Every year, about 170,000 families care for over half a million children whose parents can’t take care of them. These resource families and the social workers, volunteers, educators and professionals who support them quietly take on one of the greatest challenges our society generates. Few people know how much strong love, strenuous work, and sympathetic perseverance lie at the heart of “the faceless system.” Even fewer understand the increasingly complex roles that foster parents play – from child development experts to birth family mentors, from educational advocates to permanency team members. A group more deserving of appreciation and recognition is hard to imagine.

Every jurisdiction in the country has experienced a shortage of foster homes, and the estimates of how many foster homes are needed range into the millions. Most agencies are perpetually recruiting new foster parents at the same time that they seek to retain the ones they have.

May is National Foster Care Month, a time for people all across the nation to show their appreciation for the dedication of our foster families and workers. It is also an opportunity to get more people involved, whether as foster parents, volunteers, mentors, employers or in other ways. And as Foster Care Month has grown, it has moved beyond an awareness raising effort – it is gaining the capacity to impact recruitment and retention in a deeper way and is building the potential to contribute to effective efforts in other critical areas in child welfare.

How it began:

National Foster Care Month originated in 1988 when the National Foster Parent Association persuaded Senator Strom Thurmond (R-S.C.) to introduce a resolution to proclaim May as National Foster Care Month. President George H.W. Bush issued an annual proclamation during each year of his presidency, providing an impetus for state, county and city proclamations.

In the 1990’s, Foster Care Month focused on youth in transition, and under the leadership of the National Foster Care Coalition and Susan Weiss at Casey Family Programs it became a significant part of the drumbeat that led to the passage of the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act.

The national effort then took a new direction under Kathy Barbell at the Child Welfare League of America, who expanded the recruitment and retention scope of the work. In 2000, she brought National Foster Care Month to Casey Family Programs, which has led it since then.

Each year the campaign has gotten larger: in 1999,
The Partnership

In the past two years the original partners—the National Foster Parent Association, the Child Welfare League of America, the National Foster Care Coalition and Casey Family Programs—have been joined by several new partners. Last year, the Children’s Bureau joined, along with National CASA and the National Association of Social Workers. This year, the National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning (a service of the Children’s Bureau) came on board along with the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Casey Family Services, Connect for Kids, the National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators at APHSA and just recently, Black Administrators in Child Welfare.

Partners contribute in varying ways from message development and strategic input to technical assistance like the web-cast hosted by the NRC on March 17th. As the partnership grows, we seek to incorporate diverse viewpoints that can help us address key issues in child welfare by amplifying the voices of those who are most affected by those issues and bringing together the folks who can best help each other positively impact those issues.

Basic principles

Local Foster Care Month efforts range from state-wide collaborations between large foster parent associations and public child welfare systems to individual efforts by recruiters in small rural communities. Some basic principles we have found help to make an effort effective include:

...Leverage the work you are already doing. For example, you may mount an intensive recruitment drive during May and take advantage of publicity, collaborative opportunities and resources available then, but much of what you do will be informed by the year-round daily recruitment efforts you make. In other words, ask not what you must do for Foster Care Month—ask what Foster Care Month can do for you.

...Develop outcomes for your effort. Think about the specific changes you want to see in the lives of the children, youth and families impacted by our systems. Be realistic about this, and ask yourself how you will know when you have succeeded and when you need to change what you are doing. In fact, in much of your work, you are probably already doing this, and the real question for Foster Care Month will be: How can this campaign that comes around every year help with what we are already doing?

...Measure what you do. How else will you know if it worked? Your measures do not necessarily need to be research quality.
Often they can be included in what you already do. If you ask your callers how they found out about you, make sure you track how many found out about you through your foster care month effort. Was there a spike in inquiries during and after May? If so, was there also a rise in the number of applicants and eventual licensures? Adjust what you do according to your data. If you don’t collect data, start this year so you have a baseline that you can use next year.

... Make an “ask”. Make a request for action on the part of the person your campaign is targeting. Your “ask” is key to your effort. While there can be quite a bit of strategic value to general awareness raising, it is not likely in and of itself to have immediate impacts on the areas you are addressing. A simple example: raising awareness of the great job that foster families are doing may help to counteract any negative media attention we encounter during May, but it will probably not slow the rate of non-adoption related home closures in your system. So, make an “ask” and be specific: The more specific and targeted your effort, the more effective it is likely to be. Incidentally, we all know this rule from recruitment, where it is usually more effective to conduct targeted recruitment campaigns than general ones.

... Use the toolkits, be creative with the materials...and steal shamelessly. Use the messages provided in the toolkit and adapt them to your area and your needs. Use the graphics on the website and customize your materials. Address the issues critical to your area. For example, if your state is one that has not been able to make full use of Federal funds available for youth in transition, consider using Foster Care Month as a way to educate older youth and encourage them to request assistance.

... Partner with others. Build on other efforts, like the Governor’s proclamation, but also use the chance to involve people in ways they might not have thought of. If you have a volunteer department, talk with them about finding volunteers to photograph families for your drive. Talk with local businesses about demonstrating support for foster parents, hosting recruitment events, donating materials. When you partner with others, try to keep in mind their perspective and offer them something in return for their support. If a business donates materials, be sure to invite them to your event and give them the word-of-mouth they deserve. A few of the partners we have heard about include libraries, small businesses, large retailers and corporations, private and public agencies, faith based organizations, civic associations, public officials and professional organizations.

... Keep your messages positive and think about them from different angles. Remember that not everyone knows the positive things you know about foster families – or you wouldn’t need to hold events and run campaigns! Think about how your event will play in the press. What else is going on in your area at the same time? Who else is promoting what during May that might crowd you out? Are there negative angles that reporters will be more interested in than in your messages or event? The press is full of negative stories about child welfare in general and foster care in particular. Foster Care Month is an opportunity to lift up the best of what we do for children and families into the consciousness of the media and the general public. “Feel good” stories about selfless families and successful foster youth generate positive publicity and more importantly interest on the part of others who want to join in.

... Make small tests of change. It can be overwhelming to try to plan a whole campaign, so if you are in the beginning stages and it’s already April, if you are working on your own in a large rural area, or if you are stuck in any way, do what they do in the Breakthrough Series that Casey Family Programs conducts: ask yourself, “What can I do by next Tuesday?” Make a small test and see what works in your area, with the folks you are trying to reach, for your ultimate outcomes. This can really be a small thing – one of my favorite examples, in fact, comes from the Breakthrough Series on Recruiting and Retaining Resource Families held last year, and it demonstrates many of the basic principles just covered.

One recruiter wanted to put up fliers at a grocery store, which didn’t agree to the plan. However, when the county asked to have a booth at the store as part of Foster Care Month, the store allowed the recruiter to set up a table and pass out literature. This simple example illustrates several ways of working: a small targeted effort led to effective partnering with the business; having a person there to talk with folks increased the chance they would follow through and created the opportunity to leverage the effort by engaging another business or community group open to supporting Foster Care Month, and it allowed the recruiter to collect some data – how many folks took information, how many followed up, and what they responded to best.

The Future of Foster Care Month

The national partners hope to continue to develop the depth of local efforts and increase the breadth of impact of Foster Care Month nationally. We will all need to establish measurement baselines and collect data and link the annual efforts to one another. At the national level, we hope to include more partners with the right kind of expertise and the constituents critical to the issues, and we’ll need to develop funding. Perhaps most importantly, we’ll need to look to the long term and develop a viable strategy that allows us all to help each other positively impact intractable problems in child welfare.

Karl Brown is the Chairperson of Foster Care Month 2004, and works for Casey Family Programs in Seattle, Washington.
Foster parenting is considered to be a temporary activity, parenting for a few weeks or months until a child returns home to his or her family or is adopted by another family. Yet foster parents know that what they do is also permanent in many ways, including contributing to the child’s achievement of permanency with a family.

First, what you do as a foster parent becomes a permanent part of the life of each child who lives in your family. You have the opportunity to contribute something positive to each child’s social, emotional, physical, cognitive, and moral development by teaching, mentoring and nurturing on a daily basis. The lessons you impart, the love and affection you share, and the example you set leave your home when the child does, and stay with him or her forever.

Of course, that’s not what we think of when we use the word permanency. One of the many roles foster parents play is helping children move toward the finalization of a permanency plan. This is a complex and demanding process. To help the child transition to a permanent family (whether yours or another family), it is best if you have clearly thought about what permanency implies for the child.

A definition of permanency might include the following components:

- a safe, nurturing and stable home environment and set of relationships
- an opportunity to live in a permanent home, one which can be returned to even as an adult
- a home intended to last indefinitely
- a family that gives a commitment to continuity for the child and allows for the child to establish a lasting, supportive lifetime family relationship
- a family that gives a child a sense of belonging and a definite legal and social status

The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) lays out five forms of permanency acceptable to the Federal government. They are:

- reunification with the child’s parents
- adoption
- legal guardianship
- permanent placement with a “fit and willing relative”
- another planned permanent living arrangement, or APPLA

Long-term foster care, which had been included as a possible permanency goal prior to ASFA, is no longer considered to be an option. The major difference between long-term foster care and APPLA is in the carefully chosen words “planned” and “permanent.”

The strategy of permanency planning was created so foster children and youth would not be “forgotten” in the child welfare system. Children and youth need stability to appropriately tackle developmental tasks and to build the interpersonal skills which will help them succeed as adults. For some the answer is legal permanence. For others, the answer is caring adults (both kin and non-kin) who can provide the stability to help them make the transition to adulthood. Taking reasonable steps to plan permanence is critical to ensure children and youth find stability without becoming lost in the system. Foster parents contribute to permanence in a number of ways.

- Foster parents provide a safe and nurturing place for children to live while they wait for permanent plans to be made or achieved. They reassure children who are frightened, and share information with those children who are uncertain about what is happening with their families and their futures. They help children work on life books that tell the stories of their lives, connecting the past to the present and looking ahead to the future – an arc of permanence and a sense of continuity children and youth can carry with them wherever they go next.

- Children, and most especially infants and young children, often form emotional bonds with their foster parents (and vice versa). While it is painful for both parent and child when such a child is moved to the home of a birth parent, other relative or adoptive family, the latest research on attachment tells us that the gift of that first bond may be the factor that enables the child to form another attachment with a relative or adoptive parent. The love you give a child provides a foundation for them to build the ability to love others whether you are the child’s permanent placement or not.

- Foster parents often work with and mentor birth parents, helping them build parenting skills as well as nurturing relationships with their children. This collaboration between foster and birth parents can be a crucial step in making it possible for the child to be reunited with his or her parents. Additionally, seeing foster parents interact with birth parents can be very reassuring for children and helps lessen disloyalty they may feel about caring for the foster parents.
Foster parents may retain connections with children and their families long after those children leave their homes through adoption, transition to independent living, and even reunification with their birth families. Many foster parents maintain relationships with children they have cared for, keeping in touch by phone, mail, and email; they invite young people to spend time with them during holidays and semester breaks from college; they help them celebrate graduations, marriages, and the births of children. Without any form of legal permanence, they remain “family.”

Foster parents have a wonderful opportunity to identify other possible permanency options for children and youth in their care. They are in the best position to know who the young person gets telephone calls from, who has had a special relationship with the youth, who visits or invites the youth to visit, and with whom the young person has formed a bond. By participating in case staffing and permanency planning conferences, or just in talking with the social worker, foster parents can contribute valuable knowledge about the child’s connections that may lead to locating a permanency resource.

Finally, foster parents become permanent parents. Nearly 60% of the 50,000 children adopted from the public foster care system in fiscal year 2001 were adopted by their foster parents. When over 29,000 children achieve permanency in a year in this way, foster parents are surely supplying an important route to permanency for children and young people in the foster care system.

Foster parents can be proud of the many ways they contribute to the achievement of permanence for the children in their care. Foster parents can play an integral role in helping children and youth transition to a permanent family. Whether or not foster parents choose to adopt the children who might become available for adoption, their contributions stay with children throughout their lives.

Susan Dougherty is a consultant with the National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning (NRCFCPP). The NRCFCPP focuses on helping State, Tribal, and other publicly supported child welfare agencies to achieve permanency for youth and children in out-of-home care by providing technical assistance, training, and information services in the broad areas of permanency and child welfare systems. The NRCFCPP is a Service of the Children’s Bureau. For more information, visit the website at http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/.

Resources for Permanency Planning Today

Video

Partners in Permanency
This video was produced as part of Philadelphia’s Partners in Permanency Initiative. Through family vignettes, the viewer learns the importance of early, clear and consistent communication about the options available to families with children or caring for children in foster care. It is designed to be viewed by public and private agency caseworkers, attorneys, child welfare and court administrators, birth parents, youth, and foster parents. The accompanying facilitator’s guide provides suggested activities and ideas for adapting the video for use in other jurisdictions. For more information about the video, email Jennifer Miller at jmiller@cornerstone.to, or call her at 410-884-1546.

Book

Best Practices of Empowerment-Oriented Permanency Planning: Facilitating Change and Self-Development in Parents and Families
This is the fourth edition of a handbook for caseworkers developed by Michael A. Neff, an attorney practicing in New York City. It can be used as a training tool in workshops on permanency planning and ASFA. It incorporates legislative and judicial developments and strategies for good social work practice, with a focus on empowerment-oriented practices. A copy can be obtained by contacting Michael Neff, (212) 575-1365, maneefpc@aol.com.

Guidelines

These guidelines are a product of the Casey Outcomes and Decision Making Project, a partnership of American Humane, Casey Family Programs, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Casey Family Services, the American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law, and the Institute for Human Services Management. They provide a structured tool for making case and service decisions and development case service plans; a training guide for educating new workers about case planning; and a means for achieving agency-wide consistency in case planning. The complete Guidelines notebook with 14 removable booklets is available through American Humane for only $15 each. Order copies using the form located on the Internet (www.americanhumane.org > protecting children > best practices > Casey Outcomes and Decision Making) or call 1-800-277-4645. You can also download PDF copies for free from either www.americanhumane.org or from the Annie E. Casey Foundation at www.aecf.org.
The Utah Foster Care Foundation is a non-profit organization formed by the Utah legislature in 1999 for the purpose of recruiting and training foster parents on behalf of the state Division of Child and Family Services (DCFS). This public-private partnership, whose operation and success in recruiting foster parents is described in the book Partners: Working with the Business Community to Recruit Resource Families, has been a leader in forming partnerships, not only with DCFS but with private businesses.

They also partner with their foster families, who participate in recruitment efforts at many levels. Like many agencies, they are aware that current foster parents are often the best recruiters. Seeking to capitalize on that fact, in the spring of 2002 they created the Foster Parent Ambassador program.

The Foundation called a dozen of their foster families, whose selection was cleared by DCFS, and asked them if they would participate in this effort. They all agreed, and were granted media clearance by the Division. After a brief training on what will be expected of them, foster parents join with the Foundation to spread the word about foster care at events like the following.

“We have found that when positive, experienced foster parents engage with interested families, our message has significantly more interest and credibility. The real experts of foster care are those who successfully do it.”

-Valoy Seely
Utah Foster Care Foundation

OPEN HOUSES:
Foster Care Information meetings are held in each of the state’s five regions. About half of the 90-minute time is allotted to question-and-answer sessions, in which the Foundation has found that people who come to the open houses are most interested in hearing directly from the Ambassadors. Their experience has been that the experience and openness these foster parents demonstrate in their responses provide much more credibility than if agency workers provided the same information. Participants want to know such things as

- How will being a foster parent impact my children?
- What kinds of problems do the children in foster care have?
- What is it like to interact with birth parents?
- What about liability?
- Will there be allegations against me?

The Ambassadors are able to allay the fears and concerns expressed, especially in the wake of negative stories about foster care that often appear in media. The very presence of those who have been foster parents for as many as 15 years conveys the message that their experience has been more positive than negative, that they wouldn’t be doing it for so long if it was all bad.

MEDIA CONTACTS:
Because the Ambassadors have received DCFS clearance, they can speak to local media. The Foundation contacts local newspapers and radio stations and asks them to run a short, positive story about foster care right before a scheduled open house in a given community, and provides a Foster Parent Ambassador’s contact information. This not only places a positive message in the paper, but provides free advertising for the open house! The Foundation also makes sure that Foster Parent Ambassadors are available to the media at press events to provide interviews and sound bites.

COMMUNITY EVENTS:
With five regional offices, the Foundation participates in and/or sponsors a variety of events around the state that help to raise awareness about foster care. They recently had a booth at a Safe Kids Fair, an opportunity for families to have some fun with their children in a safe environment. Children visiting the booth joined in making paper bags, while their parents were able to talk with Foster Care Ambassadors, who took one or two hour shifts. The fair provided free admission for them and their families. Another recent event was a concert featuring a local a capella group. The Foundation’s Second Annual Chalk Art Festival is scheduled for June.

Foster Parent Ambassadors receive a small stipend for their time, about $30 per event. Each region tries to maintain a large enough group of Ambassadors so that they don’t have to be called on more than once a month.

Annual trainings include brainstorming sessions in which Ambassadors are asked to come up with new ways the Foundation might be able to reach out to their communities. This has led to innovations such as translation of the Comprehensive, Competency-Based In-Service Training pre-service from Institute for Human Services into Spanish and outreach to the Hispanic community. In fact, about half the people who attend Spanish-language pre-service training are recruited directly by an Ambassador who is active in the community.
Training also includes a discussion of “DO’S AND DON’TS” for speaking, such as:

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<tr>
<td>✓ Be honest</td>
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<td>✓ Focus on the positive</td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ Focus on the rewards</td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ Remember your own anxiety as a new foster parent</td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ Address the most common fears, such as:</td>
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<td>• Attachment – can’t say goodbye to the child</td>
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<td>• Anger/Aggression from a birth family</td>
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<td>• Effects of foster care on your own children</td>
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<td>• Running into birth families in the community</td>
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<td>• Personal property liability</td>
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<td>• Caring for sexually reactive children</td>
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<td>✓ Respect the confidentiality of children and their families</td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ Talk about the supports you receive as a foster family</td>
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<td>✓ Explain why you keep doing this</td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ Keep it short</td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ Feel free to talk about the financial impact on your own family</td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ Use specific examples that would make a child or family recognizable in the community</td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ Share extreme experiences; try to talk about the “typical” one</td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ Chew gum!</td>
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For more information about Foster Care Ambassadors, contact:
Mike Hamblin
Lead Foster/Adoptive Family Recruiter
Utah Foster Care Foundation
Phone: (801) 303-4061
Email: mike@utahfostercare.org

Visit the website of the Utah Foster Care Foundation at http://www.utahfostercare.org

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**National AIA Resource Center 2004 Conference:**

**September 27-28, 2004**

**Holiday Inn, Mart Plaza, Chicago, IL**

**Raising Kin:**
The Psychosocial Well-being of Substance-affected Children in Relative Care
This two-day conference, designed for kinship providers and professionals, will consider the mental health and developmental needs of children residing in kinship care due to parental substance abuse.

**This forum will address:**
What are the emotional, psychological and developmental needs of the children?
How can we build upon the resiliency of the children and the benefits of the kinship placement?
What services, clinical approaches, and family and community-based interventions successfully address these needs? Experts will provide an overview of the needs and strengths of these children, and will facilitate a panel discussion of youth, caregivers, and parents. Practical, skill-building workshops will present useful strategies and interventions for working with the children.

**Co-Sponsors:**
Center for Child and Youth Policy ✦ Children of Alcoholics Foundation ✦ Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

**Collaborating Organizations:**
National Resource Center for Foster Care & Permanency Planning ✦ National Resource Center for Youth Development
National Center on Grandparents and Other Relatives Raising Children at Generations United

**For more information, contact:**
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Phone: 510-643-8832 • Fax: 510-643-7019
Email: jkrall@uclink.berkeley.edu
In many cases, youth in foster care cope with feelings of isolation and being alone in their plight. Having experienced some of the abuses and tragedies of our world, they often retreat to a world of their own. Their emotions may be too painful for them to discuss with foster parents, caseworkers or school friends. Introducing them to kids who have some of the same feeling and experiences can be a healing source.

So where can a young person turn for support, knowledge and a friend when they really need them (even if it’s 2 a.m. on a Saturday night)? Who is available when the youth has an important question to ask? Where can a young person in foster care voice an opinion in an honest and productive forum?

They can turn to FosterClub.

FosterClub is the national network for foster youth. FosterClub, founded by foster and adoptive parent Celeste Bodner, is a non-profit based in Oregon. The organization has developed fosterclub.com (for kids) and fyi3.com (for teens), online communities that provide information, motivation and peer support. Just three years after the organization’s inception, FosterClub’s web sites have hundreds of young members and over 1 million hits a month. And it’s free.

“When kids hear stories from other youth who have walked in their shoes,” explains Bodner, “they are more receptive to ideas and advice and they feel they’re in a safe haven to explore, learn, and receive information. Finding a community of support is often a motivating factor for a youth who decides to participate in their foster care plan.” A FosterClub member concurs. “I make a point to tell my caseworkers, foster parents, and foster youth that I know about the site. I think it’s important to know that there are others out there who know how you feel.”

Since youth are accustomed to seeking information and friends on the internet, FosterClub designed its sites to include games, articles, biographies of famous people once in foster care, contests, Q and A, lifebooks, message boards and more, just like you might find on another teen website. In order to engage young people, FosterClub delivers pertinent information in an entertaining format that is highly graphic and written at a reading level that the target audience can easily digest. For example, youth can create a custom “avatar,” or online personality, then can gain “points” every time they visit, read an article, answer a poll or submit a contest entry. Youth can track their avatar’s score and may even become the “top dawg” for the week, which includes front page recognition.

At FosterClub youth find solace knowing they are not alone and that they can access that community when they need it. “Going to FosterClub.com has been a good experience for me!” says Selena, a seventeen-year-old foster youth from California who often participates on fosterclub.com’s message boards. “I know that I am not the only one and that there are people who are willing to help you out, especially members from the club who have lived or are still in the system. This web site helps answer all the questions there are in the system. It’s a wonderful site. It’s like a family.” The peer support young people can find at FosterClub can be impossible for some youth in care to find elsewhere due to geographical limitations. A young man writes in, “I get very depressed a lot so coming to a site where others understand me is too cool. Finally I feel like I belong in the mix.”

Another opportunity for FosterClub members to connect to one another is to read articles written by former foster youth. The first-person perspectives often provide the youth with a connection to the author, striking a chord that may not otherwise be tapped. After completing one of the articles, a young person can read responses from other FosterClub members or respond themselves. A 10-year-old reader commented to an author, “What you wrote is how I feel. I want to be someone when I grow up not just a foster kid. At my school the teachers always say ‘Oh she’s the foster kid.’ I don’t like it when they say that. It makes me feel bad inside.”

Assisting communication among foster youth (communication that may not otherwise exist) can improve the participation of young people in the system. With peer support, kids can be moved to join a Youth Board, speak to a lawyer, learn their rights and responsibilities, or participate in foster care advocacy. FosterClub has provided the necessary tools and information to begin those efforts.

Important information and tools for youth in care are embedded throughout the site. Youth can help each other simply by communicating their own experiences. “I wasn’t really told my rights when I entered foster care back in 1992,” says a message board visitor. “In fact, today I learned about The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999. If you haven’t read this Act... DO! Unfortunately I’m 22 and none of it applies to me, but it will help my younger sister. This Act lets you know what can be available to you after emancipation.” Youth can also print a glos-
FosterClub’s promise to youth – that if you advocate for yourself or someone else – you can power over your future. To aid youth in this quest, FosterClub has developed a series of FYI (Foster Youth Involved) Forms. With these free downloadable tools, a young person can advocate for their needs and desires. One form asks whether the youth feels adoption, emancipation, reunification, permanent foster care, or some other solution is best for them. Then it asks them to explain why, opening yet another gateway for communication. The youth can use these forms to communicate with a caseworker, judge, CASA or GAL, Independent Living Provider, foster parent, or even a school counselor. One grateful 17-year-old member writes, “I want to let all the makers of this site to know that I really appreciate having these forms to write up when some one is not treating me right.”

In addition to FosterClub’s youth activities and services, adults are presented with special offerings and customized tools for their efforts in reaching out to youth. Tools and articles in the same youthful graphics and voice inspire productive and creative ways to work and communicate with foster youth of all ages. “FosterClub is interested in working with Child Welfare professionals to help them develop effective communication strategies and grab the attention of young clients,” says Bodner. “The youth served by the system are primary stakeholders in ensuring positive outcomes. We need to be doing a better job informing them and recruiting their involvement.” The site offers posters centered on housing issues, education opportunities, and independent transitioning; newsletter ads; lifebook pages; fliers; the FYI3 Binder for youth transitioning out of foster care; as well as exciting new publications such as The Teen Survival Guide and From Foster to Famous, which highlights famous people who spent time in foster care.

There are over half a million youth in foster care. The isolation and powerlessness many of them feel is one of the worst aspects of life in foster care. FosterClub is working to change this. Like everyone else, foster youth struggle to learn and grow in unfriendly, uninviting environments. FosterClub aims to provide a comfortable setting for foster youth to empower themselves and begin a path toward a successful and rewarding independent life. There is power in knowledge and strength in community and for youth in care, FosterClub is becoming the national resource for both.

Sidebar 1: FosterClub’s websites

**fosterclub.com**
An upbeat and action-packed website designed to promote self esteem and a connection for foster kids aged 6 to 18. This website is a hub of information relating to foster care. Log on and find free membership, chats with kids in care nationwide, stories of famous people who grew up in foster care, contest with cash prizes and much more!

**fyi3.com**
Specially designed for youth transitioning or who have already transitioned out of the foster care system (age 14-24). It’s packed with resources, success stories, scholarship opportunities, discussion forums, youth boards, advocacy and more.

**fosterclub.com/grownups**
Our website design for the adults who care about foster children. Caseworkers, IL Providers, advocates and foster parents will find resources, articles and free downloadable tools that will inspire productive and creative ways to work and communicate with youth of all ages.

Sidebar 2: From Foster to Famous

Read the biographies of these famous people who spent time in foster care:

- **Alonzo Mourning** (NBA Star)
- **Dave Pelzer** (Author)
- **Charlotte Ayanna** (Former Miss Teen USA & Actress)
- **Tom Monaghan** (Founder of Domino’s Pizza)
- **Cher** (Rock Legend)
- **Marilyn Monroe** (Movie Star Legend)
- **Eddie Murphy** (Comedian and Actor)
- **Esai Morales** (Actor)
- **Victoria Rowell** (Actress)
- **Babe Ruth** (Baseball Legend)
- **Tommy Davidson** (Comedian and Actor)
- **Duante Culpepper** (NFL Star)
- **Eriq LaSalle** (Actor)

Visit [www.fosterclub.com](http://www.fosterclub.com) to read the biographies, then share them with the young people you work with!
There is little in the literature that helps us identify programs that are successful in achieving lasting reunification of children in out-of-home care with their families. Much of the research has looked at characteristics of children and families that help or hinder reunification, but not at whether children are able to remain in their homes over time, or what their long-term outcomes are in safety and well-being (Littell & Schuerman, 1995; Maluccio, 1998; Wulczyn, 2004).

The National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning (NRCFCPP) has worked with some reunification programs referenced in the above studies and with others elsewhere that seem to be moving toward faster, safer and lasting reunifications. However, as there is as yet little research to prove that specific models for reunification work better than others, we have chosen to highlight here several practices that have been identified as important components of reunification programs that appear to be achieving good results. These practices are:

- placement decision-making
- parent-child visiting
- intensive services
- resource parent/birth parent collaboration
- aftercare services

These are by no means the only practices that should be incorporated into a reunification program, nor do they provide a guarantee of success when used individually or in combination. Rather, they represent some of the most important building blocks on which a comprehensive system of reunification can be based.

We also endorse the following policy and practice recommendations from Casey Family Programs (Dougherty, 2003, 4-5):

Westat, Inc. and Chapin Hall Center for Children (2001) found that reunification occurred more frequently when parents received services, had a high school education, job skills, and jobs, and did not have substance abuse problems. Agencies seeking to ensure that all children for whom reunification is an appropriate plan are identified and returned to their parents’ custody in a timely manner should consider the following areas of policy and practice:

- Use strengths-based assessment methods for determining what services should be provided, with a particular focus on employment and treatment of substance abuse.
- Provide timely, appropriate treatment for substance abusing parents.
es, a full range of permanency options (reunification, adoption, guardianship, placement with kin and other planned permanent living arrangements) and post-permanency supports and services into a system of care that serves children and families at whatever point they need assistance.

A number of previous efforts have been made to describe individual reunification programs in various jurisdictions, and we recommend the resources listed below as guides to identifying several programs for models of practice.

**Resources: Reunification Programs & Practices.**


**References:**


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**Placement Decision-Making**

It can be argued that timely and successful reunifications begin with the initial placement into out-of-home care. Because three of the other four practices we are highlighting are dependent on the ability of the birth parents to interact regularly with the agency, the child and the resource family, they cannot be incorporated into the reunification program without placements that not only permit, but encourage those interactions.

Some of the hallmarks of a program that makes placement decisions that eventually result in increased reunifications are:

1. **Involvement of the family through processes such as family group conferencing can lead to decreased time in care.** Families who participate in decision-making—not just in terms of where the child will live while in out-of-home care, but to also discuss issues such as long-term safety and well-being and extended family supports for reunification—empower families to engage with the agency in finding solutions that work with family strengths.

2. **When placing with kin is not possible, children should be placed in their own neighborhoods, communities, and schools.** Neighborhood-based family foster care helps to keep children connected with their friends, schools, churches, and culture, but more importantly allows for frequent parent-child visiting. Targeted recruitment efforts provide the agency with a sufficient pool of competent resource families who reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in need of out-of-home care in the communities from which the children come.

The Family to Family Initiative created by the Annie E. Casey Foundation has neighborhood-based family foster care as one of its fundamental goals. For information about programs that work to keep children in their neighborhoods, see Annie E. Casey Foundation. (n.d.). Shortening children’s stays in temporary care. Part one: Policies and practices, pp. 43-45. For information about targeted recruitment for neighborhood-based family foster care, see Annie E. Casey Foundation. (n.d.). Recruitment, training, and support, pp. 14-16. Both of these are volumes of Family to Family Tools for Rebuilding Foster Care, available at: http://www.aecf.org/initiatives/familytofamily/tools.htm

3. **Competent legal representation of birth parents enables families to take a more effective role in court proceedings.**

Parent-Child Visiting

Visiting between parents and their children in foster care is generally considered to be the most important factor contributing toward timely reunification. Visiting maintains the connection between parents and child during placement, and also allows the worker to assess the readiness of parent and child for reunification.


- structuring visits in ways that enhance opportunities for parents to practice and enhance their caregiving skills
- scheduling visits at the home of foster families, at times that include increasingly more challenging situations such as meal times and bedtimes, and for longer periods of time
- including parents in activities that allow them to be part of their children’s lives, such as school activities, doctor appointments, and recreational opportunities
- encouraging foster parents to interact with birth parents

Parent-child visiting can be a component of residential care as well as family foster care. Nashua Children’s Home in New Hampshire, which serves children between the ages of 6 and 18, considers family involvement to be essential to the success of their program. Children visit at home, but parents also visit at the facility, joining their children for activities such as mealtimes. Contact throughout the child’s stay in the Home ensures that parents stay involved in the lives of their children. Contact information for Nashua Children’s Home can be found on their website at http://www.nashuachildrenshome.org/

According to Lorrie Lutz, a consultant in social service reform and former Commissioner for Child Protection and Juvenile Justice Services for the State of New Hampshire, placement of a child in out-of-home care – particularly an adolescent who may have challenging behaviors – allows the family to “close the hole” where the child was if there is insufficient contact during placement. Attempts at reunification in such a family are more difficult, because the family becomes used to not having the child present. Good reunification programs, she says, do not allow the family to get comfortable with the child’s absence. Visiting, particularly in ways that involve the parents and child together in family activities, promotes a continued involvement that makes sure this doesn’t happen. Examples of visits which keep the parent involved include joining the foster parent to take the child to the doctor or attending parent teacher activities.


Intensive Services

Intensive family-based services are often cited as a critical component of effective reunification programs. One often-cited study of the Utah Family Reunification Services project found that children whose families received such services were much more likely to be reunified within 90 days and to remain at home one year later. This study, and the Family Reunification Program of the Michigan Family Independence Agency that employs intensive services, are described in the CWLA Research Roundup cited previously.

The National Family Preservation Network recommends that intensive family reunification services should include the following components:

- Staff are available on call, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- Caseloads are limited to two to four families
- Families see a reunification worker within three days of referral
- Most reunification services are delivered in the family’s home
- Intensive services are provided 5 to 20 hours per week
- Services are available during evenings and on weekends
- Services are limited to 60 to 90 days


Intensive in-home services for reunification focus on making sure that families are able to meet the basic needs of their children. Parents are given hands-on learning experiences in areas in which they are experiencing problems doing this, such as meal planning, food shopping, and meal preparation or housekeeping tasks.

Part of the challenge of providing intensive in-home services is the difficulty in funding them. Because Title IV-E monies may only be used for eligible children and for routine care, they are generally not available for the types of services described here. Jurisdictions must be creative in finding ways to use Title IV-B funds, TANF monies, the Social Services Block Grant, and targeted case management under Medicaid.

Some states have obtained IV-E waivers for intensive services in family preservation and reunification programs. For information about waiver programs in California and Mississippi, see the Children’s Bureau website at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/initiatives/cwwaiver/options.htm
Resource Parent/Birth Parent Collaboration

Making resource parents equal partners in the permanency team empowers them to step up and participate in working with birth families toward the goal of reunification. Resource parents who facilitate parent-child visiting, teach and mentor birth parents in parenting skills, and participate in placement conferences are contributors to the reunification effort.

Several of the programs mentioned earlier, including the Utah Family Reunification Services, encourage resource families to act as mentors to birth parents as an important component. Another is Permanency Plus in New Hampshire, which combines the services of a home-based counseling agency, NH Easter Seals, and the Department of Children, Youth and Families to provide a combination of home and community-based treatment for families when children are temporarily removed from the home as first time placements because of child abuse/neglect. Resource parents are recruited and trained with the understanding that they will be actively involved with the placement and reunification plan and should reunification not occur, agree to provide a permanent home for children placed with them. Contact information for DCYF is:

129 Pleasant Street
Concord, NH 03301
Tel: 603-217-4714

A program that takes resource family mentoring much further is shared family care, in which the child enters care along with his or her birth parent. One such program is operating in Contra Costa County, California. The birth parent(s) move into the resource family’s home for about six months. In addition, birth parents are served by a family support team that helps identify goals, develop a plan for achieving them, and provides intensive case management services and links to community resources. Families also receive six months of aftercare services based upon individual needs. For more information about Shared Family Care in Contra Costa County, For more information contact Paul Buddenhagen at the Employment & Human Services Department; email: pbuddenh@ehsd.co.contra-costa.ca.us.

The Family to Family Initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation uses the idea of “building bridges” to represent the process of spanning the gap between foster parents and birth parents. They list four stages of contact: basic, meetings on neutral territory, visits to the birth family’s home, and birth family visiting the child at the foster family’s home. For each stage, there are tips for social workers, birth parents and foster parents. These are described on pages 36–40 in the Family to Family tool Recruitment, training, and support, available at http://www.aecf.org/initiatives/familytofamily/tools.htm For additional information on foster parents as mentors to birth parents, including ideas for gaining staff acceptance, recruitment, training, and support, see Dougherty, S. (2001). Toolbox no. 2: Expanding the role of foster parents in achieving permanency. Washington, DC: CWLA Press.

Aftercare Services

Reunification is the preferred permanency “outcome,” but that doesn’t mean it is an event; like other forms of permanence, it is a process that needs to be sustained with post-permanency services. Birth parents need many of the same kind of services and supports that are often given to adoptive parents, guardians, and other permanent caregivers. In addition, they may need other services that specifically address the issues that brought the child into care in the first place. The provision of such services can be quite challenging in reunification for a number of reasons, including:

◆ Some birth parents are ambivalent about parenting and being reunited with their children.
◆ Birth parents may receive conflicting messages from the child welfare and legal systems about their skills and ability to adequately parent their children. Reactions to real or perceived negative attitudes may be played out in ways that look like non-compliance.
◆ After complying with case plans that may have required significant life changes in order to regain custody of their children, birth parents may simply want to end any involvement with the child welfare system.

Nevertheless, post-reunification services and supports are considered to be essential by most child welfare professionals. Services should be tailored to the individual needs of the child and family, and will fall into a number of categories:

◆ clinical services such as individual, couples, or family therapy, substance abuse treatment, domestic violence intervention, or crisis intervention
◆ material or financial services such as income support, job training, health care coverage, or housing assistance
◆ support networks such as day care, respite care, peer support groups, linkages with the health and education systems and other community-based services

The intensity of needs may vary as the family experiences challenges or crises after the child returns home. Effective programs will respond to this fluctuation with higher levels of wrap-around services when they are needed.

Bullies are present in every school and community, and all children must deal with bullying and teasing from some perspective – if not as the bully, the victim, or both, then as the bystander who witnesses acts of victimization and must choose to act on that knowledge or not. For children involved in the child welfare system, bullying and teasing may be not only a more prevalent, a more constant, and a more serious problem, but they may have fewer supports to help them deal with bullying behavior.

What is Bullying?

Definitions of what constitutes bullying vary, but generally are in substantial agreement with one which appeared in the Journal of the American Medical Association (Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton and Scheidt, 2001) and includes these components:

- bullying is behavior that is meant to harm or disturb
- it occurs repeatedly
- it occurs between individuals who do not have equal power

Bullying can by physical (hitting, shoving), verbal (threats, teasing, insults) or psychological (shunning, spreading rumors).

Recently there has been some attention paid to forms of behavior used by girls that also constitute bullying. Using relationships and social status as weapons, girls bully each other with lies, secrets, ostracism, sabotage and body language, rather than the physical violence or threats commonly seen among boys. Girls who are the targets of this “relational aggression” (Simmons, 2002) suffer just as much as do children who are the targets of other forms of bullying.

Who are Bullies & Victims?

Dake, Price, and Telljohann (2003) have prepared lists of characteristics of both bullies and victims based on their review of the literature on the subject. Those lists include:

**Bullies are likely to:**
- suffer symptoms of depression
- experience suicidal ideation
- suffer from psychiatric problems
- suffer from eating disorders
- engage in substance abuse
- engage in fighting behaviors
- engage in criminal misconduct
- engage in academic misconduct
- have parents who use punitive forms of discipline
- have less-responsive and less-supportive parents
- come from harsh home environments
- have poor parent-child communication
- lack adult role models
- have suffered child abuse
- have lower school bonding
- have lower academic achievement
- have lower school adjustment
- have authoritarian parents

**Victims are likely to:**
- suffer symptoms of depression
- experience suicidal ideation
- suffer from psychiatric problems
- suffer from eating disorders
- suffer feelings of loneliness
- have low self-esteem
- suffer from anxiety
- be less popular than other children
- spend a lot of time alone
- have suffered child abuse
- have less-responsive and less-supportive parents
- come from harsh home environments
- have parents who allow few opportunities
- to control social circumstances
- have problems with school bonding
- have greater rates of absenteeism
- have problems with school adjustment
- experience physical health problems

It is difficult to separate out some of the characteristics which cause someone to bully or be bullied from the effects of being a bully or a victim, and many of these characteristics are attached to other problems, but the lists can help to signal that bullying may be an issue in a child’s life.

Why is this important in Child Welfare?

Not only are these two lists similar to one another, but they echo many of the characteristics common among children in foster care, including depression, suicide attempts, eating disorders, lower educational achievement, poor academic success, difficulties in school and impaired social relationships, among a host of emotional, behavioral, developmental, and health problems (Barbell and Freundlich, 2001). The majority of these children enter care due to abuse or neglect, which is often associated with one or more of the parent-child difficulties that appear in the above lists. A report from Australia (Create Foundation, 2003) indicates that over half of children in care who were interviewed about school issues report that bullying is not only a problem for them, but is the thing they would most like to see changed at school.
Garbarino and deLara (2002) point out that some kids bully as a reaction to the punishing lessons that they learn at home. At school these abused and much put-upon kids demonstrate with their peers the lessons they learned the hard way: Might makes right (p. 69).

The same authors discuss how children with disabilities, particularly those with developmental delays, are often the targets of bullying. How many children in foster care or those adopted from the foster care system are “special needs” due to mental or physical disabilities?

It therefore seems that these children, whether they are living with their parents or are parented by foster or adoptive parents or kinship caregivers in either formal or informal relationships, will often be either bullies or victims or both. The adults who care for and work with them must be attentive to the possibility that bullying affects the lives of these children, and learn how to both recognize bullying and victimization behaviors and how to respond effectively and appropriately.

Can caretakers and agencies be held accountable for what happens to children who are bullied? In January 2002 a 12-year-old Connecticut boy who was the victim of relentless bullying in his school committed suicide. Twenty-one months later his mother was found and convicted of a felony count of putting her son at risk by creating a home environment that was unhealthy and unsafe – and by implication, contributing to the factors (poor hygiene) that other children picked on. The child complained about the bullying to his mother and to a caseworker, among others. Both the child welfare agency, which had investigated the home on a neglect allegation and closed the case 6 days before the boy died, and the school, which did nothing about the bullying going on within its walls, were cited as having failed the child in an investigation by the state’s child advocate and state’s attorney (Santora, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c).

Once you know more about bullying, use some of these resources to learn how to help children who may be involved as bullies or victims:

- ...
Delinquency Prevention (1998) include:

- Agency staff can connect children and youth in care with others in their community or school through support groups. Joining a group of peers both gives the child a place to “belong” and allows him or her to benefit from the knowledge of others who have been in the community longer and “know the ropes.”
- Agencies and resource parents alike should advocate with schools to provide effective anti-bullying programs (see below). Use the tips in “Advocating in School for the Children in Your Care” to approach teachers and administrators about social as well as academic issues.

- Share your concerns with others who work with or care for the child. If you are a foster parent concerned that the child in your care is a bully at school, talk with the caseworker or supervisor about how the child’s treatment plan might incorporate counseling or other interventions. If you think or know a child is being bullied, ask for help in school advocacy, providing assertiveness training, or dealing with the kinds of issues that often make children the target for bullying, such as poor hygiene, unstylish clothing, difficulty in “reading” social cues, or special education needs.

- Be attentive to cues such as an unwillingness to interact with certain other children in the neighborhood or even in your family, reluctance to go to school or out to play in the community, or dropping out of activities that previously were enjoyed. A child who is avoiding situations in which bullying is occurring needs to replace them with others, and the child in out-of-home care may need assistance in finding appropriate substitutes.

To combat bullying, harassment, and violence, experts encourage parents to become active advocates against bullying in their communities and schools. Strategies recommended by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (1998) include:

- Rules against bullying that are publicized, posted schoolwide, and accompanied by consistent sanctions.
- Student and adult mentors who assist victims and bullies to build self-esteem and to foster mutual understanding of and appreciation for differences in others.
- A buddy system that pairs students with a particular friend or older buddy with whom they share class schedule information and plans for the school day and on whom they can depend for help.
- An on-campus parents’ center that recruits, coordinates, and encourages parents to take part in the educational process, volunteer, and assist in school activities and projects.
- Classes for adults in parenting skills and for students in anger management, assertiveness training, and behavior modification training.
- Behavior contracts signed by students and parents and written behavior codes for students, teachers, and staff members that are circulated to all parents and students.
- Emphasis on discipline that stresses right behavior instead of reprimands that focus on punishing wrong behavior.
- Friendship groups that support children who are regularly bullied by peers.
- Peer mediation programs and teen courts that train students to mediate problems among themselves.
- Conflict and dispute resolution curriculums available in all grades.
- Close monitoring of cafeterias, playgrounds, and “hot spots” where bullying is likely to occur away from direct adult supervision.
- Cooperative classroom activities and learning tasks, with care taken to vary the grouping of participants and to monitor groups for balanced reception and treatment of participants.
- Classroom and schoolwide activities designed to build self-esteem by spotlighting special talents, hobbies, interests, and abilities of all students.

Bullying Prevention & Intervention Curricula

Much of the work done on bullying comes from Europe and Australia; in the U.S. efforts have been mainly in tailoring curricula developed in those areas for use in elementary and middle schools. There are several programs that are cited as having proven to be effective:

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, recognized as a Model Program by both the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. For information and ordering information, see the fact sheet at http://www.modelprograms.samhsa.gov/pdfs/FactSheets/Olweus%20Bully.pdf

Linking the Interests of Families and Teachers (LIFT) is an anti-aggression program that addresses antisocial behaviors by engaging both schools and families. For a description and contact information, see Blueprints for Violence Protection from the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence at http://www.colorado.edu/CSVP/blueprints/promising/programs/BPP19.html

For research into its effectiveness, see http://www.prevention.psu.edu/LIFT.htm
The Incredible Years combines parent training, teacher training, and child social skills training to address problem behaviors in young children. It has been singled out as an “exemplary” best practice program by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention program and a model program by the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP). For information, see the program’s website at http://www.incredibleyears.com/

References


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 valuable resources we have highlighted over the past few months.

Best of Weekly Update

Fathers and Their Families: The Untapped Resource for Children Involved in the Child Welfare System

Historically, non-custodial fathers have been disengaged from the child welfare system. The advent of ASFA and recent Federal initiatives focused on fatherhood, however, have resulted in new efforts on the part of the child welfare system to encourage the involvement of fathers and other paternal relatives. American Humane focused on fathers and their families in the September 2003 issue of Child Protection Leader. http://www.americanhumane.org/site/PageServer?pagename=pc_facts_info

Future of Children: Children, Families and Foster Care

The latest issue of this publication from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation is devoted to foster care issues. Articles include:

• Children, Families, and Foster Care: Analysis and Recommendations
• Safety and Stability for Foster Children: A Developmental Perspective
• Safety and Stability for Foster Children: The Policy Context
• Meeting the Challenges of Contemporary Foster Care
• Family Reunification
• When Children Cannot Return Home: Adoption and Guardianship
• The Evolution of Kinship Care Policy & Practice
• Providing Better Opportunities for Older Children in the Child Welfare System
• Five Commentaries: Looking to the Future

http://www.futureofchildren.org/

Kinship Care Resource Kit

The Children’s Defense Fund has produced a Resource Kit which enables community or faith-based organizations to support grandparents and other relatives raising children. The resource kit is available in full pdf file, or by these smaller topic files:

• Understanding Kinship Care
• How to Offer Services and Supports to Kinship Care Families
• Kinship Care Resource Pages
• Other National and State Kinship Care Resources

http://www.childrensdefense.org/childwelfare/kinshipcare/resourcekit/default.asp

The Judges’ Page – A Web Page for Judges Who Hear Child Welfare Cases

A new web site launched jointly by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and the National CASA Association brings resources, research, best court practices and cutting edge programs that will assist judges in improving outcomes for children who have been abused or neglected.

http://nationalcasa.org/JudgesPage/index

Testimony on Child Welfare

The Subcommittee on Human Resources of the House Ways and Means Committee held its third child welfare oversight hearing on January 28, 2004. The hearing focused on what federal, state, and local officials “can do and should be doing to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of children.” The testimony of witnesses is posted.


Archived Webcasts

The National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning has been exploring innovative ways to provide technical assistance through technology. Our webcasts have enabled us to reach over 150 locations at one time to provide information on topics such as Concurrent Planning, Achieving Permanence for Children, and the Breakthrough Series Collaborative Methodology. Visit the link above to view archived versions of all of our webcasts.

A study published in the December 2003 issue of “Children and Youth Services Review” uses Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data to demonstrate that a large proportion of children whose parental rights are terminated (TPR) still do not achieve permanence within 1 year. The study also examines how particular case factors, including age, race, and geographic location, affect how quickly children exit foster care.

The authors studied a cohort of 1,995 foster children in 42 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico whose parental rights were terminated during the same month (October 1997). Of these children, only 35 percent were found to have exited foster care within 1 year. The report then provides descriptive information about the children and compares factors typical of children discharged from foster care within 1 year of their birth parents’ rights being terminated to those typical of children not discharged within 1 year.

**Characteristics found to be associated with leaving at a slower rate included:**

**Age**

44 percent of the children entering foster care as infants were discharged within 1 year, compared to 31 percent of children who were over age 1 when they entered care.

**Race**

The author found that on any given day, African American children were 23 percent less likely than children of other races or ethnicities to exit care.

**Kinship Placement**

55 percent of children in pre-adoptive placements were discharged within 1 year, compared to 19 percent of children in kinship placements.

The study also found that the rate of exiting foster care after TPR varied by State. Some State differences remained even after accounting for client demographics and other caseload differences. The author suggests this might be a result of how different States view permanency or may reflect policy and practical differences affecting foster children. Further research will be necessary to account for State differences.

The author concludes that these findings raise concerns about the large proportion of children who do not have permanence within 1 year after TPR. The author questions whether policy changes are needed to decrease the lengths of stay after TPR and stresses the need for more empirical studies on the meaning of legal permanency to children and alternative ways to recognize family bonds.

The study, “After Parental Rights are Terminated: Factors Associated with Exiting Foster Care,” can be found in “Children and Youth Services Review,” Vol. 25, No. 12.


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Tens of thousands of children are adopted through the U.S. child welfare system each year. While many of these children do not require ongoing supports and services after their adoptions are finalized, a significant number do. Casey Family Services and The Casey Center for Effective Child Welfare Practice recently released two white papers to assist States in promoting and supporting post-adoption services for these children and their families.

“Promising Practices in Adoption-Competent Mental Health Services” (www.caseyfamilyservices.org/pdfs/casey_mhpaper.pdf) helps States address the complex mental health needs of adopted children and their families by highlighting creative services, training initiatives, and collaborations that can emerge among child welfare, mental health, and Medicaid systems. While the paper reviews relevant research on the need for adoption-competent mental health services, its primary focus is on the perspectives and experiences of adoption professionals and families who have adopted children through the public welfare system. The practices described are strengths-based and family-centered, and include public policies, funding strategies, and mental health programs. The paper also offers 10 steps that public child welfare, mental health, and Medicaid agencies can implement right away.

A second white paper in the series, “An Approach to Post-Adoption Services”, was released previously (www.caseyfamilyservices.org/pdfs/casey_pawhitepaper.pdf). These papers provide States with a road map to establishing and sustaining comprehensive post-adoption services. They are all available for download from the Casey Center for Effective Child Welfare Practice at www.caseyfamilyservices.org/pr_casey_center.html.

“Related Items”

More information about post-adoption services can be found in previous issues of “Children’s Bureau Express” (http://cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov):

**“Study Explores Use, Helpfulness of Post-Adoption Services”** (June/July 2003)
**“Casey Family Services Releases White Paper on Post-Adoption Services”** (April 2002)
**“New Study Looks at Success Rates of Adoptions of Children from Foster Care”** (Nov/Dec 2001)
NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER FOR FOSTER CARE & PERMANENCY PLANNING
at the Hunter College School of Social Work

A service of the Children’s Bureau/ACF/DHHS

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MAY 2004