



PERMANENCY

PERMANENCY ROUNDTABLES: HELPING OLDER YOUTH ACHIEVE PERMANENCY



PERMANENCY ROUNDTABLES: HELPING OLDER YOUTH ACHIEVE PERMANENCY

WHY IT MATTERS

Every year, approximately 20,000 young people “age out” of the foster care system without achieving legal permanency.¹ The future for this population is often fraught with challenges.

Over half will leave foster care without a high school diploma, many will experience homelessness in the first year after leaving care and a disproportionate number will be unemployed, involved in the criminal justice system and/or living in poverty. The likelihood that their own children will be child-welfare involved is significant.²

Achieving legal permanency before they leave care, whether through reunification, adoption or guardianship, reduces the aforementioned outcomes

from occurring. Having a stable placement, a chance to stay in the same school, connected adults who care about the youth’s well-being, and an opportunity

to grow into adulthood without being “thrust” into the world, is why helping youth achieve permanency is so important.

One strategy that has been employed to help youth in foster care find permanency is through

a process called “permanency roundtables” (PRTs). PRTs are intensive, structured case consultations among agency case managers and supervisors, permanency consultants, and others related to a child’s case who bring creativity and urgency to expediting permanency for children in care.³ PRTs differ from usual case staffing in that the primary focus of the

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meeting is to intensely focus on what permanency options are available to the individual child. Brainstorming amongst the team members leads to the development of a permanency action plan with steps to

Unfortunately, the results of the evaluation weren't as robust as hoped, as a much smaller number of youth achieved legal permanency at 12 months following the PRT. However, 24 months following the PRTs saw

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be accomplished within six months. Regular follow-ups on the progress toward permanency for the youth are conducted.

Casey Family Program partnered with 11 counties to conduct a multi-site evaluation of PRT outcomes.⁴ The project focused on youth age 12 or older who generally had an APPLA case goal. The outcomes of the PRTs for over 700 youth across four States were evaluated for this study. All of the sites participated in a number of activities to help youth achieve permanency including:

- Implementing permanency roundtables and incorporating specific permanency strategies such as diligent search, youth engagement, family engagement, strengthening child connections, and services to meet child needs and prepare child for permanency, as well as strategies to overcome policy, legal, and financial barriers to permanency.
- Assessing caseworker/supervisor attitudes towards permanency, organizational climate and culture.
- Documenting the contextual factors that impacted the level of success of the projects
- Shared and generalized lessons learned from the project and evaluation with other jurisdictions.

increased numbers of youth achieving permanency. There were, however, findings that should influence practice and policy recommendations when helping youth in foster care achieve permanency:

- Youth who had at least one positive, lifelong connection to an adult were significantly more likely to achieve permanency.
- The older the youth was, the less likely they were to achieve legal permanency before exiting foster care.
- Youth whose action plans included a psychosocial, psychological, or psychiatric evaluation to determine their needs, suggesting that they had emotional or behavioral problems, were less likely to achieve permanency.
- For youth who were still in care 12 months after the PRT, permanency status increased and the restrictiveness of living situation decreased. However, the number of positive adult connections did not increase.
- Jurisdictions report that the roundtables have caused staff to have a greater awareness of the definition of legal permanency and the importance of permanency.

ADVOCATES IN ACTION

Older youth in foster care need the same things as infants, toddlers and adolescents in the system – safe and loving families that will support them now and into adulthood. They need the stability and security of a permanent family. But they also need programs and approaches recognizing that older youth in foster care face different challenges.

— Casey Family Programs

ACTIONS

Based on what we know are the poor outcomes that young people exiting foster care without permanency are likely to face, it's important to reflect on the "lessons learned" from the PRT evaluation and implement strategies that can help a young person's likelihood of achieving permanency improve.

- **Ensure youth have lifelong connections to at least one adult, and if they don't, help them identify and cultivate such a relationship.** Regardless of their age and their time in care, it is never too late for a child or youth to be connected to at least one adult who they can absolutely count on being there for them. Being connected to a caring adult has been one of the most consistent factors in youth in and from foster care achieving better outcomes later in adulthood. Help youth reconnect with siblings or significant adults that they may have lost contact with.
- **Improve preparation for permanency from the start of a child or youth's case.** Identify potential permanency resources and connections through discussions with parents and relatives. Conduct family find searches or other methods to identify potential, permanent placements.⁵ Engage the youth throughout the process.
- **Address mental, emotional or behavioral issues with evidence-based interventions.** Challenges with these issues make it less likely that a child or youth will achieve permanency. Ensure that strategies for addressing these issues are tailored to the specific child's needs, age and stage of development.
- **Participate in cross-team training on values and best practices for achieving permanency,** especially for children who have large sibling groups, are living in group settings, who have been in foster care for a long time, who are older and/or who have physical, mental and/or behavioral needs.
- **Adopt innovative strategies to overcome systemic barriers the child or youth faces to legal permanency.** Inquire about waivers and exceptions. Ensure that funding and supports encourage legal permanency and do not provide an incentive to keep children in foster care.

- **Encourage the use of roundtable practices.** Adopt a structured brainstorming planning format, use of strength-based, non-blaming and solution-focused values and the inclusion of appropriate staff and

external partners on roundtable teams. Develop action plans and timelines for evaluating action plans and back-up strategies if permanency is not achieved in a timely manner.

BRIGHT SPOT

PERMANENCY SUMMITS FRANKLIN COUNTY CASA, MISSOURI

In 2012, staff working with children and youth in foster care were “encouraged” by the Office of State Court Administrators (OSCA) to attend a Permanency Summit of professionals in the 20th circuit to discuss and develop plans about how to reduce barriers to permanency that children and youth in foster care were facing. This multi-disciplinary gathering included representatives from the court such as parents’ attorneys, CASA Executive Director, Guardian ad Litem (GALs), the Juvenile Judge, Chief Juvenile Officer and supervisors from the Children’s Division, as well as the contracting case management agency. Although the first Permanency Summit was less of a request and more of a “must-attend,” the participants found it helpful and supportive in finding solutions to achieving timely permanency for children and youth whether it was through reunification, adoption or guardianship. The collaborative nature of the gathering created a commitment to continue these “permanency summits” long after OSCA had first begun this project six years before. With the leadership of Franklin CASA serving as the “host”, these permanency summits continue to be held quarterly with approximately 5–10 participants attending who represent the aforementioned professional groups.

The summits, which last approximately two hours, provide an opportunity for the participants to review the current data — how many children are in foster care currently, what their ages are, what their permanency goals are and the identification of trends noted over time. Reviewing the data and working together to create and implement solutions has resulted in a number of changes to how things are done. For example, one barrier noted to permanency for older youth is that they weren’t able to come to court to express their wishes without missing a day of school. This resulted in an “older youth” docket for hearings scheduled after school, whereby youth 14 and older can come to their hearings without missing precious school time. This has not only meant that more youth have the opportunity to participate in their own hearings, but the older youth docket has relieved the congestion of the morning hearings. Another outcome of the summits has been the restructuring of the service agreements to be more consistent and universal, so parents working on case goals have a clear and decisive plan for what they are being held accountable to. This too aids permanency, particularly for those parents who will be reunified with their children, as there is no question about what the expectations are.

Not surprisingly, a frequent topic of discussion at the Permanency Summits has been on helping older youth who are on the path to aging out of care. As

in many programs, the older youth tend to have the most challenging circumstances, and in the case of Franklin CASA, they represent a disproportionate number of children in the overall foster care system. Glenda Volmert, Executive Director, believes that it is the collective ideas and work of the individuals who participate in these summits that makes them

successful and sustainable. Franklin County CASA is looking forward to continuing these summits and eventually expanding them to incorporate their entire circuit.

For more information, contact training@casaforchildren.org

SELECTED RESOURCES

Name	Description
Casey Family Programs, <i>When a Teen Says No to Permanence</i> ⁶	<p>This handout, created to use in preparation trainings for permanency roundtables, describes the actual messages that teenagers in foster care may be giving when they are saying “no” to permanence and provides tips for how to help the youth see a different perspective.</p>
FosterClub, <i>An Introduction to Permanence</i> ⁷	<p>This resource contains a description of a course designed to help foster parents and caregivers regarding permanency for foster youth. In this course participants learn that permanency comes in many different shapes and sizes, and that different people can provide different types of permanency for foster youth.</p>
Georgia Courts, <i>My Connectedness Chart</i> ⁸	<p>This chart and corresponding interview questions can be used by any team member who has a trusting relationship with a youth to learn about their perceptions of who they are connected to and whether that connection could help support permanency.</p>
Texas CASA, <i>Permanency Values</i> ⁹	<p>This resource includes a packet of resources provided by CPS to assist CASA volunteers in working towards permanency for children in foster care. The materials explore permanency values and how partners in the child protection system can work with – and for – children and youth in care to build life-long, supportive relationships that give them a sense of family and belonging.</p>

ENDNOTES

- 1 Casey Family Programs (2012). Permanency Roundtable Project: 24 Month Outcome Report. Available at https://caseyfamilypro-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/media/garoundtable_24month_FR.pdf
- 2 Courtney, M. E., Dworsky, A., Lee, J. S., Raap, M., Cusick, G. R., Keller, T., et al. (2010). *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth*. Chapin Hall.
- 3 https://caseyfamilypro-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/media/garoundtable_24month_FR.pdf
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 See Issue Brief on “Family Search and Engagement”
- 6 http://coloradochildrep.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/ocr_presentation_9_27.pdf
- 7 <https://www.fosterclub.com/foster-parent-training/course/introduction-permanence>
- 8 <http://cj4c.georgiacourts.gov/sites/default/files/cj4c/Perm%20conversations.pdf>
- 9 <https://texascasa.org/learning-center/resources/download-resources-permanency-values-training/>