the Mississippi Department of Human Services.

In collaboration with our state and city partners we have created an exciting framework for professional development. It uses technology and small learning communities to enhance competence when supervising adolescent cases.

There are six core perspectives with principles and practices that guide this project:

(1) Develop and maintain positive permanent connections between youth and caring adults.
(2) Actively engage youth in developing life skills that will prepare them for successful transition.
(3) Relate to youth as resources rather than just recipients of services in the child welfare system.
(4) Create and maintain environments that promote physical and emotional safety and well being.
(5) Value the individual strengths and uniqueness of each youth.
(6) Involve a diverse array of stakeholders in the development of a comprehensive continuum of services and supports for youth transitioning out of the foster care system.

Another of the unique and innovative features of this project is the use of digital storytelling methods to expose professionals to the narrative voices of youth and those who work with them. These stories, 3 minute videos, are made by youth and professionals who work with them. Youth and staff who participate in one of the three states choose a personal story that represents a change in their life and develop it into a digital story. The project has a state-of-the-art portable digital laboratory that uses Apple technology to make these stories. This enables us to expose youth to computer technology, thereby helping to bridge the digital divide and opening youth to career possibilities. Digital video is also used as a tool for self expression. As an aid to expressive arts methods, digital video allows many visual elements to come alive when dealing with difficult events such as seeking permanency in their lives. Youth enhance their literacy skills by writing their stories using the theatrical elements such as a three act structure or formal story structure.

In the third year of this project we now have 20 of these digital stories from youth and professionals. These digital stories have applicability for training foster parents, in sessions to prepare those interested in adoption, and in training child welfare staff. Check out our PASS website and view our digital stories yourself by visiting http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/pass/ or contact the project Director, Joan Morse at joanmorse@aol.com

Case Example:

A 30 year-old single mother of two active boys is facing eviction because she has been unable to keep up with her rent payments after she was laid off from her retail sales job several months ago. Moreover, she has an open child welfare investigation because her oldest son's school reported his excessive absences. She recently learned she is 27 weeks pregnant. Her worker acknowledged that a third child for a single mother will be challenging and then began to talk about local support services for new mothers.

This type of scenario is all too common in the child welfare system. One of the most challenging aspects of working with families can be setting aside personal convictions about parenting and instead helping clients make the choices that are right for themselves and their families. Whether a worker's perspective springs from cultural expectations, personal beliefs and values, or simply a habituated family preservation practice model, it is easy to make and share assumptions that can ultimately have a profound impact on many lives.

The Collaboration for Permanency is a unique and innovative program in New York City that trains child welfare workers to provide Options Counseling. This family empowerment model requires workers to discard their assumptions and set aside their personal values and instead explore all options with expectant families facing an unplanned pregnancy or struggling with the care of a newborn baby. The program represents a partnership between Spence-Chapin Services, a private adoption agency, and New York City's Administration for Children's Services ("Children's Services"). Its goals are to promote early permanency for babies, to empower families to participate in planning for their child, and to prevent unnecessary foster care placements for those families who would choose an alternative to parenting, if they were fully aware of their options.

The Collaboration for Permanency: Options Counseling to Help Parents Plan for their Babies

By Heidi Arthur, LCSW and Corinna R. Lohser, MPH

Infants in Foster Care

In 2003, 985 infants were admitted to the New York City foster care system. Two years later, 66% (649) were still in the system and 52 % (343) of these infants had a goal of adoption.

Once in foster care, infants and toddlers are more likely than older children to stay in foster care longer than a year and to experience multiple placements. If they are reunified, they are more likely than older children to re-enter foster care (Dicker and Gordon, 2004). These disruptions are often linked to problems with attachment and bonding (Schwartz, Ortega, Guo, & Fishman, 1994) and adverse outcomes are particularly acute among babies who enter foster care in the first three months of life (Wulczyn and Hislop, University of Chicago, 2002). More than 50% of infants and toddlers in foster care are at high risk for neurological and cognitive development impairments and nearly half of all foster children have behavioral or emotional problems (Vandivere, Chalk, & Moore, 2003).

Compared with other children, foster youth are much more likely to experience negative outcomes such as homelessness, involvement with the criminal justice system, and teen pregnancy (Bass, Shields and Behrman, 2004). These numbers serve to enforce the idea that providers in the system should be doing everything possible to avoid foster care placement.

When families do not have the opportunity to consider all of their permanency possibilities, they may inadvertently be steered toward parenting, even if they would have preferred an alternate plan. Because the majority of families are very clear about their desire to parent, it is easy for workers to assume that this is true for everyone and thus fail to identify those families who feel ambivalent or unprepared to care for a child. This oversight can lead to the lack of a viable permanency plan for infants, placement in foster care, and even abuse or neglect-consequences that are devastating for families and children.

The Collaboration for Permanency: Sharing a Model for Options Counseling to Improve Outcomes for Children

In 2003, Spence-Chapin Services, one of the oldest nonsectarian, accredited nonprofit adoption agencies, partnered with the NYC Administration for Children's Services (Children's Services) in the Collaboration for Permanency. The program provides training for workers to help them better explore all available options with expectant families or families in which a newborn is at risk for foster care placement.

According to Susan Watson, Director of Domestic Adoption and Birth Parent Services at Spence-Chapin, "Prior to the training, family service professionals were accustomed to discussing parenting versus termination early in their client's pregnancy, but rarely made a concerted effort to continue the dialogue to discuss kinship arrangements or voluntary adoption. Others explored these options if their clients asked, but did not broach alternatives to parenting with everyone out of concern that they would appear judgmental."

Options counseling in its simplest form means directly asking parents: "How do you feel about your pregnancy?" and "How do you feel about parenting this child?" This approach encourages families to explore and express their feelings about their ability and desire to parent and empowers them to make their own plan.

When identifying options, the worker can ensure that any myths or misunderstandings are uncovered and clarified so that the decision is based on facts. For example, women who believe that abortion will prevent them from having future pregnancies; that parenting is limited to baby care; that adoption means handing their baby to a stranger and never seeing him or her again; or that kinship adoption means co-parenting, can all be better informed through this process. The worker's own biases are left out of the dialogue while the family's personal values and beliefs are thoroughly explored.

Providers are educated about Options Counseling through an interactive, highly specialized curriculum developed by Spence-Chapin. The training includes case scenarios, group discussions, role plays, and videos and is adaptable to a two-hour or full day format. In developing the content, Spence-Chapin worked to ensure that it would be flexible enough to reach the myriad individuals who fulfill countless roles and positions in the public child welfare system and extensive safety net of social and health services in New York City.

PRESENTING THE ADOPTION OPTION

The adoption option has often been left out of the discussion because many professionals are unfamiliar with current practices in voluntary adoption, including the concept of openness in adoption. This lack of knowledge or familiarity with current trends and practices may result in an unwillingness by workers to present the option or to counsel clients who may be interested in making a voluntary plan. In fact, in one study, 40% of self-identified pregnancy counselors reported not discussing voluntary adoption with their adolescent pregnant clients. Of those who did present the adoption option, 40% provided inaccurate or incomplete information (Mech, 1984).

The reality is that there are approximately 1.6 million adopted children living in US households today and roughly 87% of these children were born in the United States (USA Today, 2003). Voluntary adoption in 2007 is a process that differs greatly from involuntary adoption or the closed adoptions of the past. Birth families are able to choose the adoptive family and also have the opportunity to decide on the type and amount of post-placement contact they will wish to have with their child. In voluntary adoption a child grows up understanding that his mother and father chose his adoptive family, that they were motivated by a concern for what was best for him, and that they loved him. The child may have ongoing contact with his biological parents and will know the circumstances behind his placement-this was a difficult choice made out of love and concern for what would most benefit him.

THE CHILD WELFARE CONNECTION

Ongoing Options Counseling training for Children's Services workers and others who work in preventive service agencies is having an impact on how these professionals communicate with their clients about pregnancy and parenting.

Cori Lohser, Program Manager for the Collaboration for Permanency, cites the case of a 13 year old new mother who came to the attention of Children's Services recently. A lengthy meeting between the family, those supportive of them, and service providers from the community had been held to develop a safety plan for the infant. The two hour meeting focused entirely on determining a strategy that would enable the young mother to parent. It was not until she engaged in Options Counseling that she was able to express her strong desire not to parent. No one knew her feelings about parenting before the session because no one had asked.

The Collaboration for Permanency is about ensuring that this type of conversation can and does happen.

Heidi Arthur and Corinna R. Lohser are past and present managers of the Collaboration for Permanency. Questions or requests for more information can be directed to Ms. Lohser at Spence-Chapin Services for Families and Children at 212-360-0239 or via email at clohser@spence-chapin.org.

The Collaboration for Permanency has received support from the Kenworthy-Swift Foundation, the New York Community Trust, the New York State Office of Child and Family Services, and the Pinkerton Foundation.

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THE CHILDREN'S BUREAU presents AdoptUsKids

Congratulations to our friends at AdoptUsKids, who have received funding under a Children's Bureau cooperative agreement to continue their wonderful work in finding families for waiting children for another five years. Visit www.adoptuskids.org.

8,431 children previously featured on AdoptUsKids now live with permanent families!

SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT IN MAINE: YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

By Alfred M. Sheehy, Amy Gieseke, Tamara Harden Herrick, and Marty Zanghi

The transition from youth to adulthood is challenging for any young teen, and navigating the often-arduous path to emotional, physical, and financial independence requires the development of many essential life skills. One subset of youth, youth with disabilities, encounters many unique barriers that make this transition particularly complex. These barriers can be even further exacerbated if a youth with disabilities is also in foster care. This article summarizes a study which focuses on the first employment experiences of a group of youth in foster care who have disabilities.

The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth, 2006) describes five "Guideposts for Success," for youth in foster care. The guideposts include:

1) School-based preparatory experiences
2) Career preparation and work-based learning experiences
3) Youth Development and Leadership
4) Connecting activities
5) Family involvement and supports

This brief describes the employment experiences of 35 Maine youth in foster care who participated in First Jobs, a summer employment program. The study methods used included a quantitative analysis of the employment experiences of youth in care and a qualitative component that included interviews with five youth from the sample and four adults (a program job coach, a vocational services case manager, a foster/adoptive parent, and a representative from a First Jobs business partner).

The study attempts to answer four research questions:

1. What are the real or apparent mental and physical disabilities that are present in youth involved in First Jobs?
2. What are the overall job readiness, work ethic, work skills and knowledge, and other positive and negative issues related to employment?
3. What are the characteristics and issues unique to foster care and transition from foster care that impact employment outcomes?
4. What are the types of job experience and work skill learning settings, employer and service provider practices, or other factors related to successful connections with a job and career path?

The 35 youth in the sample range in age from 15-22 years, and have disability profiles ranging from no documented disabilities to four types of disability. Twenty-three of the youth have at least one disability, with learning disability/cognitive disability being the most common disability type.

The summer jobs program represented the first employment experience for nearly 70% of sample youth. One third of the youth were below expected grade level in school at the time of their enrollment in the employment program.

All of the youth experienced a job placement, and received job-coaching support. Using case record narrative data the research team established three levels of job coaching support, Minimal, Moderate, and Intensive. The research team also developed four measures of job success from the case narratives:

Connection to positive peers at work
Connection to an adult (not job coach) at work
Employee offered continuing employment after the end of First Jobs
Overall employee review

Generally, the employment experiences of sample youth were very positive. Over two-thirds of sample youth made a connection with positive peers at work, nearly three-quarters made a connection to an adult other than their job coach at work, and just under two-thirds received offers of continued employment after the conclusion of the summer employment program. Looking at the fourth measure of employment success, nearly three quarters of sample youth received "Excellent" or "Very Good" overall employee reviews.

This article is adapted from: Adapted from Sheehy, A.M.; Gieseke, A.; Harden-Herrick, T.; & M. Zanghi (2006). Supported Employment in Maine: Youth in Foster Care. Portland, ME: University of Southern Maine, Muskie School of Public Service. This study is available online at http://muskie.usm.maine.edu/helpkids/rcpdfs/Supportedemployment.pdf

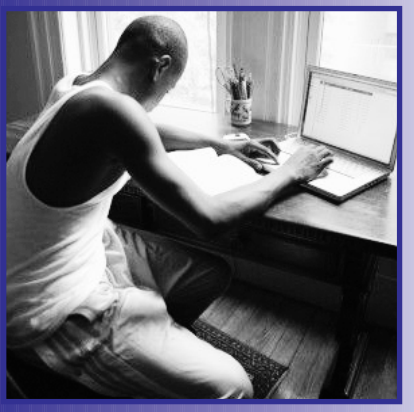
Further statistical analysis of success measures found that:

• Youth who received minimal coaching support were 25 percent more likely to achieve a connection with positive peers than youth who received moderate or intensive coaching support.

• Youth who received minimal coaching support were nearly as likely to receive an Excellent/Very Good review score compared to youth who received moderate or intensive coaching support.

• Youth who lived in Group Home or Independent Living placements were 31 percent more likely to be offered employment than youth who lived in foster family placements.

The qualitative analysis results from the five youth in care and four adults who work with the youth provide additional insight into the work experiences of youth in care who work in a supported employment environment. Commenting on work-readiness issues the employer representative interviewed for the project noted that: "First Jobs youth have a longer 'learning curve', in terms of dependability, accountability and social skills." Discussing employer and service provider practices the employer representative noted; "The job coaches eliminated the need for the employer to provide special accommodations for First Jobs youth. This service provides unique services and supports that related to the 'learning curve' piece. Youth in foster care need more support around social skills, appearance and customer service skills. Without job coach supports, First Jobs youth would probably have had lower success rates." Three of the five youth interviewed reported needing workplace accommodations in order to work; two of these youth specified the need for job coach support.



Youth perspectives on how their First Jobs experiences relate to their long-term career goals parallel the employer's perspective. Youth saw the experience as useful for future employment opportunities, for example: "Makes me look reliable for other jobs." "Makes me look good in the working world." "Good experience, I learned what I can do well and what I have difficulty with."

Three of the five youth reported no particular challenges related to foster care. Two youth identified issues unique to foster care, one mentioned the stigma of being a youth in foster care and the second noted that youth in foster care receive less financial and emotional support than non-foster children. It is important to note that the three youth who reported no challenges related to foster care resided in long-term, stable placements.

Based on the information in the literature review and the findings from the employment program review, the research team developed the six recommendations listed below.

1. Champion networking opportunities to help youth achieve employment success.

Youth in foster care typically have lower rates of employment than general population youth. Targeted early employment supports for youth in foster care can provide them with levels of support and levels of employment similar to those of general population youth. Youth aged 15-16 should be primary targets for supported early employment opportunities.

2. Cultivate business partnerships with employers.

The importance of the relationship between employers and employment service providers cannot be overemphasized. The more successful an employment service agency is at cultivating this key relationship, the greater the likelihood that youth will have successful employment experiences. One way employment support agencies cultivate this relationship is by learning each company's business culture and language, and then using that knowledge to create mutually beneficial arrangements between the employer and the employees the agency places.

3. Use targeted employment specialists to support youth employment.

Employment specialists can play several valuable roles for youth in foster care regardless of disability status. The employment specialist is an adult who plays a major supportive role focused on helping the youth explore career options, find employment, and through their supporting role at the job site help the youth learn about job responsibilities and employer expectations.

4. All systems that provide services and supports to the youth need to be involved in transition work.

The "interconnectedness" of the systems provides a wide variety of potential supports for youth, which could improve the probability of positive outcomes. Employment specialists work with and within this broader system, playing the role of services broker between key players. Employment specialist roles include: recruiting/encouraging youth through home visits; finding the route through the available supports (public and private) to help youth succeed in employment; exploring available supports at the individual level; employment specialists also broker employment opportunities through private employers.

5. Develop objective benchmarks for employment success.

Case narratives defined success very broadly as the completion of the summer employment program. The research team developed four quantifiable measures of success from the case record narratives (Connection to positive peers at work, Connection to an adult (not job coach) at work, Employee offered continuing employment after program completion and Overall employee review). These measures could objectively and reliably measure the success of the placement in a multi-dimensional way both throughout the program and at the completion of the program. Minimally a baseline and post-program data collection effort will be necessary to mark change.

6. Future research using larger samples and program evaluation protocols designed in conjunction with supported employment providers.

Research with larger samples and program evaluation protocols designed with input from providers will yield a more thorough understanding of the supports that contribute to successful early employment experiences for youth in foster care who also have disabilities. An evaluation protocol designed in conjunction with supported employment program staff and the agencies that refer youth to the supported employment program would provide a number of benefits including: collection of data that includes factors known to influence transition success for youth in foster care and for youth with disabilities; collection of data that includes variables associated with employment success; the potential to analyze larger samples either by looking at multiple programs or by examining a single program across a number of years.

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The 11th National Child Welfare Data & Technology Conference

July 21 - July 23, 2008 • Capitol Hill

The 11th National Child Welfare Data and Technology Conference will be held at the Hyatt Regency Capitol Hill from July 21–July 23, 2008. The theme this year is "Making IT Work: Achieving Safety, Permanency and Well-being for Youth." Presenters will examine the collection and use of data that influence youth in foster care.

If you are part of a local, regional, tribal, national or statewide effort to either improve data and practice for youth or you have researched the effect of improved data on changing practices for youth, we invite you to submit an abstract to present at this year's data and technology conference. Go to the NRC-CWDT web site at nrccwdt.org for the latest conference information and instructions on how to submit a paper. Papers must be submitted by February 8, 2008.

LIFEBOAT FOSTER CARE: THE CASE FOR TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

By Yoni Palmor

PERMANENCY ... ADULTISM ... CULTURAL COMPETENCE ... REUNIFICATION ... PARENTAL RIGHTS ... ADOLESCENT WELL-BEING ... SUCCESSFUL RETENTION ... CUSTODY RELINQUISHMENT ...

These terms somehow tried to define me, predict my future, but I hardly even knew their meanings. When I say me, I mean us, and when I say us, I am referring to kids in the system.

My name is Yoni Palmor.

On the outside, I look like every other upper-middle class young person. I wear Polo and Brooks Brothers, I own a few sport coats, and I speak eloquently. I went to Bucknell University for undergrad, I'm going to Johns Hopkins for graduate and I am also employed as an engineer for Northrop Grumman. I suppose upon first glance, one might say that I am just another stereotype.

Eight years ago however, I was a different kind of stereotype. I had entered the system at age 15. I had been truant from school for approximately seven months. Prior to that, I was hospitalized at age 14 at Holliswood Hospital in Queens, where after a brief physical incident with the bathroom sink (that's another story), I was told by staff that I would become a thief, a liar, and an all around detriment to society. Similarly, when I brought my first high school test back to the group home in Brewster, I was told by the group home supervisor that it was beginners' luck.

There were countless times in my teen years when adults disappointed me, made me feel like I was and should play the role of that foster care stereotype. On entry into my new high school, I was put in a remedial math class because I was tagged with a behavior problem. It seemed as though no one had faith in me. If only they could have seen that all I really needed was a little confidence and trust.

However, at some point, there was some good.

I've often, since my "graduation" from my dependent phases in Green Chimneys, thought about the mark and spirit that has been ingrained in my morals and values from my time in the group home, or even in a more general sense, my time in "the system."

I'm not quite sure if it was the actual program of regimented structure that helped me, although it obviously played a part, or my own personal experiences and interactions with a myriad of different people. All I know is that at some point in time my perspective on the world began to change, and my inner strength and understanding began to emerge.

I therefore consider myself a system sucess.

Unfortunately, although I have witnessed other successes in the system, I have seen many more failures. These failures have ultimately discouraged my hopes for what the system intends to offer its youth. It has been hard not to become extremely cynical.

So what is the system doing wrong? What can we do right? Why are the experiences I had in the system mirrored across almost all of the children's experiences? What are we teaching them with these experiences, when they have no stable familial background? What can we begin teaching them to start undoing the harm that's been done? How do we help more of these young people become contributing members of society? No one can easily answer these questions. I presume that many of this newsletter's readers are experts in both applied and academic research on foster care children. I cannot provide research that can prove that my ideas, views and opinions are correct. What I can only do is theorize, through my own success and experiences, on how and what has to change.

In too many of the environments in which I was placed, it seemed that there were more staff conflicts and staff small-mindedness than there was from the children. Not only do these children have to face and understand their own problems, but they must also learn to have the insight to observe, analyze and react accordingly to staff that have full control of their lives. Subsequently, my biggest concern for the system is the lack of thoughtful, supporting, caring, knowledgeable and qualified staff.

Keeping this in mind, I believe the system has lost sight of what is important. Instead of giving such high allowances to troubled teens (in some cases, I would receive $20 a week for allowance) and putting in billions of dollars to state-of-the-art equipment and facilities, let's put the money towards something more important: the quality of the staff. Perhaps then we could have a better retention rate and a more stable environment for the children. I strongly believe that we should emphasize the staff's involvement in their lives as one of the focal points of our "foster care strategy."

Consequently, the successes in the system have had to look outside of their home lives for stability, self-esteem, confidence, discipline, role models, empathy, and permanence. I have experienced that these qualities are instead often found in school. While for me it was in academics that I discovered these attributes, most of my peers located these traits in sports.

Along those lines, why do we try to expose our children to a multitude of different activities and experiences? Why do we teach them both math and English, and teach them how to play basketball and baseball? We want them to find their niche and be able to succeed in what they enjoy doing as well as exposing them to the possibility of being well-rounded human beings. The same should apply to children in foster care. Furthermore, in a world where successful retention of foster care staff is non-existent because of working conditions, low wages, and the lack of genuine sympathy for children, we must look to a different setting to establish permanence: school. I am certainly not the first to suggest the importance of the emphasis that should be placed on school.

There are several things that I believe to be integral to a child's development in foster care. Education is the first and foremost. With education, stems innumerable characteristics that are important to their development and their graduation from being dependent children, to independent, contributing adults. Children need discipline, self-esteem and confidence, permanency, support, friendships, respect for themselves, the capability to think independently, and the ability to discern right from wrong. The foster care system lacks a model of rewarding residents who are showing accomplishments in education and athletics. Through their relationships with teachers and coaches, and their new found drives to succeed in either academia or

LIFEBOAT FOSTER CARE: THE CASE FOR TAKING RESPONSIBILITY (CONT'D)

athletics, I believe these children can find their own niche and self-worth. The relationship they build with themselves and the people around them, will undoubtedly lay the foundation for success.

While I realize that my ideas are not groundbreaking, I am writing this article to highlight and refocus the system's goals. I do not feel as if children in foster care are pushed to try different things. It seems as if staff are quite content if they can keep everything status quo.

The foster care environment is not challenging its residents.

Several years ago, I was involved in a discussion in class in which several articles printed in a book called "World Hunger and Morality" edited by William Aiken and Hugh LaFollette* were used as citings. Two articles in particular spoke about the moral duty or lack thereof when helping impoverished people. They were both settled on either side of the extreme. One of the authors, Garrett Hardin, used a lifeboat analogy, simply saying that if you're on a lifeboat that fits 60, and only 50 are on it (you included), and 100 people are drowning in the water, you should not help any of the drowning people. Each one you put on your lifeboat will lessen your chances to survive. He believes that the only way people learn is through fighting their own hardships. Receiving help from other people is detrimental, as that only makes them dependent on those people without learning or growing themselves. The other author, Peter Singer, believes that we should give everything away to those in need.

As the discussion progresses, I look around the class. I'm sitting in a Bucknell University classroom, one which seats 40 other students. These kids (I stereotypically assume) have been raised in the epitome of what is regarded as affluence in our nation. They all seem to agree that the first argument, the one that calls for a "hands off" answer, is more plausible and would better help impoverished people to find happiness and lead comfortable and stable lives. They all agreed that helping other people would only make these people more dependent and more prone to failure. As I'm listening to this discussion, it hits me. My deontological* way of thinking about the world stems from my experience in the system, and I can honestly say that I am fully thankful for the lessons that this experience has taught me. What I instantly realized is the system's theory and the answer to my own struggles, "I understand that many may be prone to failure; however, isn't it our moral duty as people, as humans, to help others even if only one prospers?" No one had an answer.

I do not call for the Peter Singer extreme, but a more moderate approach that allows us to give, without giving ourselves away. I do believe this is our moral duty, and I do believe this is what the system stands for, and what its mission is.

I hope that the system will be able to prove Garret Hardin wrong. True, there are failures, but within those failures we get monstrous successes.

Yoni Palmor is a graduate of Bucknell University currently attending Johns Hopkins University for an MS in Computer Science. He is employed as a software engineer for Northrop Grumman Electronic Systems sector in Baltimore, Maryland, and plans in the future to become active in foster care agency boards. Yoni is also an alumni of foster care. You can contact him at: yoni.palmor@gmail.com.

* Hardin, G. (1995). Lifeboat Earth: The case against helping the poor. And Singer, P. (1995). Famine, affluence, and morality. Both In World Hunger and Morality. (W. Aiken & H, LaFollette, Eds.). Prentice Hall.

*The ethical doctrine which holds that the worth of an action is determined by its conformity to some binding rule rather than by its consequences (Webster's New World Dictionary)

TIDBITS FROM THE STATES

LOOKING FOR A NEW IDEA OR A FRESH APPROACH TO AN OLD PROBLEM? CHECK OUT THESE IDEAS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY.

CALIFORNIA: FINDING PERMANENCY FOR YOUTH: RESOURCE HANDBOOK

This booklet from the Fresno County Department of Children and Family Services is designed to give youth, caregivers, staff, and community partners information about permanency and ways to facilitate the establishment of permanent connections. Download at: http://www.co.fresno.ca.us/5600/ChildrenandFamilyServices/YouthPermanencyHandbook.pdf

CONNECTICUT: SUBSIDIZED GUARDIANSHIP

On July 5, 2007, Governor Rell signed House Bill 7037. This bill, in many cases, would allow a relative caregiver who is receiving a guardianship subsidy for a related child and also caring for the child's sibling who is not related to the caregiver, to receive a subsidy for the non-related child being cared for as well. To read the full text & legislative language of this & other provisions of this Act (Public Act No. 07-174),go to: http://www.cga.ct.gov/2007/ACT/PA/2007PA-00174-R00HB-07037-PA.htm

IOWA: LIFE BOOK PAGES

The Iowa Foster and Adoptive Parents Association created these lifebook pages to allow a child to pick the pages that fit his or her style. Each page can be printed separately which allows a child the ability to hand-select a preferred page.Download any of 61 different pages & several cover page options, or purchase a complete printed set, at http://www.ifapa.org/resources/publications.asp

MASSACHUSETTS: PROMISING PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED

From November 2005-October 2006, the Massachusetts Department of Social Services sponsored a statewide Breakthrough Series Collaborative focused on Adolescent Permanency. This initiative supported 29 teams from across Massachusetts, along with one team each from Rhode Island and Maine, as they tested and implemented practices to improve the way permanency is achieved for adolescents. This final report highlights the key themes and promising practices that emerged from these 31 participating teams.
Download at http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info_services/youth-permanency.html

MICHIGAN: CHILDREN ABSENT FROM COURT-ORDERED PLACEMENT WITHOUT LEGAL PERMISSION (AWOLP)

A Best Practices Forum. In September 2006 the Michigan State Court Administrative Office, Child Welfare Services Division and the Michigan Judicial Institute held a joint seminar and webcast covering successful intervention strategies to reduce the number of children absent from placement, the Michigan human services/law enforcement collaboration, and current and innovative AWOLP practices.
Materials are available online at http://courts.mi.gov/mji/webcast/AWOLP_2006/index.htm

NEW HAMPSHIRE: ONLINE COLLABORATION

NH is using collaboration software (E-Studio from Same-Page.com) for an extremely diverse set of objectives such as managing major system acquisitions with vendors, developing departmental protocols across locations, sharing client related case information in a secure manner that ensures only those who need access have it, sharing of best practices among agencies in different states, and coordination of multi-disciplinary teams in the delivery of services. Use of this technology has eliminated physical and logical boundaries, enhanced productivity, and voided the "not-invented here" mentality. Plus - it's GREEN (less travel; cost effective), and scalable to the organizational needs.For more information, email Richard.R.Regan@dhhs.state.nh.us

PENNSYLVANIA: GUIDELINES FOR BEST PRACTICE IN CHILD AND ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

This website from the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare includes links to documents that address many of the clinical challenges that Pennsylvania Child and Adolescent Service System Program (CASSP) practitioners regularly face by offering a set of qualitative standards. Developed over time based on cumulative experiences within the children's system of care and consistent with CASSP Principles, the documents address a range of tasks, issues, and topics and are intended to help agencies and practitioners achieve a high quality of care. The overriding assumption is that effective clinical practice facilitates positive outcomes. Documents address topics in the areas of assessment, practice, and behavioral health submissions.
Go to: http://www.dpw.state.pa.us/Child/BehavHealthServChildren/ChildAdolescentGuidelines/

Resources for Permanency Planning Today

Books

Secondary Traumatic Stress & the Child Welfare Professional

This book presents tools to help child welfare practitioners and agency managers identify and provide practical and appropriate interventions when professionals are dealing with the ongoing stress that comes with working with traumatized children and families.
http://lyceumbooks.com/SecondaryTraumaticStress.htm to read a sample chapter or purchase a copy.

Dollars & Sense: A Guide to Achieving Adoptions through Public-Private Contracting

This booklet from AdoptUsKids is designed to provide public and private agency program managers, supervisors, and contract managers with information to facilitate the purchase of interjurisdictional adoption services. This general information is designed as a starting point on purchase of service for States and counties and the private agencies with which they work. Each State has its own rules and regulations about the purchase of interjurisdictional adoption services that will direct certain aspects of the specific purchase of service arrangements that they make. The general principles in this Guide, however, can get you started in developing strong purchase of adoption service contracts and reaping the benefits for children, families, and the agencies that serve them.
http://www.adoptuskids.org/resourceCenter/atcPublications.aspx

MP3 Downloads from the National Resource Centers

Podcasts of Teleconferences and Webcasts

The NRCFCPPP is proud to announce that all of our teleconferences, as well as webcasts beginning with June 5,2007, are now available as podcasts. Subscribe via RSS feed or directly to iTunes, or continue to listen on the web to our .wma format files. You can listen in your car, at the gym, or any time! A great way to keep up with this information when you can't listen at your computer. Bring our experts from around the country with you on your MP3 player! www.nrcfcppp.org

Teleconferences from the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement http://muskie.usm.maine.edu/helpkids/tele.htm Download handouts and MP3 audio of all the NRC-OI teleconference series. Play the audio on your computer or download and save in iTunes.

Public Service Announcements

Texas: Why Not Me?

View the new public service campaign launched by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, made possible by a federal grant awarded to Texas for increasing adoptions more than any other state in 2005. The campaign includes the production and distribution of English and Spanish language TV and radio spots, 30,000 campaign brochures, as well thousands of fact-sheets, bookmarks, and other materials designed to help recruit adoptive parents.
http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Adoption_and_Foster_Care/multimedia/Why_Not_Me/default.asp

Spanish-Language Recruitment Campaign

The Advertising Council, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and the Collaboration to AdoptUsKids, has launched a comprehensive campaign designed to encourage Spanish-speaking families and individ uals to consider adoption from the U.S. foster care system. The multi-media campaign includes Spanish television, radio, and print PSAs, and issues a national call-to-action for parents to adopt children by offering important, accurate information to the Hispanic community about the foster care system and the adoption process.
http://www.prnewswire.com/mnr/adcouncil/30974/

Foster Care Month

Musician/producer Kashif, an alumni of foster care, is a spokesperson for National Foster Care Month. He produced three public service announcements encouraging people to get involved and change a lifetime. View these PSAs on the Foster Care Month website at http://www.fostercaremonth.org/SuccessStories/FosterCareAlumni/Pages/Kashif.aspx

Curriculum

Training Series: Staff Retention in Child & Family Services

The purpose of this training series of workbooks from Michigan State University School of Social Work, one of eight projects funded by the Children's Bureau to explore the issue of staff recruitment and retention, is to increase child and family service agencies' effectiveness in developing and retaining their staff by applying information from research and best retention practices to their work.
http://www.socialwork.msu.edu/outreach/childwelfare_curriculum.html

Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect in Disaster Emergency Shelters

The curriculum, including trainer's guide, PowerPoint presentation, and participants handbook is designed for training emergency shelter staff and volunteers. The curriculum was developed by the National Resource Center for Child Protective Services through funding provided by the Children's Bureau to address Hurricane Katrina-related needs.
http://nrccps.org/resources/disaster_emergency_shelters.php

Guides

Case Planning Desk Reference for Emergency Situations

With input from the National Child Welfare Resource Center on Legal and Judicial Issues and from Louisiana program managers, AdoptUsKids developed this reference that identifies specific questions that should be answered to guide decision-making in emergencies. Organized by permanency goal, the Desk Reference is formatted as a set of check lists to facilitate ease of use. While this tool was designed specifically for use in the aftermath of the hurricanes, it can be used by any worker seeking guidance in permanency decision-making regardless if the plan is reunification, adoption or anything in between.
http://216.38.216.37/adoptusa/documents/Case_Planning_Desk_Reference_FINAL.pdf

ICPC Receiving and Sending State Checklists

These checklists from AdoptUsKids serve as an overview and generalized description of how ICPC might operate for children and youth being placed across State lines with recruited, general applicant families for the purpose of adoption.
http://216.38.216.37/adoptusa/resources_reports.html#interjuris

Resources for Permanency Planning Today

Guides

Screening and Assessment for Family Engagement, Retention, and Recovery

The SAFERR monograph was developed in response to frequent requests from managers of child welfare agencies for a "tool" that caseworkers could use to screen parents for potential substance use disorders in order to make decisions about children's safety. Although research findings and practical experience have established that no single checklist yields the kind of information caseworkers need to make difficult decisions about whether children are safe, they have identified an array of screening instruments and practice principles that, if used appropriately, can provide timely information to guide those decisions. It also provides guidance on developing collaborative efforts to improve outcomes for families. Download or order from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and SAMHA's National Clearinghouse for Alcohol & Drug Information at http://ncadistore.samhsa.gov/catalog/productDetails.aspx?ProductID=17633

CFSP/APSR Toolkit

The Children's Bureau has posted a toolkit to help with the development of the State and Tribal Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP)/Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR). This toolkit is a central location for all technical assistance documents and materials, as well as references to specific laws, policies, and checklists related to the CFSP/APSR. It is available at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/programs_fund/toolkit/

A SERVICE OF THE CHILDREN'S BUREAU/ACF/DHHS

Negotiating the Curves Toward Employment: A Guide about Youth Involved in the Foster Care System

This guide from the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability builds upon the NCWD/Youth organizing framework, Guideposts for Success, which details what research says all youth, including youth with disabilities, need to successfully transition to adulthood. This publication applies the Guideposts to meeting the needs of youth in foster care with and without disabilities. The Guide also provides facts and statistics about youth involved in the foster care system; gives examples of states and communities that are changing policy and practices; identifies areas requiring further attention by policy makers and providers of services; and identifies resources and tools to assist cross-system collaborative efforts. Download or order a free copy at http://www.ncwd-youth.info/resources_&_Publications/foster_care.html

INFORMATION SERVICES FROM THE NRCFCPPP

Beyond the formal training and technical assistance we offer, we are also pleased to be able to offer a number of less formal ways to connect you with the information you need. We invite you to take advantage of some or all of our informational offerings:

OUR WEBSITE

We offer our own resources as well as links to important resources from other sites on nearly 60 individual topics from A (adoption) to Y (youth voice).

NRCFCPPP WEEKLY UPDATE

An electronic weekly newsletter provided at no charge to subscribers. Sign up on our home page at www.nrcfcppp.org

TRAINING CURRICULA IN ENGLISH/SPANISH

Training materials on a variety of topics, all downloadable for free

QUARTERLY WEBCASTS

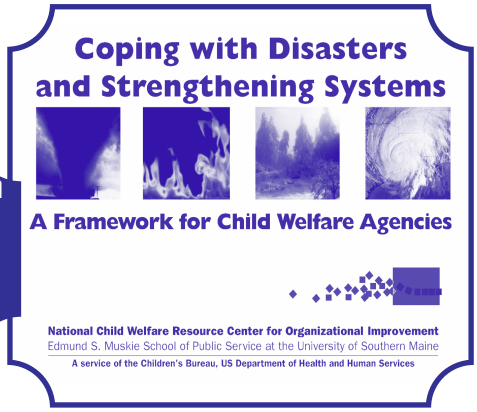
Focusing on a wide range of family-centered practice and permanency planning related issues, these are broadcast live and then archived on our website.

PERMANENCY PLANNING TODAY

This publication, our semi-annual newsletter, shines the spotlight on national promising and best practices in the field. It is a web-based publication archived on our web site. Teleconference Series for State foster care and adoption managers: focusing on a wide range of family-centered practice and permanency planning related issues. These are conducted live and then archived on our website.

BEST OF Weekly Update

The NRCFCPP publishes an electronic newsletter each week that keeps subscribers informed about new Internet-based publications, conferences and other events of interest to child welfare professionals. This section lists some of the valuable resources we have highlighted over the past few months.



COPING WITH DISASTERS AND STRENGTHENING SYSTEMS: A FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD WELFARE AGENCIES

http://muskie.usm.maine.edu/helpkids/rcpdfs/copingwithdisasters.pdf

This publication from the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement has a dual purpose -- to help managers think through what they might put in place to cope with disasters, and to highlight how taking these steps can improve systems for serving children and families. The three sections in this framework cover steps agencies should take before, during, and after a disaster. To help make this a useful tool, each section concludes with a checklist giving a quick overview of the key points discussed in the text.

THE ABA PERMANENCY PROJECT

http://www.abanet.org/child/permanency.shtml

This project from the American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law helps children move through the foster care system into permanency and helps states save foster care dollars. The Project achieves positive permanency outcomes for children in foster care through system change. An ABA Project Director visits a county or region monthly for two years to develop procedures, tools, and skills, and deliver lasting solutions. In 2005, the Project won the national Department of Health and Human Services Adoption Excellence Award for its efforts in achieving timely permanency for children.

STATE POLICIES TO HELP YOUTH TRANSITION OUT OF FOSTER CARE

http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0701YOUTH.PDF

This issue brief from the National Governor's Association Center for Best Practices describes ways that states can strengthen policies, improve coordination across agencies and systems, better utilize resources, and meaningfully engage foster youth to improve the outcomes of youth leaving the foster care system and at-risk youth in general.

HIGHLIGHTS OF RECENT KINSHIP CARE STATE LEGISLATIVE ENACTMENTS

http://www.ncsl.org/programs/cyf/kinshiphigh.htm

This document from the National Conference of State Legislatures highlights recently enacted State legislation addressing kinship care for children receiving child welfare services. Legislation is described in the following areas: allowing grandparents and other relative caregivers to access medical care and treatment for children; allowing caregivers to enroll children in schools; promoting the placement of children with relatives; subsidizing guardianship and providing kinship foster care and other caregiver subsides and supports; allowing informal caregivers to qualify as de facto custodians with the right to initiate proceedings for appointment of a guardian; establishing a variety of study groups, task forces and oversight committees charged with examining issues facing kinship care providers; and authorizing kinship care navigator projects to help caregivers navigate their way through various systems such as child welfare, child care, TANF, health, legal/judicial, education and other services. Different State initiatives in each of these areas are described

MEDICAID ACCESS FOR YOUTH AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE

http://www.aphsa.org/Home/Doc/Medicaid-Access-for-Youth-Aging-Out-of-Foster-Care-Rpt.pdf

The American Public Human Services Association conducted a survey in October 2006 to assess how states provide continuity of health care coverage to youth who have aged out of foster care, defined as former foster youth who reached their eighteenth birthday while in state custody. Based on survey results and follow-up with each state, this report includes background on older foster youth, information on how states currently provide Medicaid coverage to former foster youth, and a new option states can use to extend Medicaid coverage. The study provides state policymakers with a "how to" guide on covering youth after leaving state custody.

INVOLVING YOUTH IN POLICYMAKING AND COORDINATING YOUTH POLICY: STATE-LEVEL STRUCTURES IN CALIFORNIA AND OTHER STATES

http://www.library.ca.gov/crb/05/05/05-005.pdf

This report from the California Research Bureau examines what California is doing to increase youth participation and improve services by involving youth and encouraging collaboration between state agencies. The report also describes the actions that other states are taking to improve state-level youth participation and agency coordination.