BULLETIN FOR PROFESSIONALS
March 2019

Promoting Permanency for Older Youth in Out-of-Home Care

Although achieving safety and permanency for children and youth is the overarching goal of child welfare practice, the case plans of older youth may not reflect permanency with a family as the primary goal. This may occur because child welfare professionals may not view permanency with a foster parent, family member, or other caring adult as a viable option for older youth, or they may not have a full understanding of what permanency can entail or how it can help lead to future success for youth. It also may be due to systemic issues, such as agency policies that do not fully encourage permanency for older youth or a lack of resources for finding and engaging potential caregivers. It is important, however, that permanency efforts include both legal permanency (e.g., reunification, adoption, kinship care) and relational permanency (i.e., a relationship or connection with a caring adult, such as a relative, neighbor, service provider, teacher, or other important person in the youth's life). These adults may provide lifelong support that can help youth transition to adulthood and may even become a legal permanent option for the youth.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Child Welfare Information Gateway

Children's Bureau/ACYF/ACF/HHS
800.394.3366 | Email: info@childwelfare.gov | https://www.childwelfare.gov

Children's Bureau

This bulletin provides information for child welfare professionals about the importance of permanency—both legal and relational—for older youth and strategies for achieving it.

The Importance of Focusing on Permanency for Youth

Permanent homes and positive adult relationships can provide stability and lifelong support to youth that can buffer the effects of previous trauma. However, youth often report a lack of emotional support after they leave foster care (Semanchin Jones & LaLiberte, 2013), and 8 percent of children who left foster care in fiscal year (FY) 2017 were emancipated (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], Administration for Children and Families [ACF], Children's Bureau, 2018a). For many individuals, adolescence and young adulthood are periods of extensive developmental growth that occur in the context of a stable, caring family. Youth in foster care, however, may not have the same family or social connections to support them as they explore their identities (including sexual identities), develop independence, establish vocational goals, adopt a personal values systems, and mature into adulthood (Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 2011).

The Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth compared individuals who had aged out of foster care with individuals of the same age in the general population. At age 26, individuals who transitioned out of foster care without achieving legal permanency experienced more unemployment, lower incomes, more economic hardships (e.g., not being able to pay rent or utilities), poorer health, and higher arrest rates than youth of the same age in the general population (Courtney et al., 2011). Additionally, these individuals were less likely to have a high school diploma or GED or health insurance and more likely to receive government benefits. In other studies, youth without a connection to a supportive adult faced poorer long-term outcomes related to social connections, physical and mental health, educational attainment, finances, and life satisfaction (Semanchin Jones & LaLiberte, 2013).

Federal Legislation Supporting Youth Permanency

The growing focus on achieving permanency and securing connections for youth prior to their emancipation has led to the enactment of various related provisions in Federal legislation, including the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (Fostering Connections Act); the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act (PSTSFA) of 2014; and the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) of 2018.

The Fostering Connections Act contains several provisions that help establish and strengthen youth permanency, including the following:

- Requiring title IV-E agencies to identify and notify all adult relatives within 30 days of removal of their option to become a placement resource for the child
- Creating a new plan option for States and Tribes to provide kinship guardianship assistance payments under title IV-E on behalf of children who have been in foster care and have a relative who is taking legal guardianship
- Allowing youth who leave foster care for kinship guardianship or adoption after age 16 to receive services under the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood[1] (Chafee program)
- Permitting States to extend title IV-E assistance to otherwise eligible youth remaining in foster care after reaching age 18 and to youth who at age 16 or older exited foster care to either a kinship guardianship or adoption, provided that they have not yet reached age 19, 20, or 21—depending on State law—and are in school, employed, engaged in another activity designed to remove barriers to employment, or incapable of doing so due to a documented medical condition

For additional information about the Fostering Connections Act, visit Child Welfare Information Gateway at https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/laws-policies/federal/fosteringconnections/.

[1] Prior to the enactment of FFPSA, this program was known as the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program.

PSTSFA includes the following provisions that support youth permanency:

- Limiting the use of another planned permanent living arrangement (APPLA) to youth age 16 and older
- Instituting requirements when APPLA is the goal, including the following:
  - Documenting at each permanency hearing the efforts to place youth permanently with a parent, relative, or in a guardianship or adoptive placement and providing compelling reasons why it is not in the youth's best interests to receive those placements
  - Ensuring the court asks the youth about his or her desired permanency outcome and makes a determination that APPLA is the best permanency plan for the youth
  - Documenting the following at the permanency hearing and the subsequent 6-month periodic reviews
    - Steps the agency is taking to ensure the foster family or child care institution follows the reasonable and prudent parent standard
    - Whether the youth has regular opportunities to engage in developmentally and age-appropriate activities

For more information about PSTSFA, refer to Information Memorandum ACYF-CB-IM-14-03 at https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/im1403.

FFPSA allows States and Tribes to seek approval to extend services under the Chafee program to youth up to age 23, if the agency extended the age for title IV-E foster care to 21 or provides comparable services to those youth using State or any other funds outside of title IV-E. For additional information, see Information Memorandum ACYF-CB-IM-18-02 at https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/im1802. For information about how States have extended foster care, refer to Information Gateway's *Extension of Foster Care Beyond Age 18* at https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/laws-policies/statutes/extensionfc/.

Strategies for Permanency Planning With Youth

The child welfare field has developed programs and practices that support legal permanency and connections for youth in foster care. Given the changing situational and developmental needs of youth, caseworkers should treat permanency planning as a process rather than a one-time event. It is also important to revisit plans and their accompanying strategies regularly and adjust them as needed. The following strategies for establishing youth permanency are drawn from child welfare research and practice.

Involving Youth in Permanency Planning

Involving youth in planning for their own permanency outcomes can be beneficial for both the youth and the caseworker. When youth are involved in permanency planning, they can develop decision-making skills, gain a sense of control of their future, and enhance their self-esteem and self-efficacy (Augsberger, 2014). It also presents youth with an opportunity to express their own ideas about how they want to achieve permanency and discuss any concerns they may have. Many youth show initial or even long-term resistance to permanency planning that involves the termination of their birth parents' rights because they still feel emotional ties to their families, or they may fear embarking on a relationship with a new family because of repeated past disappointments. These permanency discussions also allow caseworkers to highlight the importance of legal and/or relational permanency for youth and outline options that could be approached (e.g., open adoption, guardianship). Additionally, youth can provide information to caseworkers and others that can assist with achieving permanency, such as information about family members and other adults with whom they feel a connection.

Caseworkers should not wait until a youth's exit from care is imminent to involve them in the transition-planning process. Their participation should begin as soon as possible—provided it is age and developmentally appropriate—so that the transition to adulthood and

Talking With Youth About Permanency

The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative developed *Keeping the Family Conversation Alive* to help caseworkers and others better understand youth perspectives on permanency, adolescent brain development, and how to discuss permanency with youth. It is available at http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-brainframes-permanence-2017.pdf.

The following are additional resources that can help professionals be better equipped to talk with youth about permanency:

- *Ten Things That Youth Want Child Welfare Professionals to Know: Talking to Youth in Foster Care About Permanency* (Project LIFE [VA]) https://library.childwelfare.gov/cwig/ws/library/docs/gateway/Blob/88918pdf;jsessionid=1C3501A047A77BB7B32F39DD8A29B6A5?w=NATIVE%28%27SIMPLE_SRCH+ph+is+%27%27Ten+Things+That+Youth+Want+Child+Welfare+Professionals+to+Know%3A+Talking+to+Youth+in+Foster+Care+about+Permanency%27%27%27%29&upp=0&order=native%28%27year%2FDescend%27%29&rpp=25&r=1&m=1
- "Unpacking the No: Helping Young People Explore the Idea of Adoption" (North American Council on Adoptable Children) https://www.nacac.org/resource/unpacking-the-no-helping-young-people-explore-the-idea-of-adoption/
- "Youth Voices: Life After Foster Care" [video] (Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption) https://www.davethomasfoundation.org/library/video-youth-voices-life-after-foster-care-full-length/

interdependence[2] is gradual and so that youth have the opportunity to take on growing levels of responsibility and decision-making in their case planning—and life—as they mature (Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 2014).

To productively include youth in permanency planning, caseworkers should employ effective strategies for engagement. This may include establishing a personal connection with the youth, providing assurance regarding any privacy or confidentiality concerns, and addressing any real or perceived power imbalances in the decision-making process (Augsberger, 2014). Caseworkers can encourage youth to help decide who they want to invite to their permanency meetings, participate in their own court hearings, and create short- and long-term goals during those meetings.

For more information about engaging youth, refer to the following:

- Engaging and Involving Youth [webpage] (Information Gateway) https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/youth/engagingyouth/
- *Working With Youth to Develop a Transition Plan* (Information Gateway) https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/transitional-plan/
- "Engaging Youth in Foster Care" [podcast] (Information Gateway) https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/child-welfare-podcast-engaging-youth
- *Transformational Relationships for Youth Success* (Center for the Study of Social Policy) https://cssp.org/resource/transformational-relationships-for-youth-success-report/

[2] Interdependence is the idea that young adults benefit from developing and maintaining supportive relationships that will help them achieve their goals rather than only relying on themselves to achieve them.

Youth Developmental Issues and Permanency

To be able to best serve youth in care, it is critical for caseworkers—as well as current and potential resource families—to understand the developmental changes and needs of youth. While many youth look like adults, their brains often have not reached the same level of maturity. Adolescent brains often continue to develop until they reach their mid-20s (Arain et al., 2013). The incomplete development of youths' brains, as well as hormonal changes, often causes them to act impulsively or rely more on emotions (rather than logic), leading to suboptimal decision-making and self-control. This may be compounded by youths' natural desire for increased independence.

Additionally, youth involved with child welfare usually have experienced some form of trauma. This may negatively affect brain development and youths' ability to regulate their emotions and behaviors, which can shape their ability to develop healthy and permanent relationships (Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 2017). (For information about trauma-informed care, including relevant interventions, visit the National Child Traumatic Stress Network at https://www.nctsn.org/.) Caseworkers and resource families will be better equipped to support youth when they recognize how brain development can affect youth behavior and decision-making and how certain actions or attitudes are often a normal part of youth development rather than indicators of problematic or defiant behavior.

For more information about brain development, refer to Information Gateway's *Understanding the Effects of Maltreatment on Brain Development* at https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/issue-briefs/brain-development/ and the Annie E. Casey Foundation's *The Road to Adulthood: Aligning Child Welfare Practice With Adolescent Brain Development* at https://www.aecf.org/resources/the-road-to-adulthood/.

Strengthening Reunification Services

Returning safely to their birth families is the case goal for more than half of children and youth in foster care (HHS, ACF, Children's Bureau, 2018a). Support services to promote this goal should be part of the youth's case plan. Parent-child visits (when child safety is not compromised) are critical to this, and child welfare professionals provide support to parents in ensuring visits are successful. Parents may be dealing with a variety of issues that impede timely reunification, such as substance use, mental health issues, domestic violence, or homelessness. Child welfare professionals should be aware of services in their communities and make referrals for parents—both in preparation for reunification and after it has occurred—as indicated by each family's needs and strengths. Parents may be receiving services through other agencies or community organizations as well, so coordination with these other providers can be critical to ensuring parents are receiving appropriate services but are not overwhelmed. Since family situations often improve, it is important for child welfare professionals to regularly assess families' readiness for reunification. Some factors that may have been detrimental for a younger child may not be of serious concern for an older, more independent child (Alameda County Social Services Agency, Department of Children and Family Services, 2018). Additionally, even if youth are not legally reunified with their parents, many of them return to their families after emancipation or otherwise maintain connections with them. Even if reunification is not actively part of a youth's case plan, caseworkers can acknowledge the possibility of future contact and work with youth to resolve any issues with unresolved grief or potentially painful relationships as well as how they can make independent decisions about potential contact (Pokempner, Mikell, & Rodriguez, 2018).

For more information, visit Information Gateway's Reunifying Families webpage at https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/permanency/reunification/.

Transition Planning

Along with helping youth attain permanent homes and connections, caseworkers also must assist youth in preparing for the transition to adulthood. These activities can support youth whether they eventually leave care by achieving permanency or aging out. Additionally, adults with whom youth have established relational permanency may be able to support youth as they prepare to transition out of foster care. To help caseworkers attend to the transition needs of youth in care, Information Gateway developed *Working With Youth to Develop a Transition Plan*, which is available at https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/transitional-plan/. There is also a companion guide for foster families, *Helping Youth Transition to Adulthood: Guidance for Foster Parents*, which is available at https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/youth-transition/.

Exploring Relational Permanency

Although child welfare policies often focus on legal permanency, many youth may feel the establishment of relational permanency is more important to them (Salazar et al., 2018). Relational permanency could include connections between youth and other family members as well as adults informally involved in the youth's life (e.g., a friend's parent). When placed in out-of-home care, youth often have adults such as these in their lives who are important to them, but they may lose those connections while in care due to a variety of factors, such as frequent moves due to multiple placements or a lack of a reliable cell phone or other form of communication (Semanchin Jones & LaLiberte, 2013).

Mentoring can provide youth in foster care with additional relational supports. Although mentorships with unfamiliar adults can provide benefits for youth, mentorships with adults already familiar to youth (i.e., natural mentoring) may be a better fit for youth in foster care (Greeson, 2013). The existence of natural mentors—who could be teachers, coaches, caseworkers, neighbors, or others—in foster youth's lives has been shown to positively affect their transition to adulthood, including in the areas of health, resilience, educational attainment, and improved self-esteem (Thompson, Greeson, & Brunsink, 2016).

The Permanency Pact (https://www.fosterclub.com/sites/default/files/Permanency%20Pact_0.pdf), developed by FosterClub,[3] provides a formalized, facilitated process for adults to pledge and specify the support they can provide to youth in foster care. In addition, if agencies want to measure the relational permanence of youth, they can use the Youth Connections Scale, which was designed to be completed by youth along with their caseworker. For more information about this instrument, including the scale and scoring guide, visit https://cascw.umn.edu/portfolio-items/youth-connections-scale-ycs/.

Helping Youth Maintain or Establish Relationships With Kin

Maintaining or establishing relationships with kin can provide important connections and supports for youth and has the potential to lead to legal and/or relational permanency. It may take some effort to locate relatives of youth, particularly for youth who have been in and out of care. In some cases, fathers and paternal relatives may be overlooked in case planning. By fully exploring these family resources, however, caseworkers can better identify family connections.

One strategy to seek out relatives is the Family Finding model, which uses intensive search and engagement techniques to find kin (including fictive kin) who can provide permanency and connectedness for children and youth in foster care. (For more information about this model, visit http://www.familyfinding.org/.) The model shows promise in helping children establish connections with relatives and develop relational permanency, but studies are mixed about whether Family Finding increases legal permanency compared with services as usual (Leon, Saucedo, & Jachymiak, 2016; Vandivere & Malm, 2015; Landsman, Boel-Studt, & Malone, 2014).

[3] FosterClub is a national organization for youth in, or formerly in, foster care, providing them with a way to make their voice heard and to exchange ideas and receive and provide support. For more information, visit https://www.fosterclub.com/.

Just as a youth's situation changes over time, family members' situations change as well. A relative who is unable to care for a youth or maintain a strong personal connection at one point in time may be in a better situation to do so later. Therefore, caseworkers should inquire with relatives regularly about how they can support youth.

Offering Guardianship as an Option

For youth who are reluctant to have legal ties permanently severed with their parents, as would occur through adoption, the option of guardianship may provide legal permanency for youth. Guardians, who may be relatives or nonrelatives (depending on State law), are given parental responsibility and authority for the youth by a court, but the parental rights of the birth parents are not terminated due to guardianship being established. The Fostering Connections Act offers States and Tribes the option to provide kinship guardianship assistance payments under title IV-E on behalf of children who have been in foster care and for whom a relative is taking legal guardianship. As of October 2018, 35 States and the District of Columbia, as well as 11 Tribes or Tribal consortia, have approved title IV-E plan amendments that allow them to make guardianship assistance payments (HHS, ACF, Children's Bureau, 2018b). Additionally, States have the option to continue foster care, adoption, and guardianship payments until ages 19, 20, or 21 for youth who are in school, employed, engaged in another activity designed to remove barriers to employment, and/or incapable of doing so due to a documented medical condition.

For more information about guardianship assistance across the United States, read *Guardianship Assistance Policy and Implementation: A National Analysis of Federal and State Policies and Programs* by Casey Family Programs at https://www.casey.org/guardianship-assistance-policy-and-implementation-a-national-analysis-of-federal-and-state-policies-and-programs/. For information about State statutes regarding the placement of children with relatives, visit Information Gateway at https://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/placement/. Additionally, the National Quality Improvement Center for Adoption and Guardianship Support and Preservation developed a factsheet for social services professionals about guardianship that is available at https://qic-ag.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/SFC-Factsheet-Guardianship-final.pdf.

Recruiting Nonrelative Foster and Adoptive Families for Youth

Not all youth have kin available for legal or relational permanency. For some youth, permanency efforts must shift to nonrelatives. Recruiting foster parents for youth carries great potential for finding them permanent adoptive or guardianship families. For example, in FY 2017, foster parents became adoptive parents for 51 percent of the children who were adopted with public agency involvement (HHS, ACF, Children's Bureau, 2018a). Part of ensuring successful placements is finding families who have the proper skills and experience to support youth, particularly given the challenges many youth involved with child welfare are experiencing. Examples of characteristics of families who succeed in parenting youth from foster care include having an understanding of their own strengths, being effective and open communicators, having previous experience with youth, and being knowledgeable about the effects of trauma (National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment, 2015a). Furthermore, youth can provide a list of caring adults already in their lives (e.g., teachers, coaches, neighbors) who may be options as foster or adoptive families.

The following provides examples of strategies for agencies to recruit foster and adoptive families for youth, including child-focused recruitment, general messages through the media and social media, market segmentation, and promoting personal connections.

Child-focused recruitment. In this strategy, agencies and organizations focus on the unique histories, characteristics, and needs of an individual child in order to find him or her a permanent home. Wendy's Wonderful Kids (WWK), a program of the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, provides grants to public child welfare agencies and private adoption agencies to hire adoption recruiters to serve children in foster care, including those

for whom finding an adoptive home may be particularly challenging, such as older youth, siblings, and children with disabilities. The WWK program includes eight components: initiating a case referral; developing a relationship with the child; conducting a case record review; assessing the child (e.g., strengths, needs, desires); preparing the child for adoption; developing a network of connections; establishing a recruitment plan; and conducting a diligent search. In a randomized control trial of WWK, children served by the program were 1.7 times more likely to be adopted than those in the control group, with older youth participating in WWK being three times more likely to be adopted (Vandivere, Malm, Zinn, Allen, & McKlindon, 2015). For more information on WWK, visit https://www.davethomasfoundation.org/our-programs/wendys-wonderful-kids/.

Media and social media. The use of the media and social media to present youth waiting for adoption and other permanency outcomes has grown tremendously. Photolistings on the internet, including social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, have become a prevalent practice, and youth can contribute by helping to craft their own stories. Prospective families reading the listings can find enough information on a particular youth to pique their interest so they follow up with the youth's agency. The Children's Bureau sponsors a national photolisting service, AdoptUSKids (http://www.adoptuskids.org), which provides information in English and Spanish. In addition, agencies have found success with print campaigns, videos and videoconferencing, and television and radio campaigns, such as Wednesday's Child.

Caseworkers should seek ways to involve youth in developing any recruitment materials specific to them. Youth may want to draft or review their profiles, or they could create presentations using available technology (e.g., PowerPoint, iMovie) to bring their personalities and stories to life for others (National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment, 2015a).

To help agencies present information about children, AdoptUSKids developed *Creating Effective Narratives for Children Waiting to Be Adopted*, which is available at https://www.adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/AUSK/Publications/AUSK_CreatingEffectiveNarratives_Booklet_final-web-508.pdf. For additional information about social media and child welfare, visit Information Gateway at https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/management/workforce/tools/socialmedia/.

Market segmentation. By using market segmentation, agencies can focus recruitment efforts on neighborhoods, communities, or families most likely to adopt children from foster care. Agencies analyze data about current, successful foster and adoptive families, as well as data about youth in care and other factors, to help develop targeted recruitment plans for potential foster and adoptive families (National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment, 2015b). Those families can then be targeted through direct or other advertising methods. For additional information, read *Overview of Market Segmentation: A Tool for Targeting Recruitment* at https://www.adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/NRCRRFAP/resources/overview-of-market-segmentation.pdf.

Opportunities for personal connections. Creating opportunities for families and adults to come into contact with youth who need homes can help broaden the pool of potential resource families. Adults who may never have considered adopting may become more open to the idea once they meet a particular youth in need. Supportive relationships, such as mentoring, may also evolve into permanency options when adults find they have grown more connected to the youth. Adoption match events, in which waiting youth and families meet during scheduled fun activities, are another way of creating opportunities to bring youth and prospective families together.

For more information and ideas about recruitment, read *Going Beyond Recruitment for Older Youth: Increasing Your System's Capacity to Respond to Prospective Parents and Prepare Older Youth for Adoption* at https://adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/NRCDR-org/going-beyond-recruitment-for-older-youth.pdf or visit the Information Gateway Recruitment Strategies and Tools webpage at https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/permanency/recruiting/recruitment-tools/.

Concurrent Planning

Concurrent planning is working toward more than one legal permanency solution (e.g., adoption or guardianship in addition to reunification) at a time. When an agency waits until parental rights have been terminated before considering alternative permanency plans, legal permanency can be delayed. For additional information about concurrent planning, refer to *Concurrent Planning for Timely Permanence* at https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/concurrent-planning/.

Focusing on Supports Before and After Permanent Placements

The provision of appropriate and timely services, as well as training, to resource families may make the difference in whether permanency outcomes are successful for youth. These services and training can be provided to families who provide adoptive, guardianship, and kinship care placements—as well as foster families, whose placements have the potential to become permanent. Areas in which youth and families may need support before and after a permanent placement include the following (Information Gateway, 2018):

- Helping youth cope with trauma, separation, and loss
- Understanding how they can support youths' emotional, physical, intellectual, and behavioral development
- Preparing for adjustments in family dynamics after placement
- Discussing openness with and search for birth family members
- Applying for financial assistance

Families can be assisted through educational and informational services, clinical services, and material assistance as well as by helping them establish and maintain support networks. Families also may need assistance navigating other service systems (e.g., participating in individualized education plans, obtaining health records). Child welfare professionals can help families seek out the appropriate resources, keeping in mind that needs will differ from family to family, and also ensure families feel empowered to advocate for the youth.

For additional information, refer to the following Information Gateway publications:

- *Providing Adoption Support and Preservation Services* (https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f-postadoptbulletin/)
- *Preparing and Supporting Foster Parents Who Adopt* (https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f-fospro/)
- *Preparing Children and Youth for Adoption or Other Family Permanency* (https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/preparing-youth/)

Open Adoption to Maintain Family Connections

Some youth may resist adoption because they believe it requires severing relationships with their birth families, but exploring the possibility of open adoption may alleviate these concerns. Open adoptions allow for both a permanent legal family for the youth and continued connections with birth parents, siblings, or other relatives. Even if an open adoption is established through a formal contract, postadoption contact can still be arranged. For more information on open adoption, visit Information Gateway's Openness in Adoption webpage at https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/preplacement/adoption-openness/. For an overview of discussing adoption with youth, refer to *Talking With Older Youth About Adoption* at https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/talking/.

Strengthening the Workforce to Support Youth Permanency

Although many caseworkers and agencies recognize that youth can and should achieve permanency, there is still work to be done in ensuring that caseworker beliefs and actions, as well as agency culture, reflect and support this. Worker bias about the possibility of achieving legal permanence for youth can undercut permanency goals (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2011). Therefore, it is important for child welfare professionals, service providers, and other adults in youths' lives to believe that permanency is possible and establish policies and practices that promote permanency—both legal and relational—for this population. Anu Family Services and the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare developed a guide to help agencies better focus on positive permanency outcomes. *Creating a Permanence Driven Organization: A Guidebook for Change in Child Welfare* is available at https://cascw.umn.edu/portfolio-items/creating-a-permanence-driven-organization/.

To be effective advocates for youth, child welfare workers should be aware of youths' individual views on what legal and relational permanency look like to them and the importance they place on each type of permanency. It is also helpful for workers to understand how youth's experiences, including past trauma, affect those views. Caseworkers are likely also working with youth on independent living skills, but it is important to remember that, while preparing youth for adulthood is required and critical, it should not replace seeking permanent families or other permanent connections.

Agencies should ensure that staff receive training and supervision support for working with youth and recruiting and working with families for youth, including how to prepare both youth and families for permanency and how to provide or refer families to postplacement support. Achieving youth permanency can be a time-intensive process, so it is critical that caseworkers have manageable workloads and caseloads and are provided with internal supports to allow for a continued focus on supporting the youth they serve. Furthermore, agencies' worker retention practices can have an effect on permanency for youth. New workers often need additional time to complete initial training, learn about their cases, and establish relationships with children and youth, which can cause a disruption in services. In addition, worker turnover may represent another loss of an adult relationship for youth in care (Horn & Spencer, 2018).

Educating the Workforce and the Public

Every State and community has a unique set of policies, resources, and practices for supporting youth permanency. To ensure child welfare professionals, current and potential resource families, youth, and others are aware of how youth permanency can be achieved and what resources are available to them, child welfare agencies can develop comprehensive guides. One example of this is *A Guide to Permanency Options for Youth* by the Department of Children and Family Services within the Alameda County (CA) Social Services Agency. This guide provides information on a wide range of related topics, including Federal and State law, the importance of permanent connections, descriptions of various permanency options, and services and supports in the community. The guide is available at http://alamedasocialservices.org/opg/documents/2018GuideToPermanencyOptionsFINALJanuary92018_000.pdf.

Working With the Courts

Since permanent placements must be approved by the courts, the legal system plays an integral role in helping youth achieve timely permanency. Child welfare agencies can benefit from partnering closely with their local courts to support and expedite permanency efforts. Child welfare professionals can ensure court personnel understand the significance of both legal and relational permanency and that permanency can and should be a goal for every child. Court personnel should also be aware of how they can fully engage youth in hearings. In a survey of 68 youth who were or had been in foster care, about one-quarter reported they had never attended their court hearings, and nearly one-half said they had never or rarely participated in their permanency hearings (Voice for Adoption, 2016). To promote youth participation, judges can schedule hearings at times outside of school hours; ensure the youth understands the hearing process and what is expected of him or her; and, if the youth's participation is found to not be in the youth's best interests, consider alternatives before excluding him or her from a hearing, such as temporarily excluding the parent, having the youth attend only one portion of the hearing, allowing video participation, or meeting in chambers (American Bar Association, 2016). Judges also can ensure that effective and legally mandated permanency practices are being followed by the court and child welfare systems.

The following are resources about how judges and other court personnel can advance permanency for youth:

- *Youth Voices for Permanency: Courtroom Guide on How Courts and Judges Can Make a Difference* (Voice for Adoption) https://www.voice-for-adoption.org/sites/default/files/Youth%20Voices%20for%20Permanency%20full%20paper%20v2.compressed.pdf
- "Involving Youth In Court: Lessons From States" (American Bar Association) https://www.americanbar.org/groups/child_law/resources/child_law_practiceonline/child_law_practice/vol-35/april-2016/involving-youth-in-court--lessons-from-states/
- *Forever Families: Improving Outcomes by Achieving Permanency for Legal Orphans* (appendix B) (National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges) http://www.ncjfcj.org/sites/default/files/LOTAB_3_25_13_newcover_0.pdf#page=37
- Legal Issues Related to Permanency [webpage] (Information Gateway) https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/courts/processes/related-perm/

Conclusion

Youth deserve safe, loving, and stable homes and relationships; however, they may face numerous challenges on their path to achieving permanency. Child welfare and other related professionals should be well-equipped to support youth on their path to permanency, be it legal, relational, or both. Life outcomes for youth are greatly affected by the presence of supportive connections with caring adults. Child welfare agencies should use all available avenues to achieve permanence and, at the same time, help youth identify, maintain, and strengthen connections to a network of caring adults while they are in out-of-home placement. It is also critical that agencies help prepare youth for independence in the event that they emancipate from foster care without a permanent home. This process should begin well before a youth's 18th birthday. To best serve these youth, it is also essential to further develop additional research, policy, and other resources in the years ahead regarding how we can best serve, support, and collaborate with young people in care.

References

Alameda County Social Services Agency, Department of Children and Family Services. (2018). *A guide to permanency options for youth*. Retrieved from http://alamedasocialservices.org/opg/documents/2018GuideToPermanencyOptionsFINALJanuary92018_000.pdf

American Bar Association. (2016). *Involving youth in court: Lessons from States*. Retrieved from https://www.americanbar.org/groups/child_law/resources/child_law_practiceonline/child_law_practice/vol-35/april-2016/involving-youth-in-court--lessons-from-states/

Arain, M., Haque, M., Johal, L., Mathur, P., Nel, W., Rais, A.,. . . Sharma, S. (2013). Maturation of the adolescent brain. *Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment, 9*, 449–461. doi: 10.2147/NDT.S39776

Augsberger, A. (2014). Strategies for engaging foster youth in permanency planning family team conferences. *Children and Youth Services Review, 43*, 51–57. doi: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2014.04.015

Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2018). *Providing adoption support and preservation services*. Retrieved from https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f-postadoptbulletin/

Courtney, M. E., Dworsky, A., Brown, A., Cary, C., Love, K., & Vorhies, V. (2011). *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at age 26*. Retrieved from https://www.chapinhall.org/wp-content/uploads/Midwest-Eval-Outcomes-at-Age-26.pdf

Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute. (2011). *Never too old: Achieving permanency and sustaining connections for older youth in foster care*. Retrieved from https://www.adoptioninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/2011_07_21_NeverTooOld.pdf

Greeson, J. K. P. (2013). Foster youth and the transition to adulthood: The theoretical and conceptual basis for natural mentoring. *Emerging Adulthood, 1*(1), 40–51. doi: 10.1177/2167696812467780

Horn, J. P., & Spencer, R. (2018). Natural mentoring to support the establishment of permanency for youth in foster care. In E. Trejos-Castillo & N. Trevino-Schafer (Eds.), *Handbook of foster youth*. New York: Routledge.

Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. (2011). *The adolescent brain: New research and its implications for young people transitioning from foster care*. Retrieved from https://www.aecf.org/resources/the-adolescent-brain-foster-care/

Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. (2014). *Success beyond 18: Quality case planning with young adults in extended foster care*. Retrieved from https://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/JCYOI-SuccessBeyond18-QualityCasePlanning-2014.pdf

Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. (2017). *Keeping the family conversation alive*. Retrieved from https://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-brainframes-permanence-2017.pdf

Landsman, M. J., Boel-Studt, S., & Malone, K. (2014). Results from a family finding experiment. *Children and Youth Services Review, 36*, 62–69. doi: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2013.10.025

Leon, S. C., Saucedo, D. J., & Jachymiak, K. (2016). Keeping it in the family: The impact of a family finding intervention on placement, permanency, and well-being outcomes. *Children and Youth Services Review, 70*, 163–170. doi: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2016.09.020

National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment. (2015a). *Going beyond recruitment for older youth: Increasing your system's capacity to respond to prospective parents and prepare older youth for adoption*. Retrieved from https://adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/NRCDR-org/going-beyond-recruitment-for-older-youth.pdf

National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment. (2015b). *Overview of market segmentation: A tool for targeting recruitment*. Retrieved from https://www.adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/NRCRRFAP/resources/overview-of-market-segmentation.pdf

Pokempner, J., Mikell, D., & Rodriguez, J. (2018). *Making reunification possible for older youth* [blog post]. Retrieved from https://jlc.org/news/making-reunification-possible-older-youth

Salazar, A. M., Jones, K. R., Amemiya, J., Cherry, A., Brown, E. C., Catalano, R. F., & Monahan, K. C. (2018). Defining and achieving permanency among older youth in foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review, 87*, 9–16. doi: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.02.006

Semanchin Jones, A., & LaLiberte, T. (2013). Measuring youth connections: A component of relational permanence for foster youth. *Children and Youth Services Review, 35*, 509–517. doi: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2012.12.006

Thompson, A. E., Greeson, J. K. P., & Brunsink, A. M. (2016). Natural mentoring among older youth in and aging out of foster care: A systematic review. *Children and Youth Services Review, 61*, 40–50. doi: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2015.12.006

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau. (2018a). *The AFCARS report: Preliminary FY 2017 estimates as of August 10, 2018 (No. 25)*. Retrieved from https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/afcars-report-25

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau. (2018b). *Title IV-E guardianship assistance*. Retrieved from https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/title-iv-e-guardianship-assistance

Vandivere, S., & Malm, K. (2015). *Family finding evaluations: A summary of recent findings*. Retrieved from https://www.childtrends.org/?publications=family-finding-evaluations-a-summary-of-recent-findings

Vandivere, S., Malm, K. E., Zinn, A., Allen, T. J., & McKlindon, A. (2015). Experimental evaluation of a child-focused adoption recruitment program for children and youth in foster care. *Journal of Public Child Welfare, 9*, 174–194. doi: 10.1080/15548732.2015.1008620

Voice for Adoption. (2016). *Youth voices for permanency: Courtroom guide on how courts and judges can make a difference*. Retrieved from https://www.voice-for-adoption.org/sites/default/files/Youth%20Voices%20for%20Permanency%20full%20paper%20v2.compressed.pdf

Suggested Citation:

Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2019). *Promoting permanency for older youth in out-of-home care*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Children's Bureau

ACF

Children's Bureau